

NOTHING SIGNIFICANT TO REPORT WHAT WINNING REALLY LOOKS LIKE

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Weekly clearance patrols which included consistent interaction with the local populace strengthened interpersonal relationships between the coalition forces (CF), Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and locals. They created opportunities for intertribal cooperation and fostered the creation of positive relationships between tribes. Finally, they assisted in establishing the conditions necessary to utilize Civil Affairs projects in building vital infrastructure for life sustainment without the need for future coalition assistance.

Commander's Overview

The company had just finished its last kinetic operation and we were informed we were going to partner with three Iraqi Police (IP) units and one Neighborhood Watch force (now Sons of Iraq). I was worried about how our Soldiers would make the transition from kinetic operations to working with Iraqis who just a few months prior were on the other side. Those worries turned out to be unwarranted, because our Soldiers made the transition smoothly without any issues.

Our area of operation (AO) for the most part was very supportive of coalition forces, just as most of the Anbar Province was at the time. Two of our three infantry platoons were assigned an IP station each and one was assigned two. We did not live at the IP stations like most police training teams (PTT), but spent most of our time with the IPs. At the time we provided them with everything from food, water, fuel, and training.

After months of hard work, the last of the active terrorist cells were removed or went underground in our AO, and it was time to figure out how to keep them out and locate the ones who went underground (sleeper cells). First we set up a series of IP checkpoints along all the main supply routes (MSRs), alternate supply routes (ASRs), and next to critical infrastructure (schools, mosques, and sheiks' houses). We then cleared our area of operations of all known improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and weapons caches. Once that was completed, we began weekly clearing patrols with the IPs. They were not doctrinally correct clearance operations in any way but were very effective. Each platoon would pick a sector of the area of operations and conduct a clearance once a week. We would walk our entire AO in about a month's time.

For the patrols, the IPs would get on line, and we would get behind them providing any support they might need. Most times we would have attack aviation on station, and this would give the IPs the confidence that they could handle anything that came their way. It would also let the local populace know that the IPs had

everything in our arsenal at their disposal.

Some would argue that this was a terrible waste of the IP's time, and they should be concentrating on training to become better policemen. We agree; it is very important to train the IPs to become a professional organization using Iraqi Police liaison officers (IPLOs) and traditional police training such as weapons training, investigation techniques, detainee handling procedures and the rule of law. These clearance operations, however, remained vital

*A Soldier with A Company,
3rd Battalion, 69th Armor,
pulls security during a
mission in Rahaliyah,
Iraq, March 10.*

Specialist Ricardo Branch



throughout our time there. These missions gave us stability in the AO that produced the time needed for all traditional police training. It allowed them to build confidence in their abilities, to build stronger relationships with coalition forces, to see and interact with everyone in their area at least once a month, and perhaps most importantly, it instilled the local populace with confidence in the IPs.

When we first started these clearance missions, we did all the planning for the missions, but by the end of our six months in Jazera, a large rural area just northeast of Ramadi, the IPs had the ability to plan and conduct these missions without our help. We still accompanied them on the missions most times and provided them logistic support, but if we could not conduct the mission with them for whatever reason they continued the mission without us.

The Mission

Once we identified the area we were going to clear, we would do the initial coordination at the IP station. We met with the IP chief and normally his training officer. We told them the area we wanted to search, and they told us the number of policemen they could provide for the mission. Once the initial plan was set, we met at our combat outpost (COP) to conduct the rehearsal. The rehearsal usually took place on a sand table and consisted of the IP officers, the leaders of the platoon conducting the mission with the IPs, the commander, first sergeant, and executive officer (XO) to sort out any last minute logistical issues. Mission rehearsals were new to the Iraqis and began much the same way the missions did — led by coalition forces. Nevertheless, it did not take long before IPs planned every mission and led the rehearsals.

Our IP missions were primarily conducted during daylight hours largely because of their limited night-vision capabilities, and because nighttime patrols minimized IP interaction with the locals. The Iraqi Police proved extremely effective at cache searches and human intelligence (HUMINT) collection. They knew where to look for caches, they knew who didn't belong in the neighborhoods, and they usually were very well received inside of the homes in the search area. Our fire support officer made information hand bills to pass out to individuals as their house was being searched. We found quickly that once the



Courtesy photos

Coalition forces and Iraqi Policemen prepare to leave on a mission.

hand bills made it into the hands of local women everyone knew about them the next day. The force multipliers we utilized during and after clearance missions included humanitarian assistance (HA) supply drops and military working dog teams, which are excellent assets for locating caches in the cooler months. During the mission our Soldiers moved behind each IP element, allowing us to assist in maintaining command and control, provide reports to higher, and most importantly employ our enablers such as attack aviation. Most of these missions covered an area two kilometers wide and five-to-seven kilometers long and would take several hours to complete, barring a cache or an IED find.

