



# The Road to Reconciliation

## Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

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**I**RAQ HAS A COMPLEX BACKGROUND of ethnicities, religions, and tribes. In many cases, the differences between these groups have resulted in conflict, ranging from a reluctance to work together to open hostility and fighting. The process of reconciliation seeks to bridge these differences to ensure that groups can function alongside each other and underneath a legitimate, sovereign government.

After major conflicts, reconciliation can also refer to the process of incorporating fighting elements into a peace process. A thorough analysis of the “human terrain” is necessary to understand group interactions that facilitate successful reconciliation. Operations on this human terrain have become as critical as the tactical operations that characterized the early stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom, if not more so.

In northern Iraq, Sunni Arabs are the key target population group for reconciliation programs. They make up most of the local population, but were not represented in the government following a boycott of the 2005 elections by many Sunnis across the country. Sunni Arabs also make up the majority of the insurgent population, fighting for groups based in Islamic extremism or nationalism. For the new Iraqi government to succeed, all ethnic, sectarian, and cultural groups must be able to participate in and support the central government. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) open the possibility for reconciliation to these insurgent fighters.

### Reconciliation and Reintegration Models

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration refers to the process for collecting and disposing of weapons and ammunition, disbanding or transforming the opposing force, and assisting former combatants’ transition back into civil society. United Nations guidelines state that “disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants should take place in the earliest stages of the peace process.”<sup>1</sup> At the end of major combat operations in the first phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Republican Guard and much of the Iraqi military were disarmed and demobilized; however, reintegration proved to be more difficult. Rebuilding the Iraqi Security Forces continued at a slow rate, and many former military (and government) members were excluded

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PHOTO: Provincial Deputy Governor Haji Sattar, right, holds a rifle he received at a reintegration shura, or meeting, hosted by 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 7, Forward Operating Base Marjah, Afghanistan, 23 June 2010. (U.S. Marine Corps, CPL Justin D. Loyal)

from serving in the new government. This exclusion caused the new government to lose significant military expertise.

The UN concept for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration begins with a detailed disarmament plan, which includes measures for demonstrating transparency and accountability, a structured weapons management program that seeks to limit new weapons coming into the country, and security for former combatants. Demobilization is accomplished at secure cantonment sites that provide basic services while ex-combatants wait to be resettled. Reintegration programs assess the skills of ex-combatants, potential reconstruction plans, and funding available to create programs. Also required, and equally as challenging, are “significant changes in attitude on the part of the former combatants and the rest of the civilian population.”<sup>2</sup>

The enemy in the counterinsurgency environment, however, does not have a conventional, uniformed force that we can systematically disarm and demobilize. “Irregular armed groups and armed individuals” are targets for disarmament, but the widespread availability of weapons and ammunition in hidden caches or brought in from outside Iraq causes “incomplete disarmament.”<sup>3</sup> Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration is not a one-time discrete process, but a continuous pipeline with individuals at various stages on the path towards reintegration.

Amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration, also referred to as “AR2,” is an alternate approach to the reintegration process. The key difference between the AR2 method and DDR is that “amnesty must be in place as a foundation before reconciliation or reintegration can take place.”<sup>4</sup> It need not be unconditional, but is fundamental to the success of the other two phases. Analysis of the human terrain is again a key consideration, leading to “the discovery and understanding of the appropriate cultural narratives through which the aggrieved parties may frame their ability to reconcile.”<sup>5</sup>

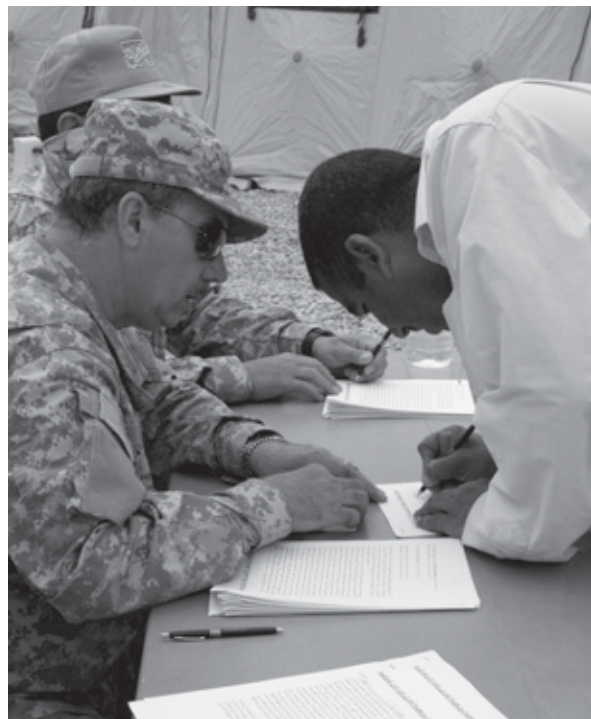
The initial approach to DDR in Afghanistan had similar human terrain conditions as Iraq (in terms of disparate religious and ethnic groups). The program did address amnesty (though not a general amnesty), and the government’s Disarmament and Reintegration Commission ran it under the name “Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups.”

