DETENTION OPERATIONS, BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, and COUNTERINSURGENCY

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INFLUENCING THE POPULATION is critical in a counterinsurgency, and the detainee population in Iraq represents a particularly salient demographic in that endeavor. Can an Iraqi detainee's extremist behavior be influenced and modified during detention, thereby making him a lesser threat to coalition forces upon release?[1] This question is crucial for Iraq's future. The lengthy insurgency has resulted in a large number of detainees, and of those who are still being held captive, many have extremist backgrounds. If enough of them can be influenced to adopt positive attitudes toward coalition forces and the Iraqi government, and they return as constructive members of their villages and social networks, the cumulative effects would help tremendously in ensuring long-term national stability.

In Iraq, 160,000 people have been through the detention process, and we estimate that each detainee has a network that includes approximately 100 other Iraqi citizens.[2] As a result, detainee experiences under America's care and custody may influence up to 16 million of Iraq's 26 million inhabitants. To see the potential future effects of current detention operations, one need only recall that many former detainees such as Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Daniel Ortega, and Jomo Kenyatta became important national leaders after their release from custody.

In the past, military practitioners and academics alike did not regard detainee operations as a legitimate subject for study in counterinsurgency, but the Army now regards the enlightened treatment of Iraq's detainee population as an integral part of successful counterinsurgency operations. Academics and military professionals, in literature and doctrine, have examined the problems of detention, but they have viewed them as outside the realm of operations. The normal perspective is that of the legal and moral necessity of collateral military duties tangential to operations, duties that sometimes lead to negative consequences. Notably, the Abu Ghraib incident emotionalized

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PHOTO: Sailors from U.S. Navy Provisional Detainee Battalion 3 stand watch at the Theater Internment Facility (TIF), 7 May 2007. Approximately 20,000 security detainees are held at two TIFs in Iraq, with more than 15,000 held at Camp Bucca. (U.S. Navy, Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist, Jon McMillan)

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The characteristics of detention operations make it an ideal arena for combating an insurgency. Both guards and detainees "inside- the-wire" are captive audiences in contact with each other 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unfortunately, the Army's detainee counterinsurgency strategy (focused as it is today) is a relatively new development. It only began with Major General Douglas Stone's assumption of command of Task Force 134 in May 2007.[3] One has to draw conclusions from the data and information available with caution. Nevertheless, developing an appropriate and successful system of detainee reintegration and reconciliation can produce great benefits and lessons for future counterinsurgency campaigns.

With the capacity to hold more than 21,000 detainees, Camp Bucca is the largest internment facility currently supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. Camp Bucca leaders and Soldiers are working to modify the behavior of detainees so that when they reenter Iraqi society, they are no longer threats to the Iraqi government and coalition forces but rather agents of change for the future of Iraq.

Detention Strategy

In conventional warfare, opposing forces usually do not release their prisoners of war until combat ends. In counterinsurgency, however, the reintegration of detainees into the population should take place as soon as they are no longer a risk to society.

Task Force 134's current strategy regards detention facility operations as a legitimate part of America's overall counterinsurgency fight. The detention facility is not just a repository for those plucked from the "real" insurgency, but a legitimate arena for counterinsurgency actions. The task force has shifted detention operations from warehousing insurgents to engaging them. The strategy focuses on touching the human spirit and aligning detainee goals and aspirations with those of a peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

Task Force 134's motto for this strategy is "Fighting for victory from inside the wire." Victory means identifying and separating detainees who can become allied with the moderate Iraqis, effectively empowering moderate detainees to marginalize violent extremists, and providing momentum for reconciliation with Iraqi society.[4] Task Force 134's objectives are to—

- Ensure it meets all standards of care and custody.
- Determine if a detainee is an imperative security risk and if so, reduce the risk.
- Replace destructive ideologies.
- Release detainees when they are no longer a threat and unlikely to become recidivists.
- Identify irreconcilables.
- Defeat any insurgency within the internment facility.[5]

Moderate Iraqi detainees can return to Iraqi society and influence extremists toward less violent action.

