A Soldier from TF 2-37 AR approaches the 14th-century Ottoman Castle in old Tal Afar. (DOD)

Using Occam's Razor to Connect the Dots

The Ba'ath Party and the Insurgency in Tal Afar

Captain Travis Patriquin, U.S. Army

Occam's Razor is a rule in science and philosophy stating that entities should not be multiplied needlessly. It is interpreted to mean that the simplest of two or more competing theories is preferable, and that an explanation for unknown phenomena should first be attempted in terms of what is already known. In other words—the simplest explanation is most likely the best.

In an era that appreciates the power of statistical probabilities, Occam's Razor is especially useful when access to all the facts necessary to arrive at absolute certainty is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. The problem at hand to which we might apply the principle involves discerning the most significant factors from among the many complex elements fueling the insurgency in Tal Afar, Iraq, and elsewhere in the country. The rational conclusions derived may seem glaringly obvious to some, but a sudden epiphany or even a total surprise to others.

The Turkoman of Tal Afar

A good way to begin to apply Occam's Razor to the situation in Tal Afar is to examine the city's history and demographic distribution from the perspective of city planning. Such an examination exposes compelling clues about the underlying nature of the insurgency there and points to the most likely leaders of the opposition to the coalition and the Iraqi government.

Ethnic background. We start by observing that the population of Tal Afar has historically been virtually 100 percent ethnic Turkoman—not Arab.[1] The Turkoman people first arrived in Iraq through successive waves of migration accompanying invading Turkic armies. They established themselves in permanent communities that became insular, xenophobic enclaves. A general suspicion of outsiders continues today: a city of at least 250,000 people, Tal Afar has never had a hotel and has no current plans to build one. Turkoman distrust of "uninvited guests" is indicative of a closely knit culture that neither desires nor welcomes outside interference.

In contrast to the more restive and predominantly Arab groups elsewhere in Iraq, Tal Afar's Turkoman population had, until relatively recently, a long history of comparatively peaceful relations despite sectarian divisions. This was mainly because they saw themselves as kinsmen within an ethnic group defined primarily by origin and language, not by affiliation with any religious sect. As a result, for over 1,300 years, millions of Turkoman Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Assyrian-Christians lived side by side in relative peace, frequently marrying across sectarian lines and, as a group, remaining relatively united politically against those perceived as outsiders. Occam's Razor therefore allows us to eliminate ethnic or religious friction as the principal cause of the ongoing conflict in Tal Afar. It leads us to conclude that the insurgency must have somehow been triggered by other—outside—motives or actions.

The Turkoman and outside influence. The mistake that most would-be occupiers have made in dealing with the Turkoman was to marginalize them on one hand while on the other leaving them enough autonomy to avoid assimilation. As a result, a resilient sense of Turkoman ethnic identity not only emerged, but intensified over time.

Starting with the British Mandate of 1921, colonial administrators went about carving up Middle Eastern lands to accord with schemes involving great-power spheres of influence. They created a host of arbitrarily drawn nation-states, mainly to keep emerging Middle Eastern entities docile and dependent on their former colonial masters. Turkoman enclaves, however, were clearly viewed as incidental to great-power politics, and so the British showed little regret when expediency dictated ceding control of Turkomani regions to the Ottoman Empire. In a similar vein after World War I, the British, having gained nominal rule over territory in which Turkoman enclaves survived, did little to help the Turkoman satisfy their independent ethnic aspirations.

One consequence of this policy was that Iraq's Turkoman population frequently and ferociously fought the British to expel them from what they regarded as a hereditary Turkoman homeland. They fought as a generally unified ethnic front, heedless of sectarian religious differences.
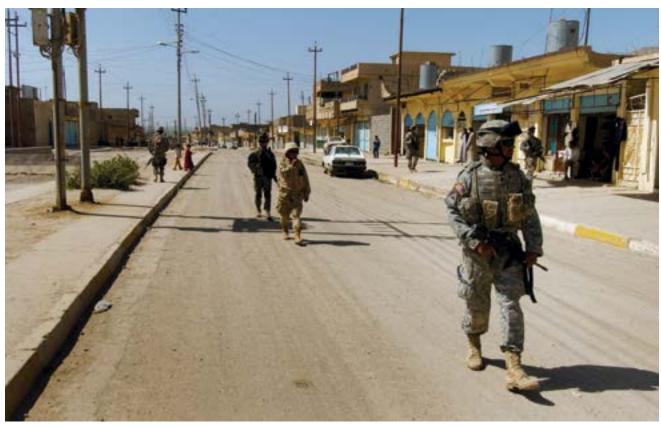
Ba'athist Co-optation