The program sought to influence fighters to disarm voluntarily, as opposed to offering monetary incentives for weapons turn-in. It offered incentives for communities, but not to the illegal armed groups themselves, in order to avoid the perception that the program directly aided criminal activity.<sup>6</sup>

## Iraq

The 2006 Iraq study group report identified the absence of national reconciliation as “the fundamental cause of violence in Iraq.”<sup>7</sup> During the 2007 increase in coalition troops (commonly known as the “surge”) and the subsequent reduction in violence, the strengthening of both the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi government allowed a greater focus on reconciliation initiatives. The government, under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, established the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation to pursue reconciliation at the national level, primarily through outreach to tribal leaders.

Coalition forces spoke with government and tribal leaders at the local level to pursue reconciliation.<sup>8</sup>



(U.S. Army, PFC Kaimana-Ipulani Kalaui)

**Iraqi interpreters, left, instruct former detainees on how to complete a reconciliation form at Forward Operating Base Warrior, At Tamim Province, Iraq, 12 April 2008.**

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However, no formal or informal disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program ensued. In Anbar Province, local Sunni leaders created the Awakening Movement, which consisted of Sunni males from the area standing up against insurgent groups to protect their local interests. Coalition forces recognized the potential security impact and began to develop contracts with tribal leaders to secure critical infrastructure, leading to the creation of the Sons of Iraq (SoI) program.

While not a DDR program by any previous definition, former fighters who joined the SoI program voluntarily disarmed themselves by getting rid of illegal weapons. The program provided employment opportunities for Iraqis who wanted to secure their local areas and provide information on weapons caches and insurgent activity. In the beginning, coalition forces called these groups “concerned local nationals” or “concerned local citizens,” and many groups named themselves after their neighborhoods (such as the “Ghaziliyah Guardians” and the “Baqubah Popular Committees” in Diyala Province). Some groups even kept the names of the insurgent groups they no longer supported. These groups were instrumental in reducing insurgent violence in their areas by providing information on weapons caches and becoming a visible presence protecting their neighborhoods by working with Iraqi Security Forces and coalition forces. At the end of 2008, in recognition of their contributions, the Iraqi government agreed to take control of and pay the Sons of Iraq, and promised to transition them to employment in the Iraq Security Forces or government ministries in a nonsecurity role. Thus, former fighters who had voluntarily disarmed (in that they no longer fought against the legitimate government) simultaneously demobilized and reintegrated into Iraqi society.

However, a true disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program for those still involved

in insurgent activity remained elusive. While responsible for the northern provinces of Iraq, Task Force Iron developed a program to receive insurgent fighters who wanted to stop fighting and become noncombatants.<sup>9</sup> Fighters were required to provide their biometric data, as well as information related to insurgent activity or weapons caches, and then sign a pledge to cease attacks against the Iraqi government, Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi civilians, or coalition forces. In return, coalition forces ceased targeting these individuals as long as they did not return to insurgent activity. In some areas, the local government also agreed to honor the cessation of targeting. However, only the national government of Iraq can offer true amnesty, and this DDR program neither advertised nor promised amnesty to these fighters, only a cessation of targeting.<sup>10</sup>

### **Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures**

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration framework, as conceived in the Multi-National Division-North area, was locally based. However, it had the potential to serve as an example for a nationally endorsed initiative and offered an alternative to low-level fighters who the insurgents were coercing or intimidating into supporting insurgent activity. The program was adapted from existing disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs and initiatives that previous units had attempted. The increased stability and security in the area, coupled with a more capable Iraqi government and security force, set the conditions for a more successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program during Task Force Iron’s deployment.

This program was an integral part of the overall reconciliation effort, which included programs such as tribal engagement and the SoI. A “reconciliation cell” in each headquarters (down to at least the brigade level) helped coordinate processing of DDR petitioners and ensured that the program fit into the broader strategy for reconciliation as well as unit “effects” objectives. Although difficult to dedicate full-time resources to reconciliation (particularly at lower echelons, where available personnel are limited), the reconciliation cell works best with participation from the intelligence section and the (lethal and nonlethal) targeting section, as





(U.S. Army, LT Scott Marler)

**Iraqi men gather outside of the Balad Joint Security Station to enter into a cease-fire agreement as part of the reconciliation process, 10 June 2008.**

well as the information operations, engineering (or contract management), civil-military, and effects sections. Task Force Iron held reconciliation-specific coordination meetings every other week during its deployment, and the reconciliation cell participated in intelligence, effects, plans, and information operations working groups. When the DDR program began accepting petitioners, the scope of these meetings expanded to include tracking the program's progress; sharing best practices and tactics, techniques, and procedures for running screenings; and incorporating the local government and security forces into the screening and tracking process.

