A Case Study: *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* and a Company during COIN Operations

by Captain Andrew P. Betson

In April 2009, to establish doctrine for brigade and below units conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, Department of the Army published Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, as a counterpart to FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.[1] FM 3-24.2 represents a continued effort by the Army to see and understand the current operating environment (COE) and enact a certain amount of doctrinal change toward flexible, adaptable units prepared to face full-spectrum operations.[2] The manual's foreword states that future threats to the United States will likely be less conventional and their inherent nature "places a premium on tactical leaders who cannot only close with the enemy, but also negotiate agreements … restore basic services, speak the native (a foreign) language, orchestrate political deals, and get 'the word' on the street."[3]

This article provides a company-level translation of the tenets defined in U.S. Army doctrine. The operations and task organization of our company, Team Apache, 4th Battalion, 64th (4-64) Armored Regiment, in the post-surge neighborhood of Sadiyah, Rashid District, Baghdad, in 2008, serve as a case study of how to properly execute doctrinal fundamentals of counterinsurgency as described in FM 3-24.2.[4] This article does not preclude the necessity to read, understand, and practice doctrine, but may aid commanders in preparing for and executing counterinsurgency operations.

Doctrinal/Theoretical Framework

Lessons learned from soldiers and scholars conducting stability, support, and major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan drove the production of FM 3-24 and, subsequently, FM 3-24.2.[5] The manual superbly establishes a framework that a company commander can work within during deployment, and further provides supporting tasks that drive each line of effort (LOE). Chapter 3, "The Fundamentals of Counterinsurgency," particularly Section III, illustrates the span of subjects that the tactical counterinsurgent must consider to successfully influence the big picture.[6] The manual best captures the fundamentals and supporting tasks in Chapter 5, "Comprehensive Tactical Planning in Counterinsurgency," with a schematic (Figure 1).[7]

Tactics in Counterinsurgency provides a firm foundation for company grade officers to develop the intellect necessary to effectively understand their environment. Team Apache's operations in Sadiyah provide a case study for organization and actions within the framework defined. To understand its value, however, you must understand the Sadiyah situation and keep in mind, "If it works in this province, it might not work in the next."[8]

The Sadiyah Situation

Sadiyah is a dense, urban, politically affluent residential neighborhood in south central Baghdad that once housed Ba'ath Party elites during Saddam's rule. When the country plunged into sectarian turmoil, as a result of the Samarra Mosque bombing in 2006, the residents of Sadiyah found themselves at the fault line of competing religious sects. Sunni extremists and their associates were attempting to spread influence from the Doura and Abu T'Shir areas to the east. Meanwhile, Shia extremists, mainly under the influence of Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), attempted to spread their area of control from Baaya and Risala, west of Sadiyah. The vast majority of the mixed Sunni/Shia residents of Sadiyah, much like most of Baghdad, abandoned their homes, busi-

