The Decisive Weapon:
A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations

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DUTY IN IRAQ has a way of debunking myths and countering Ivory Tower theories with hard facts on the ground. I admit that while I was preparing to serve in Iraq as a brigade commander, I was among the skeptics who doubted the value of integrating information operations (IO) into my concept of operations. Most of the officers on my combat team shared my doubts about the relative importance of information operations. Of course, in current Army literature there is a great deal of discussion about IO theory. There is significantly less practical information, however, that details how theory can be effectively translated into practice by tactical units. My purpose in writing this article is to provide commanders the insights I gleaned from my experience.

Soon after taking command of my brigade, I quickly discovered that IO was going to be one of the two most vital tools (along with human intelligence) I would need to be successful in a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign. COIN operations meant competing daily to favorably influence the perceptions of the Iraqi population in our area of operations (AO). I quickly concluded that, without IO, I could not hope to shape and set conditions for my battalions or my Soldiers to be successful.

It certainly did not take long to discover that the traditional tools in my military kit bag were insufficient to successfully compete in this new operational environment. As a brigade commander, I was somewhat surprised to find myself spending 70 percent of my time working and managing my intelligence and IO systems and a relatively small amount of my time directly involved with the traditional maneuver and fire support activities. This was a paradigm shift for me. The reality I confronted was far different from what I had professionally prepared for over a lifetime of conventional training and experience.

Background

My brigade, the 2d Brigade Combat Team (BCT), was part of the 1st Armored Division. For the first 12 months in Iraq, we were task organized in Baghdad with up to eight battalions, roughly 5,000 strong, all trained for conventional combat. The BCT consisted of two mechanized infantry

battalions, a cavalry squadron, an armor battalion, a field artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, a support battalion, and a military police battalion. At headquarters were staff enablers such as psychological operations (PSYOP) and civil affairs (CA) detachments. At one point, my task organization also included 12 U.S. Army National Guard or Reserve Component companies.

My brigade's AO covered roughly 400 square kilometers and encompassed 2 of the 9 major districts in Baghdad: Karkh and Karada. In those 2 heavily populated and congested districts lived between 700,000 to a million citizens. The area contained at least 72 mosques and churches.

In the northwest part of our AO, the population was predominantly Sunni. This area also contained a small neighborhood called Kaddamiya, where Saddam Hussein had grown up. Not surprisingly, that community was a bastion of staunchly pro-Baath sentiment and was steadfastly loyal to Saddam. Such demographic factors made that part of our AO particularly volatile and problematic.

In contrast, our area also contained the Karada district, one of the most affluent parts of the city. Three universities are located there, Baghdad University being at the very southeastern tip. Many Western-trained and educated elites live in Karada, and many of Baghdad's banks and headquarters for major businesses are there. The population in this area is characteristically more secular in its views and somewhat more receptive to outside ideas and influence. In addition, 70 percent of the embassies and diplomatic residences in Baghdad were situated in our AO (figure 1).

The southeastern region of our area was home to a principally Shiite population. The infrastructure in this area was, in comparison to other parts of the city, shabby. In many places the population lived in almost uninhabitable conditions, the neighborhoods having been largely neglected by the Baathist regime for years (figure 2).

Another significant component of this complex society was the Christian population. Baghdad has

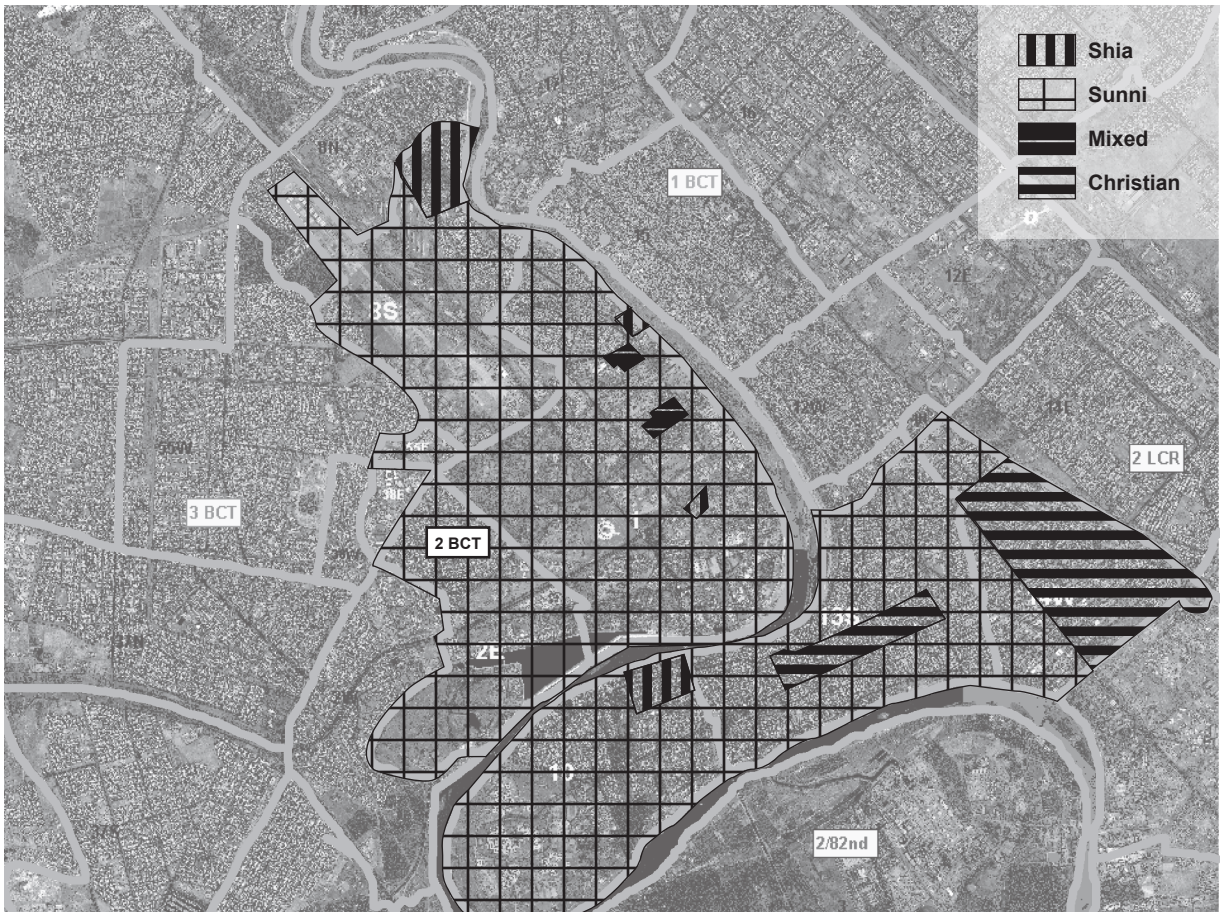

Figure 1. 2BCT/1AD battlespace religious demographics: Karkh.