Also critical to building participation in this program was the coordinated use of information operations alongside traditional operations. Information operations influenced fighters to join the program and reduced their willingness to support the insurgency (or fear it). Conventional operations targeting insurgent fighters, followed by an increase of information about the DDR program, made it clear that if fighters did not give up their arms, Iraqi and coalition forces would continue to pursue them. This created the necessary motivation for fighters to seek reintegration.

## The Process

The DDR process begins with a former fighter declaring his intent to enter the program. In some cases, fighters appear at unit-run screenings advertised in the community. Other fighters choose to send interlocutors to assess the situation before coming in themselves. Many were afraid that the screenings were a trap; treating all of the participants respectfully made those fighters more comfortable with the idea of coming forward. This allowed more mid-level fighters, or those who had committed attacks against coalition or Iraqi forces in the past, to join the program without fear of detention.

At the initial screening, we asked fighters to provide basic demographic information and then briefed them on the stages of the process and what we expected them to do to remain under the cessation of targeting agreement. Alternatively, a fighter could present himself to a joint security station or joint coordination center outside of a planned event. Following a screening, we allowed him to return to his home. If he chose to participate in the program, he went to a second event to sign the pledge to cease attacks, renounce affiliation

with any insurgent groups, and begin providing information about insurgent activity.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration participants provide details about their involvement in insurgent networks or previous activities and turn in or give the locations of weapons caches, completing the “disarmament” phase of the program. After the pledge is signed, the demobilization begins. Participants return to their daily lives during a monitoring phase. Because they have submitted their names and biometric information, coalition and Iraqi forces can determine if they return to insurgent activity. As a condition of the agreement, if this occurs, the cessation of targeting is no longer valid, and participants can be subject to detainment by coalition forces or arrest by Iraqi forces (as long as the respective conditions are met). However, in most cases, participants continue to provide information or turn in weapons and periodically check in with the joint security station or coordination center.

During this phase, coalition forces worked both internally and with the local government to develop job placement opportunities for the “reintegration” phase. The desired end state for reintegration was to have the participant enrolled in a government employment or training program. In addition to employment with the various government ministries, the Iraqi government also developed a vocational training program designed to teach various technical skills. Literacy programs allowed participants to meet the minimum requirements for many government jobs in the security sector. Reintegration was the most difficult aspect of the program to implement; many challenges remain.

## Program and Reconciliation Challenges

Although the DDR contributed to a marked reduction in violence, it had a significant drawback—it was a coalition-led initiative. Local governments

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supported coalition efforts throughout our area of operations, but the lack of a nationally based initiative hindered the program from expanding as rapidly as it could have. Without national backing, the local Iraqi authority could only implement the cessation of targeting agreements with no guarantee that they would be honored across the rest of the country. While coalition databases facilitated the sharing of participant information among units, an agreement would not block a neighboring province from carrying out a valid arrest warrant, even if the participant had entered the program in his local area.

Although this situation never actually occurred, this conflict had the potential to affect the public’s perception of the program. The need to maintain the legitimacy of the Iraqi judicial process and rule of law remained the primary concern. For any reintegration program, “successful development depends on the ability of the host nation to reconcile with its past—determining whom to punish, whom to forgive, whom to exclude, and whom to accept within the new order of the state.”<sup>11</sup>

One key consideration was how to deal with fighters who admitted to conducting attacks against Iraqis or coalition forces. The Iraqi National Amnesty Law excluded crimes of “terrorism” from the law; however, the law only applied to those who were in the Iraqi prison system at the time the law was published. The lack of a defined amnesty framework for non-incarcerated fighters (the pool of potential DDR participants) meant there was no clear distinction on what actions were too serious to allow a cessation of targeting.

Coalition units dealt with this issue on a case-by-case basis. They allowed fighters linked to attacks that occurred far in the past and who had not participated in any recent activity to enter into the program, but not fighters with recent Iraqi arrest warrants. A true amnesty program, administered by the national Iraqi government, would drastically increase the number of eligible fighters by clearly defining the guidelines and promising a full amnesty for previous actions.