Standards of care and custody. Task Force 134's overarching goal is to meet all standards of care and custody in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and the American creed that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. From a real-politik perspective, success prevents detention operations from aiding the enemy. Historically, Abu Ghraib and North Vietnam's treatment of American prisoners of war are examples of detention operations that significantly damaged the overall war effort of the party holding detainees.

The current U.S. strategy goes beyond simply ensuring that detainees are treated humanely. It recognizes the detainees' cultural and religious norms in Iraq, and detainee diets, prayer times, and influential hierarchies. During Ramadan, food service accommodates fasting and detainee leaders are able to move about without handcuffs.

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Determine security risk status. Detention operations include identifying and separating moderates from extremists and providing the moderates with vocational skills and education to decrease the likelihood of their rejoining the insurgency. This strategy does not assume insurgents are necessarily extremists. Initial studies of detainees indicate that most of them engage in insurgent activity for monetary reasons, money being more important than nationalism and fear of retribution as a motive for insurgent activity.

The threat that the insurgents pose does not reside in some Osama bin Laden-esque desire to kill infidels. It is a function of illiteracy, financial burdens, and skewed religious beliefs. Current statistics indicate a 50 percent unemployment rate and a 31 percent male illiteracy rate in Iraq.[6] As a consequence of the former, financial difficulties make Iraqis vulnerable to threats and intimidation, and as a consequence of the latter, many Iraqis have never read the Quran and rely on others to interpret its commandments.

The key to successful detention operations is timely assessment of both the security risk a detainee poses and his readiness to return to society as a positive agent for change. Detaining a person too long can be as detrimental as releasing him too early because a detention facility can become a "Jihad University" for detainees who are not already insurgents.

A multi-national force review committee assesses a detainee's risk status and recommends release or continued internment. This process provides detainees their first opportunity to present their side of the story after capture. They come before a panel of three military members. The panel evaluates a detainee's testimony and the contents of his file and recommends whether to release him, place him in the Theater Internment Facility Reconciliation Center programs at the detention facility, or continue his internment. As of November 2007, the release recommendation rate was 40 percent. This process began in mid-July 2007. Before then, the detainee did not appear before a panel.

The committee is not a court seeking to determine guilt. Its purpose is to determine whether detainees represent a continuing security risk. The word "continued" is used deliberately here. It is possible to have strong evidence of previous insurgent activity and yet conclude to release a detainee from internment based on his behavioral changes during detention. The challenge is to separate fact from fiction and determine the detainee's motives for his actions and the likelihood of his repetition of the behavior. The board's decision is not final; higher authority must approve it. The process has validity. Task Force 134 noted a marked decrease in the number of detainees released and then later recaptured.[7]

Given the chaotic nature of the battlefield and the corruption that can and often does take place during an insurgency, a process to distinguish between those who should be held and those who should not is a necessity. In the chaos of war, people who do not need to be detained often are, simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. In addition, coalition forces often rely on the testimony of local citizens in deciding whom to detain, but unfortunately, this testimony sometimes turns out to be problematic. Whether due to tribal disputes, religious differences, or other sources of tension, false accusations are inevitable. The release board identifies detainees who do not need to remain in detention, including those who were not actually in the insurgency at the time of their capture but might join it if they spend much more time in detention.

Establishing Alliances and Empowering Moderates

Establishing an alliance with moderates is not easy. Doing so implies establishing a kind of pact between coalition forces, moderate detainees, and moderate community leaders. Currently, parts of the strategy are in place, but others remain in the planning phase. We build alliances with detainee leaders in the internment facilities. Chiefs meet with the military commander and other military leaders, the tribal leader speaks for the group, and the guard force and detainee chiefs develop important *wasta* (influence) with each other.

Three things have to be true to build alliances and empower moderates. First, moderate detainees must have the strength to free themselves from extremist influences and liberate others in their social network from extremist influence. Increased membership in the moderate camp has culminated in "awakenings" in several Iraqi provinces, as well as in Camp Bucca. In October 2007, detainees in Compound 2 at Camp Bucca presented the guard force a letter declaring their awakening. The letter read, in part, "We believe that if we want to fulfill our aims, we should wake up . . . We must work together, side by side to reach our noble aims of freedom, justice."