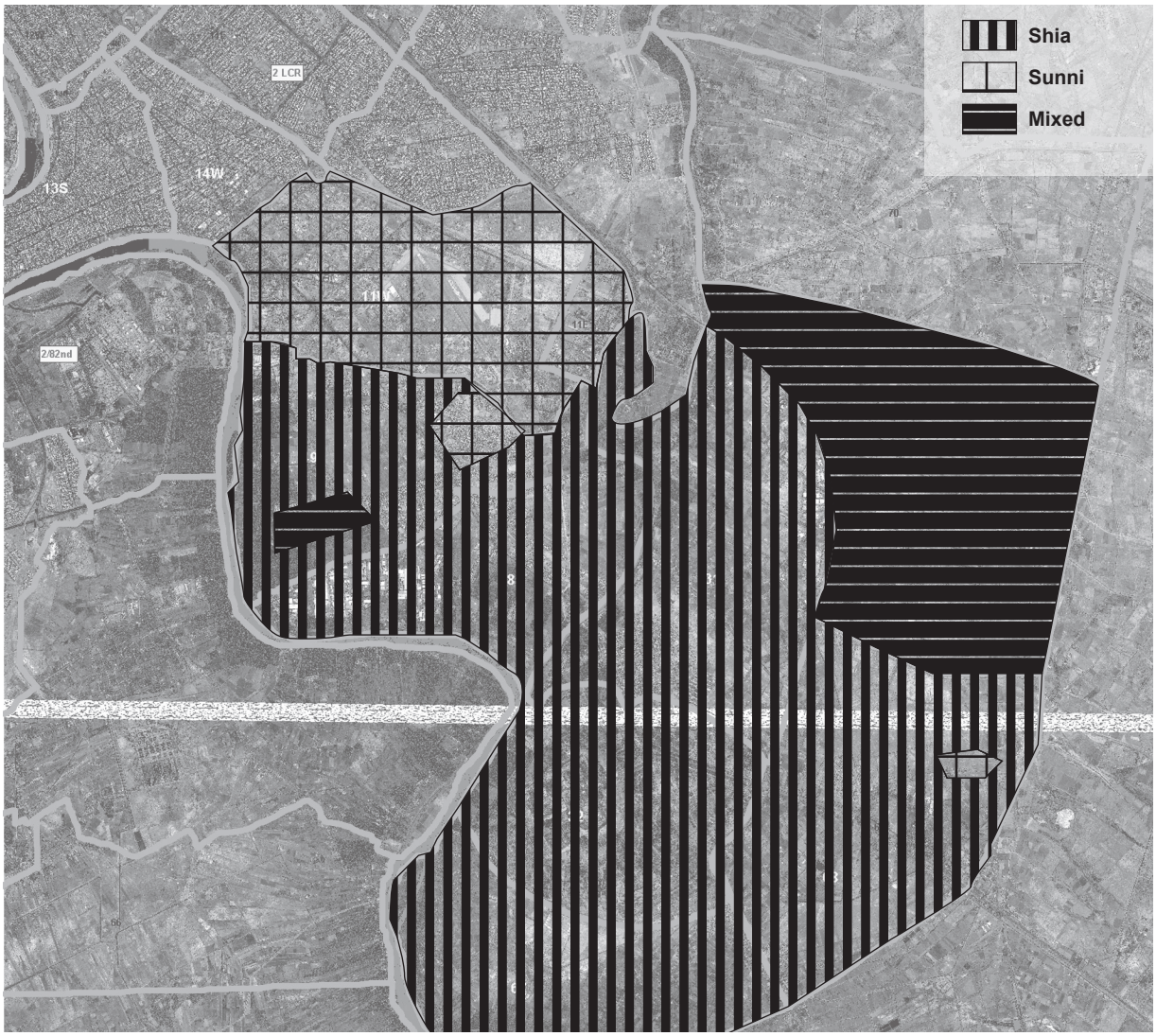

Figure 2. 2BCT/1AD battlespace religious demographics: Karada.

the largest Christian population in the country, and it was also concentrated inside our battlespace.

The demographic diversity in 2d Brigade's AO produced a lot of different ethnic, cultural, and religious dynamics. Consequently, each area presented unique IO challenges. And, of course, this already complex situation was made more complex by insurgent and terrorist violence and the persistent lack of infrastructure and basic services.

Also of note was what proved to be an additional geographic area with a completely different IO population of interest, one that had its own set of parochial concerns and priorities: the Green Zone. This area housed the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Combined Joint Task Force 7.

Another vital demographic, one that my commanders and I found we had inadvertently taken for granted and failed to effectively address, was our own Soldiers. Most news that Soldiers typically received came from watching CNN, the BBC, or Fox News. Soldiers were getting the same inaccurate, slanted news that the American public gets. With a significant amount of negative news being broadcast into their living quarters on a daily basis, it was difficult for Soldiers to realize they were having a positive impact on our area of operations.

Once we appreciated the dynamics of the demographics in our AO, we found that we could easily fit Iraqi citizens into three broad categories: those who would never accept the Coalition's presence in Iraq (religious fundamentalists, insurgents, terrorists); those who readily accepted the Coalition's presence

in Iraq (typically secular, Western-educated pragmatists); and the vast majority of Iraqis, who were undecided. We referred to this last category as the silent majority and focused much of our information operations on influencing this group.

Adjusting the Plan to IO Realities

One of the first challenges I faced was to understand the overarching IO plan for Iraq and, more important, how my combat team was supposed to support it. Part of the challenge at this time for everyone—battalion through corps—was our lack of IO experience and our ignorance of how valuable IO is to COIN success. In fact, during the summer of 2003 there was still much debate over whether or not we were even fighting an insurgency. The IO support we did receive from higher headquarters included broad themes and messages that we were directed to communicate to the local populations. Unfortunately, these messages were often too broad to resonate with the diverse subpopulations within brigade and battalion areas.

This brings me to my first essential IO observation: To be effective, you must tailor themes and messages to specific audiences. IO planners at commands above division level appeared to look at the Iraqis as a single, homogeneous population that would be receptive to centrally developed, all-purpose, general themes and messages directed at Iraqis as a group. In many cases, the guidance and products we received were clearly developed for a high-level diplomatic audience and were inappropriate or ineffective for the diverse populations clustered within our battalion AO.

When we did request and receive theme support or IO products, they were typically approved too late to address the issue for which we had requested them. To overcome what was an ineffective and usually counterproductive attempt by the IO/PSYOP agencies at higher levels of command to centrally control themes and messaging, we were compelled to initiate a more tailored IO process. We developed products that incorporated relevant themes and messages fashioned specifically for the diverse groups and micropopulations in our area of operations.

A guiding imperative was to produce and distribute IO products with focused messages and themes more quickly than our adversaries. Only then could we stay ahead of the extremely adroit and effective information operations the enemy waged at neighborhood and district levels.

Challenges

- **Initially, did not believe IO was important.**
- **Approved IO messages and themes were too broad.**
- **IO culture and policies were too restrictive.**
- **Did not understand how to work with Arab and international media.**
- **Iraqi expectations were unrealistic.**
- **Population had little visibility on—**
  - **Positive activities of US/Coalition.**
  - **Impact of insurgent/terrorist activities on Iraqi citizens/country.**
- **IO not coordinated within BCT (IO fratricide).**
- **Rumor-centric society.**
- **US/Coalition lacked credibility.**

We were also initially challenged in working through the bureaucratic IO/PSYOP culture. We often faced situations where we needed handbills specifically tailored to the unique circumstances and demographics of the neighborhoods we were attempting to influence. However, the PSYOP community routinely insisted that handbills had to be approved through PSYOP channels at the highest command levels before they could be cleared for distribution. This procedure proved to be much too slow and cumbersome to support our IO needs at the tactical level.

Good reasons exist for some central control over IO themes and products under some circumstances, but information operations are Operations, and in my opinion that means commander's business. IO is critical to successfully combating an insurgency. It fights with words, symbols, and ideas, and it operates under the same dynamics as all combat operations. An old Army saw says that the person who gets to the battle the "firstest" with the "mostest" usually wins, and this applies indisputably to information operations. In contrast, a consistent shortcoming I experienced was that the enemy, at least initially,

consistently dominated the IO environment faster and more thoroughly than we did. Our adversary therefore had considerable success in shaping and influencing the perceptions of the Iraqi public in his favor. The ponderous way in which centrally managed PSYOP products were developed, vetted, and approved through bureaucratic channels meant they were simply not being produced quickly enough to do any good. Just as important, they were not being tailored precisely enough to influence our diverse audiences' opinions about breaking events.

Faced with bureaucratic friction and cumbersome policy, and thrust into an IO arena quite different from that for which most of us had been trained, I had to make decisions concerning IO matters based on common sense and mission requirements. To this end, I had to consciously interpret policy and regulatory guidance in creative ways to accomplish the mission as we saw it, though in a manner such that those who wrote the original regulations and guidance probably had not intended. This was necessary because Cold War regulations and policies were holding us hostage to old ideas and old ways of doing business. They were simply no longer valid or relevant to the challenges we were facing in this extremely fluid, nonlinear, media-centric COIN environment that was Baghdad circa 2003-2004.

Of course, such an approach made some people uncomfortable. As a rule, if our application of IO techniques was perceived to violate a strict interpretation of policy or regulation, I asked myself: Is it necessary to accomplish our mission, and is our tactic, technique, or procedure morally and ethically sound? If the answer was yes, I generally authorized the activity and informed my higher headquarters.

We were not a renegade operation, however. If what we thought we had to do ran counter to written policies and guidance, I kept my division commander informed in detail of what, when, and why we were doing it. Fortunately, the command environment was such that initiative, innovation, and common-sense pragmatism were supported in the face of uncertainty and lack of relevant doctrine. One example of this sort of support was our decision to adopt, as a policy, the engagement of foreign, Iraqi, and international media at the earliest opportunity following a sensational act of insurgent violence.

The guidance we were operating within was that brigades could not conduct press conferences. In my view, that policy was counterproductive. Headquarters above division were usually slow to react to major events involving terrorism on the streets, and costly hours would go by without an appropriate public response to major terrorist incidents. We experienced firsthand the detrimental effects that this ceding of the information initiative to insurgents was having in our area. The Iraqis had increasingly easy access to TV and radio, but restrictions prevented us from engaging those media to rapidly, efficiently, and directly communicate our public information messages at critical times. By contrast, press reports appeared quickly in the Arab media showing death and destruction in great detail, which undermined confidence in the ability of the Iraqi Provisional Council and the Coalition to provide security.

