

THE REVITALIZATION OF SAMARRA

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Samarra sits on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, about 175 kilometers north of Baghdad and 50 kilometers south of Tikrit. While Tikrit is the capital of Salah al Din Province (and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein), Samarra boasted the largest population in the province (approximately 300,000 before OIF I and a meager 100,000 when we arrived). Samarra is a 99-percent Sunni city with one of the holiest Shia shrines, the al Askarya Mosque (better known as the Golden Mosque). Al-Qaida nearly started a civil war in Iraq by blowing up the Golden Dome of the mosque in 2006 and then attacked its minarets in 2007. For good measure, they also executed a complex attack on Samarra's main Iraqi Police station in 2007, killing one of its few effective police officers. That IP station was only a few hundred meters away from a U.S. Army patrol base where we would eventually live.

Unlike most of Iraq, Samarra did not benefit from the surge or the Awakening. The surge drove insurgents north out of Baghdad to Diyala and then into Samarra. The Awakening in Anbar Province drove them east to the Jazeera Desert and Samarra. These two insurgent forces took control of Samarra by the spring of 2007. Insurgents openly paraded and patrolled the streets. They kidnapped and executed National Policemen at the city's second largest market during the day. They moved freely into and out of the city, through the Jalam and Jazeera Deserts, and in the surrounding villages. They had a key media hub in al Rega and an in-processing and training center in Jazeera. To control a city in the context of counterinsurgency means to control its people. Despite its having been cleared four times by the U.S. Army, insurgents controlled Samarra.

An augmented Charlie Company of 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), assumed responsibility for the city in October of 2007. A few months before, several hundred National Police, Iraqi Police, and Iraqi Army moved into the city, and their presence helped. But

for the most part, despite a valiant fight by the outgoing unit, the 101st found a city with no government, no economy, no essential services, no security, and no hope.

In a period of 14 months, 2-327th Infantry and the people of Samarra transformed the city. Security is vastly improved, with few attacks on Americans and even fewer on Iraqis. Empty roads sport vehicles again. Closed shops are open. A new mayor and city counsel president are working to get the city functioning again. The transformation began with hard close combat, aided by physically closing off the city to insurgents. Months of respectful but fruitless interaction with the people finally began generating intelligence. Targeted, restrained raids led to key detentions. In March Samarra began its own awakening, coupled with a thorough census and emplacement of concrete T-walls to secure neighborhoods. Throughout the process, we spent hours each day asking locals how we could help, and then trying to help when we could. It is probably an overstatement to say that the locals liked us, but they certainly sided with us, and together we changed their city.

This article focuses on 2-327th's actions between April and November 2008, after most of the fighting had ended. The city was secure, but it still lacked a government, essential services, and economic stability. Our battalion commander (LTC J.P. McGee) and S3 (MAJ Jim Deore) realized that security gains would quickly erode if we did not begin to make progress in these areas. Our battalion created the No Slack Revitalization Team (NSRT), a group of officers paired with Iraqis with the mission to restore government, essential services, and economic prosperity to Samarra.

While we found it fulfilling to improve the lives of locals, NSRT was still a piece of the counterinsurgency fight. Counterinsurgency is a political and social fight, with the military accounting for only a fraction of the effort. We chose to try to fix every school and pave every road in order to reward or entice a neighborhood's support.

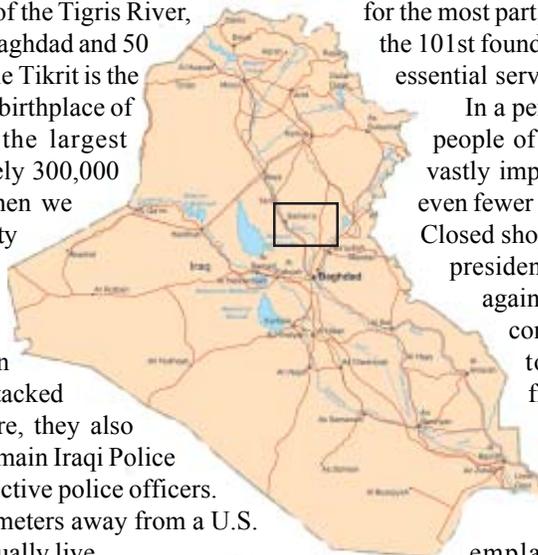


Figure 1 — Samarra's Biggest Market in December 2007



Figure 2 — Samarra's Biggest Market in December 2008





Courtesy photos

The author briefs his platoon sergeant and squad leaders before a major operation in Samarra.

