

How to Win In Iraq

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"The population's attitude in the middle stage of the war is dictated not so much by the relative popularity and merits of the opponents as by the more primitive concern for safety. Which side gives the best protection, which one threatens the most, which one is likely to win, these are the criteria governing the population's stand."

--David Galula

Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice

We cannot afford to fail in Iraq, the main front in a struggle for survival against radical Islamic fundamentalism. It may be a cliché but whether it was the right decision to depose Saddam Hussein or not, winning in Iraq is vital to the future of the United States and the rest of the world, including the moderate Muslim population.



U.S. ARMY (KATHY JO YOUNG)

Winning for the United States has to be defined as creating a representative, stable polity in Iraq that protects and responds to the will of the governed. Winning means Iraq will serve as an example of a moderate, peaceful, stable, and prosperous state; terrorists will not be welcome there, and the United States will have the initiative in the worldwide struggle against Islamic radical fundamentalism. If we allow the radical fundamentalist terrorists to trade isolated, impoverished Afghanistan for Iraq, the strategic linchpin of the Middle East, we will suffer a strategic defeat of historic proportions.

While many debate whether we are losing in Iraq, few believe we are winning. The security situation there is adequate in the Kurdish areas of Iraq, varies in the Shiite areas, and, despite use of Iraqi troops to backfill, insurgents control of all of the Sunni areas that are not in U.S. Army or Marine weapon sights at that moment.

No modern army using conventional tactics has ever defeated an insurgency. Yet successful counterinsurgency techniques devised in the 1960s from hard-won experience now languish in old books long unread by our hard-charging officer corps or harried civilian officials.

Our military is good at killing insurgents by using the firepower and maneuver tactics at which our soldiers and Marines excel. Classic counterinsurgency, however, is not primarily about killing insurgents; it is about controlling the population and creating a secure environment in which to gain popular support. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine requires killing insurgents, but as a means to gain control of the population, not as an end in itself.

What Is Needed for Success in Iraq?

We must have a philosophical redefinition at the National Command Authority level. The Bush administration's policy makers must stop acting like Iraq is an inconvenience that will soon go away and treat it as the main front in a struggle for survival against radical Islamic fundamentalism.

At the strategic level, we seem to have a winning concept: try to keep the lid on the insurgency until the Iraqis can form an elected government that respects the law, protects all the people's rights, and establishes the basis for prosperity for Iraq. Meanwhile, we will prepare the Iraqi military and police to defend their new government.

At the operational and tactical levels, our soldiers and Marines use orthodox Search and Destroy tactics to sweep through areas to search for insurgents and foreign jihadis and destroy them. Then they leave, come back, and do it again. This bloody game of whack-a-mole isn't working.

We must change to classic counterinsurgency Clear and Hold doctrine in which the security forces clear an area of armed insurgents, then hold it until its people are able to protect and govern themselves.

To achieve our national goals for the Iraqis and ourselves we must institute or modify our policies to use classic counterinsurgency policies and practices. Some examples follow.

National Counterinsurgency Plan

To implement policy at the strategic level we must form a combined U.S. and Iraqi leadership council, with a permanent staff, to prepare and supervise a countrywide National Counterinsurgency Plan. This combined council would be modeled on the World War II Combined Chiefs of Staff and include senior Iraqi leaders, a U.S. civilian proconsul in charge of the U.S. effort, the top U.S. departmental and agency representatives, and the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.

Insurgency is at base a political struggle, so the proconsul *must* be a civilian. The counterinsurgency effort fell into the military's lap at the outset, because no one else was in place to deal with it, but putting a civilian proconsul in charge would redress the balance. The proconsul position would be created to ensure unity of effort. He would have complete authority over all U.S. military and civilian personnel and operations in Iraq, and be appointed by and report directly to the president.

No freelancing should be allowed from independent operators-military or civilians coming into Iraq and doing their thing independently of the National Counterinsurgency Plan or the U.S. organization in Iraq. And no stove-pipes, people or organizations that report to, and receive their direction from, their main office in Washington independent of the U.S. organization in Iraq.

