



IRAQ TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT LESSONS LEARNED

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ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES—overt interactions between coalition military and foreign civilian personnel for the purpose of obtaining information, influencing behavior, or building an indigenous base of support for coalition objectives—have played a central role in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). They have involved efforts to reach out to village headmen (*mukhtars*), tribal sheikhs, Muslim clerics, elected officials and representatives, urban professionals, businessmen, retired military officers, and women.

Tribal engagement has played a particularly prominent role in OIF. This reflects the enduring strength of the tribes in many of Iraq's rural areas and some of its urban neighborhoods. And tribal engagement has been key to recent efforts to drive a wedge between tribally based Sunni Arab insurgents and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in Anbar province and elsewhere, as well as efforts to undermine popular support for the Mahdi Army in largely Shi'ite neighborhoods and regions of the country.¹

Because of the growing importance of tribal engagement for coalition strategy in Iraq, its potential role in future contingency operations, and its potential contribution to future phases of the War on Terrorism, it is vitally important for Army leaders at all levels to understand what history and the social sciences suggest, and what coalition forces in Iraq have learned, about how to engage and leverage tribes and tribal networks.

Anthropology 101 for Soldiers: What is a Tribe?

A tribe is a form of political identity based on common *claimed* descent.² It is not necessarily a lineage group, as tribal subunits (sections or subsections) may manufacture fictive kinship ties or alter their tribal identity or affiliations for political, economic, or security-related reasons.³ Tribes may also be of mixed sectarian or ethnic composition. Thus, Iraq's Shammar and Jubur tribes have Sunni and Shi'ite branches, while Qashqa'i tribesmen in Iran are of Turkish, Persian, Arab, Kurdish, Lak, Luri, and Gypsy origin.⁴

There is no such thing as a "typical" tribe. Tribes may embody diverse kinship rules, structures, types of political authority, and lifestyles (sedentary, semi-nomadic, nomadic),⁵ which may be influenced by security and economic conditions and government policies.⁶ Thus, for instance, the Arab tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, Levant, and North Africa tended, at least traditionally, to be relatively egalitarian and non-hierarchical organizations lacking a well-developed leadership structure, while the Turkic tribes of the Central Asian steppes tended to be hierarchical, highly centralized organizations ruled by powerful chieftains.⁷

The author thanks the many Soldiers and Marines interviewed for this article, and in particular LTC Alan King, U.S. Army Reserve (USAR); LTC Richard Welch, USAR; and LTC Patrick Carroll, United States Marine Corps, for sharing their many useful insights on this topic. He also thanks research assistants Jake Lipton, Albar Sheikh, and Zack Snyder for their invaluable assistance in preparing this article.

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PHOTO: An Iraqi tribal elder at a transfer of authority ceremony in Mosul, Iraq, 18 December 2006. (U.S. Army, SFC Robert Brogan)

Although Arab tribal ideology is relatively egalitarian, in reality, major disparities in status, power, and wealth exist within and between tribes.⁸ Among settled tribes, sheikhly families and clans tend to form dominant lineages that are better off and more influential than other families and clans in the tribe.⁹ Bedouin tribes of “common” origin are looked down on by those of “noble” origin, while smaller (“weak”) settled tribes are often looked down on by larger (“strong”) settled tribes.¹⁰

Tribal Values, Processes, and Organization¹¹

Tribal values remain deeply ingrained in Iraqi society and have had a profound influence on Iraqi social mores and political culture. (This observation holds for much of the rest of the Arab world as well.) These values include the high premium put on in-group solidarity (*‘asabiyya*), which finds expression in loyalty to the family, clan, and tribe,¹² coupled with a powerful desire to preserve the autonomy of the tribe vis-à-vis other tribes, non-tribal groups, and the authorities;¹³ personal and group honor (*sharaf*); sexual honor (*‘ird*), which pertains to the

chastity of the family’s female members; manliness (*muruwwa*), which finds expression in personal traits such as courage, loyalty, generosity, and hospitality; and pride in ancestry (*nashb*).¹⁴

Tribal processes include traditional forms of interpersonal and group conflict such as the blood feud, as well as mechanisms for regulating and resolving such conflicts: the cease-fire (*atwa*), blood money (*fasl*), and peace agreement (*sulha*).¹⁵ These processes are conducted in accordance with tribal law (*‘urf*), as opposed to *Sharia* (Islamic) or civil law, and are applied mainly in rural towns and villages and some urban areas, though the precise extent to which tribal law is applied in Iraq today is not clear.¹⁶

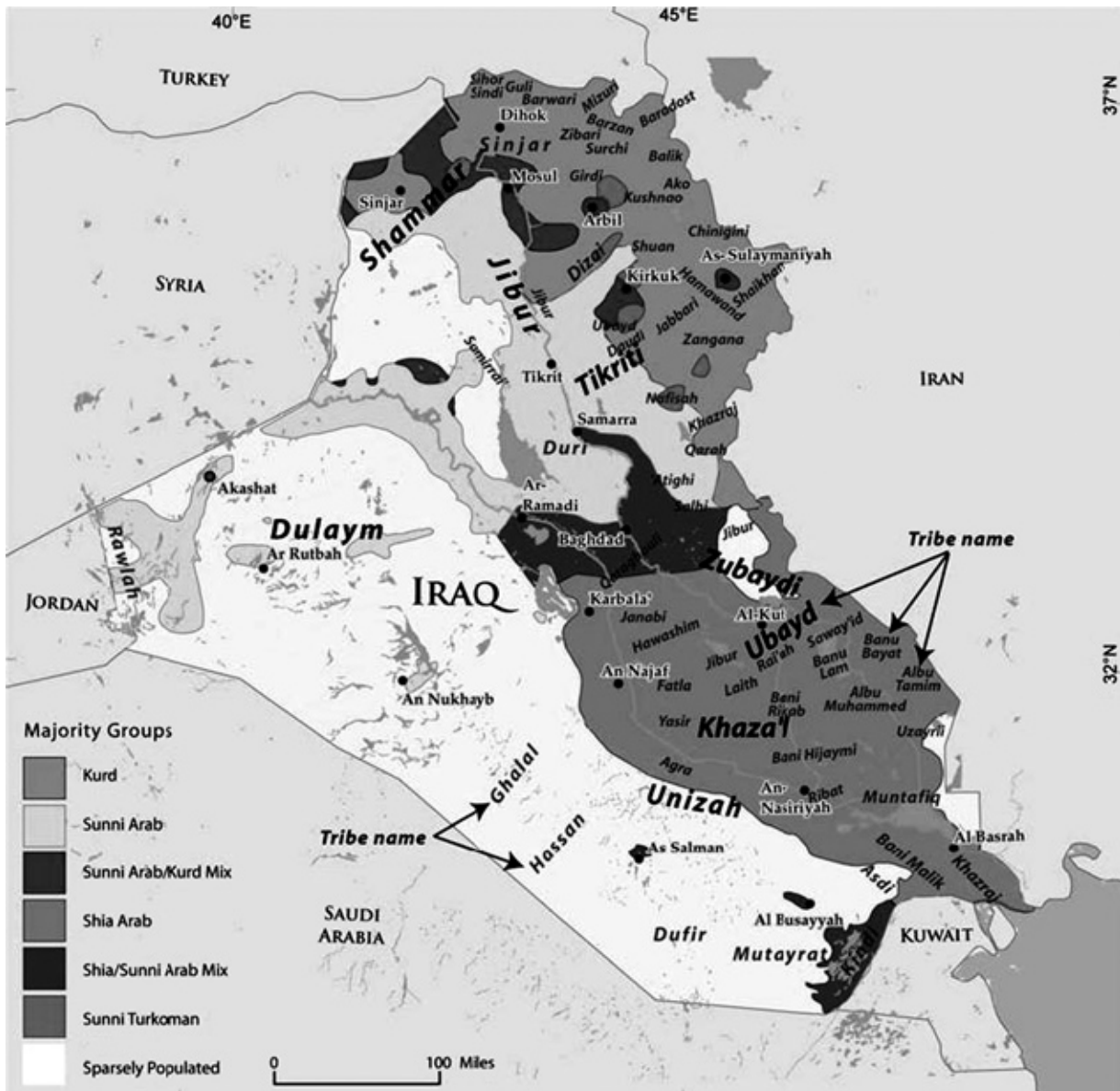
Organizationally, the tribes of Iraq consist of nested (vice hierarchically organized) kinship groups (see Table 1). There are thousands of clans, hundreds of tribes, and about two dozen tribal confederations in Iraq today, each with its own sheikh. (Saddam Hussein’s regime officially recognized some 7,380 tribal sheikhs.)¹⁷ The terms used to describe these kinship groups and the meanings ascribed to them may differ by tribe or region, however, and tribesmen frequently disagree about

Tribal Segment	Number of Adult Males	Residence Patterns	Kinship
Asha’ir/Qabila/Sillif (Tribal Confederation)	Thousands—hundreds of thousands	Local areas, provinces, or large regions, sometimes crossing international boundaries	No traceable kinship
Ashira (Tribe)	Several hundred—many thousands	Neighboring villages or local areas	Descent from a common claimed ancestor, or an ancestor who came to be associated with the tribe
Shabba/Hamula (Clan/Tribal Section)	Several score—several hundred	Same or nearby villages	Descent from common ancestor
Fakhdh (Lineage/Tribal Subsection)	Several tens—several hundred	Same village	Three-five generations or more; may be coterminous with or encompass the <i>kham</i> s, the five-generation group that acts as a unit for purposes of avenging blood and honor
Bayt (Family/Household)	One or more	Same house	Nuclear/extended family

Source: Adapted from Robert A. Fernea. *Shaykh and Effendi: Changing Patterns of Authority Among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 82-83, supplemented by information from Shakir Moustafa Salim, *Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), 43-54.