U.S. Army, PFC Amie J. McMillan

Detainees attend a class on civics at the internment facility in Camp Bucca, Iraq, 8 April 2008.

Next, moderates must take the opportunity to marginalize extremists. Such marginalization has broad implications. Of course, the moderates must be willing and capable, and they must have the knowledge and skills to perform the task and the self-confidence to engage with extremists despite their fear of violent reprisals. To empower moderates, we must determine if their beliefs and attitudes are in line with our strategy. If so, we can give them the tools necessary to affect the larger majority. The hammer in the toolbox is education. Education extends from religious discussion to learning the basic skills of reading, writing, math, civics, and English. Although the focus is on moderate leaders, others can contribute, too.

Finally, the detainees need to be willing to change their behavior and participate in Internment Facility Reconciliation Center activities to obtain release recommendations from release boards. A combination of education, vocational training, and religious discussion helps integrate detainees back into Iraqi society.

Empowering moderates gives them the opportunity to help marginalize extremists.

A number of services are currently available at the reconciliation centers, although many are under development and the system cannot handle all of the enrolled detainees. Work details provide a means of paying detainees for their labor, and the money they earn goes into their property accounts and is either paid to them in cash when they leave or distributed to family members during visitations. In a society where unemployment may be the number-one recruitment incentive for the insurgents, this policy shows detainees and their families that America is committed to their well-being. It also rewards cooperation with the authorities.

Because of the reconciliation center process, several changes have occurred. To gain favor with future release boards, detainees are now volunteering their time and effort to help beautify their areas. Detainee uprisings and riots have virtually ceased. The cycle of positive behavior is self-reinforcing; additional educational and developmental opportunities and vocational training and programs are the rewards for good behavior.

The Strategy's Effects

"Winning hearts and minds" is a hackneyed and historically dubious slogan. U.S. experiences in international conflicts suggest confidence about winning hearts and minds has often been misplaced.[8] The current strategy seeks to modify behavior through the humane treatment of detainees, educational and vocational training, and opportunities for detainees to present their points of view. The intent of the strategy is behavior modification both in internment facilities and in Iraqi society. The objective does not reflect a vague hope to win hearts and minds in a popularity contest, but a desire to promote commonalities and goal alignment between the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government, and the United States. One could argue that this approach is authentic in that it accounts for moral realities. But this is an initial assessment

of the strategy, and as time passes and more data becomes available, the real picture will be revealed.

Violent behavior reduced. The process appears to have produced a marked decrease in violence inside the internment facility. "I don't get two to three calls in the middle of the night anymore like I did back in the spring [of 2007]," says the Vigilance Theater Internment Facility commander, referring to the drop in detainee misconduct.[9] Echoing this point, Sailors who guarded extremist compounds for nine months during the heavy rioting of early 2007 reported all was calm during the second half of the year.

In the short term, good behavior earns the rewards of extra privileges, and a good observation report remains in the detainee's file indefinitely. In the long term, release boards evaluate good observation reports and disciplinary reports to determine if detainees are an "imperative threat to the security of multi-national forces, the Iraqi people, or the Iraqi government."[10] Detainees are recommended for release when the board determines they are no longer an imperative threat. One of the questions the release board asks is "Have you disobeyed the rules while you have been detained?" The answer, whatever it is, has a deterrent effect because the individual shares his experiences with the rest of the detainees in his compound and learns that the facility documents all misconduct and that this affects his likelihood of release in the future.

The history of Abu Ghraib casts a shadow on detention operations, and, of course, everyone detained is, as the name implies, a "detainee," not an adjudged criminal. To ensure that the camp follows international laws and norms, punishments are well defined and carefully applied. Punishments at Camp Bucca are a complex subject. United States forces have had time to learn about Iraqi culture and reflect on the effects achieved by various punishments.