Our adversary also frequently twisted media accounts in a way that successfully assigned public blame to the Coalition—and the 2d Brigade specifically—for perpetrating the violent attacks. When slow IO responses and outright public information inaction in the face of such incidents dangerously stoked public discontent, we decided to engage the media on our own in order to get the truth out to the multitudes of people living in our area. If we were going to influence our silent majority successfully, we were going to have to convince them that it was in their best personal and national interest to support the Coalition's efforts. We had to convince them that the insurgents and terrorists were responsible for harming Iraqi citizens and inhibiting local and national progress.

As an illustration, on 18 January 2004 a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) during morning rush hour at a well-known Baghdad checkpoint called Assassin's Gate, a main entrance into the Green Zone. This attack killed about 50 Iraqis waiting at the checkpoint. While we were managing the consequences of the incident, which included dealing with a considerable number of international and Arab media, I was instructed not to release a statement to the press—higher headquarters would collect the facts and release them at a Coalition-sponsored press conference to be held at 1600 Baghdad time.

Unfortunately, the terrorists responsible for this bombing were not constrained from engaging the press. While precious time was being spent "gathering facts," the enemy was busily exploiting to their advantage the ensuing chaos. The message

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The aftermath of a VBIED at checkpoint 1, one of the major entry control points into the Green Zone.

they passed to the press was that Coalition Soldiers were responsible for the casualties at the checkpoint because of an overreaction to somebody shooting at them from the intersection; that is, the terrorists were spreading a rumor that the carnage on the street was not the result of a VBIED but, rather, the result of an undisciplined and excessive use of force by my Soldiers.

As precious time slipped by and with accusations multiplying in the Arab media and tempers heating up, we made a conscious decision that our field grade officers would talk to the press at the site and give them the known facts; in effect, we would hold a stand-up, impromptu press conference. We also decided that in all future terrorist attacks, the field grade officers' principle job would be to engage the press—especially the Arab press—as quickly as possible while company grade officers managed the tactical situation at the incident site.

Subsequently, when such incidents occurred, we took the information fight to the enemy by giving the free press the facts as we understood them as quickly as we could in order to stay ahead of the disinformation and rumor campaign the enemy was sure to wage. We aggressively followed up our actions by updating the reporters as soon as more information became available. As a result, the principal role of field grade officers at incident sites was to engage the press, give them releasable facts, answer questions as quickly and honestly as possible with accurate information, and keep them updated as more information became known.

Our proactive and transparent approach proved to be an essential tool for informing and influencing the key Iraqi audiences in our AO; it mitigated adverse domestic reaction. Our quick response helped dispel the harmful rumors that nearly always flowed in the wake of major incidents.

I heard that the methods we were using with the media immediately following such incidents caused considerable hand-wringing and resentment in some circles. However, no one ever ordered us to stop, no doubt because the positive effects were clearly apparent.

Executing Our IO Plan

My second IO observation is that you have no influence with the press if you do not talk to them. Moreover, trying to ignore the media by denying them access or refusing to talk can result in the press reporting news that is inaccurate, biased, and frankly counterproductive to the mission. Not talking to the press is the equivalent of ceding the initiative to the insurgents, who are quite adept at spinning information in adverse ways to further their objectives.

The way we adapted to working with the media contrasted significantly with our initial approach. At first, we allowed reporters to come into our unit areas and, essentially, wander around. What resulted was hit or miss as to whether reporters would find a good theme to report on or whether they would stumble onto something they did not understand and publish a story that was out of context or unhelpful. When this happened, we would scratch our heads and say, "Gee, these press guys just don't get it." Actually, we were the ones not getting it. We lacked a good plan on how to work with the press and interest them in the really great things happening in our area.

Recognizing this, we set about preparing our spokespersons and Soldiers to engage the media in a systematic, deliberate manner. We became familiar with what the media needed to know and

adept at providing the information they required as quickly as possible. At the same time, we ensured that the messages and supporting themes we felt were important were getting out.

To impress on our leaders and Soldiers the need for a press-engagement strategy, we emphasized agenda-setting. I conveyed the manner in which I wanted my leaders to approach this issue by asking how many of them would just let me go down to their motor pools and walk around without them grabbing me and at least trying to get me to look at the positive things they wanted to show me (while also trying to steer me away from the things that were perhaps "still a work in progress"). I told them: "All of you guys understand and do that. So from now on, when working with the media, adopt this same kind of approach."

Meeting Iraqi expectations. One of the more difficult credibility challenges we encountered among the Iraqis was a consequence of the initial mismanagement of Iraqi expectations before we ever crossed the berm into Iraq. As a result, we were met with enormously unrealistic expectations that we had to manage and were simply unable to gratify in a timely manner. Such expectations grew out of Coalition pronouncements before Soldiers arrived that extolled how much better off the average Iraqi citizen's life was going to be when Saddam and his regime were gone.

The concept of "better" proved to be a terrible cultural misperception on our part because we, the liberators, equated better with not being ruled by a brutal dictator. In contrast, a better life for Iraqis implied consistent, reliable electricity; food; medical care; jobs; and safety from criminals and political thugs. When those same Iraqis were sitting in Baghdad in August 2003 suffering 115-degree heat with no electricity, an unreliable sewage system, contaminated water, no prospects for a job, lack of police security, periodic social and economic disruption because of insurgent attacks, and no income or pensions with which to support their families, better had become a problematic concept. It took on the psychic dimensions of having been betrayed by the Coalition. Unfortunately, this view was exacerbated by the average Iraqis' man-on-the-moon analogy: If you Americans are capable of putting a man on the moon, why can't you get the electricity to come on? If you are not turning the electricity on, it must be because you don't want to and are punishing us.

We came to realize that any chance of success with information operations was specifically tied to immediate, visible actions to improve the average Iraqi's quality of life. Until there was tangible improvement that the Iraqis could experience and benefit from firsthand, lofty pronouncements about how much better life would be under democratic pluralism, as well as the value of secular principles of tolerance and national unity, were meaningless. This leads to my third IO observation: There is a direct correlation between our credibility and our ability to demonstrably improve the quality of life, physical security, and stability in a society. Until we could do the latter, we would continue to lack credibility. This was especially true because we were agents of change from a Western world the Iraqis had been taught to hate virtually from birth.

Reaching out to the community. Iraqis in general had little visibility of the positive aspects of the Coalition and U.S. presence in the country. Positive economic, political, and social reforms and improvements in the security environment generally went unnoticed. Collectively, the Iraqis were simply getting too little information on the good things being accomplished. International and Arab media failed to report favorable news, and little information was being passed by word of mouth. Meanwhile, efforts by Coalition forces to share information were limited because we lacked credibility and because many Iraqi citizens did not understand the horrific toll the insurgency was exacting on Iraqi lives and how much it was affecting infrastructure repair. The problem was that we did not have a coordinated, deliberate plan at the brigade level to provide timely, accurate, focused information to communicate these facts. This changed as we developed an IO concept based on a limited number of themes supported by accurate, detailed messages delivered repetitively to key target audiences.

Preventing IO fratricide. Our brigade IO effort did not begin as a centrally coordinated program within my BCT but, rather, evolved as our understanding of the importance of synchronized IO activities matured. Initially, well-intentioned commanders, many of whom lacked clearly defined brigade guidance, had independently arrived at the

same conclusion: They needed an IO plan. Each had therefore begun developing and executing his own IO effort. On the surface this was fine: Great commanders were using initiative to solve problems and accomplish the mission. Unfortunately, because our activities were not coordinated and synchronized, we often disseminated contradictory information.

For example, one battalion IO message might state that a recent operation had resulted in the capture of 10 insurgents with no civilian casualties. Referring to the same operation, an adjacent battalion might inform its Iraqi citizens that 5 insurgents had been captured and 3 civilians accidentally injured. From the Iraqi perspective, because our information was inconsistent, we were not being honest.

One of our major objectives was to earn the Iraqis' trust and confidence. If we continued to contradict ourselves or provide inaccurate information, we would never achieve this goal. We termed this phenomenon of contradictory IO statements "IO fratricide." The remedy for this challenge leads to a fourth significant IO observation: A major IO goal at tactical and operational levels is getting the citizens in your AO to have trust and confidence in you.

We have all heard about "winning hearts and minds." I do not like this phrase, and I liked it less and less as experience taught me its impracticality. The reality is that it will be a long, long time before we can truly win the hearts and minds of Arabs in the Middle East. Most of the people have been taught from birth to distrust and hate us. Consequently, I did not like my Soldiers using the phrase because it gave them the idea that to be successful they had to win the Iraqis' hearts and minds, which translated into attempts at developing legitimate friendships with the Iraqis. However, in my view, even with considerable effort it is possible to cultivate friendships with only a small segment of the Iraqis with whom we have frequent contact.