NOTES: 1) The terms *fasila* and *hamula* are sometimes used in Iraq to refer to a subsection of a fakhdh, consisting of an extended family of several adult males, often living in the same housing cluster or compound; 2) Alternative designations for a hamula include *lahama* or *kishba*; 3) Other terms used in Iraq to refer to various types of tribal sections or subsections include *batn*, *fenda*, *firqa*, *‘imara*, *sadr*, *sha’b*, and *‘unuq*.

Table 1. The Arab tribal system in Iraq.



Sources: CIA Iraq Country Profile, Map: Congressional Cartography, Library of Congress, 2007.

Distribution of ethnoreligious groups and tribes in Iraq.

tribal lineages, relationships, and nomenclature.¹⁸ This complicates efforts by outsiders to understand tribal relationships, dynamics, and politics.

The collapse of central-government authority and the rise in political and sectarian violence in the wake of OIF has caused many Iraqis to fall back on the family, tribe, sect, or ethnic group for support in confronting the daily challenges of living in post-Saddam Iraq. As a result, tribal identities have assumed greater salience in Iraq in recent years. It would, however, be a mistake to overemphasize the role of the tribes or to regard the tribe as the central organizing principle of Iraqi society today. Large parts of Iraq are inhabited

by detribalized or non-tribal populations, and tribal identity often competes with and is overshadowed by other forms of identity (sect, ethnicity, class, or ideological orientation). Moreover, the demise of the old regime has led to the rise of new social forces and actors in Iraq—particularly Islamist movements, militias, and parties, which are playing an increasingly important role in Iraqi politics. Recent events in Anbar province, however, demonstrate that under certain conditions, the tribes can still be decisive actors.

A detailed, up-to-date picture of the tribal system in Iraq does not exist—at least in the open literature. Much of what is known about it is based on a very

small number of studies done more than half a century ago, and information gaps frequently have to be filled by inferences drawn from more recent studies undertaken in neighboring Arab states. While there are a number of useful compendiums on the tribes of Iraq done by Iraqi scholars, these are largely catalogs of tribes, tribal sections, and their sheikhs that are in much need of updating.¹⁹ Finally, there has been no systematic effort to assess the impact of violence and coalition and Iraqi Government policies on the tribes and the state of relations between tribal and non-tribal groups in Iraqi society.²⁰ This article will hopefully constitute a modest first step in this direction.

The Cultural Logic of Tribes and Tribalism

How do tribal values express themselves in the conduct of Iraqi tribesmen and tribes? Tribesmen are intensely jealous of their honor and status vis-à-vis others²¹—to the extent that honor has been described as the “tribal center of gravity.”²² The culture of honor and the implicit threat of sanction or violence if one’s honor is impugned may be a vestige of the Arabs’ Bedouin past—a means of ensuring individual and group survival when there is no higher authority around to keep the peace.

As a result, social relations between individuals and groups are characterized by a high degree of competition and conflict (usually nonviolent) over honor, status, and access to resources.²³ A well-known Bedouin Arab proverb expresses this tendency: “Me and my brothers against my cousins; me, my brothers, and my cousins against the stranger.” Some see the extraordinary politeness, generosity, and hospitality that characterize social relations in Arab society as a means of curbing this propensity for competition and conflict.²⁴

What accounts for this tendency? One explanation is that it is a consequence of endogamy (marriage within the lineage group), which may have started as a functional adaptation to desert life, but which remains a powerful factor in Arab society today. (In the desert, endogamy reinforced group cohesion, enabling the group to better counter external threats.)²⁵ Another explanation is that it is a characteristic feature of segmentary lineage groups, which tend to divide into fractious, competing lineages (families, households, and clans).²⁶

In tribal society, family, clan, and tribal affilia-

tions define one’s identity and status. Consequently, all personal interactions potentially have a collective dimension. Marriage is not a personal choice, but a family affair, with implications for the status and standing of the entire family. Conflicts between individuals always have the potential to become conflicts between groups.

Relationships are central to tribal life. In an environment marked by competition and potential conflict, building and maintaining relationships is a way to reduce the circle of potential adversaries or enemies. This is why feuds, when not resolved by the payment of blood money, were traditionally resolved by the gifting of brides—to create ties that bind between formerly aggrieved parties.²⁷

In Iraq, as elsewhere in the Arab world, tribes rarely provide the basis for sustained collective action. Tribal solidarity has been undermined by the dramatic socioeconomic changes of the past century. (The last tribal rebellion in Iraq was in 1936.) And even in the distant past, when inter-tribal wars occurred, it was unusual for all sections of a tribe to participate; subsections of warring tribes often remained on friendly terms or opted to sit the war out.²⁸

The household (*bayt*) is the fundamental unit of social, economic, and political action in tribal society, while the tribal subsection (the *fakhdh* or its equivalent)—the lowest level of tribal organization at which individuals are still bound by blood and marriage—is normally the highest level at which sustained social action occurs, usually as a result of a blood feud.²⁹ On the rare occasion when tribe-wide cooperation does occur, it is generally in response to an extraordinary event, such as an outside threat or attack.³⁰

Thus, normally contentious tribesmen will band together to fend off an external threat, then return to a state of competition and conflict once the threat subsides.³¹ This may be the dynamic driving the “Anbar Awakening,” wherein disparate tribes have coalesced to confront the growing influence and strength of AQI.

Another pattern that has repeated itself throughout Arab and Muslim history is that of the marginal man or transplanted outsider who unites otherwise fractious tribesmen under the banner of religion.³² Examples include the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the 7th century; the Sanusis in Libya and the Sudanese Mahdi in the 19th century; and the Hashemites in the Hejaz, Jordan, and Iraq and

the Saudis in Arabia in the 20th century.³³ Today, this pattern is repeating itself in parts of Iraq with the emergence of religiously based movements and parties led by formerly obscure charismatic clerics (Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army), former exiles ('Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council), or foreigners (the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and AQI). However, many of the rank and file of these groups are neither of tribal origin nor particularly religious, consisting, to some extent, of opportunistic and criminal elements.³⁴

Tribal identity has a territorial dimension as well.³⁵ Tribes are often identified with specific localities or regions: pastoral nomads with particular grazing areas, settled tribesmen with lands located near a particular village or town or in a particular region.³⁶ Thus, a description of tribal affiliation generally conveys information about both an individual's family and his geographic origins.³⁷

For settled tribesmen, the tribal domain usually consists of a compact territory owned exclusively by members of the tribe. It is divided into plots owned by the various sections of the tribe, and surrounded by a belt of land partly owned by neighboring tribes or townsmen.³⁸ It is not clear how the tribal relocation and resettlement policies selectively pursued by Saddam Hussein's regime affected traditional tribal residential patterns.³⁹

Among settled tribesmen, there is strong pressure not to alienate ancestral lands by marrying outside the tribe (lest land pass to another tribe through inheritance) or by selling land to a "foreigner" (i.e., a non-tribesman).⁴⁰ Infringement of a tribe's territorial domain by outsiders is often a cause for conflict. This has led to inter-tribal strife in post-Saddam Iraq, when the coalition has paid some tribes to secure oil pipelines in territory traditionally claimed by other tribes.⁴¹

Some tribes take the form of geographically dispersed networks. Tribes belonging to a large confederation may be spread over a vast area, even across international boundaries. Tribal ties are sometimes reinforced by marriage alliances and personal or business relationships, and may be mobilized in the pursuit of shared interests. Saddam Hussein's regime was particularly adept at mobilizing tribal networks and forging tribal alliances, which accounted in part for its durability.⁴²

Sheikhs, Tribes, and Power

Historically, states and empires have dealt with sheikhs as local power brokers to help rule or administer their territories or overseas possessions, and they have often attempted to co-opt tribes as part of a strategy of "divide and rule." Coalition forces have likewise attempted to engage the sheikhs and their tribes as part of their effort to stabilize Iraq and defeat AQI. It is therefore important to understand the sources—and limits—of sheikhly authority and tribal influence.