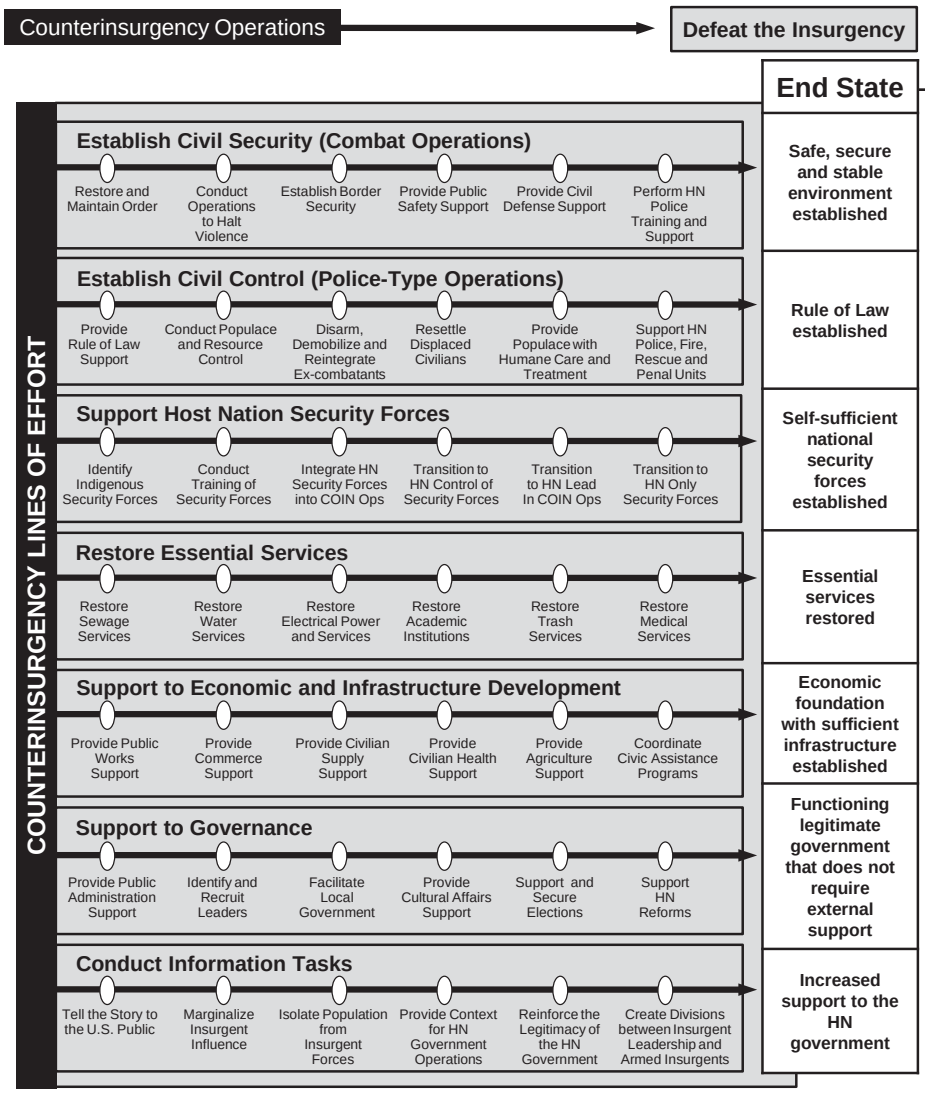

Figure 1

nesses, schools, and restaurants to escape violence. This resulted in a collection of empty homes, which were perfect for squatters (often displaced from other neighborhoods), insurgents, and terrorists to occupy.

The 4-64 Armored Regiment "Tuskers" assumed responsibility of southwest Rashid in November 2007 from the 1st Battalion, 18th (1-18) Infantry Regiment "Vanguards," in the final months of the famous "surge" of 2007-2008. The Vanguards faced the bulk of the violence in Sadiyah and set conditions for the Tuskers to succeed. The Vanguards initiated a major effort to isolate the four most dense and developed muhallahs of the neighborhood with 12-foot high concrete barriers, called T-walls.[9] When the Tuskers assumed authority, the Sadiyah wall neared completion, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were found or detonated at a decreasing rate of about one every other week, and a corrupt National Police battalion was transferring authority of the area to 1st Battalion, 24th Brigade, 6th Division, Iraqi Army (1-24 IA Brigade).

The 1-24 IA Brigade, along with the National Police brigade headquarters, which was in charge of western Rashid, partnered with C Company, 1-18 Infantry Regiment, at a company combat outpost (COP) in the far southeast corner of the enclosed muhallahs. The "Sons of Iraq" program, which was established by 1-18 Infantry Regiment, failed to contribute significantly to security for tense political reasons, and a recent memory of corrupt National Police forces caused the people of Sadiyah, represented by a quasi-legitimate support council, to staunchly resist authorizing civil control by the Iraqi Police.[10]

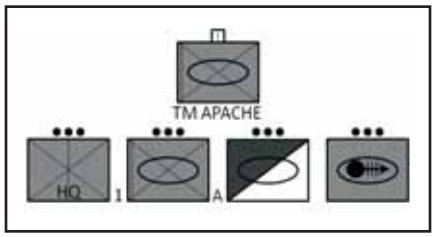

Figure 2

Upon relieving 1-18 Infantry Regiment, the Tuskers' battalion commander immediately identified Sadiyah as his decisive operation. Following completion of the wall, the Tuskers, along with their Iraqi Army partners, executed a major clearing operation, Operation Sadiyah Dawn. As part of this operation, the Tuskers also established a new COP in Muhallah 821, appropriately named "COP 821." Following clearance, the IA controlled the single civilian entry point into Sadiyah, and U.S. forces lived in a more centralized location, setting the conditions for stability operations to take hold.

To address this ambiguous security situation, the battalion task organized the scout and mortars platoons into a company-sized unit called "Team Apache." The company team also had a headquarters platoon capable of independent maneuver made up of the fire support team and some infantrymen from the platoons (Figure 2).

