

# Information Operations in Iraq

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*Mid-level Baathists . . . are conducting what I would describe as a classical guerrilla-type campaign against us.*

—General John Abizaid<sup>1</sup>

**A**N AMERICAN infantry team rolls through an Iraqi town in the Sunni triangle, an area west of Baghdad in the fertile Euphrates River valley. The team is distinctly identifiable to the residents as a foreign force. The soldiers dismount and secure the area and with little warning, kick in the door, roust the residents out of the house, and search and ransack the home. The search finds nothing.

Hot, homesick, and angry young soldiers sometimes overreact and “humiliate the men, offend the women, and alienate the very people who are supposed to be providing intelligence about terrorists and Baathist holdouts.”<sup>2</sup> The typical result of such searches is that no weapons or targeted individuals are found. The team releases the family to return to their ransacked home and moves to the next target or back behind the protective wall of U.S. forces where they await the next mission, which might be based on late or dubious information.

Did the team arrive late, was the target tipped off, or was the target even legitimate? Most likely the information was valid, but the guerrillas’ information network provided advance warning so the target could react. Iraq’s population has little reason to cooperate with U.S. forces or to not cooperate with the guerrillas. Failure of U.S. forces to adapt in mindset, organization, and command and control (C2) adversely affects their ability to win the counterinsurgency battle.

U.S. forces need to understand how control of the population is a strength for the guerrillas and how to make it a weakness. U.S. forces must perform basic problem-solving to develop a solution rather than treat a symptom. Once military commanders and planners understand how Iraqi guerrillas differ from a conventional foe, they can affect the guerrillas’ environment by applying an information opera-

tions (IO) strategy to the unconventional problem.

Information operations are “actions taken to affect an adversary and influence others’ decision-making process, information, and information systems, while protecting one’s own information and information systems.”<sup>3</sup> Understanding how Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz’s trinity—people, army, and government—differs in low- and high-intensity conflicts and why rational people continue to support guerrillas instead of the liberating U.S. forces is important.<sup>4</sup>

## Trinitarian Model of Conflict

Analyst Gordon McCormick developed a trinitarian model of conflict to demonstrate how people, the army, and the government play different roles in low- and high-intensity conflict.<sup>5</sup> For high-intensity conflict in this model, the conventional force defeats its adversary’s military; the government falls, and directs the population to cooperate with the enemy; and the people comply. Examples are Germany and Japan surrendering during World War II.

High-intensity conflict is the most efficient and logical method of war for a state with a force advantage, such as the United States. The United States has relied on its force advantage since the 1990 Persian Gulf war, when it applied the Powell Doctrine, which dictates the “use of overwhelming force in the military encounter—rather than a proportional response.”<sup>6</sup>

A guerrilla force does not have the strength to fight a state or invading force directly and relies on actions in the information environment to gain an advantage.<sup>7</sup> In a low-intensity conflict, guerrillas have the information advantage. They can see the state’s military forces and remain unseen themselves and choose when and how to engage opposing forces. The guerrillas approach the trinitarian model of conflict in the reverse order of a high-intensity conflict approach: first, they confront the people; then, the state; and finally, the army.<sup>8</sup> The guerrillas gain the confidence of, or at least control of, the population,

allowing them to attack the state on their own terms. If the state falls or compromises, the guerrillas do not have to engage the state's military forces. Guerrilla methods erode the state's information-collection process because it is a zero-sum game: what the guerrillas control, the state does not.

The Insurgent Payoff Function explains how Iraqi guerrillas can be so strong and why rational people would choose to support them over U.S. forces.<sup>9</sup> This model substitutes U.S. forces in Iraq for the regime or state. In

$$(EV_i - EC_i) > / < (EV_r - EC_r),$$

where  $E$  = expectation;  $V_i$  = the value of joining the insurgency;  $C_i$  = the cost of joining the insurgency;  $V_r$  = the value of joining the regime (U.S. forces); and  $C_r$  = the cost of joining the regime (U.S. forces), as long as the value of assisting the guerrillas ( $EV_i$ ) exceeds the cost ( $EC_i$ ), and that value is higher than support for U.S. forces, the guerrillas will control the population.