Sheikhly authority. The sheikh traditionally performs a number of functions related to the inner life of the tribe and its relations with the non-tribal world and the authorities. The role of the sheikh has not changed all that much over the last century and a half, and sheikhs still fulfill a number of important functions. These may include—

- Ensuring security throughout the tribe's domain.
- Mediating and resolving internal disputes.
- Trying cases and imposing punishments in accordance with tribal law.
- Representing the tribe to the non-tribal world and the ruling authorities.
- Extending hospitality to guests of the tribe.
- Providing conscripts or tribal levies for the security forces.
- Preserving the autonomy of the tribe vis-à-vis other tribes and the authorities.
- Organizing and regulating smuggling, to the extent that the tribe engages in such activities.⁴³

An individual may become a tribal sheikh in several ways. Sheikhly status may be bestowed on the basis of an individual's character traits (e.g., generosity, wisdom, courage); inherited within "sheikhly families" (usually by the most capable son); wrested from others by force of personality, subterfuge, or even force of arms; and conferred by the state or the ruling authorities. Today, most sheikhs in Iraq belong to sheikhly families and have inherited their position.⁴⁴

Among Bedouins, sheikhs traditionally led by consensus, functioning as a first among equals; their exercise of authority was generally based on their reading of popular sentiment in their tribe.⁴⁵ This is probably because Bedouin tribesmen could simply pick up and leave (taking all their worldly possessions with them) and join another section or tribe if they were unhappy with their sheikh.⁴⁶

Among settled tribesmen, matters are more complicated. Various Iraqi governments (including Saddam Hussein's) cultivated the sheikhs as allies, contributing to their emergence as a privileged stratum of landowners and businessmen, whose fortunes have waxed and waned, depending on government policies and general economic conditions. This development, however, often transformed the relationship between sheikh and tribesman from one of formal equality to one marked by tension and resentment over the sheikh's status as a landowner, employer, or agent of the state. Nevertheless, elements of the traditional leadership model still apply: sheikhs cannot impose their will on their tribe and generally are constrained to act within the bounds of popular opinion. Conversely, their standing in the eyes of their tribesmen depends on their ability to secure the tribe's interests.

Tribal influence. In the distant past, tribal influence was reckoned in terms of the number of tribesmen under arms. Size mattered. Small ("weak") tribes were considered less powerful than large ("strong") tribes. Reputation also mattered. Some tribes were considered more warlike than others. Moreover, the influence of the tribes generally varied inversely with that of the state: the tribes were strong when the state was weak, and vice versa.

Today, as mentioned above, the tribal subsection is generally the highest level at which sustained social action occurs; tribes are no longer effective units of action. And the influence of a tribe is generally measured in terms of its sheikh's prestige among his own and other tribesmen, his ability to secure the interests of his tribe, and the willingness of a clan or tribe to exact retribution for slights to its honor or for harm visited upon its members.⁴⁷

The tribal system today. The authority of Iraq's sheikhs and the influence of Iraq's tribes have varied greatly from place to place and over time, during the past century and a half.⁴⁸ Despite occasionally supportive government policies (e.g., during the Mandate, under the Monarchy, and during Saddam Hussein's rule), the impact of certain long-term socioeconomic trends such as urbanization, the decline of agriculture, the rise of the modern economy, and the emergence of alternative non-tribal forms of identity, have undermined sheikhly authority and tribal cohesion and influence. This is part of a broader trend also evident in other tribal societies

(e.g., Somalia, Afghanistan) where socioeconomic change, war, and resurgent Islamist movements have undermined tribal influence.⁴⁹

The tribes experienced something of a comeback under Saddam Hussein. To strengthen central-government control, Hussein bought the loyalty and bolstered the authority of the sheikhs with cars, land, money, and arms, and he replaced sheikhs whose loyalties were suspect with more compliant ones.⁵⁰ (Because of this latter policy, identifying "authentic" sheikhs who enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of their tribesmen has been a challenge for coalition forces in post-Saddam Iraq.)⁵¹

Today, like most Iraqis, the sheikhs are consumed by the daily struggle to survive and to preserve what remains of their status and privileges. In some rural areas, they remain the dominant force. In this regard, former Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) official Rory Stewart's assessment of the sheikhs of Maysan province in southeastern Iraq, where he served from 2003-2004, is worth quoting at length.

Most urban Iraqis perceived the sheikhs as illiterate, embarrassing, criminal, powerless anachronisms who should be given no official recognition. The sheikhs could no longer, despite their claims, raise ten thousand armed men—perhaps they never could. I never observed them raise more than a couple hundred. Their daily visits to our office to request building contracts, clinics, and the chance to form militias proved how short they were of money and patronage power They were [however] still the most powerful men in the rural areas, where about half the population remained; they owned much of the land, and agriculture was the only half-functioning element of the shattered economy. Almost every crime in the villages was tried and settled by the sheikhs⁵²

In other areas, the sheikhs find themselves jostling for power with the various Islamist militias and parties that are playing a growing role in the life of the country, and many are hard pressed to compete in an arena in which local political power increasingly comes from the barrel of a gun. Anthony Shadid of *The Washington Post* described this dynamic in a 2006 article about a visit with Sheikh Adnan Aidani in the village of Yusufan, near Basra. According to Shadid—

There is a saying in southern Iraq today, "No one pays respect to the saint who won't mete out punishment." Violence is the cadence of the

country. To navigate the chaos, Aidani tries to draw on century-old traditions honed by Bedouins in the desert, rules built on honor, respect, and reciprocity. He relies on the intimacy of a village where every neighbor knows the other. But in the end, the threat of punishment secures respect for Aidani. That same threat gives power to militias, gangs, and criminals who now hold sway even in the streets of a village like Yusufan.

The sheikh has his authority, backed by what he says are the hundreds of armed men he can cull from the tribe's 12,000 members. But in a sign of his curtailed reach, he twice failed to get elected to parliament, and villagers sometimes treat him as just another player... When trouble arises, villagers say, they try to settle it themselves, then go to the sheik, representatives of the Islamic parties or the town's part-time cleric... Usually, they keep to themselves. With violence endemic, it is often heard that if it's not your neighbor, friend or family killed, you keep quiet.⁵³

Still, other sheikhs have adjusted well to the new rules of the game, participating in Iraq's conflict economy and transforming themselves, for all practical purposes, into local warlords. Perhaps the best example of this new type of leader is Sheikh 'Abd al-Sattar Biza'i al-Rishawi of the Albu Risha tribe, leader of the Anbar Awakening. According to published reports, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Sheikh 'Abd al-Sattar led a band of highwaymen who operated near Ramadi and worked as a facilitator for AQI on the side, providing its operatives with cars, safe houses, and local guides. But when the AQI operatives he was helping started working as highwaymen too—encroaching on his 'turf,' cutting into his profits, and then killing his father and several brothers—the relationship soured, prompting the sheikh to turn on AQI and to ally himself with coalition forces.⁵⁴

Based on these few examples, the most that can be said with confidence is that sheikhly authority and tribal influence in Iraq today vary in accordance with local circumstances and conditions, and that sheikh and tribesman are increasingly subject to conflicting pressures. There are strong incentives for people to seek refuge in tribal identities as protection against pervasive violence and economic insecurity, and for sheikhs and tribesmen to hang together for purposes of survival.

At the same time, the sons of Iraq's tribes are well-represented in the many insurgent groups and



U.S. Army, SGT Curt Cashour

Sheikh 'Abd al-Sattar Biza'i al-Rishawi during a meeting with Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and LTG Ray Odierno, commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq, at Camp Ramadi, Iraq, 2 April 2007. Sittar helped spark the Anbar Awakening, a widespread rejection of Al-Qaeda by leaders of the province.

sectarian militias that are driving the violence that is tearing Iraqi society apart; consequently, sheikhs who are not involved with insurgent groups or militias must tread lightly vis-à-vis their tribesmen who are, lest they run afoul of the masked armed men who wield ultimate authority in Iraq today.

The Unfulfilled Promise of Tribal Alliances in Iraq

Some analysts and practitioners have argued that tribal alliances are key to defeating the Sunni Arab insurgency in Iraq.⁵⁵ While efforts to engage and leverage Iraq's tribes have yielded some successes, particularly in Anbar province, the overall effort has fallen short of expectations. It is not clear whether this is due to flaws in the coalition's tribal engagement policy, the security environment—which often makes engagement difficult and dangerous—or unrealistic assumptions about the influence of the sheikhs and the tribes.

Clearly, at various times the coalition has harbored unrealistic expectations regarding the influence of the sheikhs and the tribes. Early coalition engagement activities reflected this misconception—for instance, in the run-up to the battle for Fallujah, when coalition military officers met with sheikhs in the expectation that they would be able to tamp down insurgent violence racking the town. In *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*, Bing West describes a number of such episodes:

General Abizaid...met with the sheikhs, demanding that they show leadership and stop the violence. There were as many attacks on the outskirts of Fallujah, where the sheikhs had power, as inside the city, where the clerics dominated.... In a separate meeting with the sheikhs, Major General Charles H. Swannack, commander of the 82nd [Airborne Division], was equally forceful. "I am not going to tolerate these attacks anymore," he said. "I know the sheikhs have the ability to control their tribes." The sheikhs protested that the 82nd didn't appreciate the limits of their power. Threatening them would do no good. Improvement projects made no difference to the men with the guns. In the eyes of the sheikhs, power had shifted from them to the young clerics in Fallujah preaching that America was waging a war against Islam and was bringing in Jews to rule Iraq.⁵⁶

This tension between tribal elements and Islamists was also evident in largely Shi'ite areas, where newly empowered Sadrist challenged the established power of the tribes. According to Mark Etherington, a former CPA official who served in Wasit Province in south-central Iraq in 2003-2004:

As the threat from Moqtada al-Sadr's followers increased and the death threats were made against CPA employees, the tribes increasingly instructed "their" interpreters to leave our employ, which many of them did immediately. This might seem a curious moral retreat, given the tribes' much-vaunted resistance to external interference in their affairs; actually it merely shows the power that Sadr's followers were able to wield over ordinary Iraqis in combining Islam with nationalism. If one concluded from this phenomenon that the tribes were actually weaker than they appeared, a recent CPA poll appeared to buttress the idea; of 1,531 people in five Iraqi cities only 1 per cent of respondents said that they would vote for a tribal

party; 4.8 per cent that they would vote for a party of the same tribe but 95.2 per cent that they would not; and 98.6 per cent that they would not comply if ordered to vote in a particular manner by a tribal chief. Conversely, one might as well say that the cities were not the best of places to canvass tribal loyalty given their overwhelmingly rural roots.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the coalition's engagement efforts have yielded a number of modest but important benefits. Because the sheikhs are generally well connected and plugged into various tribal and non-tribal networks (essential if they are to look after the interests of their tribe), they have generally proven useful as sources of information and advice and as vectors of influence among their tribesmen. Sheikhs have assisted, too, in the pursuit and apprehension of insurgents and former regime officials, the screening of detainees for insurgent ties, and the recovery of kidnapping victims (such as journalist Jill Carroll).⁵⁸ Moreover, efforts to work with tribal sheikhs to reduce insurgent activity in their tribal areas of influence, in return for various *quid pro quos* (e.g., construction contracts, reconstruction projects, the freeing of detainees), have often yielded impressive results—most notably a significant reduction in the lethality and number of attacks on coalition forces (frequently by 50 percent or more).

On the down side, tribal engagement has not brought about a total halt in attacks in tribal areas of influence.⁵⁹ It is not clear whether this is due to the sheikhs' inability to influence younger fighters—who are heavily represented in the ranks of the insurgents, or certain sections or subsections of their tribe.⁶⁰

Furthermore, efforts to employ tribes to protect strategic infrastructure such as oil pipelines and electrical power lines have failed. (See inset, "Freakonomics on the Tigris.") And until recently, sheikhs have rarely delivered on promises to provide tribal levies for anti-AQI militias such as the "Desert Protectors" in Husaybah and the Albu Nimr police force in al-Furat or to provide large numbers of conscripts for the Iraqi Security Forces.⁶¹ This is particularly telling, given the high rates of unemployment in Iraq today.

The success of the tribally based Anbar Awakening, which has reportedly recruited some 12,000 volunteers for local police forces this year, represents a sea change in coalition engagement efforts.⁶² It has revived hopes that tribal engagement can turn the tide against the Sunni Arab insurgency and

FREAKONOMICS ON THE TIGRIS: The Hidden (Tribal) Dimension of Infrastructure Protection

In their best-selling book *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Investigates the Hidden Side of Everything*, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner argue that understanding the role of incentives “is the key to solving just about any riddle” pertaining to human behavior and to understanding that very often “things aren’t quite what they seem.”⁶³ Might Freakonomics help answer why the coalition has been unsuccessful at using Iraqi tribes to secure oil pipelines and electrical power lines running through their tribal domains?

Some background: due to the CPA’s decision to dissolve the Iraqi Army and the subsequent lack of trained Iraqi security personnel, the coalition has on a number of occasions paid tribes to secure strategic infrastructure in parts of Iraq, particularly oil pipelines and electrical power lines. However, attacks on the pipelines and power lines have continued, to the point that the vital Baiji-Kirkuk oil pipeline and sections of the national electrical grid have been shut down for extended periods. What is going on?

U.S. Government assessments have tended to focus on flaws in the incentive structure—an answer that could have been lifted straight from the pages of *Freakonomics*. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), “the Ministry of Electricity contracts with tribal chiefs, paying them about \$60-\$100 per kilometer to protect transmission lines running through their areas. However, IRMO [Iraq Reconstruction Management Office] officials reported that the protection system is flawed and encourages corruption. According to U.S. and UN Development Program officials, some tribes that are paid to protect transmission lines are also selling materials from downed lines and extracting tariffs for access to repair the lines. IRMO officials stated that they want the Ministry of Electricity to change the system so that tribes are only paid when the lines remain operational for a reasonable period of time.”⁶⁴

The congressionally mandated Iraq Study Group (ISG) report echoed these findings, recommending that coalition forces improve pipeline security “by paying local tribes solely on the basis of throughput (rather than fixed amounts).”⁶⁵

One problem with the GAO and ISG model for incentivizing the tribes is that it fails to explain how to prevent the tribes from maximizing their profits by taking money from both the insurgents and the coalition (tolerating a certain level of violence against the pipelines or power lines, though not enough to greatly reduce throughput). Clearly, a more complex model is called for here, one that recognizes that the tribes stand to make money by playing both sides of the game, and that they might not be the only relevant actors.

Moreover, the GAO/ISG solution fails to account for intra- and inter-tribal dynamics and politics and relations between tribal and non-tribal groups. There is good reason to believe that some, if not many, of the attacks on oil pipelines and electrical power lines have been undertaken by the same groups being paid to protect them. Why would they do this? Perhaps to—

- Justify their jobs.
- Extort more money from the coalition.
- Maximize profits and hedge their bets by working with both the insurgents and the coalition.
- Protest possible inequities in the distribution of funds within the tribe by their sheikh.

It is also possible that tribes not on the payroll are involved in some attacks, either to drum up business for themselves by creating a security problem that they then offer to solve, or to protest infringement of their traditional tribal domains by tribes on the coalition payroll.

In fact, it is likely that all of these factors have been in play at one time or another, and that a variety of actors—smugglers, insurgents, criminal gangs, and corrupt security officials—have also been involved. Interestingly, those Iraqis and coalition personnel who deal with this issue on a daily basis understand the complexity of the problem, even if some in Washington do not.⁶⁶ The solution to the challenge of employing tribes for infrastructure protection is not simply a matter of proper incentives; it is also a matter of understanding tribal dynamics and politics in the areas of concern. Indeed, things are *not* always what they seem.

perhaps undermine popular support for the Mahdi Army.⁶⁷ As part of this effort, the coalition has brokered a number of informal cease-fire agreements with local Sunni insurgent groups, freed detainees after extracting good-conduct pledges from tribal sheikhs, and hired tribal militias and their sheikhs as “security contractors.”⁶⁸

Several factors likely account for the Anbar Awakening, including popular revulsion against the ideology and methods of AQI, the threat that AQI poses to the autonomy of the tribes and their way of life, and the damage that AQI has done to the local economy. As General David Petraeus recently noted—perhaps half facetiously—the sheikhs in Anbar province “all have a truck company, they all have a construction company and they all have an import-export business,” and the havoc that AQI has wreaked was bad for business.⁶⁹

It remains to be seen, however, whether the Anbar Awakening can hold together, whether it will continue to work with coalition forces or eventually turn on them, whether successes in Anbar can be replicated elsewhere, or whether coalition efforts to work with the tribes and arm tribal militias are in fact paving the way for an even more violent civil war.⁷⁰

Lessons Learned

A recent study of 1st Cavalry Division operations in Baghdad during its OIF II rotation (April 2004–February 2005) concluded that—

- Nonlethal means were the most effective method to defeat the enemy.
- Spending time with local leaders and conducting information operations and civil-military operations were the most effective ways to influence the battle.
- Successful commanders used military operations to shape the environment, but engaged the civilian population to achieve success.⁷¹

Despite such acknowledgements of the importance of engagement and the fact that engagement activities in Iraq frequently consume between 20 to 50 percent of a commander’s time, it is remarkable how little attention has been devoted to this subject in the military professional literature.⁷² Hopefully, this article will spur greater interest in what is probably the most important coalition line of operation in Iraq today.

The following engagement lessons learned—with particular emphasis on the special challenges of tribal engagement—are drawn from a review of

the military professional literature, journalistic dispatches, individual and group interviews with civilian and military personnel who have served in Iraq, and the author’s own experiences.⁷³

Cultural sensitivity, “hearts and minds,” and shared interests. Because of the complexity of the operational environment in Iraq, particularly in tribal areas, missteps are inevitable—even by experienced individuals.⁷⁴ The local population will usually forgive such missteps if they have a vital interest in cooperating with the coalition and believe coalition personnel have fundamentally good intentions. Moreover, while winning “hearts and minds” may not be achievable in much of Iraq, neither is it necessary for success. What is important is for coalition forces to convince Iraqis that they have a shared interest in working together to achieve common goals.⁷⁵

Building relationships. In Iraq, as elsewhere in the Arab world, persons are more trusted than institutions.⁷⁶ Personal relationships are the basis of effective professional partnerships, and a *sine qua non* for effective counterinsurgency operations.⁷⁷ These relationships, however, can only be established and maintained by engaging the civilian population.

Relationships take time to build and need constant tending.⁷⁸ “Face time” with locals is critical, even if nothing tangible comes of some meetings, since time together is an investment in a relationship whose benefits may not be immediately evident. In addition, such meetings might discourage fence sitters from going over to the insurgents.