Addressing the Lines of Effort in a Counterinsurgency

FM 3-24.2 does not directly assign responsibilities for LOE, as described in Figure 1. Below are seven essential LOEs performed by Team Apache in Sadiyah; each identifies key leaders, responsibilities, methods, and results (both positive and negative).

LOE 1: Establish Civil Security

Establishing civil security is the most important mission for maneuver platoons. Team Apache's platoon leaders each possessed their own area, corresponding to Sadiyah's muhallahs, which reinforced positive relationships with the population. As part of a daily patrol matrix, platoon leaders achieved presence by identifying focal points in their muhallahs and engaging the population during patrols, which were aptly named "engagement patrols." They did this with host-nation (HN) forces as often as possible and used this opportunity to expand the information campaign in the area. Because of the limitations of interpreters, engaging the population fell on platoon leaders or platoon sergeants while the remainder of the platoon provided local security.[11]

After taking command, I enacted an enduring company-level operation, Apache Brolo, where each platoon leader identified a "main effort," compared to the size of a handful of city blocks. The operation was derived from an example set by 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment (1-4 Cavalry), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James Crider, in eastern Doura. The 1-4 Cavalry's Operation Close Encounters could be described as a census, as it

included an extensive list of questions about everything from family ties to education and jobs. Crider explains that "the operation increased the personal contact between our soldiers and the population, thereby increasing the number of safe opportunities for those willing to provide intelligence."[12] Like Crider's men, Team Apache platoon leaders were armed with a list of questions and given the guidance *to take their time*. Accepting invitations for dinner or tea was highly encouraged; at times, we could accomplish more by spending the entire patrol at one house drinking chai rather than visiting a multitude of houses on several streets. *There is always tomorrow*.

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The day-to-day patrol matrix does not downplay the importance of kinetic action, however. Team Apache's operations in Sadiyah also included directed raids, which were based on significant signal and human intelligence against known terrorists and insurgents. One platoon effectively dismantled an IED cell using intelligence gathered during engagement patrols and other sources. Our targeting process and intelligence collection for these operations were directed by a savvy fire-support noncommissioned officer from the company team. His impromptu team rounded out the civil security LOE through communications with the battalion intelligence shop and other intelligence teams.

LOE 2: Establish Civil Control

Establishing civil control in Sadiyah was delayed until the end of the deployment based on a gap in establishing effective unity of command with the U.S. Air Force police training team responsible for working with the Iraqi Police in Sadiyah. Much like partnering with host-nation forces, approaching this LOE effectively includes a strong relationship between the transition team and ground commander. This leads to a clearer understanding of the scope of authority and effectiveness of the civil control elements.

Knowing crucial facts about the local police aids in the transition of civil authority; for instance, the Iraqi Police were divided as a patrol police and station police, with separate types of headquarters, organizations, and responsibilities. Gathering such information helps strengthen the police's legitimacy among the local population. If the locals do not trust the civil-control element, as in Sadiyah, the commander must first bring the host-nation forces together with the local governing population and then slowly relay authority to the policing forces. We began this process by collocating Iraqi Police checkpoints with IA checkpoints, but transferred authority before we could see the effects.

LOE 3: Support Host-Nation Forces

Maneuver platoon leaders supported host-nation forces through constant engagement with 1-24 IA Brigade, which had its own challenges. Initially, we designed the patrol matrix based on feedback from platoon-level leadership regarding where they wanted — or needed — to develop the situation within their muhallahs. Bluntly, U.S. forces picked up the IA and told them "this is where we are going; now we'll follow you." Two methods improved these day-to-day patrols: the IA battalion commander, with help from his transition team chief, assigned areas of operations for the IA companies in the neighborhood; and Team Apache began to steadily follow the IA patrol matrix.

Prior to changing commanders, 1-24 IA Brigade was effective during cordon operations and in manning checkpoints in the neighborhood, yet lacked coherent organization at the company level. Under the new commander, who was a graduate of the Italian Staff College, each IA company established its own COP (safe house) within its defined area, and created rosters that corresponded checkpoints with the company responsible. This organization also allowed our leaders to interact more effectively by becoming acquainted with IA company commanders, their strengths and weaknesses, and the capabilities of their command and control nodes. To prevent complacency, they also conducted checkpoint and company-level command post capability inspections, which allowed face-to-face discussions between company commanders to address issues. By developing habitual relationships with IA company commanders, our platoon leaders could begin the transition of engagement patrol leaders. The patrol matrix, by the end of our tour, loosely ensured coverage throughout the neighborhood, but allowed the IA company commander to choose the precise location.