Every local who benefited from these improvements was another potential source of intelligence and another defense against the insurgents' return.

I worked on the rule of law in Samarra, an area in which we made great progress. I will use the rule of law as a case study of the overall system for rebuilding a city's, province's, or country's government, essential services, and economy.

The No Slack Revitalization Team succeeded in restoring the rule of law to Samarra because we treated revitalization as the main effort in our counterinsurgency fight and used an active partnership with local counterparts, instead of a passive advising role. The active partnership succeeded due to the amount of time we spent engaging the locals, our organic mobility and security, our location on a small patrol base in the city, and our commitment to accountability.

NSRT Overview

CPT Juan Garcia, the battalion fire support officer (FSO), led the No Slack Revitalization Team, which consisted of four platoon leaders, a civil affairs officer (CAO), a civilian law enforcement professional (LEP), and our battalion surgeon. Our satellite provincial reconstruction team (PRT) member also attended most meetings, and our battalion commander and S3

oversaw the team. Eventually we added a member of the military transition team (MiTT) responsible for escorting fuel from Bayji, the local IRD representative (a private company associated with the U.S. Agency for International Development that was completing projects in Samarra), and three more platoon leaders who came to our company later in the deployment. In the last few months our company commander, CPT Joshua Kurtzman, who had intimate knowledge of almost everything going on in the city, joined the group. He had been focused on security, but the battalion commander realized that he should have been a part of NSRT from the beginning, due to his connections and involvement in all of the city's affairs.

We each assumed responsibility for an essential service or an aspect of government. Our initial areas of responsibility included electricity, water, rule of law, education, agriculture, health, industry/minerals, municipalities, and microfinance. After a few months we added fuel, due to its huge value to the locals and the vast amount of corruption surrounding it. Each officer partnered with the local counterpart responsible for that aspect of government. Some officers had more than one area. NSRT Six worked with the city council president and director of municipalities. The PRT representative

worked with the mayor. The civil affairs officer and NSRT Six handled the money, project paperwork, and liaising with brigade and higher. The team met weekly with the battalion commander and S3.

We partnered with locals; we did not do things for them. The one area in which we did act unilaterally was money. We encouraged the Iraqis to use their own funds when possible, but did not delay action on any project due to lack of Iraqi financing. We did not hesitate to use American money. We worked with the locals; we advised them and supervised them. At times we suggested to the city council and mayor to replace incompetent people. We took a very active role in revitalizing the city.

The Iraqis largely rose to the challenge, but it is important to note that it required constant attention and supervision on our part to ensure that the Iraqis did what they said they would. Americans provided an incorruptible force in a corrupt society. We supervised to make sure the money (or fuel or detainees) went where it should, without corruption. We provided motivation where they lacked it. We provided a capacity for planning, foresight, and organization that the Iraqis lacked, especially at the municipal level. We provided support when a local director or politician might come under pressure, whether from insurgents or other politicians. We provided pressure on provincial politicians when the locals were powerless to do so. We always presented our efforts to the public as Iraqi projects, and the locals largely responded well. But, the local leaders were not ready to do this on their own.

NSRT members evaluated their essential services, set goals, and worked toward achieving them. As for electricity, we realized that we could not generate more power for a city wallowing in less than four hours of electricity a day. We could emplace transformers, however, to improve distribution and target them to certain market areas or neighborhoods. We funded and built a water treatment facility. We renovated several schools. We funded and fixed the city's asphalt plant with the intent that it would be used to pave the city's roads. We fixed the city's vehicles so they could begin garbage and rubble removal. Then we continued to supervise these projects after completion to ensure that the vehicles removed garbage, the city maintained its water treatment facility, and

that the roads were paved.