Following the departure of the British, the Turkoman enjoyed a brief period of relative regional autonomy that lasted until the rise of the Ba'athist Party under Saddam Hussein. In contrast to the former colonial powers, Saddam's regime took severe measures to extinguish minority identity in Iraq. In their attempts to stamp out non-Arab differences in the name of a unified Iraq, the Ba'athists sought to absorb the Turkoman into Iraqi society.

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Wide streets, good wiring, and plumbing mark Tal Afar's northern "retirement communities." U.S. Army Soldiers from the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, on a combat patrol in Tal Afar, Iraq, on 9 April 2006. (DOD)

The southern, predominantly Shi'a section of town remains crowded and unimproved. 1st Armored Division Soldier SPC Anthony Bouley conducts a combat patrol in Tal Afar, Iraq, on 13 February 2005. (DOD)

As coalition partners now know well, Saddam's Ba'ath Party, for better or worse, became the unifying sociopolitical force that held Iraq together. Ba'athism was an unswervingly secular movement. Ruling with an iron grip for several decades until Saddam's overthrow in 2003, the Ba'athists brutally oppressed sectarian religious parties to prevent them from blocking the creation of a single Iraqi national identity. The Ba'athists maintained overall control of the population through a combination of policies that promoted fierce loyalty among party members while instilling terror in all who opposed them. Ba'athists manifested their loyalty to the party by performing without question ruthless and horrific acts aimed at keeping the party in power.

The fanatic loyalty of Ba'athist members was coupled with an incredibly diverse and efficient internal intelligence network that spied on every sector of Iraqi society. Together they created a society in which state-sanctioned acts of murder and intimidation aimed at eliminating internal political opposition became commonplace. The end result was a Ba'ath Party habituated to using domestic terror as a "legitimate" tool of governance, and a traumatized Iraqi public with deep and lasting psychological scars that remain as barriers to trust and faith in any central government today.

So deeply seated was the general public's fear of the party and its reprisals that there is no serious challenge to the proposition that, had the coalition not intervened in Iraqi affairs, the Ba'athists would still be firmly in charge today. In fact, many Iraqis believe the party would rapidly and mercilessly emerge to resume power if the coalition were to leave Iraq tomorrow.

Although the Ba'athists were widely loathed and feared, they were also envied in many quarters, mostly because of the power and privileges they enjoyed. Thus, one effective way to reduce the influence of ethnic minority identity was to recruit members of ethnic minority groups into the party via service in the Iraqi Army, and then co-opt those with the most promise by offering them economic opportunities, special status and privileges, and the ability to participate in administering coercive power. Under this policy, many soldiers recruited from the Turkoman population became ardent Ba'athists and supporters of Saddam's government.

The policy helped develop a loyal cadre of grassroots party members of diverse ethnic origin. These adherents were used to neutralize political and ethnic enclaves like the Turkoman. To hedge his bet, Saddam did not go so far as to promote minority Iraqi soldiers to high responsibility on the basis of merit—promotion to high rank in the military was reserved for those who were most politically reliable and had specific reasons for showing extreme loyalty to Saddam personally, such as being a close family or clan member. Nevertheless, despite these discriminatory practices, the Turkoman proved that they were very good soldiers and loyal to the regime. They often ended up in highly sensitive units, frequently serving as technical specialists for handling special weapons or for collecting internal intelligence.