The IA battalion commander took advantage of security conditions in Sadiyah and my attendance at his weekly command and staff meeting to plan larger scale cordon operations, using Team Apache in a support role. While he used Team Apache for closing gaps in his cordon, we used them to influence the population with our own information operations campaign.

LOE 4: Support to Economic and Infrastructure Development

Millions of dollars passing through the hands of our fire support officer (FSO) provided the skeleton key for success in supporting economic development and the general advancement of Sadiyah. *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* uses the term "money as a weapons system" three times in its text.[13] While cynical observers will scoff at the idea of "buying security," the proper use of money at the company level can influence all LOEs for the commander. We assigned the headquarters platoon to the FSO for approximately 2 days during the week to assist in completing many important tasks along current and future LOEs.

The downside to successful isolation achieved by the Sadiyah wall (mentioned above) is the deadly effect that limiting traffic will have on the economy. This was my first lesson in city planning and zoning — businesses attract people. Sadiyah had two major bustling markets before the exodus of its residents, and many other small markets, such as furniture production, sewing, ice production, and more. Each provided an opportunity to bring the neighborhood back to life; the "microgrant" program provided the elixir. A microgrant is a sum of money, determined by the size and potential of the requestor's business, awarded from the commander's emergency relief program by the land-owning U.S. force. Mentioned above, a critical factor in this program was our battalion commander's decision to weigh Sadiyah as his main effort.

My FSO's plan for the application process and payment of the microgrants achieved more than originally expected. Shaking off a previous attempt to "sprinkle" microgrants throughout the area, he identified the most critical markets capable of bolstering public confidence and, in turn, supporting security and resettlement. With information collected from the population, the FSO identified the most prominent market in the neighborhood, which was the "cherry market."[14] The FSO began with an information campaign, in cooperation with the support council, which provided applications — on an assigned day — to shop owners with an open shop and *proof of ownership*. This required our soldiers to interpret legitimate government documentation, often with the help of local support or neighborhood councils. The chance of receiving a microgrant brought shop owners back to their stores. The day the applications were distributed was the busiest day in the marketplace since our unit had arrived in Baghdad!

The FSO divided his element into teams, which handed out applications after validating deeds and taking photos of each applicant and his shop. Over the next few days, applicants reported to COP 821 with completed applications, valid identification, and ownership deeds. Before they arrived, the FSO generated packets for each applicant to determine the category (determining money) and ranking (determining priority for payment) assigned to each shop. At the COP, the owner (or posing owner) was required to enroll in a biometric database maintained by coalition forces, which was used to cross-reference forensic evidence from criminal or terrorist attacks. One can see how the effective execution of this process was so helpful, let alone the legitimacy that the local government and coalition forces deposited on payment day.

Developing the economy, under proper security conditions, is the most important improvement factor to consider as security improves. Opening stores for business and actually bringing people into the marketplace significantly improved the quality of life of the remaining residents. The "declaration" of safety measures, or perception thereof, spread to residents who had left the neighborhood (or country) and resettlement began. As residents returned, more security became necessary as these individuals had an investment in long-term success and likely provided intelligence.

LOE 5: Restore Essential Services

Along with the glory and satisfaction of economic development comes the tedious work of essential services for the fire support team (FiST) and headquarters platoon. Experience with this LOE demands company-grade officers be familiar with aspects of city planning to be successful in stability operations, as these are key terrain for insurgents and counterinsurgents. The local thug, small crime boss, or sleeper insurgent cell will control local power generation, gas distribution, and other such essential services, to make money and intimidate the population. Controlling this LOE demanded day-to-day tedium, but resulted in two major projects that advanced overall success in the neighborhood.

To collect extensive information requirements for essential services assessments, the FSO was given exclusive control of the headquarters platoon 2 days a week. Having certain predictability allowed the FSO to coordinate with local government officials to be present during assessments of essential services such as schools, generators, and gas distributions. When local government elements, such as support council members or neighborhood council members, saw these shortcomings and made themselves present for town hall meetings, results materialized. During school openings, Iraqi brigade and battalion commanders were also present, which assigned legitimacy to host-nation forces.

