



Winning with the People in Iraq

by Captain Jason M. Pape

While there are no generalizations that work everywhere in Iraq, no tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that will ensure success in all situations, we must agree that winning over the people in Iraq will ultimately determine success or failure. Given the brutal history of Iraq, the nature of its religious and political insurgency, and the significant rifts between cultures, this war cannot be won through attrition.

Success in Iraq

What does an armor company, equipped according to its standard modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE), do when deployed under alert conditions to Iraq, immediately following a traditional maneuver train-up and a National Training Center (NTC) rotation, with the mission of relieving part of 3d Infantry Division to begin combat, stability, and support operations in Baghdad, Iraq? Adapt and overcome.

Company B, 1st Battalion, 13th Armor, "Wolfpack," of the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, deployed from Fort Riley, Kansas, separate from its brigade and division, prepared to fight the ground offensive. And we were ready! Our sister battalion, 2d Battalion, 70th Armor, was already in theater supporting the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and we were eager to catch up to them. During reception,

staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) in Kuwait, as the coalition swept toward Baghdad, we realized our likely role was changing from combat to urban operations and stability and support operations. But we had not prepared for stability and support operations!

We took every opportunity to train soldiers in the unfamiliar tasks associated with military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) and stability and support operations. We relied heavily on the experience of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who served in Kosovo and Bosnia. We also had to change our mindset. Soldiers, who were trained, rehearsed and mentally prepared to defeat the enemy through overwhelming firepower and mounted maneuver, do not readily accept the role of peacemakers. No longer judged on the attrition we cause against the enemy, the ground we gain, or the objectives we secure, we must learn the language of stability and support operations. What defines success? Before we could think about that too much, we were in Kadimiyah, on the northern edge of Baghdad, relieving 2d Battalion, 69th Armor, 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, of responsibility for the area.

By all accounts, we were successful in Kadimiyah. We maintained the third most important holy site in Iraq, the religious epicenter for Shia in Baghdad, the most significant avenue in and out of northern

Baghdad as one of the safest areas in Iraq. We had not trained for this mission. We prepared almost exclusively for combat operations. We were not equipped with much in the way of emerging technology. We left home with little more than our standard MTOE equipment and none of the essential supplies now required for operations in Iraq.

Ultimately, strong NCO leadership, basic soldier discipline, training the basics, and enduring American resolve kept us alive and brought us all home. Most units can cite these same qualities; did we do something different to determine our success or was Kadimiyah simply a different place, destined to be stable and safe? I dare not venture a guess on this. None of us should accept an inevitable end in our mission in Iraq. Never rest on your laurels, relishing your assignment in a safe part of Iraq, for nothing is certain here. At the same time, never give up on peace in an area, submitting to a battle of attrition with no hope of pacifism.

Winning Hearts and Minds

When we relieved 2d Battalion, 69th Armor, we realized they had set us up for success in Kadimiyah. We inherited many strong relationships and programs from them. We learned quickly that our most difficult task would be tempering Iraqis' new sense of freedom with good order and discipline while avoiding the same



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cruelty and violence they knew from Saddam. Iraqis regularly told us that a heavy hand could only govern their people. They encouraged us to use violence and power to manage the people. We knew this was a shortsighted answer. Much like abused and neglected children, they needed to grow to respect authority, not for fear, but because that authority represents freedoms and provisions. But like abused children, they viewed our threats with disdain, knowing we would never resort to the same tactics they were conditioned to by Saddam.

We knew that we must learn how to present different faces, depending on the audience and situation. We must be capable of quickly escalating force to overwhelm the enemy, prepared to avoid or counter an attack without sustaining casualties, while doing something as peaceful as handing out candy to children outside a school. We must exude power, survivability, and readily lethal capability while inviting supporters, fans, and people who would cooperate with us to defeat our enemies. By no means was this easy.

