2nd Place
COIN Writing Competition

Unit Immersion in Mosul: Establishing Stability in Transition

Major Paul T. Stanton, U.S. Army

Major Paul Stanton is an infantry officer now serving as an instructor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the United States Military Academy (USMA). He has a B.S. from USMA and an M.S. in computer science from the University of Illinois. Major Stanton has served in leadership and staff positions from platoon to battalion in the continental United States, Italy, Germany, Kosovo, and Iraq.

PHOTO: CPT Paul Stanton, Commander of B Company, 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, briefs Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, COL Joseph Anderson, Commander of 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and MG David H. Petraeus, Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, during a patrol in the center of Mosul, Iraq, 21 July 2003. (DOD)

AS CONVENTIONAL U.S. FORCES transition from full combat to stability operations, they will likely assume responsibility for areas that have suffered significant war-related damage. In the wake of combat operations, the local people may be demoralized by their nation's defeat, by the apparent lack of economic opportunity, and by shortages of critical needs such as electricity, water, and fuel.[1] The establishment of any governmental authority supported by our military may also contribute to the disillusionment. Such situations are ripe for the development of an insurgency and must be quickly and decisively defused. Experience has proven that immersing tactical units in their assigned areas of responsibility offers the best chance for achieving stability.

The growth of an insurgency relies heavily on unstable conditions. A few disgruntled community leaders can spark interest and offer financial backing to fuel insurgent recruitment efforts. Insurgent cadre will actively garner support for any effort contrary to that of the fledgling government while attributing desperate conditions to the "occupation" of the foreign military. When faced with such situations, U.S. forces must immediately begin counter-operations that simultaneously provide an accurate picture of the situation to the people, demonstrate the potential effectiveness of the government, and publicly defeat the insurgent element with direct action. U.S. forces must "arrest [an insurgency's] growth before it is able to gain initial traction" by installing and maintaining a constant, authoritative presence within neighborhoods to provide basic security.[2] Defeated forces cannot initially provide this authority; thus, a strong initial U.S. presence is necessary.

The potential for success in these operations is significantly enhanced by immersing tactical units in their operating environments as they transition to assume responsibility. The daily interaction and relationships between Soldiers and host-nation civilians form the foundation of a stability operation. Working together and developing relationships at the grassroots level bolster opportunities for success by demonstrating the potential for improvement through deeds and by humanizing Soldiers in the eyes of the local population. Living within the assigned area of operations (AO), among the people for whom U.S. forces are providing stability, promotes the development of these critical habitual relationships.

During a recent interview with the *Washington Post*, Colonel Chris Short, commandant of the forward-deployed Counterinsurgency Academy in Iraq, emphasized the need to break the "big-base mentality" and mix with the population. He said that "classic counterinsurgency theory holds that troops should live out among the people as much as possible, to develop a sense of how the society works and to gather intelligence."[3] Such immersion increases

the opportunities for Soldiers and civilians to interact in a positive manner while simultaneously helping Soldiers develop a very detailed knowledge of their operational environment. Immersion provides units a greater flexibility to effect each tenet of stability operations, whether gathering and disseminating information, influencing host-nation political development, or neutralizing threat activity.

The remainder of this paper will illustrate the positive impact of company-level immersion during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Analysis and examples are drawn from my own experiences while commanding Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry (B/1-502) of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during the transition to stability operations in Mosul.

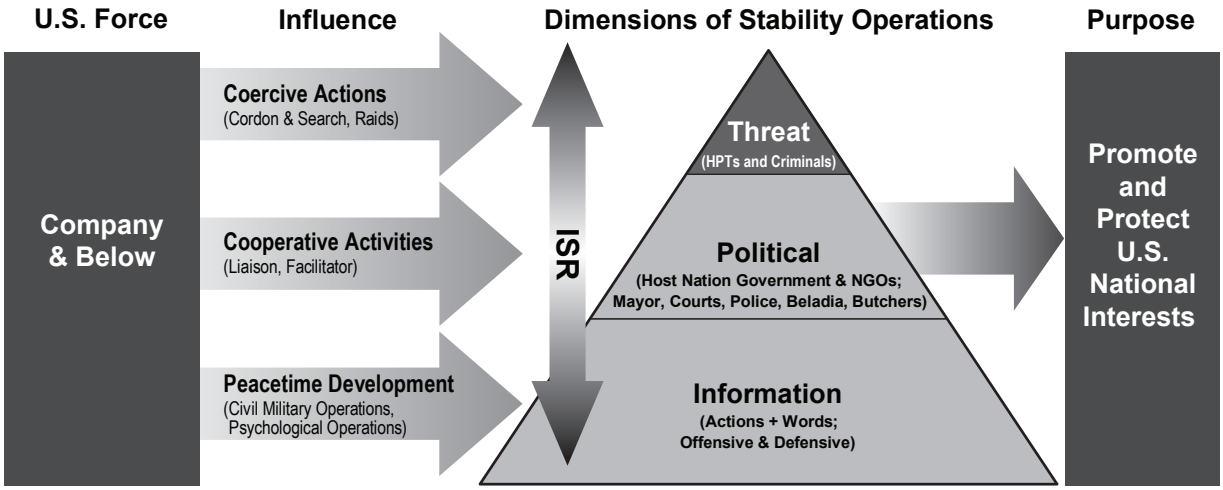
Bravo Company arrived in Mosul in April 2003 after the city had seen some limited fighting, but significant looting. Most public buildings were gutted down to their foundations; no government agencies were functioning; there was no running water or electricity; and fuel was in critically short supply. Over the next 10 months, the company lived in and operated from three separate locations within the heart of the city to stabilize and secure the city's center, an area that included city hall, the courthouse, the central bank, several police stations (to include the citywide headquarters), the bus station, the train station, the commercial epicenter with the central open air market, and thousands of residences ranging from the wealthiest to the poorest in the city.