To help motivate soldiers like the Turkoman and to ensure their loyalty, Saddam put in place an extended system of perks and privileges for those who had served the government faithfully. One of these perks was the right to live in specially built, Ba'athist-only communities equipped with amenities and privileges (e.g., priority for power and water service) not accessible to common Iraqis. That such privileges might arouse the ire of other Iraqis was unimportant to Saddam; in fact, the internal animosity and jealousy created may have been viewed as a positive benefit, since any chance to sow division among potentially rebellious ethnic groups would have been viewed as desirable.

In what amounted to resettlement schemes, many loyal Turkoman Ba'athist soldiers were rewarded upon retirement with land grants or given the right to purchase land cheaply, so that they might establish such communities. These settlements were strategically located among populations of suspect loyalty. Tal Afar was the site of one such Turkoman resettlement.

Ethnic Strife via City Planning

In applying Occam's Razor to the situation in Tal Afar, it is important to understand that Ba'athist policies divided the city, effectively pitting the north against the south. Tal Afar had been a significant urban center since the early Ottoman Empire. The pattern of construction and physical layout of the southern and eastern areas of town continues to reflect the priorities of a medieval city's political and community concerns. The city center is a communal gathering place with wells (harkening back to a time before running water was piped to individual houses), a marketplace, and

houses of worship. The streets through this area are narrow and difficult to negotiate with modern vehicles. They are easily congested. Freedom of movement is also limited because the streets were originally laid out not to aid movement, but to channel potential enemies into vulnerable locations. Today, not only the physical layout in south and east Tal Afar, but also the demographic tendencies engendered by current city planning, reflect medieval patterns of family associations, tribal law, and social traditions.

By contrast, the northern part of the city is characterized by more or less modern city planning and a cosmopolitan sense of secularism reflected widely in the attitudes and habits of its relatively new settlers—the loyalist NCO retirees of Saddam's army. The vast majority of these men were Turkoman, and after the end of the ill-fated invasion of Kuwait, they represented more than half of the military-age males in north Tal Afar—approximately 20,000 men.

The location of the new Ba'ath Turkoman community in the north was not selected arbitrarily; it was purposely situated to increase Ba'athist presence, influence, and control in key areas where loyalty to the central government was suspect. It was no accident that a community of Ba'athists of proven loyalty, consisting mainly of highly skilled military technicians who could be readily mobilized, was built on key terrain overlooking the vital Mosul-Sinjar Highway.

The Ba'athist neighborhoods of Hai al Sa'ad, Qadisiyah, and Hai al Bouri have central plumbing, square blocks, and wide streets built to accommodate motor vehicles. Unlike neighborhoods in south Tal Afar, they are ethnically diverse, with a mix of religious persuasions and secularist viewpoints. Thus, for reasons both ancient and modern, the more contemporary and secularist population of north Tal Afar is at odds on many different levels with the population of south Tal Afar, which remains dominated by traditional tribal and religious relationships rooted in older traditions. Clearly, Saddam's policies effectively split Tal Afar both physically and spiritually, giving him the ability, if he needed it, to convert the north's residents into networks of Ba'athist agents for the purpose of armed insurgency and terrorism.

Instigating Sectarian Strife

In apparent accord with other state policies aimed at broadening and deepening ethnic and religious divisions, Sunni imams began arriving in Tal Afar in 1988, not long after the Ba'athist Party had established its retirement community in the north.[2] These imams began to have considerable success in spreading extreme Wahhabi and Takfiri versions of Islamic beliefs, both of which are intolerant of the values and beliefs not only of Westerners, but of Shi'a Islam as well.

Owing to the tight control that Saddam exercised over every aspect of Iraqi life, such potentially divisive activity had to have been sanctioned in some way by the government itself. The social and political fractures engendered by Wahhabi zealots dovetailed so well with Saddam's overall divide-and-conquer tactics that coincidence seems out of the question. The imams' actions would have been especially attractive to Saddam since they served to stoke suspicion primarily against the Shi'a, a group the dictator personally loathed and had long considered to be a potential fourth column for Iran.