A little knowledge of Arabic and Islam pays huge dividends, for it demonstrates the kind of respect for the local population and their traditions that helps establish rapport and build relationships. And contrary to the conventional wisdom, discussions about politics and religion need not be off-limits, although judgment and discretion are advised when dealing with such matters.⁷⁹

Credibility is priceless; once destroyed, it is very hard to reestablish. Accordingly, it is vital to make good on promises and to avoid making commitments that cannot be kept. Broken promises undermine efforts to establish rapport and build the relationships that are essential to success.⁸⁰

For these reasons, coalition forces should, to the extent possible, avoid practices that disrupt relationships with the local population, such as mid-tour realignments of unit boundaries or areas of operation

MILITARY IMPLICATIONS of Tribal Land Tenure Practices

While a detailed discussion of how land is owned and inherited among tribal groups in rural Iraq is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to recognize the military value of such cultural knowledge. This point was driven home in a recent email from 1st Lieutenant Brendan Hagan of the 82d Airborne Division to an Army buddy, in which he described how, after stumbling across a weapons cache, his unit used knowledge of tribal land ownership patterns to discover additional weapons caches:

One way we've used simple info to get great results was with a [weapons] cache we found in an unused orchard. We stumbled onto the largest cache ever found in our division's history, by accident. But we used simple reasoning to lead us to another of equal size. When we found the first one we grabbed the local sub-sheik and showed him what was within his area of influence, then used him to tell us who owned every piece of land from the river to a major road in the region. It turned out that the land the cache was on and numerous other tracks [sic] of land were owned by a father and series of brothers. We used this info to search other orchards owned by the brothers and found a second large cache. Seems simple, but most people would not have asked who owned all the adjacent land and put the family connections together. This allowed us to refine our searches to specific fields and orchards.⁸¹

The details of this account are consistent with what is known about land ownership in lineage-based (clan- or tribe-based) communities in Iraq and the Levant. Among the practical consequences of Islamic inheritance rules is that individuals frequently own multiple parcels of land scattered

throughout the tribal domain. Moreover, land is often owned jointly by siblings (usually brothers), paternal cousins, or entire tribal subsections, to prevent the division of heritable land holdings into ever smaller, economically non-viable parcels among an ever-growing number of heirs.⁸²

Another feature of the Iraqi rural landscape that may be militarily significant concerns the relationship between patterns of field cultivation and social relations among cultivators. Agricultural land in many parts of Iraq is divided into strip parcels (parallel strips of land worked by different cultivators). This is a widespread practice in the developing world.⁸³ A "virtual tour" of Iraq using Google Earth reveals that strip parcels are found in many villages around the country.⁸⁴

Research of field patterns in iron-age Northern Europe and in contemporary East Africa has shown that strip parcels are generally associated with lineage-based communities. In such communities, the allocation of the strips often mirrors the family tree of the land-owning group and reflects the genealogical ranking of its members: older sons own strips of land (or sections of the family's strip of land) that are closer to the family dwelling than those owned by younger sons, while owners of strips on the right, when viewed from the dwelling, are senior to owners of strips on the left. Adjacent strips of land are generally owned by brothers, and adjacent plots of land are often owned by cousins (unless sold to an outsider).⁸⁵ Further investigation is required to determine whether such practices are followed in Iraq. If so, it may prove to be yet another bit of cultural knowledge that can help coalition forces locate insurgent weapons caches, and aid coalition military operations in Iraq.



A recent aerial view of strip fields in a village near Yusufiya, central Iraq.

and gaps during unit rotations that preclude incumbent coalition personnel from introducing their successors to their Iraqi partners.

Engagement as a military activity. Engagement planning at the lower tactical echelons—which are the echelons that interact most intensively with the civilian population—is often *ad hoc*, highly informal, and done “on the fly” by the commander with little if any formal staff input. Engagement, however, is too important to be done in such a manner, and should be approached like any other essential military activity.

There should be a formal engagement planning process, with input from all relevant staff elements, to identify engagement targets, assess their motivations and interests, determine engagement goals, schedule meetings, and set agendas. Commanders and staff should hold after-action reviews to evaluate the outcomes of meetings and plan for and prepare follow-on activities.

Engagement planning would probably benefit from the creation of small, dedicated engagement cells at the battalion and brigade combat team levels, to organize and oversee the aforementioned activities. The Army’s new human terrain teams and the Department of State’s new embedded provincial reconstruction teams will likely bring additional assets to bear on the problem as well.⁸⁶

Cultivating “native informants.” Very few non-natives have the knowledge and expertise needed to navigate Iraqi tribal politics. While book knowledge is extremely valuable, it only goes so far. Thus, it is essential to cultivate a cadre of “native informants” who are intimately familiar with local history, personalities, and tribal politics. Translators generally serve in this role, although it is important to know how the local population perceives these individuals. A translator whom the locals look upon with suspicion because of his family or tribal background can be more of a hindrance than a help.

A top-down, interagency-led process. Because tribes often span unit boundaries and international borders, and because tribal leaders may interact with tactical as well as operational-level commanders, coalition military and civilian organizations could inadvertently find themselves working at cross-purposes.⁸⁷ Accordingly, tribal engagement should be a top-down, interagency-led process. Such an approach would help to—

- Develop a single, synchronized tribal engagement strategy that spans unit boundaries, military echelons, and international borders.

- Deconflict, and ensure synergies among, multiple engagement efforts.

- Develop a unified IO message for engagement inside and outside of Iraq.

- Coordinate kinetic targeting of high-value individuals and planned or ongoing tribal engagement efforts to ensure that former efforts do not hinder or harm the latter.

A top-down approach would also ensure that tribal engagement receives the attention and emphasis it merits, and that tactical units receive the support required to succeed in this important mission.

Understanding limitations in sheikhly authority and tribal influence. Power relationships are in flux in post-Saddam Iraq, and sheikhly authority and tribal influence may vary from place to place, depending on local conditions. Coalition forces have sometimes had unrealistic expectations concerning the authority of the sheikhs and the influence of the tribes. Nonetheless, tribal engagement has yielded important successes in places such as Anbar province, and it remains a key part of coalition strategy in Iraq.

Because of their connections, sheikhs are useful sources of information, insight, and advice. They can also influence their tribesmen, although their ability to do so often depends on their ability to dispense patronage (i.e., money, jobs, and contracts), and to otherwise secure the interests of their tribe. They generally have the greatest influence among members of their own subsection or section and their own generational cohort; thus, while they may be able to influence many of their tribesmen, they usually cannot influence them all, nor do they “control” their tribe. Additionally, just as a sheikh who agrees to work with the coalition may not be able to bring around all his tribesmen, the presence of insurgents among his tribe does not necessarily mean that he surreptitiously supports the insurgent cause—although he may hedge his bets by turning a blind eye toward insurgent activities he is aware of.

Given these limitations, while it is not unreasonable to demand 100-percent effort from the sheikhs in return for patronage and assistance, it is unrealistic to expect 100-percent results. Most sheikhs are just as vulnerable to intimidation and terror as any other Iraqi; scores, if not hundreds of sheikhs have been killed by insurgents and terrorists.

Tailored engagement strategies. Tribal engagement strategies should account for local variations in sheikhly authority and tribal influence. And because there are thousands of clans, hundreds of tribes, and about two dozen tribal confederations in Iraq, each with its own sheikh, tribal engagement is a potentially time-consuming activity. Mass meetings and “sheikh-fests” may help, but these are not always appropriate—the more prominent sheikhs at these meetings will often overshadow lower- and mid-level sheikhs, who may feel slighted. On the other hand, it might not be realistic to engage all the sheikhs in a particular area of operations; here, the commander’s engagement plan will determine who gets special attention.⁸⁸

Because all tribal power is local, there is no substitute for engaging lower- and mid-level sheikhs who head tribal subsections and sections. However, engaging more prominent tribal or paramount sheikhs (of tribal confederations) may sometimes aid this effort, and may be useful for both symbolic and substantive reasons. Each tribe will require a different approach based on a detailed understanding of local conditions and the tribe’s history and politics. And that kind of knowledge can only be obtained by spending time on the ground with Iraqis.

Avoiding the pitfalls of tribal politics. Working with tribes poses special challenges. Tribesmen are intensely status conscious and competitive, and rivalry and intrigue often characterize tribal politics. Thus, tribal engagement often requires a careful balancing act among sheikhs, tribes, and non-tribal groups to avoid creating or aggravating rivalries or conflicts.

There are a number of specific pitfalls associated with tribal politics:

- *Errors of ignorance.* It is easy to err due to a lack of knowledge of local and tribal history and politics. Coalition forces initially dealt with a number of sheikhs who had been appointed to their positions by the former regime and therefore lacked legitimacy in the eyes of their tribesmen. Likewise, the coalition initially appointed an unpopular sheikh as governor of Basra, a large city with a largely non-tribal population. These actions created resentment and undermined coalition credibility.⁸⁹ It is therefore essential to become intimately familiar with the history and politics of the tribes in one’s area of operations and their relationships with other tribes, non-tribal elements, and the authorities, in order to avoid such missteps.

- *Rivalries and feuds.* Establishing a close relationship with a particular sheikh or tribe may often be necessary, but it may entail the risk of entanglement in their rivalries and feuds.⁹⁰ While it is usually best to stay above such frays, such situations can offer coalition personnel the opportunity to mediate local conflicts, thereby enhancing local security and the coalition’s standing in the eyes of the local population.⁹¹ Furthermore, in some circumstances it may be possible to use a relationship with one sheikh or tribe to entice a rival sheikh or tribe to work more closely with coalition forces or the local government.