British forces and U.S. Marines were right about perceptions. The British noted that when you carry loaded weapons at the ready, you have eliminated much of your escalation of force; your choices for escalation quickly narrow to lethal force. The Marines noted the U.S. Army's defensive, possibly antagonistic appearance in wearing full protective gear. Rather than argue if they were right and we were wrong, it is possible to wear full individual body armor (IBA) and Kevlar, patrol with weapons in red status, and maintain an offensive stance to protect the force, while presenting approachable, benevolent, and liberating images to the Iraqis.

How do you strike fear in the hearts of your enemies and kindle respect in the people you are trying to protect? The key is to quickly adapt your presence to your situation. We concentrated heavily on ramping down following any significant action, such as a direct fire engagement, an apprehension, or a public confrontation. Something as simple as a smile, a wave, and a piece of candy to a nearby child can break the Iraqis' perceived image of you as a conqueror and oppressor.

Word Gets Around

Our first efforts were directed toward those injured during the war. While Kadimiyah is primarily Shia and urban, it is bordered by Sha'at a Taji, a rural Sunni suburb to the north. The Iraqi army used the area to hide artillery during the war and several high-ranking regime leaders lived there; thus, it saw heavy aerial bombardment. As we patrolled the area, we routinely stopped to treat people who were accidentally injured by coalition attacks. Our medics treated a small girl, seriously burned by air strikes that hit her house; a man and his son who lost their legs to cluster bombs that landed on their farm; and an old man who was shot through his Achilles tendon. We tried to avoid becoming a visiting clinic, reinforcing the fact that local medical facilities were fully functional, getting involved only when we felt responsible.

Early on, we decided children were critical to our success in winning over the people. First, they provided a good gauge to the local sentiment. If children did not wave or smile, chances were their parents held contempt for us. If they waved and smiled, it meant we were headed in the right direction — if we could win their favor, it would be that much more difficult for their parents to resent or resist us.

Most important was the impression our soldiers gave during operations. Iraqis watched everything we did! Some watched to observe our methods and establish patterns that they would use against us. Most watched to learn who we are on a personal level, which forced us to be aware of:

- **Soldier discipline.** Soldiers who were attacked directly in our area were generally doing something wrong. A lapse in uniform standard, relaxed security, or inappropriate activity preempted many attacks. Soldiers, who appeared disciplined, prepared, and vigilant often dissuaded an attack, prompting the enemy to find a softer target.

- **Soldier professionalism.** Not all Iraqis know English but most know our profanity. Iraqis also have a strong sense of pride. Soldiers conducting themselves professionally, treating Iraqis with dignity and respect, doing their duty rather than showing personal aggression will earn points with Iraqis. Once they realize you are after criminals or insurgents, good Iraqis will support you, assist you, and even detain the suspect for you. If they perceive abuse of power, you will encounter resistance. Our brigade motto was, "Be polite, be professional, and be prepared to kill!"

- **Animosity.** Iraqis watch the way we conduct business. Do we take pleasure in roughing up people? Do we target indiscriminately, as if all Iraqis are the enemy? We must target specifically, to defeat current insurgents without creating new ones.

Word does get around. My most trusted translator, a Sunni, told me about a friend of his from Aadamiyah. Aadamiyah was one of Saddam's most favored neighborhoods with some of the strongest opposition to coalition forces. His friend came across a U.S. soldier, intimidating and unfriendly in his words. Because of the language barrier and some misunderstood glances, the Iraqi mistook him for an enemy. Then the Iraqi saw this same soldier

buy some candy from a store and hand it out to nearby children. The Iraq thought, "maybe these guys are not all that bad."

Trust Somebody

Trust in Iraq is difficult. As our brigade commander often told us: "The story of the turtle and the scorpion presents a good example of trust in Iraq. The scorpion needs to cross the river, but cannot swim. He asks a turtle preparing to swim if he can ride across the river on his back. The turtle agrees, if the scorpion promises he will not sting him halfway across the river. The scorpion insists he will not, because if he does, they will both drown. The turtle agrees to help the scorpion cross the river. Halfway across the river, the scorpion stings the turtle. With its last breath, the turtle asks 'why?' The scorpion responds simply, 'welcome to the Middle East.'"