In the face of such a dramatic reversal of the former conditions of religious balance and tolerance among the Turkoman in Tal Afar, most Shi'a continued to attend their own mosques. Meanwhile, the majority of the Sunni population in the city's northern neighborhoods responded to the fiery message of the Wahhabi zealots and began to act with animosity toward the Shi'a. Not surprisingly, serious sectarian tensions and divisions emerged where none had existed before. Today, the legacy of tensions between Tal Afar's Shi'a and Sunni communities continues to exacerbate the political and social discord that prevails in the city.

The Insurgents Unmasked

Looking back at the conscious creation of north Tal Afar and other areas in Iraq as bastions of Ba'athist/Sunni loyalty, it is somewhat surprising that in the aftermath of Saddam's overthrow in 2003, various coalition leaders expressed astonishment, confusion, and even denial over how quickly a fairly well organized insurgency emerged. Some coalition figures still refuse to acknowledge the obvious, and assert instead that the insurgency is in the main a terrorist conspiracy fueled by foreigners working for Osama bin Laden. The major problem with this assertion is that very few of the insurgents captured or killed have been foreigners. Outsiders are certainly playing a role, especially as suicide bombers, but hardly in the

numbers one would expect if they were to be regarded as the driving force of the insurgency.

Other coalition leaders claim that the insurgency is mainly the result of support from Iran through a network of Shi'a contacts. This theory, too, is flawed. Although Iraqi Shi'a militias are only too glad to accept help from anyone offering it, for the most part the Iraqi Shi'a have little love either for Iran or the Iranians' fundamentalist brand of Shi'ism. Even more problematic is that the Shi'a appear to be the insurgents' main target. The vast majority of civilian casualties since 2003 have been Shi'a. This would seem to eliminate them from being the principal force behind the insurgency.

Why the identity and motivation of the insurgents should be regarded as such a mystery by some, given what we know about the history of Tal Afar under Saddam, is itself a kind of mystery. Nevertheless, many in the coalition still wonder aloud who the insurgents are, how they are able to coordinate their campaign, and how many of them there are, especially since the insurgency has proven to be virtually impenetrable to coalition infiltration efforts. Although it may be convenient to blame the rise in violence following the collapse of Saddam's regime solely on foreign fighters or on meddling by Iran, to do so is to overlook the simplest, most logical explanation, at least as far as Tal Afar is concerned—that the insurgency is being conducted through a deeply entrenched network of Ba'athists who are still connected via positions of authority and privilege held long before the coalition invaded. This network would logically include a large number of Ba'athists who show an outwardly benign, even cooperative face to the occupying forces, enabling them to move about openly in public. Thus, questions about the insurgents' identity and manpower can be answered simply by counting the number of Ba'athists who used to have power in each region prior to Saddam's overthrow, then subtracting the number of former Ba'athists who have proven themselves to be pro-government. This should give anyone a good estimate of the size of the insurgent force, including its supporters.

Unfortunately, this easiest explanation leads to a politically ominous conclusion: the insurgency numbers not in the thousands or tens of thousands, but in the hundreds of thousands, even

though only a relatively small number might actually be engaged in fighting at any one time. Applying this logic in Tal Afar, we are probably looking at over 20,000 former Ba'athists involved in supporting the insurgency in some way, shape, or form.

Writer Scott Taylor provides support for this conclusion in a first-hand account of his captivity during Operation Black Typhoon. Taylor describes the resistance in Tal Afar as "purely Turkoman" and notes that his first encounter with a foreign fighter was when Ansar al Islam handed him over to an Arab terrorist in Mosul.[4] Colonel H.R. McMaster, commander of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) in Tal Afar during Operation Restoring Rights, seems to second Taylor's observation. According to McMaster, the vast majority

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Three days after he arrived in Iraq, Bremer dispatched an aide to Jay Garner's office with a copy of the de-Baathification policy. …

Garner read it. *Holy Christ*, he thought to himself. *We can't do this.*

He contacted the CIA station chief and asked him to meet him in front of Bremer's office right away. As Garner walked down the hall to the viceroy's suite, he ran into one of the State Department ambassadors and explained what was happening.