A market lighting project, in particular, received overwhelming support from the population in Sadiyah. After the effects of a microgrant surge took hold on the spruce market (prior to the cherry market project), we saw an opportunity to support the growth of the economy, essential services, and security with a well-funded, single project. Given an intelligent general contractor, local workers rewired the original street lights along the market (long since shot out or destroyed entirely) to a large generator within sight of COP 821 and an IA checkpoint. The project funding provided start-up costs, the first tank of gas, and initial maintenance, but the key aspect of the project was the long-term plan. The support council, by vote, identified a manager for the micro-generation, which was provided by the project's generator. Shop owners paid for a power line, from the central street lights to their shop, at a manageable price (determined comparable to what it would cost from the government supply), and their monthly payments sustained the maintenance and gas prices for the generator. Although many questions arose after the grand opening, the contract's long-term stipulations provided an identifiable, local point of contact when things were not working properly, thus reducing the reliance on American intervention — and dollars.

A larger micro-generation project throughout the battalion area followed a similar model as the Sadiyah street lights. This project further emphasized the city planning that inherently follows stability operations along this LOE. Emplacing the generators required host-nation security, noninterference with water lines, and provided a lucrative target for opportunistic thugs looking for money. It's easy to identify how one simple services project has the potential of crossing all LOEs.

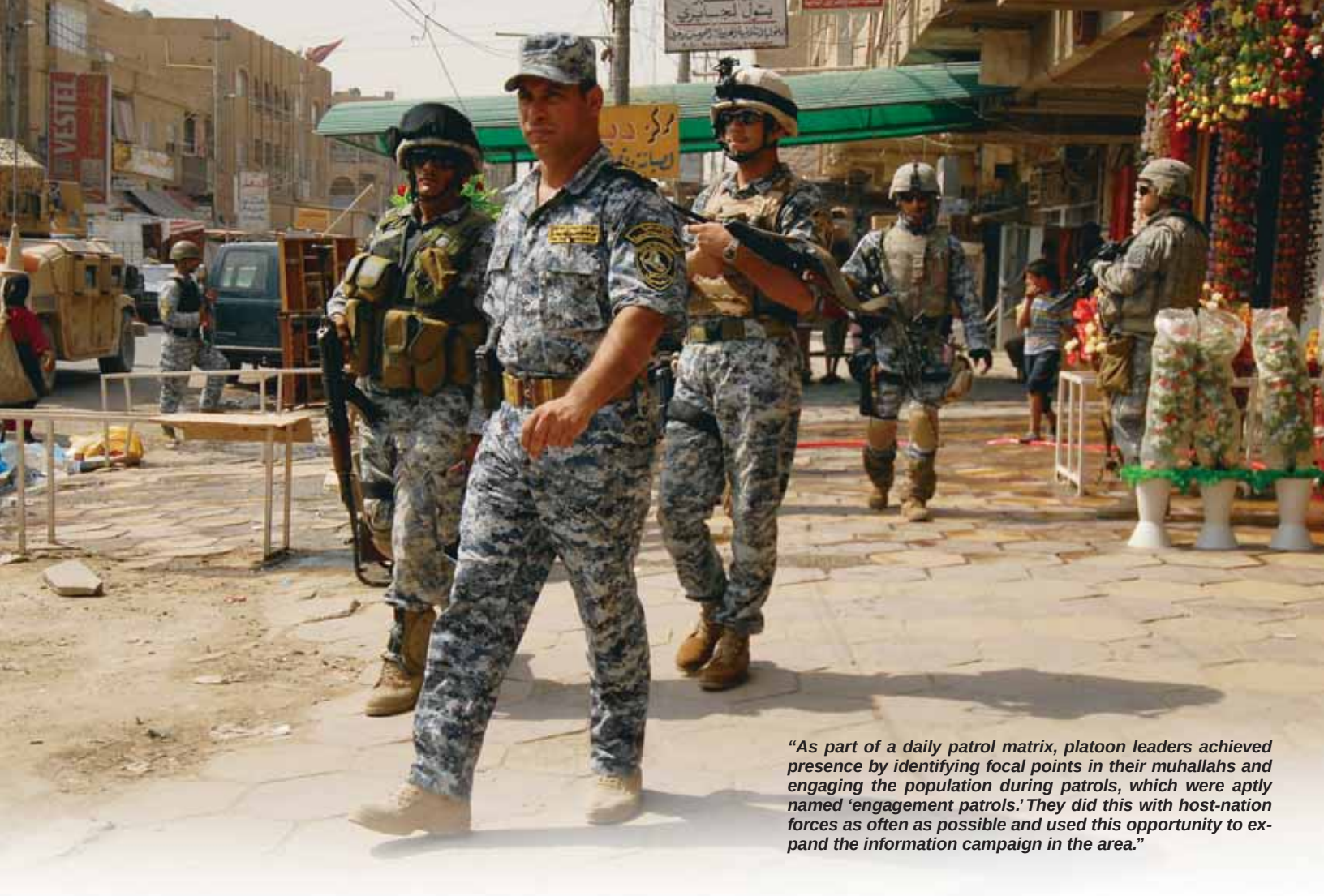
The FSO was quick to garner as much information as possible relating to power, water, and sewage operations, and identify the Iraqi administrator charged with the responsibility of each service. This information was passed on to ensure we were familiar with these key players before we attended scheduled governance meetings.