Different sources and amounts of money required different approval mechanisms and authorities. At times, brigade and division also supplied people with expertise that we lacked. We also developed contacts with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Personnel at the brigade partnered with Iraqi provincial politicians and technocrats, because our brigade headquarters was at a COP outside of Tikrit. Our local counterparts worked with these Iraqi provincial leaders, while we worked with their American counterparts. With the exception of the local PRT representative, some e-mails and a visit by an American electrical expert, we never made contact with Iraqis or Americans in Baghdad working on a national level.

The Main Effort

Battalion Main Effort — FM 3-0, *Operations*, defines main effort as “the activity, unit, or area that commanders determine constitutes the most important task at that time. Commanders weight the main effort with resources and priorities and shift it as circumstances and intent demand.” Charlie Company was our battalion main effort. The battalion commander augmented our company with the scout platoon, a Delta Company section, a tactical human intelligence team, a law enforcement professional, a CAO, an intelligence officer, and eventually the NSRT.

When NSRT began, it became the battalion main effort. Just as our battalion augmented Charlie Company for its kinetic fight, it gave NSRT the people and resources it needed to complete its mission. The battalion commander and S3 were busy men but came to our patrol base weekly to lead two to three hour-long meetings. The battalion commander also spent most of his reconstruction money in the city, rather than spreading it throughout the battalion AO. Just as the city was the center of the kinetic fight, it became the center of the revitalization effort.

The battalion commander held us to the same high standards to which he held his primary staff. We set targets and tracked milestones. He expected flawless, professional slide presentations. He taught us quickly how to develop systems to plan and track our areas of responsibility. We had short, medium, and long-term goals. We backwards planned. We assessed where

and how we could be effective, and then we executed. We did not spend much time talking or debating. He also gave us freedom. When either we or our counterparts wanted to do a project, he supported us. He set priorities and funded those accordingly, but we each felt a sense of ownership over our areas. Infantrymen are competitive by nature, and just like we each wanted our platoon AO to be the most secure, we each wanted to make the most progress in our area of government.

By spending time with us, the battalion commander made it clear how much NSRT meant to him. By holding us to professional standards several ranks above our own, he forced us to take NSRT seriously. If our local counterpart or agency missed a deadline or failed to complete a project, the battalion commander held us responsible. If we failed to secure the funding we needed, he personally engaged the brigade commander. He took time to engage all of our local counterparts, and if they were consistently under-performing, he used his influence to motivate or replace them. He designated NSRT the main effort and then manned and resourced it accordingly.

Platoon Main Effort — NSRT also became my main effort as a platoon leader. That meant that if my platoon had a patrol and I had a meeting, my platoon sergeant took the patrol and I went to my meeting. As an Infantryman, I did not like this. As a counterinsurgent, I understood its importance and executed my mission. Less of a combat environment and a group of

outstanding NCOs made this arrangement possible. We could not have made NSRT our main effort without the hard fight of the first six months of the deployment.

NSRT as main effort also meant that it consumed a great deal of my non-patrolling time. Meetings with counterparts lasted for hours sometimes, and we met several times a week. I would spend time prepping for my meetings, just as platoons rehearse for operations. Then, I would take time after the meeting to record its results and analyze their implications. Sometimes this took a few minutes, sometimes a few hours, depending on the meeting. Preparing for NSRT meetings also took time, because we had to present professional slides. I spent time discussing issues with my company and battalion commander, battalion FSO, S2, and LEP. NSRT was a full-time commitment.

Rule of Law

Background — The full story of the rule of law in Samarra would take too long to tell and delve too deeply into Iraqi law. Instead, I will use some examples from the rule of law to illustrate our approach to revitalization.