"We've got to put a stop to this one," Garner said. "It's too hard, too harsh."

Garner and the station chief barged into Bremer's office.

"Jerry, this is too harsh," Garner said. "Let's get Rumsfeld on the phone and see if we can't soften it."

"Absolutely not," Bremer said. "I'm going to issue this today."

Garner asked the station chief what would happen if the order were issued.

"You're going to drive fifty thousand Baathists underground before nightfall," he said. "Don't do this."[3]

—Rajiv Chandrassekaran,
Imperial Life in the Emerald City

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of fighters captured during Restoring Rights were Iraqis, not foreigners.[5] It is also hardly coincidental that such foreign fighters as there are enter Iraq mainly from the last Ba'athist country in the world, Syria, which had many unofficial and familial ties to Iraq's Ba'ath regime prior to Saddam's ouster, and to where many of Saddam's supporters have fled.[6] Furthermore, a host of influential Tal Afaris who had close ties to the deposed regime still travel relatively freely between the city and Syria to those very areas that continue to supply foreign fighters and suicide bombers.

Thus, although there is no doubt that foreign fighters have provided many of the foot soldiers (and a lot of the cannon fodder) for the insurgency, a reasonable person who looks at things broadly and from the perspective of prior history will arrive at a simple conclusion: a network of Ba'athists established long before the 2003 overthrow of the regime is clearly active, and it enjoys widespread popular support in key areas of Tal Afar.

Strong secondary evidence supports this contention. When foreign fighters turn up in the insurgency, they often appear as suicide bombers. Several U.S. commanders have likened these bombers to "human cruise missiles."[7] Actually, they are more like laser-guided bombs, directed to their targets by someone on the ground who has done reconnaissance, figured out where the bomber might have maximum effect, and then taken pains to smuggle the bomber into Iraq, arm him, and direct him to the attack site. Without that ground support, each individual suicide bomber would have a difficult time becoming a significant threat. Which, then, should we regard as the more important component of such a threat, the foreign suicide bomber, or the insurgent network that devises the campaign for employing him and facilitates his attack? Peeling problems back to their essentials, Occam's Razor suggests that it is the local Iraqi insurgent—the plan synchronizer, bomb maker, attack coordinator, and propagandist—who is the actual center of gravity in the suicide bomber scenario. In Tal Afar, the principal threat is the former Ba'athist Turkoman put in place by Saddam long before the current war began.

In summary, a long history of ethnic resistance and cross-border smuggling, combined with Ba'athist resettlement policies and measures of control prior to 2003, provided the social dynamics, cadre, and physical infrastructure conducive to organizing resistance to the occupation. In the chaos following the regime's fall, Saddam's agents could easily have exploited the status quo in Tal Afar to establish and fund covert networks of loyal intelligence operators who would then organize resistance fighter cells. Organizational efforts would no doubt have included gathering weapons caches, establishing networked contacts to aid insurgent movement and activity, giving instructions and assistance to foreign volunteers, funding public relations efforts to sow discontent, and training others in the art of insurgency.

The above hypothesis jibes with the chronology of the insurgency in Tal Afar as related to me personally by a 30-year-old Sunni male resident of the city. This man stated that in late 2003 and early 2004, the first foreign fighters started to arrive in Tal Afar from across the nearby border with Syria and from other areas in Iraq, which they had had to flee. Welcomed and housed primarily in the Sunni neighborhoods, these fighters described themselves as *mujahadeen* and bragged in the local mosques and streets that they had come to fight the "invaders." They could not have arrived en masse uninvited and unassisted.

My contact also stated that the town leaders were primarily responsible for giving the foreigners the go-ahead to commence operations. Among those operations were activities aimed at intimidating Shi'ite families into fleeing from specific areas in northern parts of the city. The foreign fighters would then occupy many of the former households to gain control of key routes and ground, which they would exploit in future actions. At the same time, the insurgency initiated targeted assassinations and other terror attacks. One of the first citizens of Tal Afar killed in a terrorist attack was a Sunni contractor working with the United States who was murdered because he was getting "too rich." Another early casualty was Sheik Dakhil, of the Marhat clan. Significantly, his position was quickly filled by one Mullah Marhat, an individual of murky and suspect background.

