

# A Synchronized Approach to POPULATION CONTROL



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**M**ULTI-NATIONAL CORPS–IRAQ’S (MNC-I) GOAL of reducing violence, gaining the support of the Iraqi people, stabilizing Iraq, and enabling the attainment of security self-reliance by the Iraqi Government is under attack by diverse groups that have changed their tactics significantly during the past few years. We must protect and secure the population because of the threat this cycle of violence presents to both coalition forces and the people of Iraq. A critical component in securing the population from the insurgent groups is population control. Right now, population control is a key part of Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, the Iraqi Government-led security plan for Baghdad, which calls for a number of measures specifically designed to bring stability and security to Iraqis and to protect them from the violence perpetrated by terrorists and militias.

The threats opposing our efforts in Iraq can be divided into the following categories: sectarian violence, Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda-Iraq (AQ/AQI), the Sunni insurgency (former regime members/Ba’athists), Shi’a extremists (militias), and Shi’a-on-Shi’a violence. Originally, coalition forces were the primary focus of attacks because the enemy’s goal was to force us out of Iraq. The threat these groups posed directly affected our efforts to provide the security and stability that would allow the Iraqi Government to build the capacity to secure its territory, to increase its ability to provide for and meet the needs of its population, and to earn it legitimacy in the eyes of the people. While a coalition withdrawal remains the enemy’s primary objective, the elements confronting us have expanded their vision to defining Iraq after we leave. Some of their most frequently mentioned objectives are to expand their power base, regain lost influence and power throughout Iraq, and establish a safe haven to facilitate the creation of a caliphate.

A key part of the groups’ strategy to achieve their end state involves the Iraqi population. Some groups, such as Jaysh al-Mahdi, promote themselves as the protectors of a certain segment of the population (Sunni and Shi’a). This is a classic insurgency strategy. Other groups, such as AQI, target certain segments of the population along sectarian lines by using suicide vehicle-borne

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PHOTO: An Iraqi Soldier patrols in the Rusafa district, Baghdad, Iraq, 21 February 2007. (U.S. Army/SGT Curt Cashour, MNC-I Public Affairs)

improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs), suicide-vest improvised explosive devices (SVIEDs), and other means to kill as many civilians as possible. The lethal targeting of civilians is intended to terrorize the population, demonstrate the government's and Iraqi Security Forces' (ISF) inability to protect the people, and, most importantly, provoke a violent response along sectarian lines. To some extent, it has worked, creating a cycle of violence that continues to destabilize the country and prevent the government from building the capacity and setting the conditions that will eventually lead to self-reliance. This cycle of violence poses the biggest problem to the coalition as it attempts to achieve its desired goal of stability in Iraq.

The employment of population control measures to secure the populace is one effective tool the coalition can use to break the cycle of violence. Population control measures include physical activities meant to protect the population; influence operations that engage key leaders and an information operations strategy to build support for our actions; and the promotion, coordination, and facilitation of economic opportunities to reduce the pool of disenfranchised communities that enemy forces can rely on for support.

Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, discusses population control measures and the role they play

in the overall counterinsurgency effort: "Population control includes determining who lives in an area and what they do. This task requires determining societal relationships—family, clan, tribe, interpersonal, and professional. Establishing control normally begins with conducting a census and issuing identification cards."<sup>6</sup>

Population control, however, cannot be solely focused on actions at the tactical level that center on restricting movement or acquiring data on the population. Strategic and operational-level leaders must plan, coordinate, and execute activities that set the conditions for success at the tactical level. A plan that is not synchronized at all levels may achieve isolated short-term success, but it will fail to realize the sustainable, long-term success required to reduce violence, build capacity, and establish a stable and viable environment.

## Strategic Population Control

Strategic population control in Iraq requires the engagement of leaders at all levels in the coalition, the Iraqi Government, the ISF, and other influential players. For the purpose of this article, engagement is defined as leader discussion and negotiation with an appropriate counterpart in order to gain support or produce a desired effect. The purpose of such engagements is to ensure development and oversight of the critical systems needed to achieve the organization's goal. In the population control arena, the critical systems needing development and oversight at the strategic level are a national identification card system, a census collection and biometrics registration program, a weapons registration program, border points of entry control procedures, strict rule-of-law enforcement policies, a public assembly permit policy, and economic programs that facilitate long-term employment opportunities.

## Operational Population Control

Operational population control in Iraq requires continued engagement with key community leaders and the synchronization and allocation of unique resources



U.S. Army/SGT Curt Cashour

An Iraqi soldier with the 3d Battalion, 1st Brigade, 3d Iraqi Army Division, stands guard along with a trooper from the 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2d Infantry Division, at a market in Baghdad's Dora neighborhood, 5 April 2007.

available to the operational commander that aid tactical-level operations. Critical actions at the operational level include senior-leader engagement with influential tribal sheiks, prominent religious leaders, and local political leaders; leveraging and allocating intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to gather information on organizations targeting the population; coordinating public affairs messages between the Iraqi Government, coalition forces, and the ISF; giving up control of MNC-I enablers to subordinate units (i.e., pushing engineer and civil affairs units down to brigades) for tactical operations; and developing an integrated economic plan.

## Tactical Population Control

Tactical population control in Iraq requires coalition forces and the ISF to coordinate in providing security. Key tasks are conducting combined offensive operations (cordon and searches and precision strikes) against groups attacking the population; focusing the use of ISR assets on key nodes and locations; increasing friendly visible presence in urban areas through the use of joint security stations, combat outposts, and traffic control points (TCPs); and limiting access to population centers through entry control points (ECPs) and TCPs.

One of the techniques used at the tactical level to protect the population is to create gated communities. These are built with temporary barriers, berms, and other obstacles and incorporate designated ECPs to prevent access by would-be attackers. The technique has proven effective in reducing the number of attacks on population centers and has brought a greater sense of security to many of Baghdad's people. Similar methods used to protect markets and other critical sites are showing positive results throughout Baghdad.

## Population Control Risks

When implementing population control measures at the tactical level, commanders must consider how the measures and the resources used to secure the population are perceived, not only by enemy forces, but also by the populations they are intended to secure. While members of a community want security, over time they come to view the measures

used to isolate their community and regulate access into it as impediments to freedom of movement. Elements that oppose our efforts will capitalize on any loss of support among the people; they will put pressure on the government through the media and other conduits to make the coalition and ISF reduce the control measures.

To mitigate any such development, the Iraqi Government and the coalition will define the conditions that must be met before the population control measures are reduced. Failure to develop such a plan may result in significant public opposition to current and future protection measures, as was seen in the Adhamiyah district of Baghdad in April 2007.

Commanders must also consider how enemy forces could take advantage of our control measures even if the community embraces those measures. For example, gating urban areas and establishing ECPs effectively clusters the inhabitants into centralized locations, making them vulnerable to indirect fire and SVBIED and SVIED attacks that may lead them to believe the control measures have made them less secure, not safer. The media will highlight successful attacks, and enemy forces will use the reports to reinforce their claims that the government and coalition forces cannot protect the people.

Regardless of potential vulnerabilities or drawbacks, protecting the population through control measures is a critical component of our strategy to help the Iraqi Government create a stable, secure Iraq. Some of our measures might restrict the freedom of movement of individuals, and we can expect the enemy to use every means available to discredit us and degrade the population's confidence in and support of our efforts. But increased security trumps inconvenience and hollow accusations almost every time. Keeping the Iraqi people safe by implementing temporary control measures will set the conditions for Iraqi self-reliance. To attain our objectives and achieve success, we must synchronize our efforts at all levels and not be deterred. **MR**

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### NOTES

\* Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 5-21.