Unfortunately, befriending a small portion of the population will not help us convince the remaining Iraqi citizens to begin tolerating or working with us. For us, given the amount of time we had to influence our target population, the more effective plan was to prioritize our efforts toward earning the grudging respect of our target population within the 12 months we would occupy our AO. This was a more realistic goal. If we could demonstrate to our population that we were truthful and that we followed through on everything we said we would, then we could earn the respect of a population and culture that was predisposed to distrust us.

Conversely, I felt that it would take considerable effort and time (resources we did not have) to develop legitimate friendships—assuming friendships were possible on a broad scale. So, by replacing "winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis" with "earning the trust and confidence of the Iraqis," I attempted to provide a mental construct to guide our Soldiers and leaders in all aspects of the IO campaign.

Subsequently, we began to formulate a general concept for IO based on the objective of garnering the trust, confidence, and respect, however grudging, of the various populations. Our overarching goal was to convince the silent majority that their personal and national interests resided with the Coalition's efforts, not with the insurgents'. If we were to succeed, it was imperative to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the Iraqi population.

Manning the IO cell. Staffing an IO cell at brigade level was another challenge. Because we were not authorized many of the military occupational specialties necessary to plan, coordinate, and control information operations, we built our own IO working group (IOWG) out of hide. Our IOWG consisted of senior officers from the PSYOPs and CA detachments attached to the brigade, one intelligence officer detailed to serve as our public affairs officer (PAO), an engineer officer, and the brigade fire support officer.

The engineer officer was key because much of the visible progress we were enjoying in our AO was the result of renovation and reconstruction activities. The engineer officer maintained visibility on these projects to ensure that we did not miss opportunities to inform the Iraqis of any progress.

Adding a PAO to the IOWG was an obvious step. Because of the immense interest in our operations shown by international and Arab media, I had to assign this duty full time to one of my most competent and articulate officers. Subsequently, we realized that we needed to expand our public affairs activities and therefore hired two Iraqi citizens with media experience to manage our activities with the Arab press.

In concert, we leveraged the doctrinal knowledge of our PSYOPs and CA officers to organize activities and develop messages and distribution concepts. Finally, because our IO activities were ultimately "targeting" specific demographic elements in our

AO, it was a natural fit to place the brigade fire support officer in charge of the IOWG.

Evolving unity of effort. Our approach to conducting IO evolved over time, out of the operational necessity to accomplish our mission. We were probably a good 3 to 4 months into our tour before we gained the requisite experience and understanding of key IO factors. We then began to deliberately develop a structure and mechanism to systematically synchronize our information operations throughout the brigade. The following observations ultimately helped shape our operational construct:

- It is imperative to earn the trust and confidence of the indigenous population in your AO. They might never "like" you, but I am convinced you can earn their respect.
- To defeat the insurgency, you must convince the (silent) majority of the population that it is in their best personal and national interest to support Coalition efforts and, conversely, convince them not to support the insurgents.
- For information operations to be effective, you must have focused themes that you disseminate repetitively to your target audience.
- Target audiences are key. You should assume that the silent majority will discount most of the information Coalition forces disseminate simply because they are suspicious of us culturally. Therefore, you must identify and target respected community members with IO themes. If you can create conditions where Arabs are communicating your themes to Arabs, you can be quite effective.
- Being honest in the execution of information operations is highly important. This goes back to developing trust and confidence, especially with target audiences. If you lose your credibility, you cannot conduct effective IO. Therefore, you should never try to implement any sort of IO "deception" operations.

Commander's Vision and Guidance

Visualizing and describing a concept of operation, one of a commander's greatest contributions to his organization, was a contribution I had yet to provide to my combat team. It was essential to do so immediately. I also understood that after developing an IO plan, I would have to act energetically to ensure that subordinate commanders embraced information operations and executed them according to my expectations. I did, and they embraced the concept and ultimately improved on it. My fifth IO observation is that for all types of military operations, the commander's vision and intent are essential, but when directing subordinate commanders to perform outside of their comfort zones, personal involvement is especially necessary to ensure that the commander's concept is executed according to plan.

After establishing an initial IO cell, we obviously needed to develop an IO concept of operation that would synchronize our collective efforts. The centerpiece of this concept was the decision to dedicate brigade IO efforts toward two major themes and five target audiences (figure 3). The two major themes were to convince the silent majority of Iraqis in our AO that the economic, political, and social reforms being implemented were in their personal and national interest to support, and to discredit insurgent and terrorist activities in order to deny them support by the silent majority.

Our overall target audience was clearly the silent majority. However, to reach them and to ensure

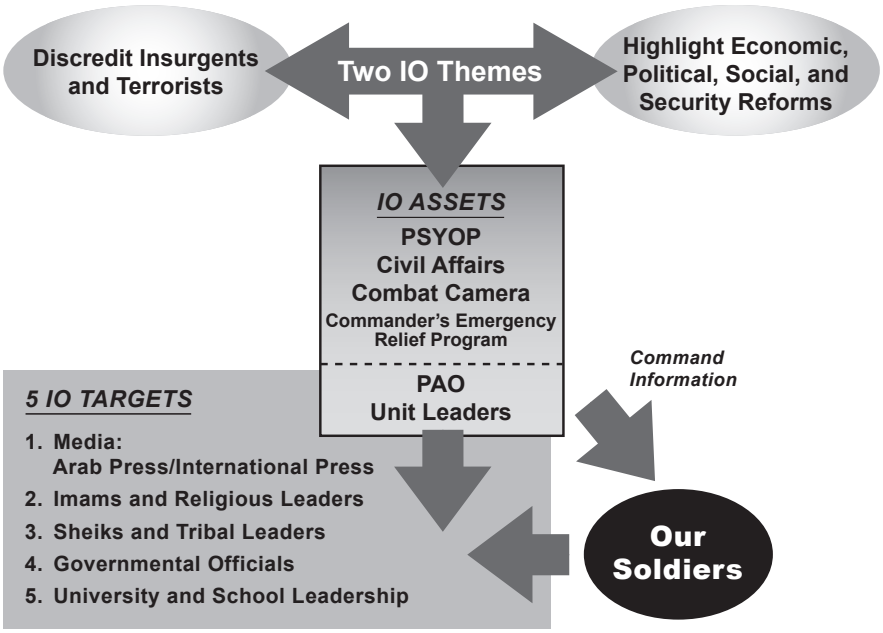

Figure 3. 2BCT IO campaign plan.

that our messages and themes would resonate with them, we determined that we needed to use mainly Iraqi proxies to convey our messages. We therefore identified five groups of Iraqis that had significant influence among the population: local imams and priests, local and district council members, staff and faculty from the universities, Arab and international media, and local sheiks and tribal leaders. Armed with a conceptual framework for conducting information operations throughout the brigade, we then wrote and published an IO annex. This leads to my sixth IO observation: An IO campaign has a greater likelihood of success if messages are simple and few, and repeated often.

Repeating themes and messages. While developing my commander's guidance, I recalled that the average person has a hard time remembering even simple concepts if he is only exposed to the concept once. A person watching commercials on TV, for example, must watch the same commercial 10 or 12 times before he retains the message and becomes inclined to buy the product. Keeping this in mind, we strove for sufficient repetition whenever we disseminated information. To influence the population, it was important to develop and repeat the messages that focused on our two themes, and to ensure that they were accurate and consistent.

Staying focused. Our ultimate IO objective was to convince the majority of the Iraqis in our area that they should tolerate our short-term occupation because we, working with them, could create conditions that would lead to a better life for them individually and collectively. As mentioned earlier, we developed two overarching themes that, if communicated often and convincingly to the Iraqis, would contribute to our goal. To support our first theme (convincing the Iraqis that it was in their personal and national interest to support reform initiatives), we defined success as progress being made economically, socially, politically, and in security. To support our second theme (discrediting the insurgents and terrorists), we took every opportunity to draw attention to the destructive, vicious disregard the enemy had for the Iraqi people and the adverse effects their actions were having on individual and national progress.

With much command emphasis, we developed metrics and the information requirements to support them. We then meticulously collected information from throughout the brigade area in support of the metrics, which we integrated into IO messages to bolster our two major themes. Using "economic reform," for example, we tracked the status of every brigade renovation and reconstruction project. These projects were effective in supporting our first theme because they directly resulted in quality-of-life improvements for the Iraqis. Better schools, cleaner drinking water, functional sewage disposal, more efficient distribution of electricity in our area, functioning health clinics and hospitals, and repair of university schools are some examples of the information we used to substantiate our claims.

We maintained a running total of the new projects we had started, how many were in various stages of completion, how many had been completed, and how much money the Iraqi transitional government, the U.S. Government, or the international community had contributed to each. We also collected detailed information about insurgent and terrorist activities in our area to support our second theme. We tracked the number of Iraqi citizens killed or injured because of insurgent activities each day, the type of property damage and associated dollar value of damage caused by the insurgents, and the adverse effect that insurgent attacks were having on the quality of life (hours of daily electricity diminished, fuel shortages, number of days lost on completing vital infrastructure projects, and so forth).