For example, commanders increasingly direct their forces to use interpersonal communication skills rather than force to remedy misconduct. This style of dealing with misconduct closely mirrors a recommendation in a recent RAND study, which concluded, "The use of force can reinforce [progression from frustration to faith to terror] by validating the argument that the ummah and Islamic purity are being attacked by a physically stronger power and therefore require heroic jihadis to defend them. Interfering with the progression from Muslim to martyr is thus better done with brainpower than firepower."[11]

This willingness to avoid using kinetic force is evident during guard-force responses to major disturbances and riots. Increasingly, the guard force will maintain vigilance over the situation and only engage in discrete, directed uses of non-lethal force. As a result, detainees in other compounds rarely join in the fray and those in the affected compound have less reason to join the ranks of disgruntled protesters.

In the spring of 2007, Compound 2 rioted with a very high participation rate among the detainees, and two adjacent compounds rioted in support. However, when Compound 2 initiated another riot in the fall of 2007, less than 10 percent of detainees within the compound participated in it, and no other compound joined in. When the guard force uses force to deal with an uprising, it must apply it professionally and decisively so as to leave no confusion about who the winner will be in a physical confrontation.

Guard actions affect detainee attitudes in the long run. For example, a guard who uses force to achieve an objective may well promote the very response he wants to eradicate (i.e., aggression). On the other hand, a guard that applies logic and reason to resolve a situation is likely to reinforce logic and reason as a desired behavior. Soldiers should avoid both applying excessive force and giving the impression of weakness.

Of course, Arabic culture respects a certain degree of strict authority. Muslim scholar Bernard Lewis comments on the centrality of physical force within Islam. Referring to the Islamic view towards Christendom, he says, "In principle, there was of course a permanent state of war."[12] Lewis also talks of the "general Arab propensity for fighting."[13] Culturally, physical force is more acceptable to Arabs than Americans think it is. Raphael Patai notes that

…a guard who uses force to achieve an objective may well promote the very response he wants to eradicate…

the frequency and severity of Arab corporal punishment noticeably exceeds American standards.

Recidivism rate declining. The average recidivism rate for prisoners in U.S. jails is 51.8 percent. The rate for those detainees released since the strategy's inception in June 2007 is 0.1 percent. This compares to a 1.2 percent rate for all of 2007 and a 7.7 percent rate for the three years before that.[14]

The passage of time is one reason for the dramatic difference in rates; the longer a person has been released from detention, the less likely of his being detained again.

Opportunities

This section discusses well-positioned levers that coalition forces can use to facilitate the counterinsurgency strategy inside the wire.

Guard force. An intra-compound dynamic exists between the guard force and detainees, and it plays an important role in counterinsurgency. Most detainees never really get a chance to know Americans. The detainee roll-up and interrogation process provides only a single impression of America (i.e., how it engages in warfighting).

Although the guard force is made up of combatants, the opportunity exists for a more balanced interaction with Iraqis. During detention, U.S. guards are likely the first real Americans the detainees have encountered on a constant basis.

The relationship between the guard force and detainees is quite dynamic. Many guards used to refer to the mission as "babysitting." This notion may not be far from the truth; however, a guard does much more than just care for detainees' basic necessities. Human beings are social and, given the amount of time guards and detainees spend together, relationships understandably emerge. For military leaders, the relationships should remain professional.

Another aspect to consider is guard force military specialties. Leaders may want to keep front-line combat units out of detention operations. Having experienced the brutality of war, front-line units may naturally choose a "firm but firm" instead of a "firm but fair" inside-the-wire approach. On the other hand, the U.S. Navy's performance has been consistently strong, says Task Force 134's commander Colonel James Brown.[15]

The language barrier between detainees and guard force members adds to the complexity of counterinsurgency. Recognizing this issue, the Army has required Soldiers deploying to Iraq to attend language-learning laboratories prior to deployment. However, very few people can learn a language in the short amount of time allocated. This makes it vital to have trustworthy interpreters.