- *Corruption and nepotism.* Funneling money to tribes through their sheikhs is one way to leverage tribal networks, but it can sometimes cause as many problems as it solves. Sheikhs may not disseminate funds among their tribesmen in an equitable manner, thus engendering resentment against the sheikh and the coalition. Intervening to ensure a more equitable distribution of funds—if the issue has become a problem—is risky, and requires an intimate knowledge of the politics of the tribe and a deft diplomatic touch. But if done right, intervention can help coalition commanders deepen their base of support among the tribesmen.⁹²

- *Tribal vendettas.* Humiliating, injuring, or killing a tribesman can embroil the coalition in a vendetta with his family or relatives, thereby widening the circle of violence. There are many anecdotal reports about former fence sitters in Iraq opting to join the insurgency because of incidents involving coalition forces and family members or relatives. This only underscores the especially high cost of not strictly adhering to the rules of engagement in tribal areas or in societies founded on tribal values.

Tribal engagement and long-term U.S. interests. For a time after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, there was an ongoing debate among coalition officials about the desirability of working with the tribes. Some argued that wherever possible, the tribes should be leveraged to defeat the insurgency and create stability. Others argued that the tribes are an anachronism and an obstacle to the long-term goal of building democracy in Iraq.⁹³

With the coalition now engaging the tribes as a matter of necessity, the debate has been overtaken by events. The concerns that drove the original debate, however, remain salient. The coalition cannot afford to forego the potential benefits of tribal engagement:

a modicum of stability and the weakening of AQI in large parts of Iraq. But neither can it afford to ignore the possible long-term costs of this policy: the strengthening of the tribes and tribal militias (many of which include former insurgents) at the expense of the eventual development of broad-based civil society and governmental institutions.

The challenge is to strike a balance between these two competing objectives. Tribal engagement should be part of a broader effort to engage multiple sectors of Iraqi society in order to support and strengthen not just the tribes, but civil society and governmental institutions that bring Iraqis of varied backgrounds together to work toward common goals.

Conclusions

Engagement is probably the most important coalition line of operation in Iraq today. If coalition forces eventually achieve some degree of success in stabilizing Iraq, it will be in large part because they succeeded in engaging the civilian population and leveraging Iraq's tribes and tribal networks.

Tribal engagement, however, poses unique challenges deriving from the special demands of interacting with tribal communities whose norms, values, and forms of social organization diverge, in many ways, from those of non-tribal society. To succeed in this environment, it helps to have more than just a passing familiarity with the historical and social sciences literature on tribes and tribalism in Iraq and the Arab world. But ultimately there is no substitute for time on the ground with Iraqis, learning through dialog and observation about the history, inner life, and politics of the tribes of Iraq, and establishing through trial and error what engagement techniques do and do not work.

Finally, while tribal engagement lessons learned in Iraq may apply elsewhere, this should not be assumed to be the case. Every tribal society is unique in its history, its internal dynamics and politics, and its relations with the outside world. Further research is required in Iraq and elsewhere in order to better understand the nature of this human diversity and its implications for future tribal engagement efforts. **MR**

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE: "A Greater Security Than Firearms"

Czech explorer and Orientalist Alois Musil (1868-1944) is famous for his books about his travels in the Arabian Peninsula during the first decades of the 20th century. Musil faced many dangers on his journeys, not least from Bedouin raiders bent on booty and plunder who would not have thought twice about taking the life of a foreigner in the vast, empty expanses of the desert.

To defend against this threat, Musil made sure to ingratiate himself with the sheikhs of key tribes along his route of travel, and to procure from them the services of a local guide and a written pledge of safe passage through their tribal domains, which he could invoke when threatened.⁹⁴

The guides were often able to distinguish "friendly" from hostile raiding parties at a distance through their knowledge of local personalities and customs, enabling Musil to quickly determine what kind of approach was appropriate for dealing with the raiders.⁹⁵

When attacked by a raiding party from a "friendly" tribe (that of a sheikh who had promised him safe passage or of an allied tribe), Musil would invoke the local sheikh's name and remind the raiders that

violation of a sheikh's pledge of safe passage would dishonor the sheikh and could lead to the violator's expulsion from the tribe.⁹⁶ If this did not work or if the raiding party was from a hostile tribe, Musil would warn them that his sponsor would be honor-bound to seek revenge if any members of his party were harmed, or stolen property was not returned.⁹⁷

Nonetheless, travel in the desert remained dangerous, even for as savvy a traveler as Musil, for as he was once warned by a friendly sheikh, there were always brigands and outlaw tribes that would not honor a pledge of safe passage.⁹⁸

Musil's experience demonstrates the importance of knowing the cultural "rules of the road," of seeking out knowledgeable and dependable locals as guides, and of surviving by one's wits rather than by force of arms.

Musil's ability to talk his way out of many difficult situations led the anthropologist Louise Sweet to observe that, when confronted with a Bedouin raiding party, Musil's "shrewd use of the rules of intertribal relations was a greater security than firearms."⁹⁹ Or to put it in the modern Soldier's vernacular: cultural knowledge is the ultimate in force protection.

NOTES

1. LTC Kurt Wheeler, "Good News in Al Anbar?" *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2007, 36-40; Sean D. Naylor, "Jumping the Fence: Tribal 'Awakening' Brings Troops—and Hurdles," *Army Times*, 4 June 2007, 8-11.
2. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 126-150; Charles F. Swagman, "Tribe and Politics: An Example from Highland Yemen," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 44, No. 3, Autumn 1988, 251-261. In the Middle East, Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmen tribes are organized along claimed patrilineal (male) lines of descent; tribes elsewhere may be organized along claimed patrilineal, matrilineal (female), or cognatic (male and female) lines of descent. Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 49.
3. In late 18th- and early 19th-century Iraq, townsmen often joined the nearest tribe for purposes of protection. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 73. Likewise, a study of the Beni Isad tribe in the early 1950s found that many lineages and clans were of "foreign" origin (i.e., they were not original members of the tribe). The usual reasons given for leaving one tribe for another were disputes over land or compensation or a desire for better protection. Shakir Moustafa Salim, *Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), 45.
4. Batatu, 41; Lois Beck, *The Qashqa'i of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 11, 23, 204.
5. Sahlins, 20-27, 48-55.
6. Samira Haj, "The Problems of Tribalism: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Iraqi History," *Social History* 16, no. 1 (January 1991): 49-52.
7. Charles Lindholm, "Kinship Structure and Political Authority: The Middle East and Central Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (April 1986): 334-355.
8. Salim, 44; Robert A. Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi: Changing Patterns of Authority Among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 103-105.
9. Fernea, 101-104, 105-110; Salim, 14-15, 27-29.
10. The traditional tribal status hierarchy among the Bedouin is, in descending order of rank: camel herders, sheep herders, farmers, marsh dwellers, tinkers/smiths, and gypsy tribes. Batatu, 68-70; John Glubb, *Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service* (London: Cassell, 1978), 37, 51.
11. For the distinctions between tribal values, processes, and organization, see Richard T. Antoun, "Civil Society, Tribal Process, and Change in Jordan: An Anthropological View," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, No. 32 (2000), 441-463.
12. As a former cavalry squadron commander who served in Iraq observed, "First and foremost, tribes will protect their own. Individuals willing to provide information about insurgents or criminals would do so about members of other tribes, but never about members of their own." Lieutenant Colonel Ross A. Brown, "Commander's Assessment: South Baghdad," *Military Review* (January-February 2007): 29.
13. William Lancaster, *The Rwala Bedouin Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 128-131.
14. Fernea, *Sheikh and Effendi*, 77; Amatzia Baram, "Victory in Iraq, One Tribe at a Time," *New York Times*, 28 October 2003, A25.
15. For more on the institution of the blood feud and mechanisms for regulating and resolving such conflicts, see Joseph Ginat, *Blood Disputes Among Bedouin and Rural Arabs in Israel: Revenge, Mediation, Outcasting and Family Honor* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987). For more on tribal warfare, see Montgomery McFate, "The Memory of War: Tribes and the Legitimate Use of Force in Iraq," in Jeffrey H. Norwitz (ed.), *Armed Groups: Studies in National Security, Counterterrorism, and Counterinsurgency*, forthcoming.
16. Former deputy director of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Office of Provincial Outreach LTC Alan King claims that "the Iraqi people spoke often of tribal law, but I only witnessed its application in the most remote and rural areas of the country." By contrast, former British CPA official Rory Stewart noted, "Almost every crime in the villages [in southern Iraq] was tried and settled by the sheikhs." R. Alan King, *Twice Armed: An American Soldier's Battle for Hearts and Minds in Iraq* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 178; Rory Stewart, *The Prince of the Marshes* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2006), 219-220.
17. King, 17.
18. This is true for both Arab and Kurdish tribes in Iraq. Fernea, 14; Salim, 44; Hosham Dawood, "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: the Case of Iraq," in Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawood, *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2003), 115-116, 133-134; and Martin van Bruinessen, Agha, *Sheikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 59-64.
19. See, for instance: 'Abbas al-'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir al-'Iraq* (The Tribes of Iraq) (Baghdad, 1937), three volumes; 'Abd al-Jalil al-Tahir, *al-Asha'ir al-'Iraqiyya* (The Tribes of Iraq) (Baghdad, 1972); 'Ali al-Wardi, *Lamahat Ijtima'iyya min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Hadith* (Social Aspects of the Modern History of Iraq), (Baghdad, 1972), six volumes; Tamir 'Abd al-Hassan al-'Amiri, *Mawsu'at al-'Asha'ir al-'Iraqiyya* (The Encyclopedia of Iraqi Tribes) (Baghdad, 1992-1995), nine volumes; and 'Abd 'Awn al-Rawdan, *Mawsu'at 'Asha'ir al-'Iraq: Tarikh, Ansab, Rijalat, Ma'athir* (Encyclopedia of the Tribes of Iraq: History, Lineage, Personalities, and Exploits) (Amman: Al-Aniliya Publishing, 2003), two volumes.
20. It is interesting to note that during the occupation and Mandate (1914-1932), the British never conducted a detailed survey of the land and peoples of the area that was to become the state of Iraq. The resultant lack of empirical data was a major hindrance to the effective administration of these territories and to the formulation of effective tribal policies by the British, and it led to policies based on culturally grounded preconceptions and stereotypes about the nature of Iraqi society. Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xi, 43, 63.
21. King, 182-183. King relates an episode in which he was made an "honorary sheikh" by one of the larger tribes of Iraq. He states that "when word spread among the