Theoretical Framework

As defined in FM 3-07, *Stability Operations and Support Operations*, there are three critical dimensions in stability operations: information, political, and threat. A successful stability operation involves winning the information battle with the host population, helping rebuild and restructure the host political agencies, and defeating the threat element.[4] Figure 1 depicts how small-unit activities can influence these dimensions.[5]

Information (at the base of the triangle) serves as the foundation for mission success since it is impossible to affect the other dimensions without gathering substantial, credible information. The proper dissemination of information also serves to increase host-population support by keeping people abreast of activities that will positively affect them as individuals. Offensive information operations promote legitimacy, eliminate confusion, and reduce bias and ignorance through persuasion and education of the indigenous population.[6] Such influence helps to combat local perceptions of the U.S. military as an occupation force and deters nationals from accepting without question any anti-American messages presented by an insurgency.

Only after gathering sufficient information regarding their areas of operation can leaders make informed decisions about the restructuring of political agencies. Almost immediately, however, they must begin rebuilding the host nation's infrastructure. This must be done to increase economic



Legend: HPT, high pay-off target; ISR, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; NGOs, nongovernmental organizations.

Figure 1. Stability Operations.

activity, to restore order, and to give the local population hope. While these efforts should be initiated quickly, units must be cautious in offering support so that they do not alienate portions of the local population. Insufficient knowledge of an individual's history or lack of a full understanding of ethnic considerations in the region can result in a deleterious perception of favoritism. Units must constantly gather information and monitor political activities to ensure reconstruction efforts proceed in a positive direction for all of the people. Exercising tactical patience to collect information that identifies the right person to place in a critical position can save significant time and energy in the long run.

Information is also the foundation for direct action against enemy elements. Direct action requires a source to inform units of insurgent activities and locations. Moreover, units must be able to react quickly to capitalize on time-sensitive information. The threat element is flexible, necessitating friendly forces that can act almost instantaneously upon receipt of credible intelligence.

Units must simultaneously address all three of these dimensions of stability operations—win the information battle, rebuild the political apparatus, and defeat the threat—to provide a secure environment, legitimize political agencies, and defeat an insurgency. Overlooking any one of these may jeopardize the mission. It is the synergistic effect of the daily activities addressing each dimension that provides the best opportunities for success. Units need the authority and the ability to act quickly and constantly with regard to any and all of the dimensions. Immersing units into their AOs immediately upon transition empowers them to affect stability operations in the most significant manner.

Information Operations

Gathering information is a multifaceted problem with no simple solution. Experience has shown, however, that decentralizing command and immersing units in their own areas helps to quickly develop an accurate picture of the situation. With a permanent, dispersed footprint in the AO, we can use multiple patrols that can act simultaneously to provide a constant intelligence-gathering presence over a wide area. As doctrine accurately points out, "timely and accurate intelligence depends on aggressive and continuous reconnaissance and surveillance."[7] This patrol presence naturally results in substantial information that helps leaders make sound decisions.

As Soldiers become familiar with back alleys, streets with restricted mobility, and unlit roads, moving through the area becomes second nature.

Learning the terrain. One facet of the information battle comes from knowledge of the environment, specifically, the proper use of terrain, which is a combat multiplier. Generally speaking, the element that knows the terrain the best has a distinct advantage during a fight. The situation in a stability operation is no different.

If units are afforded the opportunity to live in their AOs during stability operations, they can learn the terrain as well as, if not better than, the enemy. Since the operational area is their own backyard, every patrol increases the Soldiers' awareness and understanding of the environment. This familiarity increases their own maneuver capabilities while reducing the threat's advantage of operating on their own turf. As Soldiers become familiar with back alleys, streets with restricted mobility, and unlit roads, moving through the area becomes second nature. They soon find that they don't need maps or satellite imagery.