The White-Grey-Black Iraq Categories

In the National Counterinsurgency Plan, each of Iraq's governorates would be placed in one of three categories. In classic counterinsurgency practice these are: Under Iraqi government control (White), contested (Grey), and "too hard for now" (Black). The counterinsurgency plan must be governed by the principle of economy of force, by which resources are husbanded rigorously in the lower priority areas so they can be massed against high priority governorates. The goal should be to use Clear-and-Hold to change Grey governorates to White and Black to Grey.

The council would publish an Emergency Code to provide the legal basis for the counterinsurgency campaign. The Code could be as rigorous as needed: Most Iraqis would likely accept draconian rules as long as they brought peace and order and were fairly, impartially, and transparently enforced.

A U.S. Security and Reconstruction Team would move into each governorate, live there, and work with the Iraqi government to manage the counterinsurgency plan in that governorate. Each team would have officers from the State Department, Agency for International Development, CIA, other U.S. departments and agencies as their expertise is required, and the military.

In each governorate the U.S. proconsul would delegate to a Senior Coalition Representative the same authorities over all U.S. military and civilian presence and operations at the governorate level that the U.S. proconsul had at the national level.

Only the minimum U.S. troops needed to protect and support the Security and Reconstruction Team would be assigned to the governorate. U.S. combat units would be deployed to a governorate only as part of the National Counterinsurgency Plan or if requested by the Senior Coalition Representative in an emergency. They would operate under the control of the coalition representative.



U.S. MARINE CORPS (JONATHAN C. KNAUTH)

Positive identification is crucial to any census of Iraqis. Retinal scans can be a big help.

ones should be taken on only when we can concentrate enough troops and resources and keep them there to ensure success, and when we have ironed the kinks out of our procedures.

In the Clear phase we flood the selected governorates with U.S. and Iraqi troops and police. They subdivide the governorate into smaller areas and methodically cordon off each area. Then they search it, killing or detaining any insurgents. Instead of moving on to another governorate, though, major combat units remain there to Hold.

Military Police and Military Intelligence units stay to work directly and closely with the Iraqis to do the unglamorous police-type work of identifying, rounding up, or killing insurgents. MP units would form Combined Action Teams with the Iraqi police. The intelligence units would work with the Iraqi security forces to establish a legitimate, professional detainee interrogation system. Interrogation reporting is the gold standard for counterinsurgency intelligence; detainee interrogation must become a finely honed weapon rather than an embarrassment. Combat units would provide the muscle and patrol, patrol, patrol.

Leaders of clans and tribes, sheiks, play a major, extra-legal role in controlling Iraq, especially the rural areas. Each sheik must cooperate with the government or have their power broken. Provisions based on anti-racketeering laws in the United States must be written into the Emergency Code. The metric that will count most for success of the counterinsurgency in a governorate will be when the sheiks there join the government in eliminating the insurgency.

A census would be conducted. If "guerrillas are like fish that swim in the sea of the people," in Mao Zedong's famous dictum, the census charts that sea for the U.S. and Iraqi forces. Everyone above a certain age would be given a bilingual digitized ID card with a biometric photo. As part of the census, each individual would be required to provide a DNA sample, the names, locations, and date and place of birth of his parents, siblings, and parents' siblings, clan and tribe, and leaders. All vehicles would be registered and their owners and all approved drivers recorded. Today's information technology will allow easy cross-checking and sorting to chart relationships and identify real and potential insurgents and their supporters. Foreign jihadis could be identified quickly.

Clear and Hold Grey

The counterinsurgency plan would rank every governorate on a timeline for pacification. As each governorate's turn came, overwhelming military forces would move in to Clear and Hold. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine starts with easy areas.

There will be strong pressure to go after strategically important governorates first. Some will argue, for example, that to close Iraq's borders to infiltration of foreign men and funds for the insurgents we must gain control of the border governorates early. But the insurgents also recognize the importance of these border governorates, so they can be expected to fight for them. It is better to start with easy governorates. The tough



U.S. ARMY (ROBERT LIDDY)

Security is the key to any counterinsurgency plan. Here, military police talk with a local village sheik as they conduct a sweep for weapons

purification and sewage treatment can be expanded and improved. Civic associations should be encouraged. Security for the populace must come first, however; it doesn't matter how many soccer balls you hand out if the recipients know their eldest sons' heads will be cut off when the sun goes down.