sheikhs that I had accepted this honor, many expressed their animosity. One prominent sheikh bluntly said to me, 'You are like a sheikh-of-sheikhs in this country. Why would you accept to be identified with one specific tribe over the rest?'"

22. SGT Christopher Alexander, CPT Charles Kyle, MAJ William S. McCallister, "The Iraqi Insurgent Movement," Unpublished Paper, 14 November 2003, 19-20. In one recent episode, the sheikh of the Albu Alwan tribe near Ramadi complained to a U.S. commander about a rival tribe's domination of the local council, exclaiming, "We are a bigger tribe than they are, so how can a majority be ruled by a minority? Where is democracy?" Yaroslav Trofimov, "To Find Peace in Sunni Triangle, Talk to the Sheikhs," *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2003, A1.

23. Lawrence noted this tendency among the tribal warriors of the Arab Revolt: "We could not mix or combine tribes, because of their distrusts; nor could we use one in the territory of another." T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Doubleday, 1926), 338.

24. Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (New York: Vantage Press, 1986), 52. According to Chatty, "Arab life is filled with interpersonal rivalry, tribal feuds...family and village quarrels...and intergroup hostility.... Politeness is a means of maintaining enough distance to prevent aggressive tendencies from becoming actual. Hospitality and generosity are means of demonstrating friendliness while warding off expected aggression. Such measures as excessive politeness (a form of avoidance) or hospitality (a form of ingratiation in a situation where intimacy cannot be avoided) appears at times to be absolutely necessary if social life is to be maintained."

25. Michael M. Ripinsky, "Middle Eastern Kinship as an Expression of a Culture-Environment System," *The Muslim World* 58 (1968), 225-241. The Arabs—and Iraqis in particular—have among the highest rates of endogamy in the world (though rates vary by country, socioeconomic class, and religion). While reliable data is hard to come by, rates of endogamy for the entire region are believed to be between 10 to 15 percent, while in some tribal groups, they may exceed 70 percent. Eickelman, 175-178; Fernea, 181-182; Salim, 48-49; A. H. Bitlles, "A Background Summary of Consanguineous Marriage," <<http://consang.net/images/dd/01AHBWeb3.pdf>>.

26. McFate, *Memory of War*, forthcoming.

27. Fernea, 88-89, 112; Salim, 51-54. In some parts of the Arab world, the payment of blood money was prolonged interminably to create an open debt, thereby perpetuating the relationship and ensuring the maintenance of peace between formerly aggrieved parties. Immediate payment of the debt would have signified the end of the relationship and the resumption of hostilities. Emrys L. Peters, "Some Structural Aspects of the Feud Among the Camel-Herding Bedouin of Cyrenaica," *Africa* 37, no. 3 (July 1967): 266-267.

28. Fernea, 90; Peters, 277-279. Not always, however. Salim reports that the entire Beni Isad tribe "rose up as one man" to participate in a war against a neighboring tribe in 1945. Salim, 43.

29. Fernea, 110-111, 119; Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crisis: Saddam Hussein's Strategy for Survival* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), 28-29.

30. Fernea, 110-111; Salim, 43.

31. McFate, *Memory of War*, forthcoming.

32. This pattern was first noted by the medieval Arab thinker Ibn Khaldun: "The Bedouins are the least willing of the nations to subordinate themselves to each other, as they are rude, proud, ambitious, and eager to be the leaders. Their individual aspirations rarely coincide. But when there is religion (among them) through prophethood or sainthood, then they have some restraining influence in themselves. The qualities of haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and unite." Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 120.

33. Andrew J. Shryock, "Popular Genealogical Nationalism: History Writing and Identity among the Balqa Tribes of Jordan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 2 (April 1995), 346.

34. David Kilcullen, "Religion and Insurgency," *Small Wars Journal: SWJ Blog*, 12 May 2007, <www.smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/05/religion-and-insurgency/>.

35. The author would like to thank Montgomery McFate for this insight.

36. Batatu, 71-72; Fernea, 101. As an expression of this territoriality, Bedouins in times past would often extract tribute (*khawa*—literally "brotherhood" money) from travelers and caravans passing through their tribal domain. Glubb, 60.

37. Chatty, 44.

38. Lars Wahlin, "Inheritance of Land in the Jordanian Hill Country," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994): 77-78.

39. Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 4-6.

40. Wahlin, 80.

41. Agence France Presse (AFP), "Competition for Iraq Oil Contracts Spurs Tribal Clashes," 22 January 2004.

42. Baram, "Neo-Tribalism," 1-31.

43. In the past, sheikhs were also responsible for collecting taxes, registering births and deaths, and arresting military deserters. Batatu, 63-152; Fernea, 105-117, 131, 133-136, 143-145; and Lancaster, 80-84, 87-90, 92-94, 114-115, 127-131. See also Gabriel Baer, "The Village Shaykh, 1800-1950," in *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 30-61, and Paul Dresch, "The Position of Shaykhs Among the Northern Tribes of Yemen," *Man* (N.S.) 19, 31-49.

44. Batatu, 63-152; Fernea, 105-117, 133-135; Lancaster, 80-96; Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq," 3-4.

45. Lancaster, 96; Chatty, 55.

46. Glubb, 159.

47. Anthony Shadid, "In a Land Without Order, Punishment is Power," *Washington Post*, 22 October 2006, A1.

48. See, for instance, Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 161-181.

49. Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*, London: IISS, 2004, Adelphi Paper 364, 28-31; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil & Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 207-208.

50. Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq," 6-7, 12-13.

51. CPT Travis Patriquin, "The Ba'ath Party and the Insurgency in Tal Afar," *Military Review* (January-February 2007): 22-24.

52. Rory Stewart, *The Prince of the Marshes* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2006), 219-220. For many sheikhs, coalition contracts are their lifeblood. In the words of Sheikh Hamid Rashid Mahenna of the Albu Alwan tribe from Ramadi, "A sheikh has no power without contracts. If I do not provide for my people, they will not cooperate with me." Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "In a Hostile Land, Try Whatever Works," *Washington Post*, 23 December 2003, A1.

53. Shadid, A1.

54. Mark Kukis, "Turning Iraq's Tribes Against Al-Qaeda," *Time*, 26 December 2006.

55. See, for instance: Amatzia Baram, "Victory in Iraq," A25; Andrew Krepinovich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (September-October 2005): 87-104; Kenneth Pollack, "Five Ways to Win Back Iraq," *New York Times*, 1 July 2005, A17; Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 38, 42-48; King, 178; Lieutenant Colonel Richard D. Welch, "Building Cultural Bridges: A Year in Iraq with the First Cavalry Division," Personal Experience Monograph, U.S. Army War College, 23 March 2006; McCallister et al., "The Iraqi Insurgent Movement," unpublished paper.

56. Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 33.

57. Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris: The Al-Sadr Uprising and the Governing of Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 104. Published polls are consistent with Etherington's CPA polling data. See: International Republican Institute, *Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion*, July 24-August 2, 2004, 27, 33; IRI, *Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion*, September 24-October 4, 2004, 42; IRI, *Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion*, November 24-December 5, 2004, 37, 38; IRI, *Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion*, December 26-January 7, 2005, 40, <www.iri.org/mena/iraq.asp>.

58. King, 161-166, 180; Operational Leadership Experiences Interview with LTC Paul Yingling, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 22 September 2006, and; Tulin Daloglu, "Freeing Jill Carroll: Iraqi Sheik Negotiated Behind the Scenes," *Washington Times*, 5 April 2006, 19.

59. Martin Rodriguez, Andrew Farnster, and John Bott, *Constructive Engagement: A Proven Method for Conducting Stability and Support Operations*, Association of the United States Army Institute of Land Warfare, Landpower Essay No. 07-1, February 2007, 2-3, 5; MAJ Morgan Mann, "The Power Equation: Using Tribal Politics in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2007): 104, 106; Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Iraq, A Perilous Alliance with Former Enemies," *Washington Post*, 4 August 2007, A1, A12.