When we arrived, Samarra had no rule of law. It had no judges or judicial investigators. It had a jail, but it was completely corrupt. Detainees had no opportunity for trial, whether they were insurgents or innocent civilians rounded up for bribes. Some detainees lingered in jail for two years with no trial. Instead of a trial, a committee of Iraqi National Police (NP) and Iraqi Police (IP) decided whom to release. In order to



SGT Kani Ronningen

LTC J. P. McGee, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, meets with a local Iraqi army officer in Samarra, Iraq.

secure a detainee's release, family would have to pay \$3,000-5,000 to the IP and NP. For an insurgent, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) received \$30,000-50,000. In January, insurgents and corrupt ISF took advantage of an uninformed National Police Transition Team (NPTT) member and released more than 30 al-Qaida operatives, resulting in an increase in significant activities (SIGACTs). ISF investigators and jailers were chosen for political connections or their ability to deliver bribes for releases. Abuse occurred regularly in the jail. Detainees did not receive regular food and water and received no medical care. The courthouse, judges' residence, and jail all needed significant refurbishment. Each day on patrol, local citizens would pass us the names of sons and fathers in jail, begging for their release.

Iraqis are no different from Americans in that they want a fair system, but Samarra had no system of rule of law at all. This was not only difficult for the locals, but it hurt our counterinsurgency campaign. We worked with the ISF, but the locals viewed them, especially the NP, as corrupt. We sent detainees who did not have enough evidence for U.S. detention to the Samarra jail, where they could be abused or released for bribes. The jail hurt the locals, but it hurt our standing in the community as well.

Long before the kinetic fight ended, the battalion set the stage for re-introducing the rule of law. The local government asked the province for judges to come back to Samarra, and the battalion commander and FSO lobbied their counterparts at the provincial level as well. They sought money to refurbish the residence and courthouse, damaged and looted for years. Our battalion leadership showed great foresight in making these moves early, so that when the security situation improved, we could begin working immediately. In April, when the city was more secure than it had been in years, things began to change.

Between April and November of 2008, we made great strides in the rule of law. We brought back four judges and four judicial investigators. We replaced the corrupt jailers with professional, honest men. We secured financing to repair the courthouse and judicial residence. We improved security at the courthouse, and worked with USACE and U.S. Marshals on a large project to upgrade the courthouse and jail's security. We worked with the Police Transition Team (PTT) and civilian police advisers to improve the investigative competence of the IP and NP. We worked with the judges and jailers to release innocent detainees and send insurgents to trial in Tikrit. We almost completely stopped jail corruption.

Between April and November, the judges released more than 800 detainees with no increase in SIGACTs. The NP ran a jail with regular food, water, and medical care. We registered and tracked every detainee, whether from a U.S., NP, IP, or Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) raid. We improved the efficiency of the legal process, and by November, it was functioning almost up to Iraqi constitutional standards. We then worked with the judges and jailers to implement a unique reconciliation system. In April, the jail held more than 400 detainees, nearly all of whom were detained for terrorism and only 31 for non-terror crimes. When we left, the jail held 149 detainees — 76 for terrorism and 73 for criminal acts, and 10 of those were pending release. Civil suits are now a common occurrence. On patrol, no one complains

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about the rule of law anymore.

The legal system in Samarra still has many problems, chief of which is the difficult interaction between the government (ISF and judges) and the CLC. The ISF and judges want to arrest many CLC members and leaders for their past insurgent acts. To do so would be completely legal and is probably required under Iraqi law; however, it would also

jeopardize peace in the city. The head of all ISF in Samarra still maintains release authority, which is in complete violation of the Iraqi Constitution. As such, the threat of corruption remains. Also, the National Police runs the jail, but eventually the local IP will take over. They do not have the same competence as the NP yet. The IP and NP still lack investigative skills. Only 9 percent of detainees sent to Tikrit for trial are convicted, usually because of a lack of witnesses who do not make the trip from Samarra or from lack of physical evidence. Despite the role that we gave the Iraqi judges in our reconciliation program, most ISF view it as an American effort and reserve the right to arrest those who have reconciled. Despite the problems, we set the system up to continue to improve in the future.