Even a neutral population represents passive support for guerrillas because the guerrillas need information dominance to remain invisible to U.S. forces. Tacit support of guerrillas can occur if the population feels the state cannot protect it. Guerrilla assassinations of public figures who cooperate with U.S. forces serve to strengthen that support. The Iraqi population then believes U.S. forces will depart prematurely, so it remains quiet, which amounts to passive support for the guerrillas. Insurgents want the population to keep silent, and bribe or coerce it to do so. To increase  $V_r$  and minimize  $C_r$ , the United States must change the way it interacts with the Iraqi population.

### Current Solution Part of the Problem

According to *Newsweek* writer Fareed Zakaria, if U.S. forces continue to mingle infrequently with the locals, tour in vehicles rather than on foot, and make force protection their chief goal, they will not gain popular support and will lose a chance to gain intelligence to erode the guerrillas' information advantage.<sup>10</sup> The boundaries of U.S. military compounds in Iraq are not just physical; they represent the chasm of a cultural divide—soldiers on one side, the people whose trust, safety, and information they should be securing on the other. U.S. forces cannot sit behind walls and wait; they must neutralize the enemy by winning over the crowd and giving the enemy no place to hide.<sup>11</sup>

When U.S. forces control the population, the guerrillas will lose their invisibility and secrecy, and the population will believe that supporting the United States is preferable to supporting the guerrillas. It follows that the population will then take action on its own. U.S. Marine Corps General V.H. Krulak

quotes North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap on the importance of people to guerrillas in an insurgent war: "Without the people, we have no information. . . . They hide us, protect us, feed us and tend our wounded."<sup>12</sup>

The guerrillas, organized, coordinated, and capable of adapting their tactics to U.S. tactics, techniques, and procedures, have expanded their expertise and the range of weapons they use "from small arms and rocket-propelled grenades to mortars and more sophisticated mines and explosives."<sup>13</sup> To win, Abizaid says U.S. forces must "adapt their tactics, techniques, and procedures."<sup>14</sup> Zakaria observes that "the purpose of guerrilla operations is not to defeat the enemy militarily; it is to defeat him politically."<sup>15</sup> The guerrillas are also improving their organization and communications, making them a progressively more serious threat.

Each week that the United States fails to neutralize or diminish guerrilla control of the population is another week the United States loses the counterinsurgency struggle. Even if U.S. forces maintain current levels of involvement with the population, gains by the guerrillas actually result in negative growth by U.S. forces.<sup>16</sup> Unless U.S. forces make real strides in controlling the population or diminishing the guerrillas' control of it, the United States could lose in the long run. According to Henry Kissinger, "The guerrilla wins by not losing. The army loses by not winning."<sup>17</sup>

### IO and Counterinsurgency

Information operations are integrated into U.S. military campaign and crisis action planning and are valuable in changing the environment in which guerrillas thrive. I propose the Army develop an IO product in accordance with the *Joint Information Operations Planning Handbook*, using the scenario of an IO cell planning IO activities to further the campaign against guerrillas in Iraq.<sup>18</sup> The commander's intent is to degrade the guerrillas' ability to coordinate attacks and to expose guerrilla members.

Joint planners developing an IO plan to deal with Iraqi guerrillas should work through this process. First, it is necessary to understand the problem-solving process, which includes the following steps:

1. Identify the problem (not the symptom).
2. Gather facts and make assumptions as necessary.
3. Develop and evaluate possible courses of action (COA) or solutions.
4. Select and execute the best COA or solution.

After understanding the tasks associated with the commander's intent, the next step is to develop the IO objective: effect (desired) + target + purpose (sought). The goal is to control the environment by influencing the population in order to build popular



Military Police sign over an Army generator to Shiek Hadi at a water treatment facility in Audeh, Iraq, 25 October 2003.