One of our early IO challenges was maintaining consistent, accurate, noncontradictory IO messages. To address the challenge, we codified in our IO annex the kind of information to be collected, along with the requirement to roll up such information and submit it to the brigade IO cell each week. The cell used this precise, accurate information to develop talking points for all brigade leaders, and the points were disseminated to subordinate commands in our weekly fragmentary order. As a result, when we spoke with the media, government officials, imams and priests, university staff and faculty, and tribal sheiks, we were all saying the same thing—one band, one sound—all the time, with talking points crafted to reinforce our two themes.

Making IO part of overall operations. Because battalion leaders were busy fighting a war and dealing with lots of other problems, it would have been easy for them to place less and less priority on the brigade IO plan until it was subsumed by some other priority. Therefore, I knew that if I did not

emphasize IO, it would not become a cornerstone of our daily operations. I felt strongly enough about the need for a brigade-wide IO effort that I made it one of my top priorities, so that the battalion commanders would follow suit as well.

Almost all of our IO activities were codified in our IO annex, which we developed and issued as a fragmentary order. This detailed annex described our two major themes and five target audiences, and it directed subordinate commands to conduct meetings, either weekly or bi-weekly depending on the audience, with the leaders of our targeted audiences (figure 4). The annex also directed subordinate commands to collect the information needed to support our weekly talking points, provided specific guidance on how to work with the media, and stipulated many other tasks that were necessary to support the brigade IO concept. I did not leave the "who and how often" up to the battalion commanders. They could not say, "I know I'm supposed to meet with these imams this week, but I'm just too busy." The engagement was required.

To manage this process further, I required weekly reports. If a commander failed to conduct a mandatory target audience engagement, I demanded an immediate justification. I do not typically operate in such a directive mode, but I felt such an approach was necessary, at least initially, to ensure that our IO plan developed into something more than a good idea.

Not surprisingly, there were some growing pains, even gnashing of teeth. But once commanders saw and felt the positive effects we were having, they bought in and the program became a standard part of how we did business.

To institutionalize the IO process even further and to habituate battalion commanders to it, I required monthly backbriefs, not unlike quarterly training briefings but focused on IO activities. The commanders briefed from prepared slides in a standardized format. They addressed such topics as the frequency of engagements with targeted audiences in their areas, the number of Arab press engagements conducted, and a roll-up of directed information requirements collected that month in

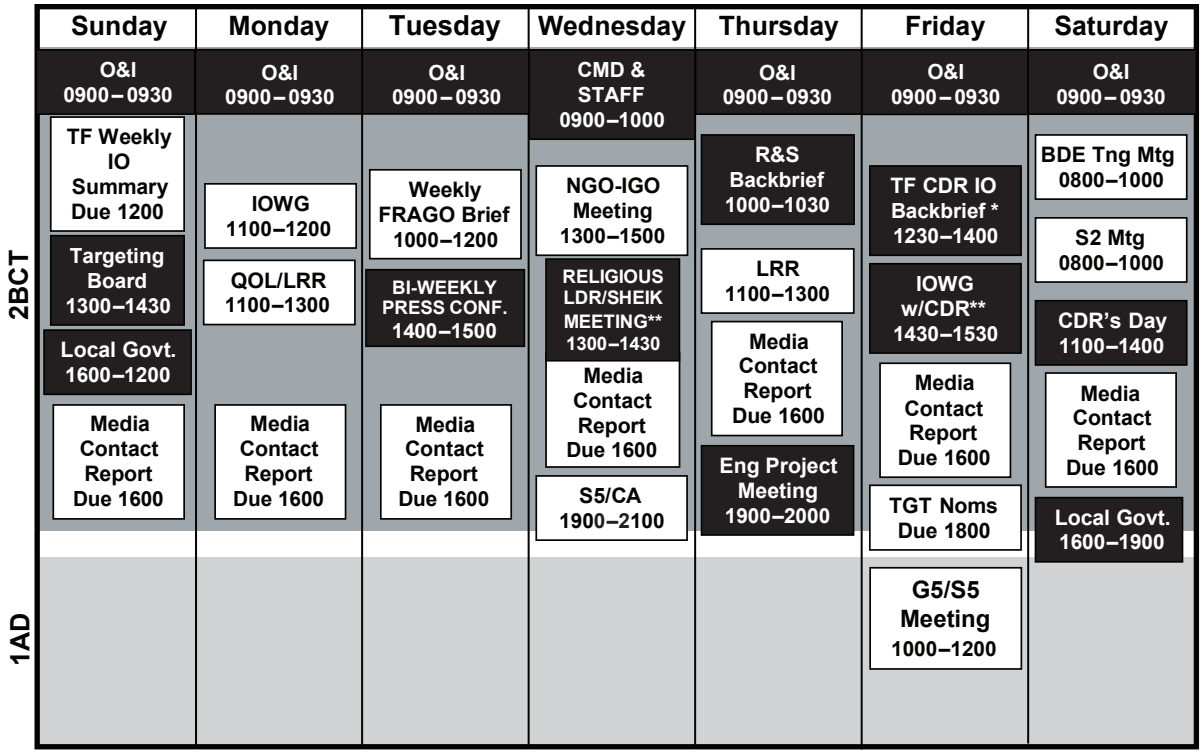

Figure 4. 2BCT IO battle rhythm.

support of our major IO themes. They were also expected to brief what they had accomplished for the month, and what their plans were for the next month, specifically highlighting planned changes and adaptations.

This briefing technique improved my situational awareness of the brigade's IO and provided a forum where leaders could share ideas and best practices. For example, one of the commanders might brief a new way in which insurgents were attempting to discredit Coalition forces, then address what he was doing to counter it. Other commanders could anticipate similar attempts in their AOs and take proactive measures to deny insurgent success.

When we executed more traditional operations, I gave the battalion leadership great latitude to plan and execute in their battlespace. For information operations, however, I felt I had to be directive to ensure compliance with the plan I envisioned.

Developing talking points. We developed two sets of talking points to support our themes. The first set came from input the battalions provided weekly. It addressed what the insurgents were doing that adversely affected the Iraqis, and detailed actions showing how Iraqi lives were getting better because of cooperative Coalition and Iraqi successes. This information was consolidated and vetted by the IO cell, then pushed back out to the battalions to provide consistent, accurate talking points and to preclude us from committing IO fratricide by contradicting ourselves.

The other set of talking points were templated standing sound bites for engagements of opportunity that might occur due to catastrophic events. We could not predict when, but we knew suicide bombings and other sensational insurgent attacks were going to occur, and we wanted officers who would be the first to arrive to have some handy formatted guidance with which to engage the media and local officials who were sure to show up. These standard talking points gave the first company commander or battalion commander on the scene sufficient material to talk to the media with confidence.

The talking points also helped commanders stay on theme and make the points that we wanted to make. While the talking points were general, they were still specific enough and timely enough to satisfy the press. The standard talking points also allowed us to shape the information environment somewhat by suggesting what the focus of an incident should be rather than leaving it up to the media to find an interpretation (which the insurgents were often clever at providing).

Along with the five target audiences that we engaged with our weekly talking points, we actually had a sixth audience: our own Soldiers. As our own quality of life began to mature, our Soldiers gained easy access to satellite TV. Typically, they would watch CNN, the BBC, FOX, or some other major international news media. It quickly became clear to us that if these organizations were the most influential sources of information Soldiers were exposed to, they would receive unbalanced information from which to develop their opinions of the effect their efforts were having in this war.

I remembered talking about Soldier morale with Major General Martin E. Dempsey, who said that a Soldier's morale was a function of three things: believing in what he is doing, knowing when he is going home, and believing that he is winning. Watching the international news was not necessarily going to convince anyone that we were winning. Therefore, we decided to take the same information we were collecting to support our two IO themes and use it as command information for our Soldiers, so they could better understand how we were measuring success and winning, and be able to appreciate the importance of their contributions.

Value of Societal and Cultural Leaders

For communicating our message to the Iraqis, our challenge was twofold: We had to exhaust every means available to ensure the Iraqis heard our messages, and (frankly the greater challenge) we had to get them to believe our messages. We constantly strove to earn the trust and confidence of the Iraqis in our area by consistently being truthful with them and following through on our word. Many if not most of the Iraqis we were trying to influence with our IO themes did not have access to us, did not have an opportunity to change their opinions about our intentions, and tended not to believe anything a Westerner said to them. For our information to resonate with the population, we realized we had to reach the most trusted, most influential community members: the societal and cultural leaders. We hoped to convince them to be our interlocutors with the silent majority.

We identified the key leaders in our AO who wielded the greatest influence. These included clerics (Sunni and Shiite imams and Christian priests from Eastern Orthodox churches), sheiks and tribal leaders, staff and faculty at the universities (a group that has incredible influence over the young minds of college-age students), local government officials whom we were mentoring, and finally, select Arab media correspondents.