LOE 6: Support to Governance

The Sadiyah governance plan produced an interesting collection of dilemmas, which represented the sensitive nature of counterinsurgency. Prior to transferring authority to the Tuskers, the Vanguards, much like other units, coordinated a vote for establishing a support council in Sadiyah, with equal representation regarding Sunni and Shia. The result was a well-funded support council with a suitable headquarters inside the major neighborhood muhallah. The council, under U.S. forces guidance, divided into committees that reasonably matched our LOEs, mainly essential services.

These weekly meetings generally drew all of the elected members, some volunteer members, representatives from IA and U.S. forces, and often the National Police brigade commander and U.S. battalion commander. The focus and effort put into this council gave it de facto legitimacy.

After a legitimate attempt at learning enough Arabic to track topics of conversation, I found that the less I was involved, the more the council accomplished. While I held a place at the head of the table, I did not have my interpreter interrupt the meeting to translate, but allowed the council to work through topics with occasional updates in English. I made a point to develop relationships, which included chai at homes and in mosque courtyards, and encourage discussion on politics and economics. A commander who does not accept invitations to religious celebrations, dinner, or casual conversation is missing the "mark" on successful counterinsurgency operations.



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There also existed a neighborhood council for Sadiyah, which had literally been ostracized and undermined as a casualty to the establishment of the support council. The most important meeting we had regarding governance LOE was a chance meeting in the battalion conference room with the FSO and an embedded provincial reconstruction advisor from the U.S. State Department, who was working for the brigade. During this meeting, the advisor sketched out how essential services and governance was *meant* to work in a government that higher-level officials were attempting to establish. The support council, our most effective organization, literally undermined the legitimate local government with our unwavering support. By emplacing a semi-legitimate elected support council body in Sadiyah, we, in a sense, had become the insurgents. The personalities within the two councils constantly butted heads, which made for tense moments when our platoon leaders requested local presence on engagement patrols or during infrastructure assessments.

Understanding this, we set about supporting and empowering the legitimate local government, but not without certain friction. It was difficult to convince the neighborhood council chairman that we supported him when our support for the support council implied otherwise. While so many attended these support council meetings, I was the only security representative who attended the actual, legitimate neighborhood council meetings. I overtly began supporting the neighborhood council by inviting them to support council meetings, and then inviting the IA commander to attend neighborhood council meetings.

The delicate nature of this LOE demands the apt and constant attention of a commander. Command of the politics presents multiple lines of communications to the population. A commander must be willing to protect these lines of communications, despite the associated uneasy feelings.

LOE 7: Conduct Information Tasks

FM 3-0, *Operations* describes information as a "powerful tool … as important as lethal action" in the modern operational environment, and further states that, "commanders use information to understand, visualize, describe, and direct warfighting functions."[15] Given this, and the ambiguous nature of counterinsurgency operations, one can see why FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, emphatically states that "Conduct information tasks are part of all military operations in an area."[16]

Months after taking command, it became apparent that the amount of reporting going up to the battalion (and subsequently brigade), far outweighed the information being pushed down, even within our company. Reality 'hit' when one of our platoon leaders stated that he could only talk about "how few hours of power there are" for so long. Although frustrated that he had missed so many opportunities for discussion, his comment established that we were using the most important details of our information campaign only to appease higher headquarters — the voracious monster.