60. Several observers have noted the apparent generation gap between youthful insurgents and their elders. For instance, LTC Ross A. Brown, who commanded a unit south of Baghdad, stated that "a trusted sheik told me that he could influence the perspective of those 40 years and older, but had very little influence over younger tribe members. Since the vast majority of those I was fighting were younger than 40, the sheiks couldn't help me much." LTC Ross A. Brown, "Commander's Assessment: South Baghdad," 29. Observers noted a similar loss of control over the actions of young people by their parents and elders during the first Palestinian intifada (1987-1993).

61. For more on these previous efforts, see Andrew Tilghman, "Marines Entangled in Disarming Situation in Husaybah," *Stars and Stripes*, 21 November 2005; Kirk Semple, "U.S. Forces Rely on Local Informants in Ferreting Rebels in West Iraq," *New York Times*, 10 December 2005; John Ward Anderson, "Iraqi Tribes Strike Back at Insurgents," *Washington Post*, 7 March 2006, A12; and Ann Scott Tyson, "In a Volatile Region of Iraq, U.S. Military Takes Two Paths," *Washington Post*, 15 September 2006, A1. For more on the Anbar Awakening, see Sarah Childress, "Retaking Ramadi: All the Sheik's Men; U.S. Commanders Are Hoping Tribal Levies Can Help Fill The Ranks of Anbar's Police and Tackle Al Qaeda," *Newsweek*, 18 December 2006, 43.

62. Elaine M. Grossman, "Tribal Engagement" Has Mixed Record of Ups and Downs in Iraq," *Inside the Pentagon*, 7 June 2007.

63. Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Investigates the Hidden Side of Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), xi, 13, 205.

64. Congressional testimony of David M. Walker, *Rebuilding Iraq: Governance, Security, Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges*, Government Accountability Office Report No. 06-697T, 25 April 2006, 12-13. See also *Report to Congress of the Special Inspector General for Iraq*, 30 July 2006, 27.

65. James Baker and Lee Hamilton, *The Way Forward—A New Approach: The Iraq Study Group Report*, (New York, Vintage Books: 2006), 84.

66. AFP, "The Fight for Oil Pipelines in Iraq," 12 September 2003; AFP, "Competition for Iraq Oil Contracts Spurs Tribal Clashes," 22 January 2004; Robert Collier, "Ethnically Diverse Oil Zone a Tinderbox," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 June 2004; Adam Handelsman, "BlastGard International, Inc. Completes Successful Oil Pipeline Test," BlastGard International Press Release, 6 December 2004, <www.blastgardintl.com/pdfs/pipeline_test_results.pdf>; Roger Brown, "Iraq's Pipeline War," *World Pipelines* 5, no. 5, (May 2005): 28-31; Samah Samad, "Tribes Accused of Iraq Oil Protection Racket," *Environment News Service*, 10 June 2005; Radio Free Iraq, "Judge Describes Corruption Case Against Lawmaker," RFE/RL Interview, 8 February 2006; and Philip Shishkin, "Pipeline Thefts Cripple Iraqi Oil Production," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 May 2007, A1, A13.

67. Naylor, 8-11.

68. William H. McMichael, "Odierno: Negotiations with Insurgents Underway," *Army Times*, 11 June 2007, 10; Thomas E. Ricks, "Deals in Iraq Make Friends of Enemies," *Washington Post*, 20 July 2007, A1; Raghavan, A12.

69. Naylor, 9-10.

70. Joshua Partlow and John Ward Anderson, "Tribal Coalition in Anbar Said to Be Crumbling," *Washington Post*, 11 June 2007, A11.

71. Rodriguez et al., 1, 6. Similarly, SGT Mounir Elkharni noted, based on observations

during his time in Iraq, that "the most effective [units] were always the ones with close ties to the local community." "Dealing with the Iraqi Populace: An Arab-American Soldier's Perspective," *Military Review* (January-February 2007): 113.

72. This estimate is based on the author's interviews with several dozen Soldiers and Marines who have served in Iraq.

73. The author was responsible for engagement in a Kurdish refugee camp along the border of Turkey and Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort (1991), and it was this experience that prompted his interest in tribal engagement.

74. See, for instance, late CPA senior advisor Ambassador Hume Horan's affirmation during a meeting with a large group of sheikhs in 2003 that U.S. forces came to Iraq as "occupiers," which provoked an angry response from the audience. King, 108-109. Horan was one of the U.S. foreign service's most knowledgeable and experienced Middle East hands, and while his statement may have been an accurate characterization of the status of coalition forces under international law, he probably should have known better than to have used a term so fraught with negative associations in the Arab world.

75. Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Fighting the War to Win the Peace in a Post-Saddam Iraq," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *PolicyWatch* No. 739, 2 April 2003, <www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1617>.

76. Lawrence, 275.

77. According to a Special Forces team sergeant in Iraq: "These insurgencies are defeated by personal relationships." Ann Scott Tyson, "In a Volatile Region of Iraq, U.S. Military Takes Two Paths," *Washington Post*, 15 September 2006, A1.

78. Elkharni, 111.

79. King, 82-83, 90-91, 121-123; Rodriguez, et al., 5.

80. Rodriguez, et al., 2.

81. Thomas E. Ricks, "Tom Ricks's Inbox," *Washington Post*, 29 April 2007, B03.

82. Fernea, 80-81, 97-104, 192-193; Wahlin, 57-84; Lars Wahlin, "How Long has Land Been Privately Held in Northern Al-Balqa', Jordan?" *Geografiska Annaler*, 76 B:1 (1994), 33-49; and A. Granott, *The Land System in Palestine: History and Structure* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), 185-212.

83. The strip parcel system should not be confused with strip farming, which is an anti-erosion measure. See Granott, 208-212.

84. See, for instance, the hamlet north of Yusufiya in north Babil province at 33° 00' 41.52" N by 44° 22' 24.47" E; the village outside of Rumaytha in al-Muthanna province at 31°28' 20.42" N by 45°19' 07.90" E; the community on the outskirts of Habbaniyah in al-Anbar province at 33°25' 37.72" N by 43°31' 33.52" E; the community just outside of Taji in Salah al-Din province at 33°38' 14.70" N by 44°21' 20.56" E; and the village just north of Balad in Salah al-Din province at 34°04' 50.98" N by 44°05' 22.28" E.

85. Wahlin, "How Long has Land been Privately Held?" 39; Mats Widgren, "Reading Property into the Landscape," *Norwegian Journal of Geography* 60: 57-64; Parker Shipton, "Lineage and Locality as Antithetical Principles in East African Systems of Land Tenure," *Ethnology* 23, no. 2 (April 1984): 125.

86. Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, and CPT Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review* (September-October 2006): 8-15; Robert M. Perito, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq*, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 185, March 2007.

87. COL Christopher Costa, "Phoenix Rises Again: HUMINT Lessons for Counter-insurgency Operations," *Defense Intelligence Journal* 15, no. 1 (2006): 137.

88. King, 110.

89. See, for instance, Patriquin, 22-24; and Susan B. Glasser, "Sheik's Appointment by British Triggers Protests and Accusations," *Washington Post*, 11 April 2003, A29.

90. See, for instance, Ann Scott Tyson, "In a Volatile Region of Iraq, U.S. Military Takes Two Paths," *Washington Post*, 15 September 2006, A1.

91. In Arab society, trusted and respected outsiders—even non-Arabs—may be called upon to mediate and resolve feuds. See, for instance, Ginat, 10-12, 32-37, 126-127; Wilfred Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (London: Penguin, 1967), 213-219.

92. The author of an article offering guidelines for hiring Bedouin tribesmen for government conservation and development projects cautions that "it should not be assumed that an intertribal legal structure exists [sic] for allocating [jobs] fairly, or that tribal or clan leaders will decide in a just fashion which people within the kinship group should get those jobs. Indigenous leaders may not always act appropriately on behalf of their constituents, and may choose their own sons or other people to whom they owe favors. Ironically, the best arbitrator may sometimes come from outside, with project personnel in the best position to make fair decisions. This process requires careful diplomacy and explanation, especially to indigenous leaders, to ensure that local sensibilities are acknowledged. In [the case in question] a park ranger, specifically hired for the task because he had anthropological training, conducted interviews with community guard candidates, selected them, and had tribal leaders approve the choices. This process worked with few complications and had the locals' approval because they acknowledged that their own institutions could not deal fairly with the problem." Joseph J. Hobbs, "Guidelines for the Involvement of Nomadic Pastoralists in Conservation and Development Efforts," in Dawn Chaty, ed., *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 796-797.

93. For a fascinating discussion of the debate among British administrators regarding the role of the sheikhs and the tribes in Mandatory Iraq, which in many ways prefigured the contemporary debate, see Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 101-129. See also Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 161-181.

94. Alois Musil, *Arabia Deserta* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1927), 22.

95. Musil, *Arabia Deserta*, 77; and Alois Musil, *The Northern Hegaz* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926), 73-74.

96. Musil, *Arabia Deserta*, 26-29.

97. Musil, *Arabia Deserta*, 275, 299-300; Musil, *The Northern Hegaz*, 117-118.

98. Musil, *Arabia Deserta*, 120; Alois Musil, *Northern Negd* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928), 167-168.

99. Louise E. Sweet, "Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouins: A Mechanism of Ecological Adaptation," *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 5, Part 1 (October 1965): 1139.