Each platoon conducted clearance patrols in their individual areas of operation and each platoon leader used the same basic patrol to accomplish extraordinary results which spanned the company's sector, but more importantly crossed tribal boundaries.

Part of the Community (3rd Platoon)

Soon after the weekly clearance patrols began, it became apparent that they were catalysts for change. The most apparent and immediate changes came in the form of physical security, which we used as a means to bettering the community. Security provided our Soldiers the opportunity to interact with locals on an interpersonal level.

It allowed our Soldiers and the local populace the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of exactly what and who we both were fighting for.

These clearance patrols would occasionally yield old caches, IEDs, and ordnance. However, the most amazing results that my platoon saw from doing these patrols and spending every day with these IPs and local nationals were the relationships built between American Soldiers and Iraqi citizens. Over time, I began to hear local nationals calling out both myself and my Soldiers by name. Our IPs would talk to locals, introduce us, and I would end up being invited over for tea or dinner. It was during these invites and interactions where the time we spent with our IP unit and local nationals would really pay off. We would hear about the real concerns that would drive Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) projects by our company projects officer, receive intelligence about the anti-Iraqi forces (AIF) activity and eventually would get the idea to form local councils.

Many of the problems that faced American forces in the beginning of this war were amplified when we, as a foreign force, came up with our own solutions. This strategy was doomed to fail. By building these crucial interpersonal relationships, we met the local nationals' chosen leaders (sheiks, imams, police chiefs, business

leaders, etc.). Our company spent hours a day talking and socializing with these men. It was not uncommon to spend three hours coming to a conclusion that could have been reached in 15 minutes. By giving these men the respect of coming to them for solutions to local national problems, it accomplished several things for our forces in the area. First, it bought the respect of their leaders. Taking the time to come to them first and ask for help or offer ours made them feel important, respected, and ultimately more eager to cooperate with my company. Second, it



Local police found more than 4,000 pounds of harmful material caches.

bought the respect of the local nationals who could no longer ignore the fact that we were not an occupying force bent on running their lives or changing their culture. Residents of Hamdiya, a local town, would see us working and talking with the leaders they respected, followed, and trusted. Thus, the people of Hamdiya and the rest of our AO cultivated a sense of trust for the Americans who they perceived as advisors supporting their leaders. Finally, Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems, no matter the outcome of the decision, were always a plus. If their solution succeeded, it strengthened the leaders in the eyes of their people, bolstering sheiks' support for coalition forces. If their solutions failed, it was not the Americans' fault, and the sheiks were held accountable by their people, who demanded more effective solutions.

During these clearance missions, we collected vital data and feedback. We learned the terrain where individual families lived, scouted future projects, and assessed the tribal atmospherics. In time, the local Iraqis who once opposed our presence through violence and noncooperation began calling my Soldiers and me by name. I often wondered about their change of heart and concluded that our daily interactions tipped the scales. It is easy to hate and oppose the idea of America when all they see are Americans locked away inside vehicles or comes in the form of a cordon and knock in the middle of the night. After countless clearance missions and joint operations with IPs, it dawned on me that our security was no longer measured by a body count but by the strength of our relationship with the local populace. It became too hard for them to

hate and fight against an ideal when they saw and interacted with Soldiers they knew on a daily basis.

Insight into the Tribe (1st Platoon)

One of the most important and lasting effects of our clearance patrols was the insight it provided into intertribal politics. The relationships we formed in each platoon area of operations provided the company with a more complete picture of not only our relationship with the locals but of their tribal relationships with one another and the inevitable conflict between each tribe. The clearance missions again served as a conduit for change and a new approach to CF involvement in tribal politics.

The joint clearance patrols served multiple functions and were an overwhelming success. As the local population became more comfortable with our presence, we began seeing why Iraq is a complicated and difficult battleground. My platoon drew the difficult task of overseeing two IP stations. Normally this would not pose any significant issue except that the two IP stations were in Albu Obaid and Zuweah in the Anbar province. These two particular tribes were constantly at odds with one another. As the area became more secure, and the local populace more comfortable with our presence, the underlying issues that affect everyday life rose to the surface. These tribal disputes allowed terrorists to move in and manipulate the population. The tribal fissures were a source of tension in neighborhoods closest to tribal boundaries, and as a result security was weakest in these areas. My platoon took on the challenge to bridge this gap and

prevent future relapse into conflict.