The Parties Involved — We realized early that we could not separate the jail from the rule of law. Only by working both systems could we succeed. Charles Storlie, a law enforcement professional, took the lead on the jail and engaged the NP that ran it. I worked on the legal system, courthouse, and relations with the judges.

The civilians and Soldiers in Tikrit played an important role in our efforts, but should have been more effective than they were. I cannot speak for every essential service or the civilians and Soldiers that strove so hard to improve Iraqi lives. I only speak here about my experiences in the rule of law. However, I think that these experiences reveal lessons that apply in many areas. The PRT had a civilian rule of law expert from the Department of Justice who operated out of the COP in Tikrit. The division also assigned a JAG officer for rule of law issues. At times, other Soldiers who worked with the PRT or Civil Affairs would briefly enter into our efforts, but the main people I dealt with were the civilian expert and the JAG.

Active vs Passive Partnership — The best way to help the Iraqis is to work hand-in-hand with them. We did not do anything for them, except secure American funding. However, it is not enough to just teach them and then let them work on their own. Herein lies the greatest difference between our approach and that of others working on the rule of law in Salah al Din. We took a much more active, involved, and insistent approach.

Some people could object that we sacrificed long-term success for short-term gain by taking an active role. They could say that by not allowing the Iraqis to try and fail on their own, we deprived them of a learning experience. We might have developed a stable system in Samarra, they could say, but the minute that we leave, the system will fall apart. They recommend the slow, passive approach, wherein we talk to the Iraqis and let them work it out on their own.

In my opinion, the active approach actually did more for the long-term success of Samarra's legal system than passivity would have, while also gaining short-run successes. We gave credit to the Iraqis, even when we played a major role in a project. Platoons carried talking points throughout the city, praising the local

achievements. Moreover, we always operated behind the scenes.

Further, the locals learned how to do things the right way. Providing an honest, hard working, thoughtful, respectful example may do the most for Iraq in the long-term. What could the local judges, investigators, and jailers have learned from a passive approach that involved us talking to them at times and watching them struggle? Not much. Also, when the passive approach allows the Iraqis to fail, they do not learn from their mistakes as much as get frustrated. No matter how active or passive a role we play, the Iraqis will blame us for any failures. We might as well do all we can to achieve success.

The Iraqis were not ready yet to do things on their own. They did not have the experience, training, or education. Some did not have the commitment or will to see things through. Some were dishonest, and others were grossly inept. Too often Americans allowed them to get away with the omnipresent excuse: “in’shallah” or “God willing.” To pretend otherwise is wishful thinking and always leads to wasted time, wasted money, frustration, and failure.

Moreover, we do not have the time to allow the passive approach to succeed or fail. My American counterparts in Tikrit stressed that they wanted to build Iraqi systems and let them work things out for themselves. This strategy takes time, and they felt that I was too impatient. I firmly believe that their approach will not work, even if given 20 years. But the point is moot, because we do not have 20 years. They could never understand the urgency with which we pursued our goals. Soldiers died to secure Samarra; NSRT existed to prevent insurgents from coming back. We had to succeed in the short-term, or there might not be a long-term. Now that America is pulling out of Iraq, whatever window we have throughout the country is closing. I would rather leave them with the best systems we could actively achieve, than with a legacy of frustration and failure and only their neighbors in the region to teach them differently.

Time and Resources — The active approach required an immense amount of time and energy. Here, the Department of Justice expert and JAG were at a great disadvantage. They had to serve the entire province, whereas we only worked on our city. I can only imagine how successful our



Charles Storlie, the No Slack Revitalization Team’s law enforcement professional, trained the Samarra courthouse security guards.

involvement in Iraq would be if each major city had its own rule of law expert and JAG, instead of a police advisor and Infantryman. We should have surged civilian and military experts into Iraq, not just combat arms and support.