Marhat entered the scene under a cloud of suspicion. As a rule, coalition forces routinely investigate the background of individuals stepping forward to assume public office. They interview would-be leaders and do background checks, especially with regard to previous military service in Saddam's army. Experience shows that most Iraqis are glad, even proud, to describe what

they did in the army. Marhat, however, was very reluctant to discuss his background or his military service. Moreover, despite a three-year search, coalition forces found no official record of his former activities. He was later arrested on accusations of being a Ba'athist operative. Interestingly, immediately following his arrest, Tal Afar experienced a sudden and precipitous decline in violent insurgent activity.

to situations like those found in Tal Afar. This key vulnerability stems from a typically American over-eagerness to make friends in the local community and to quickly establish a cooperative working relationship with locals. U.S. units initially engaged with anyone calling himself a sheik. Unfortunately, it now appears that they were frequently duped by persons who took advantage of U.S. ignorance of the Turkoman commu-

A U.S. Army M1 Abrams tank from the 1st Armored Division conducts a combat patrol in Tal Afar, Iraq, on 27 February 2005. (DOD)

The Marhat case ended successfully for the coalition, but it demonstrates a technique on the rise among the predominantly Ba'athist insurgency: the murder of certain prominent Sunni leaders clears the way for former Ba'athists to assume key leadership positions in Tal Afar's government, business sector, and tribes.

Coalition Mistakes with Iraqi Leaders

The coalition's experience with Mullah Marhat highlights a potential vulnerability in its approach

nity generally, and of Tal Afar specifically, to successfully pass themselves off as sheiks.

Our naive and clumsy approach to community relations was particularly apparent in our initial dealings with the Marhat and Jolaq tribes, formerly relatively minor entities within the hierarchy of regional tribal-clan affiliations in and around Tal Afar. Ill-conceived coalition engagement with the sheiks of these groups, such as buying weapons from them or delivering food to them, proved to be a strategic error. Arbitrary as they were and undertaken without

Military officers meet with city officials in Tal Afar. (DOD)

considering the impact such intercourse might have on the entire local situation, these acts were interpreted as favoritism aimed at undermining the prestige and authority of other, traditionally dominant, tribal groups. As a result, we angered and alienated groups that could have acted as key agents in working with the coalition to stop insurgent elements and establish stability in the community.

We also empowered many supposed sheiks who were more interested in personal gain than in aiding their fellow Iraqis. The paucity of real progress in tamping down the insurgency and rebuilding parts of Tal Afar revealed that these unscrupulous men had no influence to guarantee compliance with the law and no ability to provide accurate information on insurgents in our area of responsibility. For example, we engaged with one Sheik Mullah because we had heard through the indigenous grapevine about his great concern for

his people's safety and the economy. When we examined his activities closely, however, we discovered that he was primarily involved in reconstruction contracts for personal gain and empowerment.

Such activity is especially pernicious since resources diverted from helping the Iraqi people build their economy frequently find their way not only into the pockets of greedy men, but into the hands of insurgents themselves. It is well known that insurgents attempt to obtain money from coalition forces for supposedly legitimate ends and then use the money to fund their activities.

To uncover and counter such practices, Occam's Razor should be ruthlessly employed by enforcing an audit trail of the money paid to current sheiks. Failure to account for significant sums of money, or to produce the quality or quantity of products called for in a contract, are strong indicators that funds are being skimmed or pocketed for later use by insurgents.

Another simple analytical tool might be to correlate the visits a sheik makes to Syria with the incidents of terrorist attacks upon his return to Tal Afar.

Unfortunately, hasty engagement with the lesser or even spurious sheiks continued for some time and contributed to increasing dissension and insurgent activity in the Turkoman community. Eventually, Shi'ite leaders felt compelled to call upon the Ministry of the Interior to send forces from Baghdad. In an effort to maintain their power, the Sunnis in turn called for foreign fighters, and this precipitated a surge of violence.