Civic action and economic development programs appeal to both the hearts and the minds in the hearts-and-minds equation and should start as soon as the Clear phase begins. The senior representative would be responsible for managing development and reconstruction to reinforce security and control of the population. For example, this should be the carrot for the sheiks who are already feeling the stick from the Clear operations.

The people in the governorate must be able to compare their situation as the Hold phase progresses with the areas that have already eliminated the insurgents. As government control of the governorate's population increases, noticeable improvements to living conditions must result. Curfews can be relaxed. Electrical power should come on more often and stay on longer. Water

Economy of Force in Black

In "too hard" (Black) or lower priority Grey governorates, U.S. and Iraqi forces would be there mainly to keep the insurgents from getting comfortable. Large conventional military units would sweep these governorates occasionally to Search and Destroy. This would be the only time this tactic would be used.

Special Operations teams would be assigned to these governorates to run counter-guerrilla programs. The Special Operations teams would have all the firepower as backup that they could ever need, but they would follow the rule that one targeted killing or detention is worth ten indiscriminately killed or detained. These governorates would receive no development funds and be last in line for water, sewage, and electrical power.

Maintaining White

The pacified (White) governorates would be turned over to the Iraqis with regional U.S. Quick Reaction Forces as backup. These governorates would get priority on development funds to demonstrate the advantages of pacification. Their senior representatives would emphasize reconstruction and development; the first priority, however, would be guarding against insurgent attempts to return.

Building Effective Iraqi Police and Military Forces

In building Iraqi police and military forces, quality must take absolute precedence over numbers. Our ability to develop honest, dedicated, well-led, and well-trained Iraqi police and soldiers, whose principal loyalty is to Iraq and not a sect or sheik, will determine whether we succeed or fail.

We have no business even thinking about Iraqi army battalions until we have trained capable squads and platoons, with competent, trustworthy leadership. We should start by assigning two to three Iraqi army squads to each U.S. Army and Marine infantry company. When the squads demonstrate their readiness, they can be formed into Iraqi platoons.

The process would be designed to identify Iraqis who demonstrate leadership potential to serve a full 6 to 12 month tour with U.S. units for further assessment and training. Will some of these Iraqis be insurgent penetrations? Of course. This simply means we must take extra precautions.

The Right Stuff



U.S. ARMY (LAURA M. BIGENHO)

Training starts with the individual. Sergeant Andrew Derrick, U.S. Army, is doing it the right way as he helps an Iraqi policeman achieve a correct shooting stance. We have no business even thinking about Iraqi army battalions until we have trained capable squads and platoons.

A major reason the administration must communicate that it regards Iraq as part of a serious long-term struggle is to force the whole U.S. government to treat it as such. Each department and agency must be directed to begin immediately to identify experienced, mature civilians and military officers and noncommissioned officers to staff our effort. Developing the quality Iraqi army and police needed will require a large, multi-year U.S. commitment of quality advisors and a large and expensive program to educate them in the Iraqi language and culture. Compensation packages and advancement would provide all the incentives necessary to get and keep highly qualified people. Enabling legislation would probably be required, but that goes beyond the scope of this article.

As part of the staffing process, the departments and agencies in Washington must submit regular reports on their people in the pipeline for Iraq to the U.S. proconsul's staff; if a department or agency's efforts flagged, the proconsul could identify the problem in his report to the president.

Information Battle

Our public information programs in Iraq are broken, badly: the nation that invented advertising is being left in the dust by fanatics out of the 7th Century and the surviving henchmen of a deposed dictator. We must blanket every governorate in Iraq-Black, Grey, and White-continually with explanations of what is happening and why. For example, we must tell the Iraqi people exactly what the National Counterinsurgency Plan is, what it means for them, and why it is good for Iraq.