Before you jump to conclusions about Iraqis' values, ask yourself if you would trust us if you were an Iraqi. Many soldiers stumble into thinking Iraqis are inherently fallible, more so than us, responsible for everything that has befallen them. This comes from the frustration of seeing a country looted, destroyed, and polluted from within, and working to repair infrastructure faster than "they" can tear down. It comes from deceit, deception, and friendly pretenses followed by deadly attacks, followed by local ignorance of the attackers. But again, try to see things from their perspective. You do not have to affirm their beliefs, just understand their situations and circumstances so you may effectively counter the issues. Consider this:

- Iraq was one of the wealthiest, most modern and westernized Arab countries in the 1980s. Twelve years of embargo later, they are a third-world nation in most respects.
- We have waged war twice in their country, recently. Whether you call it invasion or liberation, we killed a lot of their people.
- Iraqis are convinced we are in bed with Israel, the war on terrorism is a veiled attack on Islam, and we really came for their oil.

Understanding these obstacles to Iraqi trust is the first step. Now, ask yourself if you trust the Iraqis. How can we expect them to trust us if we do not trust them? In most cases, they do not even trust themselves or each other. Bottom line: trust somebody, not everybody! Accept risk and trust somebody. It is the only way you will know what is really going on in your area.

Leading the Leaders

Will the real Sheikh please step forward? In the power vacuum that followed the dissolution of the Ba'ath party, religious, tribal, and political leaders scrambled to secure their parts of community influence. Coalition forces, naïve about the potential power of tribes and religion in Iraq, were caught off guard by this fact in many instances. Some were duped into alliances with frauds. Others dismissed the legitimacy of these groups altogether and went it alone. While U.S. forces struggled to grasp the situation, Imams, Sheikhs, and Hawasem (looters) grabbed property, money, and influence wherever the fallen regime left it accessible.

Coalition forces responded by recovering as much as they could, but was then left holding the reins on Iraq. From the very beginning, our goal was to make Iraqis responsible for Iraq. So how do we give Iraq back to the Iraqis? Without writing a book on this, here are some tips on identifying leaders, cultivating relation-

ships with them, and guiding them down the right path:

- Find out who the real community leaders are and win their support. Religious leaders, tribal leaders, businessmen, and government officials will determine your success. Type-A personalities (you and I) cannot win Iraq with brute force.
- Real Sheikhs and Imams will not come to you directly. If they show up at your forward operating base, they are middle management, *maybe*. Real Sheikhs and Imams already have enough power that they need not come begging and borrowing. You must go and find them.
- Tribes are like mafia. While friendship and loyalty play a part in dealings, Sheikhs ultimately respect power and authority. Deal with them on the basis of authority, yours and theirs.
- Regardless of what we think of religious and tribal influence in Iraq, it matters to Iraqis.



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- Do not ever cross the line between hospitality and bribery. Even when intentions seem harmless, if you accept large gratuities, you will be indebted, possibly leveraged. During the regime, everything in Iraq could be bought; Americans lead by example in their personal integrity and sense of righteousness.

- If you are a leader of an area, find *the* most influential person in that area and make him your partner. Remain neutral and weary; avoid taking sides and losing your objectivity. But you need someone you can trust to bounce issues and ideas against, someone who will candidly tell you what public perception is, and someone who will support you with their people.

- Work with Iraqi security and police forces. Do not do their job for them; but do not separate them completely from your mission. Your presence lends power and authority to their activities; their presence adds legitimacy to yours.

- Be prepared to dissolve relationships and/or fire people who fail to hold up their end of the bargain.

Decentralized Operations

The more you can empower subordinate leaders to build rapport within the community, the better. This requires face-to-face interaction with people from all walks of life, in as many parts of your area as the threat permits. Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants play an integral role in expanding your unit's influence to the people on the street. They provide exposure to local community leaders and neighborhoods, while administrators and high-level leaders keep company leaders occupied. As much as possible, integrate rapport building into your daily operations by:

- Assigning areas to individuals, much like additional duty areas. Make people responsible for facilities such as schools, hospitals, electricity, sewage, and sanitation.