Our goal has always been to create a stable environment for the local Iraqi government to take root. Iraq is riddled with unique tribes with distinctive beliefs that sometimes clash. We constantly endeavored to separate issues that should be handled by the local Iraqi government from the issues which required coalition involvement. In the end we discovered that every issue in Iraq needs to have an Iraqi voice and the coalition supported the local leadership's decisions inasmuch as they remained congruent with our end state of a secure and self sustained civil

society.

As our platoon conducted these weekly clearance operations, the locals would constantly bury us under a tide of issues and complaints. We gained their trust and were treated as well-respected members of the community. We needed to support the local community, but at the same time distance ourselves from the issues that needed local leadership. Family disputes that last generations should be handled by the local sheiks and not coalition forces. The systems were already in place; we just needed to give some power back to the local government. My platoon used the local sheiks to handle a vast majority of the trivial arguments that arose between people. We helped give the power back to the people of Iraq, and by doing so came one step closer to a unified peaceful nation. The family heads helped to create representative councils that ensured the health, safety, and education of everyone in the community. Now that each tribe operated effectively, our goal became creating better relations between these two neighbors.

We used these clearance missions as a way to force the IPs from both Obaid and Zuweah to interact with each other. The two IP chiefs were forced to plan together, and the two communities were forced into each other's lives. This met resistance at first, but as the weeks drove on, the two communities began trusting each other. A local farmer would talk to a passing IP even if he was from the opposite tribe. Each IP chief would offer trucks and IPs to help the other if the need arose. Locals looked toward the sheiks to solve local issues and the IPs to keep them safe. Coalition forces are still held in

high esteem, but Iraq is now looking inward for the solutions to its problems.

Projects for Peace (2nd Platoon)

One by-product of security and cooperation is tribal self-sufficiency. We accomplished this through careful project management over multiple tribal areas. Projects began as a way of getting money back into the hands of needy locals. They provided money for those who, in the absence of any other form of income, might resort to planting IEDs for money. Over time the projects evolved into long-term solutions to infrastructure and life support systems sustainment. Our security patrols provided the company opportunities to better assess the community's needs and deliver the most vital projects to those in the most dire need. The rapport we earned with the local leadership through consistent security patrols allowed us a voice in the sheik council and provided us the ability to guide the effective use of projects within the community.

The joint security patrols and clearing operations produced a bond between the local ISF and my platoon's Soldiers and in turn opened the minds of local leaders to usher in a period of reconstruction for Albu Bali. The establishment of security and stability by the local ISF allowed for local leaders to open their minds and work together to rebuild the local infrastructure.

Some projects were the immediate result of clearance operations. As the platoon — along with the IPs — cleared the canals, which lay like cobwebs across the town, we saw an opportunity to contract the labor necessary to clean and make the canals more effective and useable. A project was later designed to have local sheiks clean out their canals. A \$500,000 project was laid out in which all 14 sub-tribal sheiks would receive a contract, ranging between \$20,000-60,000 to clean out their own canals. The canal clearance missions succeeded in that locals appreciated the beautification of their town as well as the added security they provided by ridding the canals of caches and unexploded ordinance.

Other projects were later granted as well including funds to clean and repair its initial infrastructure. One of the routes had been badly damaged by enemy IEDs. These projects helped to level off large craters and clean it of debris. Another major project was designed to help compensate some 300 local ISF who were not

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hired as part of the 200-man paid police force. A project was instituted to hire 100 of these men as an armed fixed site security force. These men would guard key infrastructure in the village. Sites included schools, mosques, and the water treatment facilities. This security force received about half the amount of money than that of an IP but was enough to keep them employed, providing for their families, and part of the security solution in the AO until future jobs opened.

Over six months of operations, from what began as security patrols with a few local Iraqi Police came long-term solutions to security, stability, and a self-sufficient community. The key to this success, however, is not a simple doctrine. It requires adaptable leaders and Soldiers able to transition seamlessly from kinetic to humanitarian operations.

In Conclusion

In the daily reports most of the patrols were listed as Nothing Significant to Report (NSTR), but becoming part of the community, finding Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems, and gaining insight into the intertribal workings is far from NSTR. It is hard for any community to allow a member to be harmed in any way, and so becoming part of the community provides us with security. Insight into the tribe allows one to better understand the real problem behind the symptoms. Once the Iraqis start solving their own problems, there will be less need for American Soldiers on the ground, and that will bring us closer to our overall objective of a free and democratic Iraq. It is very important to train the Iraqi Police on the tasks that will eventually turn them into a police force that resembles one in the United States, but anyone who said these clearance missions were a waste of time and resulted in nothing significant to report doesn't realize what winning really looks like.

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Iraqi Police link up with coalition forces prior to a clearance mission.