We spent many hours engaging our local counterparts at the jail and courthouse. I met with the judges once or twice a week after court ended so as not to disturb their work. I also met with them whenever a crisis arose. I had an Infantry platoon to move and secure me wherever I needed to go, and with the courthouse and jail in Samarra’s green zone, I could take a small dismounted patrol to my engagements between my combat patrols. I also stayed in phone contact with them through our interpreters. Our LEP or I visited the jail daily. We did a daily detainee headcount to ensure no one physically released a prisoner without the judge granting a release. We inprocessed new detainees weekly and conducted bimonthly medical checks with our medics and Iraqi doctors. We gained trust by making small promises, then following through. When Mr. Storlie could not obtain financing to fix the jail’s sewer system, he found PVC pipe at the patrol base, scrounged a little money, and made it happen.

When you are always around, you are around when something happens. Several

times we stopped the ISF’s attempt to release detainees without the judge’s consent or our knowledge. We could do that because we were there when it happened.

The legal expert and JAG were constrained by a lack of vehicles and security, and by having to work with judges all over the province. I estimate that the PRT’s rule of law expert and division JAG met the provincial judge once or twice a month. They had no visibility on what went on in the provincial legal system. Tikrit had a three-percent conviction rate when I left Iraq. Was it because of corruption, lack of evidence, or poor work on the part of local judges? No one knows. Tikrit was the home of the province’s Amnesty Committee, a product of Iraqi legislation. The PRT and JAG did not once engage this committee to see if it was legitimate or not, to see if it needed help or security, or even to see who was on it or how it worked. As such, we never allowed Samarra detainees to go to the committee, angering our local judges. That is why Iraq needs more experts and America needs to give the experts and PRTs dedicated assets, so that they can use the active engagement technique. Without constantly engaging the locals, you cannot revitalize a legal system or anything else.

The location of our small patrol base located in the city not only facilitated engagements with our counterparts, it

provided other benefits over larger FOBs. Small patrol bases foster a flexible, resourceful mindset. The PRT rule of law expert and the division JAG lived at a large FOB. They had schedules and routines. They were not alone; everyone on large bases falls into a pattern. My platoon sergeant had a broken wrist and caught a logistics patrol to the COP where the PRT and JAG lived. He tried to see a doctor, only to learn that the doctor did not work on Saturdays. In the same way, when we asked Soldiers and civilians at the COP to do something outside of their routine, like engage a provincial judge about computers for the Samarra courthouse, they were reluctant to do so. We had no schedule at our patrol base. We were used to four-hour patrols lasting 14 due to contact or unplanned raids at 0200. That mindset allowed us to be flexible with any issues that came up at the courthouse or jail.

Accountability

We held the locals accountable where the PRT and JAG would not. First, we only made promises we could keep, and then we kept them. That meant that we could hold the Iraqis accountable. We did not allow the Iraqis to lie, and we called them out when they did. We forced them to commit to dates and timelines. We strongly encouraged the local leaders to fire incompetent subordinates. For example, we convinced the ISF commanders to remove the officer in charge of the jail and an intelligence officer for corruption. They grudgingly did so. Replacing them with an honest NP, who had a background in detainees, was a huge step forward for the rule of law.

We also forced locals to commit. Anyone who has been to Iraq knows that Iraqis speak differently than Americans, and Iraqis do not always expect to keep their promises or for you to keep yours. Promises are sometimes polite ways to say “no.” This is not a cultural judgment; it is a product of the language. As such, I would not allow “in’shallah” or God-willing promises. I would force the local to commit, and then hold him to it.

One example is very telling. We lacked judicial investigators, which are key players in the Iraqi legal system. I encouraged the local judge to write a request, then obtained a copy (ensuring he actually did it), translated it, and sent both to our provincial counterparts. Then I supervised on both ends. When it became apparent after a month of stalling that no one would help us, I asked the PRT and JAG if the local judge and I could come to Tikrit and engage the provincial judge personally. They made excuses. So I told them that I was coming on a certain date, that I would appreciate their making an introduction, but that I would go with or without them. A few days later we met the provincial judge. The local judge did a good job lobbying for Samarra. The provincial judge gave the usual “in’shallah” promise. So I forced him to commit to a name and date. He was upset, but we got our investigators.