Following this revelation, our FSO was dealt the responsibility of providing proper talking points during the company's nightly synchronization meetings. By opening this conduit of information, our patrol leaders had something to discuss with the people of Sadiyah. Armed with this information, engagement patrols carried a purpose and end state beyond just answering a list of questions. This LOE finally rounded out engagement patrols, both combined with host-nation forces and Apache Brolo, and connected them with reciprocal LOEs, which resulted in

effective presence throughout the neighborhood.

Resettlement – The Elephant in the AO

Resettlement of displaced civilians proved to be the most challenging aspect of stability operations in this environment. FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, fail to properly acknowledge the importance or complexity of this inevitable challenge.[17] Much like the essential services listed above, insurgents and criminals fought for control of this key aspect of human terrain.

The system we developed to prevent the enemy from taking advantage of this sensitive objective consisted of three parts:

- U.S. forces were not involved in removing families (squatters) from homes, therefore we involved host-nation forces. Specifically, IA soldiers directed civilians, who came to checkpoints with luggage and indicated they were resettling, to report to the support council.[18]
- The support council collected and consolidated information about each person to provide a weekly list of returning internally displaced persons.
- Ensuring the weekly list corresponded with engagement patrols, which included patrol leaders requesting families to produce a deed to their property. If the patrol discovered resettled families, they would be directed to report to the support council, if they had not done so.

Word spread quickly and people soon became aware of our efforts to validate the reentry of families. These efforts quickly mitigated potential corruption seen in other areas, as one demographic group simply dominated the resettlement of civilians as a way to control which insurgent or idealistic group controlled the area. Understanding the importance of resettlement and its relation to the development of the host-nation forces' legitimacy drove almost all our operations by the time we transitioned authority to our replacements. This fundamental aspect of stability lacks proper consideration in our manuals and often comes as an afterthought — when the enemy has already seized control.

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Lessons from Sadiyah

Conducting stability operations in a counterinsurgency weighs heavily on the commander's intellectual understanding of the tasks he faces. Each LOE will influence another as quickly as a warning shot on a busy street. Given a doctrinal framework to operate within and an understanding of the complexities of the enemies therein, company-grade leaders have only reached the line of departure, or the beginning. The framework provided by FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, effectively brings deploying units that far, but falls short on providing vignettes on how to organize to accomplish the tasks it demands.[19] The operations and task organization of Team Apache, 4-64 Armor Regiment, although a product of a specific time, place, and situation, serve as a case study of how to properly execute these doctrinal fundamentals. All the company's successes resulted from great junior leaders and great men working hard in a confusing world.

In closing, below is a summary of lessons learned based on Team Apache, 4-64 Armor Regiment's deployment to Iraq:

- Create a feasible approach to *each* LOE described in FM 3-24.2.[20] It will ultimately help maneuver platoons during day-to-day patrols and achieve *effective* presence.
- *Saying* the population is key terrain is different than *understanding* why it is key terrain.
- View your area as a city planner would when addressing essential services. For example, emplacing a generator might flood a market.
- Ensure local successes are not undermining the big picture.
- Resettlement is a critical aspect of stability operations, which is greatly ignored in our doctrine.
- Units would greatly benefit from a training support package or mission training plan associated with FM 3-24.2.[21]

Notes

[1]Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, DC, April 2009, p. ix; and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, GPO, Washington, DC, December 2006, p. x.

[2]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency.*

[3]Ibid., p. x.

[4]Ibid.

[5]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency;* and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency.*

[6]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, Chapter 3.

[7]Ibid., Chapter 5.

[8]FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 1-28.

[9]Section off neighborhoods and serve as the basis for the address system in the city.

[10]While the Sons of Iraq program failed, our "Daughters of Iraq" program provided female searchers at entry points to Sadiyah, and at the neighborhood bank, which reopened with our help after multiple bombings.

[11]The engagement can also be effective with a particularly affable individual who can convey information talking points.

[12]Colonel James Crider, "Inside the Surge: One Commander's Lessons in Counterinsurgency," Working Paper, Center for a New American Security, Washington, DC, June 2009, p. 12.

[13]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency.*

[14]We named it the "cherry market" based on its location on Route Cherry. In fact, it was a major fish and fruit market for Baghdad.

[15]FM 3-0, *Operations*, GPO, Washington, DC, 2008, p. 4-3.

[16]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, p. 5-11.

[17]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency;* and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.

[18]This measure was possible because of the displacement money that the Iraqi government claimed they would pay to internally displaced persons.

[19]FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency.*

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

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