The upshot was a conflict between Turkoman Shi'ites who rallied around the Jolaq sheiks and their American supporters, and Sunni (Ba'athist) insurgents who initiated a wave of attacks that successfully, albeit temporarily, gained control of the northern part of the city. Although the foreign fighters were chased out of Tal Afar during Operation Black Typhoon in 2004, they later returned unmolested when U.S. forces left the city proper.

The speed and ease of the insurgents' return speaks volumes about the quality and source of inside information they clearly were being provided by local supporters. Not surprisingly, the mayor and chief of police, both former Ba'athists, did nothing to stop the return of the insurgent fighters, who once again plunged the city into chaos. Thereafter, the stream of foreign combatants increased until the 3d ACR arrived in Tal Afar and began Operation Restoring Rights in August of 2005. However, even though the 3d ACR completely encircled the fighters, many of the latter simply disappeared from Tal Afar. This could not have happened without significant assistance from residents and the prior preparation of escape routes.[8] Clearly, the insurgents had a lot of indigenous support, much of it not apparent to outside observers.

In the final analysis, anyone applying Occam's Razor to the situation must conclude that the insurgents could not have moved in and out of the areas around Tal Afar without widespread assistance from persons well-versed in arms cache techniques, and without a functioning intelligence network manned by those with intimate knowledge of the area's geography. It is likely, too, that a large number of the insurgents were not foreigners at all, but members of the local population who could ditch their weapons and melt easily back into the general population.

The Razor and Cultural Awareness

During the 3d ACR's ensuing civil-military operations, many supposed sheiks and other figures came forward claiming to control key areas of the northern part of town. This was especially interesting—and suspect—because up until that time, most residents of northern Tal Afar had openly derided tribalism and its tradition of sheikdom, and no sheiks were known to have existed in the north.

However, investigation revealed that many residents of Tal Afar's northern neighborhoods had close ties to relatives living in the older, southern part of Tal Afar, where the city's traditional sheiks resided. These sheiks were usually modest men who willingly sheltered their relatives and friends fleeing the sectarian violence in the northern part of the city.

Originally, the identity of many of these sheiks was kept from coalition forces, but after evaluating the probable influence of the Ba'athist program of "Arabization" on Turkmenian cities, we concluded that tribes with Arabized names in north Tal Afar were, in fact, connected to tribes in the south with which the coalition had already developed a relationship. We discovered, for example, that "Hawday," a name prominent in the north, was an Arabized version of Jarjary, the name of a tribe in the south. The north Tal Afar Jarjarys had had to Arabize their name when they entered the army, to accord with Saddam's policy of forced assimilation. Thereafter, whenever we wanted information on members of the Hawday tribe, we went into south Tal Afar to the neighborhood of the Jarjarys. Understanding this imposed cultural anomaly assisted us in engaging sheiks and concerned citizens, who later helped us ferret out hostile Hawday tribal members.

Conclusions

Despite some officials' wishful thinking, a significant portion of Iraqis do not want democracy. For them, the conflict is driven mainly by Ba'athist loyalists who want some measure of power back without the limiting shackles of the democratic process. Any solution we formulate to the current insurgency must take this into account. We must acknowledge that the predominantly Sunni Ba'ath party is playing a major role in directing the insurgency, and then make our plans accordingly.

In Tal Afar, this is certainly true. Our enemy there consists mainly of Ba'ath party members who were