Visitation. Impressions of the events that took place at Abu Ghraib persist, worldwide. Fortunately, Iraqis are more likely to believe what they see in person than what they see in the media. Allowing detainees to continue to see their families and friends provides hope. They also see Americans treating their family members with dignity and respect. The visitation program touches Iraq's most disenfranchised demographic, so

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Navy Provisional Detainee Battalion Chaplain Anne Krekelberg plays with an Iraqi child as he waits at the Camp Bucca Visitors Center, 27 March 2007.

seeing such attitudes from occupiers has immense, positive implications.

The new "Artist Colony" has been a big hit with detainees. The detainees make stuffed animals and select one for each of their children. During visitation, the detainee is able to give his child the stuffed animal. The impact on the detainee is significant. He is able to "provide" for his children while detained. The impact has been equally significant for the family members. Two of the most telling comments from family members have been, "This changed my opinion about Americans" and "Everything we see outside is armed, angry Americans…Now, we see what the Americans are truly trying to accomplish while trying their best to make our children happy."[16]

In January 2008, American Soldiers and Airmen built a new detainee visitation center. Detainees completely tiled the facility, painted a mural on the side of the building, and installed playgrounds for children and a large gazebo for visiting families.

One of the brilliant innovations in visitation allowed detainees to give their families the cash they had in their possession when apprehended. The absence of a banking system in Iraq means that many families carry their life savings on their person, so allowing detainees to "repatriate" their money to their families shows that U.S. forces have actually safeguarded their money for them and care enough to allow the families to get access to it. The program at Camp Bucca places the family in the center of the engagement and reconciliation process.

Communication

Being able to communicate successfully is the most important skill for effective behavior modification. To affect behavior and change attitudes, one must be able to communicate a message the detainee can understand and acknowledge.

The Department of Defense has developed several programs to increase the linguistic and cultural skills of deploying forces. Even so, the linguistic and cultural skills of uniformed members have not reached the desired levels.

One way of increasing information flow is to maximize technology. Plans are currently in place to acquire large stadium-style display screens and to generate a periodic newsletter written by detainees for detainees. Both of these advances will increase information not otherwise known or acknowledged.

… Camp Bucca places the family in the center of the dynamic engagement and reconciliation process.

Yet, the radio will likely remain the most efficient mass medium due to the high illiteracy rate of most detainees. We do not know how much information is being correctly interpreted and understood during one-on-one information exchanges with compound chiefs, religious leaders, and detainee interpreters. Technology can help maximize educational opportunities, religious discussions, and other behavior modification programs.

We must acknowledge the nuances of non-verbal communications in a detainee population of many ethnicities, languages, tribes, and cultures. Riots, in fact, are a form of communication. Arguably, a riot is the communication forum of last resort.

Personal relationships are vital if competing cultures are to embrace mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. While there are certainly extremists in the theater internment facilities, an appreciation of the full spectrum of communication opportunities is important. After the Multi-National Force Review Committee was established in mid-July 2007, reduced violence and fewer large disturbances suggested that quality communication was having a positive effect (i.e., that the review process opened up a dialogue between the capturing force and detainees).

Toward a Stable Iraq

Some think detention operations are only a sideshow where detainees and guards interact in a post-conflict space. This is a simplistic view that does not take into account the dynamic nature of the battlespace.

Camp Bucca, Iraq, has a proactive counterinsurgency strategy for detention operations. The strategy identifies detainees who no longer pose imperative threats, then educates and trains them, and subsequently releases them to return to their homes as "moderate missiles of the mind" who can marginalize extremists. We can marginalize extremist detainees who show an unwillingness to

change over time by keeping them in detention and confining them to areas where they are unable to influence moderates or former extremists moving toward moderation.

Such progress-oriented detention operations are central to reconciling former combatants, and we should use them for that purpose in future counterinsurgent campaigns. Detainee change does not come through brainwashing or indoctrination, but through the freedoms of basic education and vocational training. Detainee transformation (behavior modification) occurs as a result of first-rate medical care, culturally appropriate food, and the lifting of the human spirit by American guards, whom express the Nation's humanistic ideals through their words and deeds. Planting the seeds of change is a worthy endeavor in a society filled with hatred, fear, illiteracy, and poverty. ***MR***

NOTES

1. The authors think "behavior modification" is a more suitable term than "winning hearts and minds." America may fail at winning hearts and minds, but could conceivably succeed in modifying behavior until hatred against America will not manifest itself in terrorist acts or other destabilizing behaviors.