Since the information battle is critical, top U.S. and Iraqi officials involved in the decision-making process must lead from the front. The example might be General Norman Schwarzkopf, who personally wielded the media as another weapon in Operation Desert Storm. No junior flak catchers would be allowed to muddy the message. Everything the coalition forces do except legitimate secret operations must be publicized and explained.

We must provide a sophisticated, multifaceted U.S.-controlled media complex with a central TV and radio facility, local TV and radio affiliates at the governorate level, and print media targeting every niche of Iraqi society. They must be slick, ratings-conscious, and professional so Iraqis want to watch and read them.

These media outlets must subtly depict the benefits of a democratic, secular, or moderate Muslim society connected to the 21st Century world. The central facility would set the general tone and message, providing regular TV and radio feeds much as is done by the major networks in the United States. The governorate senior representative would have the authority, staff, and funds to tailor the local affiliates for local audiences.

The media complex would provide news and entertainment. The news would be accurate, complete, and designed to capture the market in ideas; entertainment should range from soaps, to recipes, to sports, to whatever appeals to the target audience. As an important side benefit it can give on-the-job training in responsible journalism to a new generation of Iraqi media.

David Galula, in his classic primer, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, establishes the criterion for victory as the local populace forming its own local government and self-defense capability. Only when the people and the local authorities in a governorate are able to protect themselves can the U.S. military and Iraqi Security Forces move on to the next target area, with the confidence and momentum derived from success. With practice and experience, the U.S. and Iraqi drive will become inexorable, sucking the oxygen out of support for the insurgency in the remaining Grey and Black areas as their inhabitants compare their situations with those in the White areas.

Through our errors after we overthrew Saddam we have allowed the insurgency to grow strong. The struggle will be long and will cost more U.S. and Iraqi blood and treasure, but if we stay the course and apply classic counterinsurgency policies and practices, we can win.

Lieutenant Colonel Daly is a retired U.S. government national security and foreign policy official. After training in counterinsurgency he served in Vietnam as a civilian advisor.

Recommended Reading (and Viewing) on Counterinsurgency

Nathaniel Fick

These six books, and one movie, provide a military and historical overview of counterinsurgency warfare and are essential to understanding what the United States is doing right, and doing wrong, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife:
Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*

By Lieutenant Colonel John A. Nagl, USA (University of Chicago Press, 2005). Nagl, currently a Military Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, focuses on organizational culture as the key to defeating insurgencies: successful militaries learn and adapt.

The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century

by Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, USMC (Zenith Press, 2004). In keeping with his Marine infantry roots, Hammes argues that *people*--not high-tech weaponry--win asymmetrical wars.

Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice

by David Galula (reissued by Praeger Paperbacks, 2005). Galula published this book in 1964 after serving as a French officer in Greece, China, Southeast Asia, and Algeria. His conclusions ring true across more than four decades: treat prisoners well, protect innocent civilians, and convince the population that the counterinsurgent will be the victor.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph

by T. E. Lawrence (reissued by Anchor, 1991). Lawrence's classic account of his role in the 1917 Arab Revolt concludes that military might isn't enough to win an unconventional conflict: "Guerrilla war is far more intellectual than a bayonet charge."

The Village

by Bing West (reissued by Pocket, 2002). West tells the story of a Marine squad in Vietnam's Combined Action

Program. They sought to win not by sweeping through neighborhoods and kicking down doors, but by living in the same village for a year, learning the language, culture, and local customs.

Tactics of the Crescent Moon: Militant Muslim Combat Methods

by H. John Poole (Posterity Press, 2004). Whereas the other books listed here focus on principles, policy, and strategy, Gunnery Sergeant Poole targets the men and women doing the fighting, and imparts his hard-earned experience in counterinsurgency tactics.

"Battle of Algiers"

Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, with Brahim Haggiag and Jean Martin (1966). This fictional account of the revolutionary movement in Algeria was hailed by the West Point history department as "renowned for its subtle depiction of the internal dynamics of cell-based revolutionary movements."

Mr. Fick led a Marine infantry platoon in Afghanistan and a Recon platoon in Iraq. He is the author of *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005).