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support in key cities, especially within the Sunni Triangle, and to erode direct and indirect support of guerrillas in Iraq.

Success requires comprehending the intricacies of the Iraqi psyche—the tribal loyalties, the stubborn sense of national pride, the painfully learned distrust of America’s promises, and “the power of fear.”<sup>19</sup> The United States must convince Iraqis that the temporary U.S. military presence in Iraq is necessary to rebuild the country for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Developing a measure of effectiveness (MOE) for this type of objective is difficult.

U.S. commanders must reduce the ability of Iraqi guerrillas to gather information on U.S. units and operations. The guerrillas are likely doing so as part of the Iraqi population or by gathering information from willing agents among the population. U.S. forces must convince Iraqis that helping the enemy will have a negative effect on their future and persuade them to stop doing so and even to begin misleading the enemy. Establishing a sufficient rapport and trust to entice Iraqis to provide information when they are unhappy with the guerrillas is one way to produce this result.

U.S. forces must also make the Iraqi people aware of the progress, as Coalition Provisional Authority Administrator Paul Bremer reports.<sup>20</sup> Bremer’s statements provide valuable material to use in an IO campaign. Iraqis must conclude that the U.S. military presence is good for Iraq, that the United States can protect Iraqis, and that the guer-

rillas will have a negative effect on their lives.

The population the United States controls is the population the guerrillas do not control. When the population is silent, guerrillas control it by default because U.S. forces will not gain information. A silent population provides guerrillas with an information advantage. Often the population has no choice but to help the guerrillas, so if U.S. forces build a connection with the Iraqi people, some Iraqis might tell U.S. forces what they have heard or told to the guerrillas. This method has worked for special operations forces (SOF) teams in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> Of course, it is also possible the information the informants give to U.S. forces could be misinformation designed to mislead U.S. forces in order to harm noncombatants or U.S. soldiers.

The IO task is to influence guerrilla information-collection efforts by employing psychological operations (PSYOP) and SOF teams to increase support for the U.S. mission. Over time this should reduce the guerrillas’ information advantage and increase U.S. access to actionable information. The guerrillas will then experience negative growth.

### An IO Solution

Thoroughly understanding guerrilla operations, low-intensity conflict, the trinitarian model of conflict, and the McCormick Payoff Function, combined with conventional IO planning, leads to a doctrinal IO solution. U.S. forces’ specified operational task is to neutralize the Iraqi guerrillas’ ability to



Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division patrol a neighborhood in Najaf, Iraq, 19 April 2003.

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coordinate attacks and to expose guerrilla members. The implied tasks are to reduce the population's support of the guerrillas, to degrade the guerrillas' ability to communicate individually or collectively, and to identify guerrilla members.

Information operations have two themes: guerrillas are bad for Iraq's future, and the United States

can best help build Iraq's new future. The IO objective is to influence the Iraqi population to believe that the temporary U.S. military presence is necessary to rebuild the government and country for the people so that—

▫ Members of the general population will report the location or identity of guerrilla fighters before or following attacks, demonstrating trust, erosion of support for the guerrillas, and a decrease in the guerrillas' information advantage. Tactical PSYOP teams, SOF, and conventional forces will provide feedback.

▫ Weekly support for U.S. forces will increase or at least remain stable. Several weeks of declining support, evidenced by established indicators, would be a valid negative trend; one week would not. PSYOP teams, SOF, and conventional forces will provide feedback.

### The Right Tool

Doing a job is easier with the right tools. A hammer might sink a screw, but a screwdriver would be more efficient and effective. The Powell Doctrine of using overwhelming force is a hammer; information operations, the screwdriver.

The Powell Doctrine forces the United States to rely on its force advantage rather than on gaining an intelligence advantage over its opponents in Iraq. Although IO doctrine was developed for conventional forces, U.S. military planners can use it effectively in an unconventional war, if they understand the adversaries' guerrilla tactics and sources of support. **MR**

### NOTES

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