2. Major General Douglas Stone, Commander, Task Force 134, United States Marine Corps, comments made at a leadership conference, Camp Bucca, Iraq, 10 November 2007.

3. It is interesting to note that Major General Stone is as atypical a leader of detention operations as his strategy is to the world of detention operations. He is a Marine, often touted as the service most willing to embrace small wars, filling a traditional Army position. He is a reservist rather than active duty officer. Having spent many years running successful businesses, he is a thinker with a doctorate in public administration.

4. Task Force 134, "Detention Operations Process" slide (2007).

5. Ibid.

6. Office of Management and Budget, "Iraq Relief and Reconstruction," 27 March 2003, <www.whitehouse.gov/omb/iraq_2.pdf>, 18 November 2007, 2; GEN Barry R. McCaffrey, U.S. Army (retired), "After Action Report—Visit Iraq and Kuwait 5-11 December 2007" (18 December 2007), 6.

7. Task Force 134, "Recapture Rate" slide (2007). In what may be termed "large," "unlimited," or "conventional" war, America has been somewhat successful in winning hearts and minds through the continued, punishing application of lethal force as occurred in World War I and II. In the accepted usage of the phrase, though, winning the hearts and minds is meant to occur through the use of what Joseph Nye has termed American "soft power," set in distinct opposition to the continued, punishing application of lethal force of large wars. In "small" wars such as in Iraq, winning hearts and minds has proved much more elusive for America, as we have seen in Vietnam, Somalia, Haiti, and the Global War on Terrorism. "Winning hearts and minds" is not a practical vision for fighting insurgencies. However, modifying behavior is.

8. LTC Patrick Williams, Commander, 705th Military Police Battalion, discussion with the author, Camp Bucca, Iraq, 28 October 2007.

9. Multi-National Force Review Committee, "Committee President Binder," 2007.

10. David Gompert, "Heads We Win: The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency (COIN)" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2007), 26.

11. Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141.