We began our leader engagement strategy by contacting members of local governments at neighborhood, district, and city council meetings. We sat side by side with elected local council leaders and helped them develop their democratic council systems. Eventually, we took a backseat and became mere observers. My commanders and I used these occasions to cultivate relationships with the leaders and to deliver our talking points (never missing an opportunity to communicate our two brigade themes). We typically met weekly or bi-weekly with prominent religious leaders, tribal sheiks, and university staff and faculty to listen to concerns and advice and to communicate the messages that supported our IO themes.

The meetings were excellent venues for our target audiences to express whatever views they were willing to share. Usually, we initiated a session with them by asking "What are we doing that you think is going well in your neighborhoods? What are we doing that is not going so well?" Not unexpectedly, 95 percent of their comments focused on what we were not doing so well (from their point of view). But this dialog, however negative the feedback might have been, gave them a forum to communicate to us the rumors they had heard through the Iraqi grapevine. In turn, this gave us a platform to counter rumors or accusations and, using the detailed information we had collected, to invalidate untrue or unsubstantiated rumors or allegations. After fostering relationships with the leaders from our target audiences over a period of time, we were able to refute anti-Coalition rumors and allegations with some degree of success.

These venues also gave brigade leaders insights to follow up on any allegations of unacceptable actions by any of our units or Soldiers. In fact, when any group raised a credible point that involved something I could affect, I tried to act on it immediately. In our next meeting with the Iraqi leaders, I would explain to them what I had discovered based on their allegations and what I was doing about it. For example, a sheik alleged that we were intentionally insulting Arab men when we conducted raids. He specifically referred to our technique of placing a sandbag over the head of a suspect once we apprehended him. I told him that doing so was a procedure we had been trained to perform, probably to prevent prisoners from knowing where they were being held captive. His response was that everybody already knew where we took prisoners and that it was humiliating for an Iraqi man to be taken captive in his house and have "that bag" put on his head, especially in front of his family. The sheik's point was that by following our standard operating procedure to secure prisoners, we were creating conditions that could potentially contribute to the insurgency.

Back at headquarters we talked this over. Why do we put bags on their heads? Nobody had a good answer. What do we lose if we don't use the bags? What do we gain if we don't? We decided to discontinue the practice. Whether doing so had a measurable effect or not is unknown, but the change played well with the target audience because it was a clear example that we valued the people's opinions and would correct a problem if we knew about it. This simple act encouraged the people to share ideas with us on how we should operate and allowed them to say, "See, I have influence with the Americans." This was useful because it stimulated more extensive and better future dialog.

Another benefit of these engagement sessions was an increase in our understanding of the culture. We had not undergone cultural training before deploying to Iraq, but we received a significant amount of it through on-the-job training during these sessions. In fact, many of the tactics, techniques, and procedures we adopted that allowed us to strike a balance between conducting operations and being culturally sensitive came from ideas presented to us during meetings with leaders of our key target audiences.

Embedded Media

Everybody thinks embedded media is a great concept. I do. I had James Kitfield from the *National Journal* embedded in my unit for 3 months during my tour in Iraq. That is an embed—somebody

U.S. Army

The author engages with reporters from an Arab TV network. Arab satellite TV had tremendous influence on the people in 2BCT's area.

who stays with the unit long enough to understand the context of what is going on around them and to develop an informed opinion before printing a story. Unfortunately, as Phase IV of the operation in Iraq began, the definition of what an embed was for some reason changed to mean hosting a reporter for 3 or 4 days or even just 1 day. That is risky business because a reporter cannot learn about or understand the context of the issues Soldiers face and, consequently, has a greater propensity to misinterpret events and draw inaccurate conclusions. Realizing this, I made it a brigade policy that we would not allow reporters to live with us in the brigade unless they were going to come down for an extended period of time.

Reporters who wanted to visit us for a day or two were welcome, but they had to go home every night because I was not going to expose them to, or give them, the same kind of access a true embed received if they did not want to invest the time needed to develop a sophisticated understanding of the environment the Soldiers faced, the decisions we were making, and the context in which we were fighting. Therefore, my seventh IO observation is that reporters must earn their access.

Unfortunately, it is also my experience that some reporters come with a predetermined agenda and only want to gather information to support some particular political or personal slant for a story they are already developing. However, I learned by experience who those reporters were and what to expect from them. No matter what we do, we are not going to change some reporters' or publications' mindsets. The best way to work around a biased and unprofessional journalist is by being more professional than they are and by developing a plan to deal with them.

Arab versus international media. Although the international press is an integral component of our IO effort, they were not our top media priority. While higher headquarters viewed U.S. and international media as their main media targets, our priority was more parochial: We regarded the Iraqi and Arab media as our main targets. As a result, most of the time I spent on the media was focused on the Arab press because it informed the population in my area. What most people were viewing on their new satellite TV dishes was Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, not CNN, the BBC, NBC, or FOX. From my perspective, I was competing with the insurgents for the opinion of the silent majority, the wavering mass of Iraqi citizens who were undecided in who they

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CPT Scott Nauman, Commander, A Company, 2-6 Infantry, 2BCT, meets with local neighborhood council members.

supported and who constituted the most important audience we needed to influence.

Weekly roundtables. The most effective technique we developed to routinely engage the key members of the Arab press was the bi-weekly, brigade-level news huddle. Since policy at that time did not permit us to conduct press conferences, we held small roundtables, something like the exclusive U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) press roundtables conducted in Washington, D.C. We allowed only the Arab press to come to these sessions; CNN, the BBC, and other international media were excluded. The Arab media was our target audience because it was our conduit of information back to the Arab community.

Every 2 weeks I invited Arab media representatives to my headquarters. In preparation, one of my PAOs drafted talking points and a script. I began each meeting with scripted comments emphasizing messages related to our two primary IO themes, then opened the floor to questions.

To focus our efforts and to determine which venues the Iraqis received their news from, we conducted surveys and ascertained which newspapers were read and which TV programs were watched in our battlespace. We then hired two Iraqis to be brigade press agents. Their main jobs were to facilitate attendance at our press roundtables and to promote the publication of our messages. They would go out, visit with various newspapers, and invite reporters to our press conferences. Typically, the press agents described how we conducted our press conference, provided reporters with the location and frequency of our meetings, and coordinated the reporters' clearance for entry into our forward operating base. Finally, the press agents would stress to the reporters that they were not only allowed but encouraged to ask anything they wanted.

It was not unusual to have anywhere from 8 to 10 newspaper reporters attend these meetings, among them representatives from Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and one of the Lebanese satellite TV stations. After the press huddle I usually did offline interviews with the Arab satellite stations.

Engaging Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, for the most part, enjoy a justifiably bad reputation in the West because of their biased reporting style. But the fact is they report to the audience we need to influence, so why not develop a rapport with them so that maybe we can get some of our messages across to the Iraqi public?

When Al Jazeera reporters first came to one of our press huddles, they were distant. However, after three or four meetings they began warming up to us and later, they became just as friendly as any of the other reporters attending. We can, if we put enough effort into it, develop a good working relationship with almost any reporter as long as we are truthful and honest. They cannot help but respect us for that and, much of the time, respect is rewarded with fairer and more balanced news accounts because reporters know they can trust what we are saying. It is a mistake not to allow Al Jazeera and other Arab media access simply because we do not like much of what they report. We need to work with them specifically if we want more accuracy and balance. We cannot just censor them, deny them access, or fail to respect them because, ultimately, they talk to Arab peoples in their own language and are the most likely to be believed. Not to engage them or work with them is to miss tactical and strategic opportunities.

Handbills. Another important tool in our efforts to communicate IO themes to the Iraqi public was handbills. Generally, we Westerners dismiss handbills as a trivial medium because we associate them with pizza advertising, close-out sales, and other such activities. In Iraq, hand-distributed material in the form of flyers and leaflets is an effective way to distribute IO messages.

To take the initiative away from the insurgents, we developed two different types of handbills: one to address situations we faced routinely (figure 5), another for mission-specific operations or incidents (figure 6). Standard handbills spread news about such events as improvised explosive device (IED) incidents, house raids, and road closings (usually to clear an IED). Because we wanted to ensure that we had a way to take our IO message straight to the local population as soon as an opportunity presented itself, every mounted patrol carried standard flyers in their vehicles at all times. Thus, when Soldiers encountered a situation, they could react quickly.

We also relied on handbills tailored to specific incidents that had occurred or operations we were conducting. For example, we might draft a handbill addressing an insurgent incident that had killed or injured Iraqis citizens in a local neighborhood. Being able to rapidly produce and disseminate a

Figure 5. House raid handbill.

handbill that exposed the callous and indiscriminate nature of insurgent or terrorist activities while a local community was reeling from the attack was powerful and effective.