The lack of employment opportunities affected reintegration of DDR participants and hindered other reconciliation programs. The opportunity to receive education, training, job placement, or employment by the government is a tangible sign

that reintegration is complete. However, the general high unemployment and underemployment rates across Iraq, coupled with the slow expansion of government agencies (including security forces), reduced the number of available avenues for reintegration. Developing gainful employment opportunities was one of the key measures of success for the reconciliation effort.<sup>12</sup>

A lack of national support to the program exacerbated the problem of limited employment programs. Iraqi-led employment programs developed slowly and targeted SoI members moving out of contracted security positions. Despite the government's commitment to transition, the SoI saturated the work force.<sup>13</sup> DDR participants at the end of the demobilization phase did not have priority over SoI members, and this slowed the reintegration. As reintegration programs expand, more SoI and DDR participants will receive the skills they need to gain employment or utilize the various micro-grant and micro-loan programs to build their own businesses.

## Potential for New Reintegration Efforts in Afghanistan

With the drawdown of coalition forces in Iraq following the transition to Operation New Dawn,

additional attention and resources now focus on Afghanistan. The Afghan government has had limited success reintegrating members of illegal armed groups and reconciling with certain Taliban fighters. The goal of the "Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups" program was to disarm and reintegrate 150,000 militiamen, but "these goals have not been met in part because armed groups in the south fear the continued Taliban combat activity and refuse to disarm voluntarily."<sup>14</sup> In September 2007, Taliban leaders stated that they would reject offers from Afghan President Hamid Karzai to reconcile until "(1) all foreign troops leave Afghanistan; (2) a new 'Islamic' constitution is adopted; and (3) Islamic law is imposed."<sup>15</sup>

Changing tactics in Afghanistan might create the same opportunities for reconciliation that became available in Iraq. If the security situation improves and the local populace becomes more supportive of the central government, more fighters will be willing to participate in a DDR program. Because a government agency focused on reconciliation issues (the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission) already operates, a mechanism exists to obtain support from local security forces and the government and synchronize efforts. As long as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration



(U.S. Army, SSG Margaret Nelson)

Sixteen reconciliation petitioners returned for phase two processing during Operation Restore Peace VII, Forward Operating Base McHenry, Hawijah, Iraq, 1 June 2008.

are integrated into the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) reconciliation and information operations efforts, this program has the same possibility for success as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts in Iraq. “Sporadic . . . interim” efforts at the local level have already met with some success, but if the national government implements a more widespread program, ISAF and local leaders can leverage these early initiatives to increase participation.<sup>16</sup>

## A Unique Solution

Because it creates a key mechanism to give current fighters a way to declare their intent to reconcile,

the DDR program remains a unique solution for a unique counterinsurgency. The government’s support to the program, or to any reintegration program, demonstrates the intent to reconcile, and thus the two groups have the means to cease conflict and bring former fighters back into society. Although a national amnesty framework can be one way to begin this process, the coalition-initiated DDR program showed that the potential for reconciliation did exist and could significantly reduce violence from insurgent groups. As with all agreements, both parties must follow through on their promises and pledges to solidify the gains they have made. **MR**

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### NOTES

1. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations: *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment: Principles and Guidelines*, December 1999, 20.

2. *Ibid.*, 34-39.

3. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

4. Michael W. Mosser, “The ‘Armed Reconciler’: The Military Role in Amnesty, Reconciliation, and Reintegration Process,” *Military Review* (November-December 2007).

5. *Ibid.*

6. Christian Dennys, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Rearmament?* 6 June 2005, <<http://www.jca.apc.org/~jann/Documents/Disarmament%20demobilization%20rearmament.pdf>>, 9.

7. James A. Baker, III, Lee H. Hamilton et al., *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 30.

8. The use of the term “tribal leaders” is not meant to exclude other authority figures who are not part of the officially recognized government. For example, familial ties can frequently influence combatants or former combatants to adhere to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration or other agreements.

9. As Multi-National Division-North, Task Force Iron was responsible for Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, and Diyala Provinces during its deployment from September

2007 to December 2008. Additionally, the division maintained relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government provinces of Dahuk, Irbil, and As Sulamanyah, but did not conduct combat operations in the area. Neither the Sol nor the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program was active in the KRG.

10. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between amnesty and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, see Tom Dempsey, “The Use of Amnesty in Peace and Stability Operations: What Commanders need to Know,” *The Colloquium*, 3/1, (September 2008).

11. FM 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 6 October 2008), 2-11.

12. Joseph Anderson, “Factors Considered in Promoting Reconciliation and Amnesty in Iraq,” *The Colloquium*, 4/1, (October 2008).

13. Rob and Rubin Nordland, J. Alissa, “Sunni Fighters Say Iraq Didn’t Keep Job Promises,” *New York Times*, 23 March 2009.

14. Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (Congressional Research Service, 30 April 2008), 14.

15. *Ibid.*, 25.

16. Elisabeth Bumiller, “U.S. Tries to Reintegrate Taliban Soldiers,” *New York Times*, 23 May 2010.