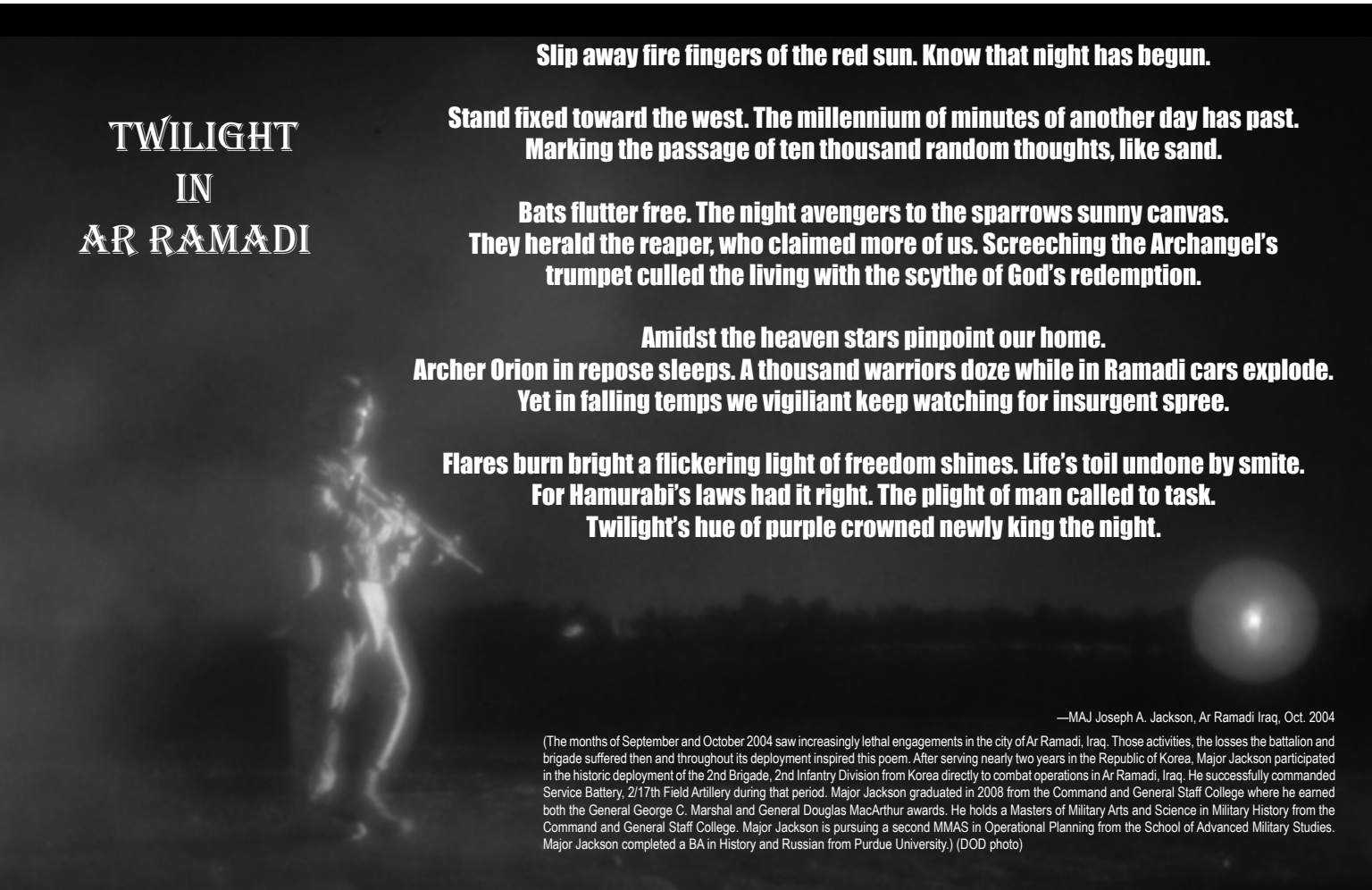
12. Ibid, 221; Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002) 27, 36.

13. Patrick Langan and David Levin, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice (2002), 1.

14. Task Force 134, "Recapture Rate" slide (2007).

15. COL James Brown, Commander Task Force Bucca, comments at various staff meetings, Camp Bucca, Iraq, November 2007.

16. Anonymous voluntary comments made by two Iraqi citizens to U.S. forces.



TWILIGHT IN AR RAMADI

Slip away fire fingers of the red sun. Know that night has begun.

**Stand fixed toward the west. The millennium of minutes of another day has past.
Marking the passage of ten thousand random thoughts, like sand.**

**Bats flutter free. The night avengers to the sparrows sunny canvas.
They herald the reaper, who claimed more of us. Screeching the Archangel's
trumpet culled the living with the scythe of God's redemption.**

**Amidst the heaven stars pinpoint our home.
Archer Orion in repose sleeps. A thousand warriors doze while in Ramadi cars explode.
Yet in falling temps we vigiliant keep watching for insurgent spree.**

**Flares burn bright a flickering light of freedom shines. Life's toil undone by smite.
For Hamurabi's laws had it right. The plight of man called to task.
Twilight's hue of purple crowned newly king the night.**

—MAJ Joseph A. Jackson, Ar Ramadi Iraq, Oct. 2004

(The months of September and October 2004 saw increasingly lethal engagements in the city of Ar Ramadi, Iraq. Those activities, the losses the battalion and brigade suffered then and throughout its deployment inspired this poem. After serving nearly two years in the Republic of Korea, Major Jackson participated in the historic deployment of the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Korea directly to combat operations in Ar Ramadi, Iraq. He successfully commanded Service Battery, 2/17th Field Artillery during that period. Major Jackson graduated in 2008 from the Command and General Staff College where he earned both the General George C. Marshal and General Douglas MacArthur awards. He holds a Masters of Military Arts and Science in Military History from the Command and General Staff College. Major Jackson is pursuing a second MMAS in Operational Planning from the School of Advanced Military Studies. Major Jackson completed a BA in History and Russian from Purdue University.) (DOD photo)