When developing handbills, we followed two important guidelines: Ensure that messages were accurately translated, and ensure that the handbills were distributed in a timely manner. Much careful, deliberate thought went into the scripting of our messages. We made sure our best interpreters translated the material, and we vetted each translation through multiple interpreters to ensure accuracy.

It is an unfortunate characteristic of war that tragedy invites the greatest interest in political or social messages. As a result, the best time to distribute a leaflet, as exploitative as it seems, was after an IED or some other sensational insurgent attack had resulted in injury or death. A population grieving over lost family members was emotionally susceptible to messages vilifying and condemning the insurgents. Consequently, we would move rapidly to an incident site and start distributing preprinted leaflets to discredit the insurgents for causing indiscriminant collateral damage. We also requested help in finding the perpetrators of the attack. Such leaflets brought home immediately the message that the insurgents and terrorists were responsible for these events and that the best way to get justice was to tell us or the Iraqi security forces who the insurgents were and where they could be found. This technique, which helped drive a wedge between the insurgents and the locals, often resulted in actionable intelligence. Quick distribution of leaflets helped influence our population before the insurgents could spin the incident against us.

We also drafted handbills that informed the Iraqis about local or national infrastructure progress (figure 7). We highlighted successes, such as the increased production of electricity in the country and improvements in the amount of oil produced and exported.

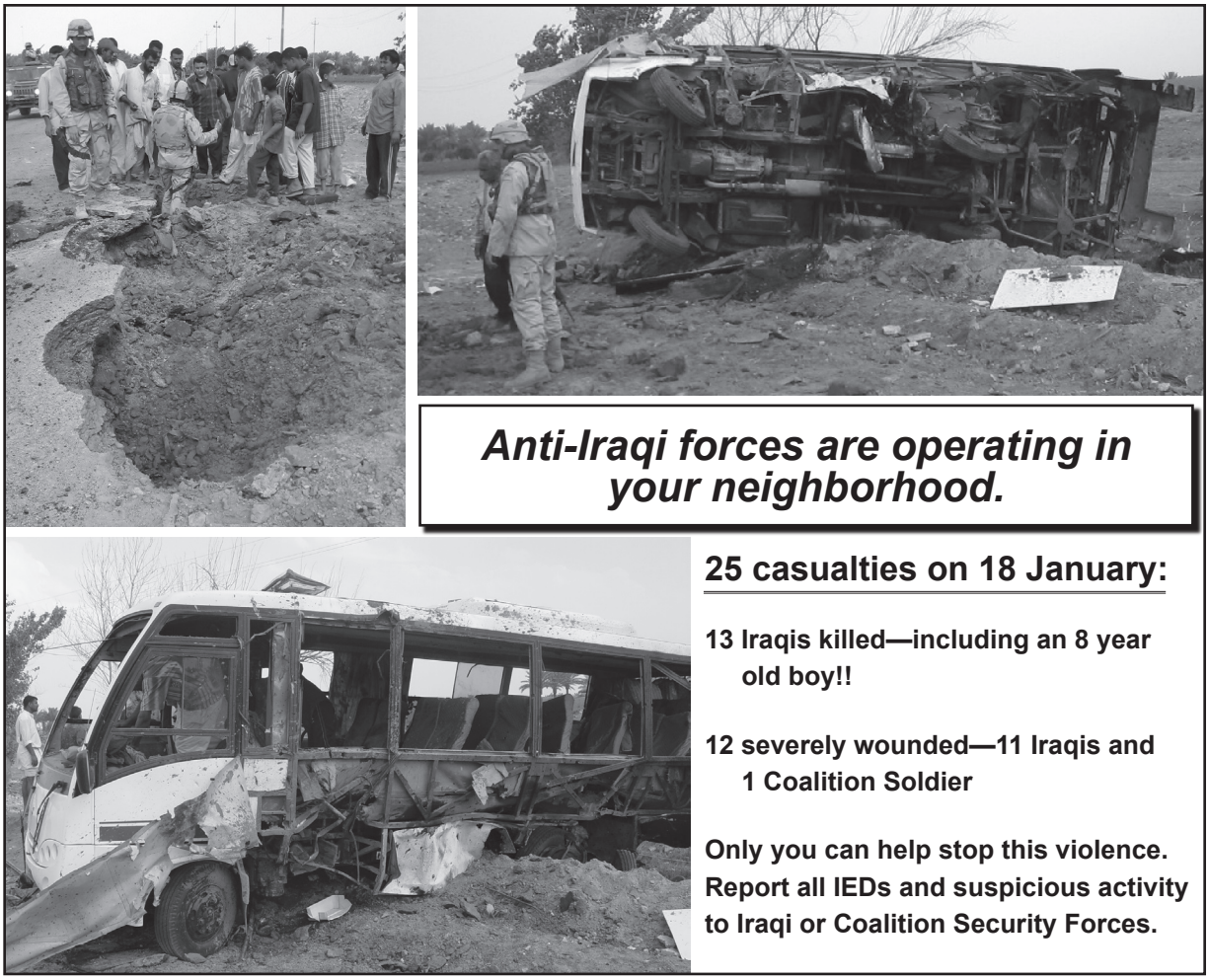


Figure 6. Handbill addressing specific incident.

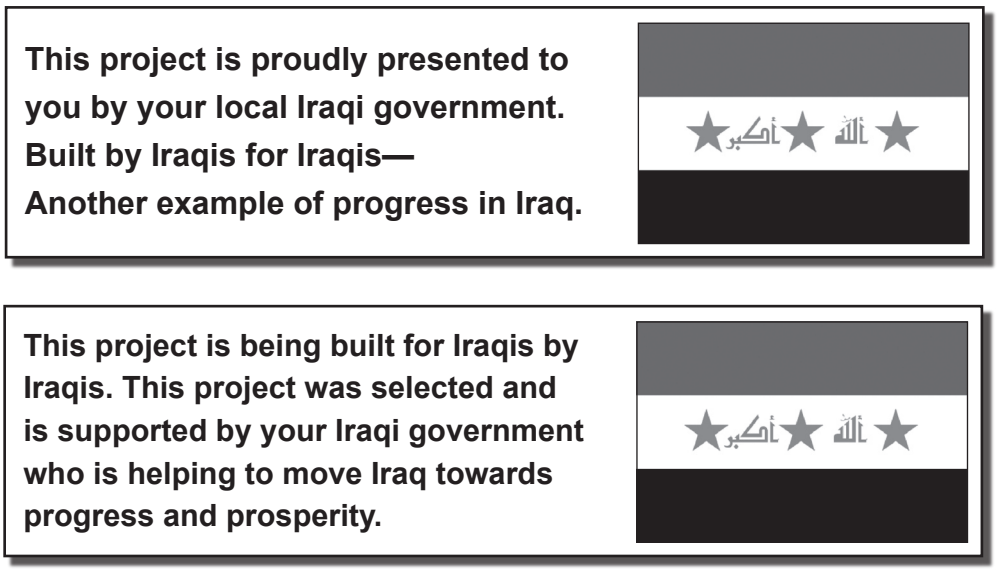


Figure 7. Iraqi success handbill.

We specifically designed these leaflets to convince the population that progress was occurring.

Measures of IO Effectiveness

As with all operations, gauging IO effectiveness is important; however, the process of measuring IO success is not a precise science. That noted, we did discover certain simple techniques to identify indicators that we found useful for measuring effectiveness.

Iraqi PAOs. Iraqi PAOs were indispensable to our success with the Iraqi and Arab press. They were instrumental in soliciting Arab media correspondents to attend our bi-weekly brigade news huddles and in gauging what was being published or broadcast that directly affected our area of operations.

We hired two Iraqi interpreters and dedicated them to 24-hour monitoring of Arab satellite news. That's all they did: They watched satellite news television in our headquarters and noted every story that was aired about operations in Iraq.

Through their efforts we were able to determine that our information operations were having the intended effect because of an increase in the number of accurate, positive stories published or aired in local papers and on satellite TV.

Updates and analysis from this monitoring process became a key part of the daily battle update brief. The PAO briefed us on newspaper articles or Arab TV stories related to our operations. For example, a story might have appeared on Al Jazeera about some particular issue or event in the brigade AO that might have been incorrectly reported. We would respond by developing an IO action to counter the story. This type of monitoring told us about the type of information being directed at the local population, which in turn allowed us to take action to counter or exploit the information.

Lack of adverse publicity. A similar key indicator that our IO efforts were succeeding was a lack of adverse publicity. While we were in Baghdad we raided eight mosques, but received no adverse publicity other than from a few disgruntled imams. To our knowledge, these raids were not reported by either the Arab or the international press. Nor did these raids prove to be problematic in feedback from the various target audiences we were trying to influence. We attributed this success to the meticulous IO planning we did for every sensitive site we raided. Ultimately, we developed a brigade SOP that detailed the IO activities we were required to do before, during, and after such raids.

