

# PRODUCING VICTORY: A 2007 Postscript for Implementation

Lieutenant Colonel Douglas A. Ollivant, U.S. Army, and  
Captain Eric D. Chewning, U.S. Army

*This paper is a postscript to the authors' July-August 2006 Military Review article "Producing Victory: Rethinking Conventional Forces in COIN Operations." That article won the Combined Arms Center Commanding General's Special Topics Writing Competition: Countering Insurgency.*

*Lieutenant Colonel Douglas A. Ollivant is the chief of plans for Multi-National Division-Baghdad. He previously served as the operations officer for the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, in Baghdad, Najaf, Fallujah, and North Babil. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from Indiana University and is a graduate of the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies.*

*Captain Eric D. Chewning is a graduate student in business administration at the University of Virginia and an Army Reservist serving at the National Ground Intelligence Center. He previously served as the tactical intelligence officer for the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, in Iraq. CPT Chewning holds an M.A. in international relations from the University of Chicago.*

"**P**RODUCING VICTORY" was an Operation Iraqi Freedom II product. We wrote the bulk of the article in mid-to-late 2005, but the essay's foundational experiences clearly ended in late 2004. We believe that we gravitated to some key principles based on those experiences—specifically, that the combined arms maneuver battalion, partnering with indigenous security forces and living among the population it secures, should be the basic tactical unit of counterinsurgency warfare. However, that does not mean that the essay could not use some updating to serve as a framework for operations in 2007.

Of course, in many ways, we are manifestly unqualified to update the article. While one author keeps his hand in the intel world, he is in graduate school in Virginia; the other has served at division level since mid-2005 and makes no pretense about seeing today's Baghdad, save by air. Nevertheless, with the strategy we articulated now being made possible by the "surge" of Army brigades, we felt compelled to add this postscript.

The tinder for ethnic and religious cruelty was always a flammable thread in the fabric of Iraq. Given the sadistic nature of the Saddam Hussein regime, the current conflagration sparked by the bombing of the Golden Dome is, in a sad way, understandable. This level of sectarian violence, new since 2004, makes the environment more complex, but it does not fundamentally change the battalion-level dynamic we prescribed. In particular, whether we portray the problem as insurgency or low-level civil war, the antidote remains much the same: a strong, representative government that has a monopoly on the use of force. The Iraqi Government needs to exert primacy over competing religious, tribal, and ethnic centers of power. It would have been preferable if this government had been built from the bottom up, drawing legitimacy from neighborhood and district advisory councils rather than from the top down, but this is now a moot point: we have to work with the government we have, not the one we wish we had.

Early 2007 finds the U.S. military in Iraq responsible for two related missions: counterinsurgency in support of the Iraqi Government, and nascent

peace enforcement between warring Shi'a and Sunni partisans. While analogies are slippery, our current predicament somewhat echoes pre-Dayton Bosnia. The most notable difference, of course, is that in Iraq all parties involved are also shooting at us.

To be sure, this is an Iraqi problem that ultimately requires an Iraqi solution. The coalition force mission is to catalyze this process by mitigating the effects of insurgents and partisans in battalion areas of operations while assisting the Iraqi Government at all levels in developing the necessary institutions to govern. At the same time, we need to be constantly aware of actions that empower one belligerent over another, particularly within the government itself.

Our mission to strengthen civil government rests on kinetic and non-kinetic foundations. As Soldiers, we are conditioned for kinetic action. While this visceral response is often the safest in the short term—and may be necessary—it often comes at the cost of local support. Four years into our experience in Iraq, it is unrealistic to expect that we would be overwhelmingly popular. *But support from the population—even tacit support—is critical.* Like a patient diagnosed with cancer forced to choose between chemotherapy and malignant decay, the average Iraqi can and should be expected to choose a path of distressed hope over terminal despair. But we must first demonstrate that there is such a path. Just as the 20th century required America to provide an alternative to both fascism and communism, the 21st century demands an alternative to both repressive dictatorship and Islamic extremism.

The non-kinetic component of this mission will take time and must be incorporated into initial planning. While kinetic action provides immediate results, economic opportunity and political empowerment promise long-term sustainability. Success, here and now, depends on the U.S. and Iraqi Governments offering a viable future to the Iraqi people.

By embedding U.S. maneuver elements throughout Baghdad and partnering them with Iraqi Security Forces, we should be able to clear militia-dominated neighborhoods and so reduce sectarian influence. With many of the key facilities in Baghdad repatriated to the government of Iraq, the joint security station concept—integrating coalition troops with Iraqi forces at secure locations in sector—represents a feasible alternative to the joint battalion basing we previously articulated. Further,

commanders can supplement the joint security stations with additional combat outposts and patrol bases. The U.S.-Iraqi projection of security rests on the physical proximity between our forces and the population. Accessibility is, in a very non-doctrinal sense, a form of maneuver and certainly a form of protection. Living among the population enhances our ability to act.

Holding gains in the *mulhallas* will require a sustainable political solution that recognizes the local balance of power. Such a settlement will only result from the concentrated application of economic, military, and diplomatic influence at the lowest level. In an environment like Baghdad's, success will be measured block by block, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood. The Iraqi Government must replace tribal and religious actors as the primary suppliers of physical security, essential services, and economic opportunity—although tribal and religious actors will likely be incorporated into local arrangements. That said, communities must gradually learn to depend more on their civic institutions and civil society than on sectarian actors to resolve the problems of daily life.

Of course, challenges remain. As we previously articulated, interagency relationships, tactical intelligence collection, and civil-military operations have not yet been sufficiently restructured. Further, while we advocated a powering-down to battalion level, much of the theater seems to have gone in a different direction, with commands at echelons above corps proliferating. We remain unconvinced that “Mother Army” has shifted her mindset and now views the battalion as the “supported command.” We will all have to help foster this change as we move forward in operations that place a premium on activities at the battalion level.

From America's own democratic experience, we know that building responsible government agencies is a time-consuming and dynamic endeavor. But whereas the United States had the luxury of dealing with its various internal tensions over time, the Iraqis seem destined to deal with them all at once, using weaker institutions as instruments. Forging a government with an identity distinct from the sectarian interests that formed it is the *Iraqi* challenge. Strengthening their institutions, so they can achieve self-sustainment within the timeframe allowed by U.S. public opinion, is *our* challenge. **MR**