After the meeting the JAG told me that they did not force the locals to make promises and that they were more interested in building Iraqi systems. I do not know if he really believed this. What I do know is that not only is our active method more effective in each instance (investigators, getting money for the courthouse, installing plumbing in the jail, etc.), but in the end, by our example and our commitment, we taught the Iraqis the right way to do things and allowed their system to develop correctly. Samarra went from having no legal system to having one of the province’s best. The judges saw the right way to operate, and the citizens saw what an

uncorrupt system looked like. Even after we leave, they will remember what right looks like. If we had taken a passive approach, none of this would have occurred.

In the end it is all about effort. Whether it is playing a football game, charging a machine gun position or fixing the rule of law, the unit that wants to win the most will usually win. We would not let the locals fail. We let them do things on their own, but we actively helped them. The active approach leads to short and long term success.

Coordinated Efforts

We would have had even more success had we had a better relationship with our civilian and military counterparts at the provincial level and higher. My experience in dealing with civilians and military at the provincial level was that they did not understand the urgency of what we were doing in our AO. We had a small window in which to improve essential services, thereby solidifying the people’s support, and cementing the security gains for the first time in five years. The experts said that they wanted to build relationships and processes and let the Iraqis do it themselves. More experts in more locations, living on small patrol bases, would allow them to better understand the people and places that they came overseas to help. By virtue of their proximity to their counterparts, I believe that they would take a more active approach, and therefore achieve more.

From my perspective, we lacked a unified approach. Our battalion, a PRT in Tikrit and Samarra, the PTT and NPTT, IRD, the brigade and division, USACE, and eventually the UN all worked in Samarra. However, no one controlled all of these various groups. The groups did not even coordinate their actions. We could have been much more effective if someone was directing all of these groups toward a single goal, synchronizing their plans, reducing double efforts or massing forces at different times. There may have been, it just did not appear so to me, at my level, in the rule of law.

As an example, USACE’s headquarters was just a few hundred meters from our brigade headquarters on the COP, yet for almost the entire deployment, they never coordinated with us when they did projects in the city. Only late in the deployment were we able to develop a relationship with them, just before USACE was about to spend \$500,000 to upgrade the jail and courthouse security. We managed to form a strong relationship with them, which allowed them to improve their plan. They originally proposed metal gates that rose out of the ground and closed circuit television cameras, without knowing that Samarra still lacked electricity 20 hours a day and that any generators would likely not receive the fuel required to run the cameras and gates. We used Hescos instead. By working together, from recon to planning to contracting to execution to supervision, we spent less money, got more out of it, and developed what I hope is a lasting relationship for the follow-on unit.

Lessons Learned

Here is a list of successful tactics for implementing the active engagement technique:

- Use a good interpreter, even if he is not your usual interpreter. Some of the conversations will be highly technical. Large amounts of money are involved. It is important to communicate effectively.
- Use interpreter cell phones. Use CAT 2 terps, or the local ones that you trust. It makes life easier to be able to call to set up a

meeting, to verify it, to admonish the local that missed the meeting, to pass on a small piece of information that would otherwise require a patrol to take you somewhere in the city, etc. The local can also call you through the interpreter if there is an issue or problem, and they will. This now improves your overall relationship with the local.

- Meet your counterpart early and often. Like all engagements, you will need to spend time just getting to know the individual. It will take several engagements before the local really forms a relationship with you.

- Meet them when it is convenient for them. Unless it is a time-sensitive matter, understand that they have jobs, appointments, and a life. If you barge into their day unannounced or at its peak, do not expect a fruitful engagement.

- Treat an engagement like a mission — plan for it. I would write out some key talking points on an index card and mark them off while we spoke. I would have a goal for each meeting and would not leave without either accomplishing the goal or trying to and realizing that I would not accomplish it.