- Encouraging subordinate leaders to adopt a neighborhood, learn as much as they can about the area, and build ties with the local people.

- Assigning an information (recon) objective in every mission. Require leaders to record routes they took, significant events, personal contacts made, and information gathered. It may be something as simple as "find out what they use that building for," or "who is shooting at night in that area."

- Allowing your soldiers to become part of an Iraqi family. They will appreciate their role in Iraq much more if they can get to know the people they are tasked to protect.

When Things Go Bad

Mistakes will be made. You will arrest the wrong guy, an innocent guy, or break down the door of someone harmless. You will experience collateral damage, vehicle accidents, perhaps even accidental engagements that result in innocent Iraqi deaths. Your ability to handle these situations will be just as critical as avoiding them. Manage these issues separately by:

- Determining what system is in place to compensate people, if you make a mistake. The claims system is clogged with vehicle damages, fraudulent attempts to recover money, and frivolous suits for war damages. Prioritize and track claims that are important to community relations.

- Integrating civil affairs personnel and the unit's claims officer to expedite re-

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pairs. Use psychological operations to hear what people are saying and get your message (explanation) out.

- Not promising anything! Do not allow room for Iraqis to infer a promise.

- Targeting precisely. You will develop targets at the company level based on human intelligence (HUMINT) you receive directly. You cannot affect targets assigned by higher; you must simply execute them. Know that your target can be off. Receiving targets with incorrect addresses and ten-digit grids is not uncommon and requires reorganizing and shifting to the correct target at a moment's notice. When you hit the wrong target, you must decide if you will use immediate HUMINT to find the right target. If you put information on the street and cannot immediately exploit the target, you have shown your hand. We traditionally accepted this risk, immediately working the area to correct our target information.

- Learning how to tactically question. Learn how to differentiate between single-source HUMINT, source reliability, source motivation, and time sensitivity. Understand that 90 percent of the reports you receive are dated and lost their value, falsified to watch your reaction or set you up, rumor, or simply fabricated to bring harm to a rival Iraqi. Beware the urgent report from an unknown person; it could be a trap or a trick. Keep the source with you.

Training to Do It Again

The following training ideas can help you prepare for deployment to Iraq. Some are contingent on support from higher-level commands, but worth fighting for:

- Determine as early as possible if your unit is going to Iraq. When you know you are, fight to tailor your training to Iraq. The traditional NTC train-up does not do it.

- Train tactical questioning. You are not allowed to interrogate; do not ever say you did. Tactical questioning skills will enable you to develop your own HUMINT.

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These skills also assist in normal encounters, which helps determine the validity of what people tell you and why.

- Train with media!
- Learn Arabic. Iraqis admire soldiers who take the time to learn a little Arabic.
- Train more at lower levels. Most operations in Iraq occur at the section level. Platoon leaders or platoon sergeants led their sections daily, while company leaders conducted their own coordination.
- Train soldiers to integrate other forces. Psychological operations, military working dogs, civil affairs, aviation, and Iraqi security forces became habitual attachments in Iraq.
- Train combative. Restraints and submission holds leave options in escalation of force, prior to using deadly force.

Many times, Iraqis told us that we were the real Muslims. They were amazed by our generosity, righteousness, integrity, and discipline. They only saw this if they let down their guard enough to see through the foreign invader. Iraqis are both proud and ashamed of their nation, their people, and their history. They contradicted themselves constantly with stories of Iraqi betrayal, Muslim pride and virtue, wishes for Saddam's return to restore order, praise for newfound freedoms and amenities, hatred for other religious groups, and relationships that have upended every bit of bigotry they knew. The people can be won over. Former Fedayeen soldiers have come to our side to fight against their former friends simply because they saw firsthand how readily the Americans help Iraqis. The cynic might say this demonstrates just how the Iraqis sway in their loyalties, that you cannot ever trust them. Only time will tell.



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