As is the custom of *Military Review*, articles accepted for publication undergo careful editing, and usually a number of rewrites, in close consultation with the author to satisfy mutual concerns and to ensure professional standards of grammar and usage are observed. Correspondence on such issues is usually done through e-mail together with phone coordination when possible. In the case of the above article, the staff of *Military Review* corresponded with the author, who was forward deployed in Iraq, over a period of several months. The process was more than usually challenging because the author was only able to work on the article periodically, in between professional responsibilities. The proposed final draft of the article was sent to him via e-mail several times during the second week of December, but without a final approving response. On 11 December, the staff of *Military Review* was saddened to learn through press accounts that the author, Army CPT Travis Patriquin, had been killed in action as a result of an Improvised Explosive Device attack in Tikrit. CPT Patriquin was reportedly a hard working, extremely pleasant individual who had a penchant for lifting the spirits of his colleagues by telling humorous stories and seeing the bright side of dark situations. He also seems to have had a rare gift for languages, having acquired not only Arabic, but Spanish, Portuguese, and two Central American Indian dialects. He is survived by a devoted wife and three young children. We presume he would have approved the final draft of his article, published here.

fought primarily by former Ba'athists. After fading into the background, these men stimulated disaffection and division in Iraq for their own purposes. It is more out of expediency than religious conviction that they have adopted "Allah Hu Akbar" as their current battle cry instead of "Saddam, Saddam."

If the problem in Tal Afar is essentially the product of an increasingly well-organized network of residual Ba'athist members operating in cooperation with Iraqi Ba'athists currently living in Syria and elsewhere, the way ahead seems clear: formulate a solution that will satisfy their aspirations, perhaps by giving them a share of power, while also taking effective action to deconstruct their network.

Occam's Razor would suggest that engaging the insurgents and supporters in north Tal Afar through the real sheiks who control Sunni families in the south part of the city is the simplest and most feasible way to defeat the insurgency. Dealing realistically with these leaders will be more productive than our current practice of engaging a handful of sheiks whose names were passed on to us by previous units.

We must also embrace the concept of amnesty for those who are willing to come in out of the cold, even for those who have killed coalition members. Insurgents who have no prospect of a job or a place in the new Iraqi society will have no reason to stop fighting; in fact, they will have every reason to continue. We will also benefit by engaging radical imams in a similar manner, if for no other reason than to gather intelligence on them and their followers.

trained as Saddam's soldiers and are prepared to wage war until they regain some measure of the status they lost. Ethnic and sectarian religious strife is certainly complicating the picture, but the insurgency is being

Finally, the single-minded objective of such engagement must be to secure the Shi'ite population's safety and the Sunni population's compliance with the law. Joint meetings with Sunni and Shi'ite

sheiks might help the Turkoman reunite, and the sooner this happens, the sooner law and order will be restored. Tal Afar's unrest has been the result of insiders trying to build a power base, not random acts by terrorists. Bringing in a key leader from Baghdad to unite the town, agree on blood money, and settle tribal disputes (some of which we unwittingly took part in) should be our next step. Another key move should be to identify former Ba'athists and individuals with prior military experience.

A close look at former Ba'athists may uncover surprises as well. It is reasonable to assume that at least a few Kurds and Shi'a had a role in Saddam's secular army. Are Shi'a and Kurds operating against us in Tal Afar today? We won't know until we vet the population for former Ba'athists.

Tal Afar could become a shining example, a working Iraqi democracy in miniature. But we must first use Occam's Razor, tempered with cultural understanding of the Turkoman, to adjust our course. Only non-sectarian engagement in which the coalition does not take sides will lead to the intelligence and operational breakthroughs necessary to stabilize Tal Afar. A substantially larger, more loyal Iraqi security force now exists in Tal Afar, and the town has a powerful and popular mayor, but the future threat to the city should not be understated. We cannot, in good faith, turn Tal Afar over to the Iraqi Security Forces until the coalition has stabilized the security situation. **MR**

Notes

1. Helen Chapin Metz, *Iraq: A Country Study* (New York: Kessinger, 2004), 85. Metz is my primary source for the information about Turkoman history in this article.

2. Information obtained by personal interviews and debriefings conducted by the author in Tal Afar, 2006.

3. Rajiv Chandrassekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and Random House, 2006), 70-71.

4. Scott Taylor, *Among the Others: Encounters with the Forgotten Turkmen of Iraq* (Ottawa, Canada: Esprit de Corps Books, 2004), 208-228.

5. *Frontline* interview with Colonel H.R. McMaster, online at <www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/insurgency/interviews/mcmaster.html>.

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