- Treat Iraqis with respect, but hold them accountable. Iraqis will tell you what you want to hear. They are incredibly concerned with face, with outward appearance, and with praise. Hold their feet to the fire, make them give concrete answers and set concrete dates; do not accept “in sha’allah.” Then, check on it and keep checking until they do what they promised.

- Find the right person for the job. If your counterpart is inept, consider finding a new one. At times there is no one competent for the job, but you can always look. Still treat him with respect, treat him like a man, and hopefully he will respond as one. But if he does not, look to someone else.

- Try to understand the bigger picture. Samarra has the largest population in Salah al Din Province, but the power lies in Tikrit, the provincial capitol. Even under Saddam, Samarra was a neglected city. Then, when Iraq had elections a few years ago, Samarra did not participate, and so has no representation on the provincial council. Tikrit still views Samarra as unsecured, and Tikrit does not trust its leaders. So, it is hard to get provincial support or funding for Samarra projects.

- Work both the Iraqi side and American side. Have the Iraqis send a request for whatever they want through their Iraqi channels, but get a copy from them, translate it, and send it to our (U.S. Soldier or U.S. civilian) counterparts who engage the province. That way, everyone is on the same page and if the province does not uphold its end, the Americans at provincial level can hold them accountable.

- Engage Iraqis at the provincial level by actually going there, using your American counterparts to set the meeting up and introduce you.

- The system is very hierarchical and Iraqis do not usually use initiative. So, it is common to hear an Iraqi say he cannot do something without provincial approval or even approval from Baghdad. Sometimes it is an excuse, but sometimes it is true. Most of us were unable to make contacts in Baghdad, but that is the next step and would be worth trying. At the least you will work with the province.

- Dedicate the CA team to working on Iraqi Commander’s Emergency Response Program and other CF methods to get money for your projects, because the Iraqis will not always come through with money. We had projects requesting money and always had

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more ready when those were fulfilled or denied.

- Have a short, medium, and long-term plan, and work all three simultaneously. It is too easy to get caught up in the short-term difficulties. Until the locals are able to do it themselves, you must help them realize their vision for the future and work to secure it.

Conclusion

NSRT was successful, but could have been more so. A group of lieutenants and captains trained to fight suddenly found themselves as electrical engineers, agriculture experts, and municipal planners. On top of that, we still had to execute our normal combat patrols and raids. If the military is only part of a counterinsurgency, and if all of these other aspects that NSRT addressed are the real main effort of our fight, then the U.S. government should have had experts in these fields ready to work with locals to get their cities back on track. Indeed, a few of these experts worked with us at times, but there were far too few and they were too spread out. They lacked organic movement and security forces, severely limiting their effectiveness. Their location on large FOBs, stuck in routines, away from the people they try to help, further limits them.

Beyond these limits, the basic difference between the civilian and military experts we worked with and us is use of active versus passive approach. We all agree that we have to teach Iraqis to do things on their own, and that we cannot do things for them. But we disagree on how to teach them, or how far along in the learning process they are, or their level of competence and integrity. Hard as it is to accept, the officials in Samarra were not ready to do this on their own. A few were competent but inexperienced. A few were honest but could be easily strong-armed or bypassed. A few were motivated but not enough to bring the rest along with them. To operate under the false pretense that we have to let the Iraqi system operate is a cop-out. It is only through the exertions of U.S. Soldiers, every day, that we made progress in Samarra. Not only does the active approach lead to short-term gains, I believe it leads to long-term, lasting, system-building success as well.

Without our effort and supervision, little to nothing would have occurred. This is absolutely true with regards to the rule of law in Samarra. I believe it to be true in cities across Iraq, at the provincial and national level, in all areas of government. I believe this to be true in other countries. If the U.S. does not put the effort into Iraq, who will? If we do not take the lessons we have learned in Iraq and apply them to Afghanistan and elsewhere, then we have no one to blame but ourselves.

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