Measures of Effectiveness

- **Number of accurate/positive stories published/aired.**
- **Lack of negative press.**
- **Number of walk-in or non-informant tips.**
- **Wave factor.**
- **Increase/decrease of anti-U.S./Coalition graffiti.**
- **Tenor of mosque sermons.**
- **Willingness of Iraqis to work with our forces.**

Increase in intelligence tips. Another indicator of success was the increased number of intelligence tips we received. We determined that there was a correlation between the number of tips we received from unpaid walk-in informants and the local population's growing belief that they should distance themselves from the insurgents and align themselves with Coalition reform efforts. By comparing week after week how often local citizens approached our Soldiers and told them where IEDs were implanted or where they were being made, we had a pretty good idea that our efforts to separate the insurgents from the population were working.

The wave factor and graffiti. An informal but important indicator was what we called the wave factor. If you drive through a neighborhood and everyone is waving, that is good news. If you drive through a neighborhood and only the children are waving, that is a good but not great indicator. If you drive through a neighborhood and no one is waving, then you have some serious image problems. A similar informal indicator was the increase or decrease of anti-Coalition graffiti.

Monitoring mosque sermons. A more sophisticated indicator came from reports of what had been said at mosque sermons. Monitoring imam rhetoric proved to be an important technique because messages delivered during sermons indicated whether or not imams were toning down their anti-Coalition rhetoric. If they were, we could claim success

for our program of religious leader engagements. Feedback on what was said inside the mosque steered us to those imams we specifically needed to engage. For example, I would be briefed that a certain imam was still advocating violence against Coalition forces or that he was simply communicating false information. We would then tailor our IO efforts to engage that particular imam or other local neighborhood leaders so that he might modify his behavior and rhetoric.

The Way Ahead

In Iraq's COIN environment, information operations are important tools for achieving success. I believe the program we developed, with its focus on engendering tolerance for our presence and willingness to cooperate (rather than winning hearts and minds), and its basis in consistent, reliable actions supported by targeted communications to specific audiences, paid dividends.

Repetition of message, accuracy of information, and speed of delivery were key to executing our plan. Ultimately, those of us tasked with counterinsurgency must always keep in mind that we are really competing with the insurgents for influence with the indigenous population. In Iraq, that means convincing the population that they should tolerate our short-term presence so that economic, political, social, and security reforms can take root and ultimately give them a better country and a better life. To achieve this goal, we must dominate the IO environment. To dominate the IO environment, we need to ensure that information operations receive the same level of emphasis and involvement that our commanders have traditionally allocated to conventional maneuver operations. Until our Army matures in its development of doctrine and approach to training for insurgencies, commanders at all levels will need to play a prominent role in developing, implementing, and directing IO within their areas of operation.

One of the many strengths our Army enjoys is that it is an adaptive, learning organization. Significant changes are already taking place as we begin to learn from the lessons of fighting an insurgency. Our Combat Training Centers are implementing changes to their training models to better integrate IO into rotation scenarios. Their challenge will be to give rotating forces an irregular warfare experience that acknowledges and rewards good IO planning and execution by our Soldiers. The addition of IO, PA, and CA officers, PSYOP NCOs, and PAOs to maneuver brigades is encouraging, and the offering of COIN electives at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) indicates real progress. However, there is still more to be done before our Soldiers and our Army can comfortably employ IO as a key instrument for waging war against an irregular enemy. Some of the following suggestions are already being considered and will soon be implemented; others I hope will spark some debate as to their merits:

- Do more than add a COIN elective to the CGSC curriculum. Immediately require COIN instruction at all levels in our institutional training base.
- Integrate cultural awareness training as a standard component in our institutional training base curriculum.

Essential IO Observations

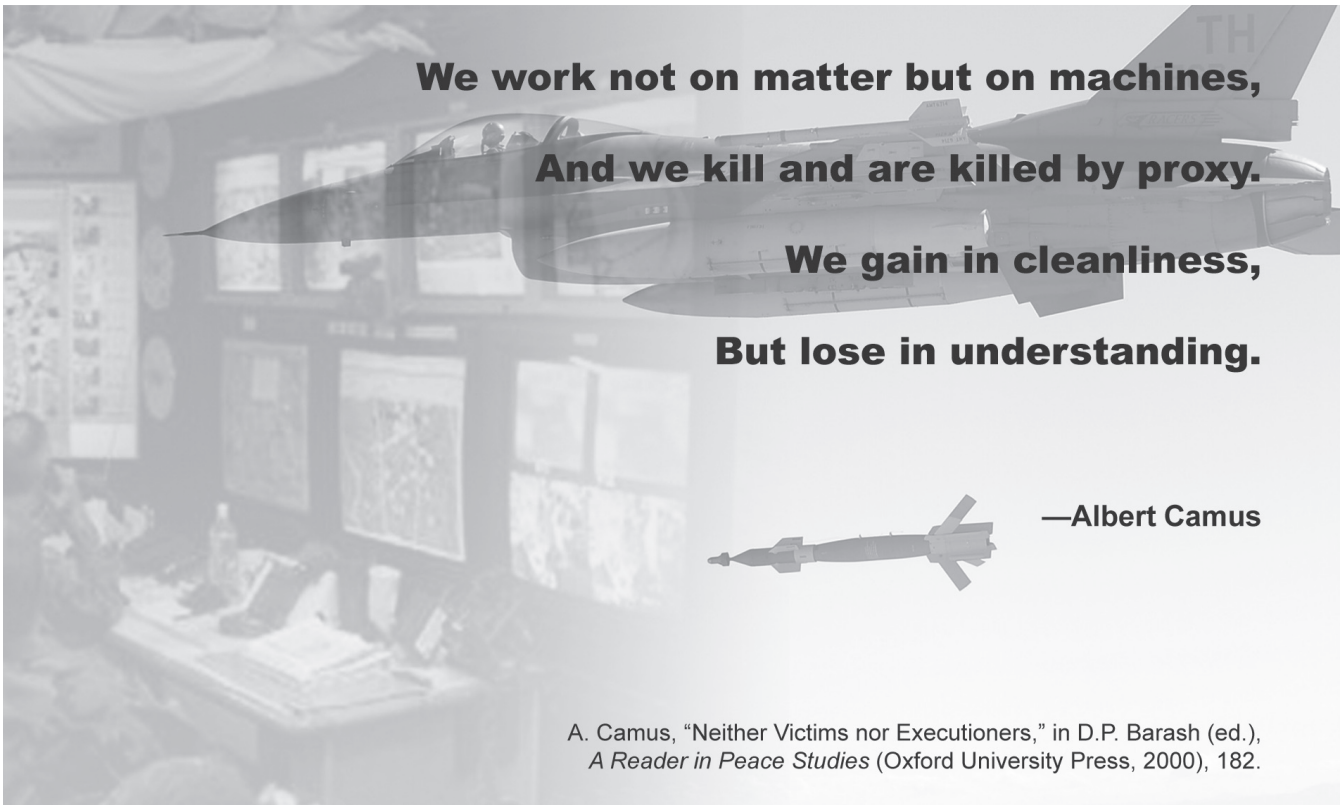
1. **To be effective, tailor themes and messages to specific audiences.**
2. **You have no influence over the press if you do not talk to them.**
3. **There is a direct correlation between your credibility and your ability to demonstrably improve the quality of life, physical security, and stability in a society.**
4. **A major IO goal at tactical and operational levels is getting the citizens in your AO to have trust and confidence in you.**
5. **The commander's vision and intent are essential, but when you direct subordinates to perform outside their comfort zones, your personal involvement is especially important to ensure that your concept is executed according to plan.**
6. **An IO campaign has a greater likelihood of success if messages are simple, few, and repeated often.**
7. **Reporters must earn their access.**

● Increase the quality and quantity of media training provided to Soldiers and leaders.

● Consider compensating culture experts commensurate with their expertise. Why is it that we see fit to give pilots flight pay but do not offer foreign area officers cultural pay? If we want to build a bench of specialists in key languages such as Arabic, Farsi, and Mandarin Chinese, we should consider a financial incentive program to attract and retain people who possess these critical skills.

● Reassess policies and regulations that inhibit our tactical units' ability to compete in an IO environment. The global communications network facilitates the near-instantaneous transmission of information to local and international audiences, and it is inexpensive and easy to access. Our Soldiers must be permitted to beat the insurgents to the IO punch.

In closing, the model of information operations I have advocated here is simply one way to conduct IO at brigade level and below. This model is not intended to be the only way. The unique aspects of each operational environment, our national goals in wartime, the culture of the indigenous population, and many other factors will ultimately dictate each commander's concept of information operations. The important thing is to develop a plan and to execute it aggressively. Failing to do so will give the insurgent a perhaps insurmountable advantage. ***MR***



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