More importantly, Soldiers will develop knowledge more detailed than they can derive from a map. B/1-502 was responsible for securing a portion of Mosul's inner-city marketplace where the satellite imagery suggested that there were multiple vehicle-sized corridors. What the imagery did not show, however, was that every day between 0900 and 1600 hours the area was so congested with vendors and shoppers that even dismounted movement was nearly impossible. Since the marketplace was within view of our rooftop surveillance points and was a focal point of our patrols, we quickly learned that there were two to three dismounted routes that supported rapid movement through the market, and that vehicular movement wasn't even an option

until late in the evening. We learned to budget 15 minutes for a vehicle convoy to move a quarter of a mile during peak periods.

In addition to improving mission execution, knowledge of the terrain enhances leader planning. When conducting counterinsurgency missions in support of stability operations, leaders are often forced to develop orders with little or no planning time. The immersed commander's ability to grab his subordinates and speak off of common checkpoints and landmarks without looking at the map while still clearly communicating the mission creates opportunities to act decisively on time-sensitive information. Soldiers learn the names of coffee shops, hotels, streets, and other details that minimize the requirement for terrain analysis and map orientation.

In one particular instance, we received a mission to apprehend a suspected insurgent who had allegedly been operating out of one of the local coffee shops. A brigade informant had provided intelligence consisting only of local names: "Subhi Affer was organizing activities from the Al Dur coffee shop and staying at the Fordus Hotel on Nebashid Street." When I relayed the information to my subordinates, one platoon leader instantly said, "They probably mean the Al Durra coffee shop and the Fordhaus Hotel on Nebasheed Street. The coffee shop is the one with the mural of a boy on it and the hotel is on the 2d floor of a building halfway between checkpoints 2 and 3." Without a recon and without satellite images, the Soldiers were capable of translating cryptic messages from informants into meaningful information. Moreover, they knew the area so well that we could instantly plan a mission and respond to time-sensitive information because we weren't trying to decipher 10-digit grid locations and guess which building was the one of interest from a satellite image—we knew it. We knew it as well as the informant who had originated the intelligence because the information didn't refer to just our AO, but also to our neighborhood.

Knowing the people. Detailed knowledge of the AO certainly facilitated operations, but successful direct action against the enemy also depended on information about specific people and locations. The best source of this information was the people who lived in the area and overheard conversations in the coffee shops. Insurgents concealed their activities in the presence of American forces so that U.S. Soldiers rarely saw any suspect behavior firsthand; the locals, however, were privy to what was really going on in the neighborhood.

From the outset, we needed to tap into this source, but the locals would not openly risk their lives to pass information to American forces. Many were skeptical of our true intentions in the area to begin with. Since they had been raised to hate Americans, it took only one disgruntled individual to persuade an entire coffee shop of listeners that Americans were in Iraq as an occupation force to steal oil and corrupt Muslim beliefs. Citing the previous "liberation" of Baghdad in 1917 by the British, the insurgents had a historical perspective to demonstrate how "liberators" enjoyed the benefits of Iraqi oil reserves.[8] Additionally, insurgent cadre could easily point out the absence of critical services like electricity to demonstrate the Americans' supposed inability to restore order.

We had to understand this context and approach the local people accordingly; we needed to understand the history and background of the area to relate to the people. The average citizen didn't care about the Coalition's strategic advances in developing the country; the amount of oil flowing through the pipeline in Baji didn't interest the average Iraqi citizen. Whether or not there was propane available for cooking dinner or electricity for powering fans were the true concerns.

We soon recognized that we had to address their concerns if we were going to persuade the locals that we were in Iraq to help. They needed to see action, not hear rhetoric. If we wanted to earn their trust and eventually persuade them to offer us information, then we had to legitimize our presence by focusing our activities on real solutions to their immediate requirements.

We also had to win the street-level information battle with the insurgency during the transition period. The longer we delayed in producing tangible evidence of our intent to help, the more we risked losing the local population to the insurgents. In his book *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*, Anthony Shadid conveys the opinions of many Iraqis during the transition period. Most citizens were guarded but open-minded about U.S. intentions; however, they all wanted to see tangible evidence of our claim to

help.[9] While the insurgency sent its cadre into the streets to pay average citizens to fight us, we had to convince the same people to support the Coalition-backed reconstruction efforts instead. This couldn't be done with rhetoric or from atop a vehicle. It required activity in the marketplace, on the street corner, and in the local coffee shops with a persistent, tangible message delivered through habitual relationships and via small-scale direct action targeting local concerns. It also had to be initiated immediately upon transition to prevent the insurgent message from taking root.

U.S. Army

While on patrol in Mosul, 24 April 2003, a squad from B/1-502 walks with a large group of excited local children yelling "George Bush."

Soldiers walking the streets and talking to the people were the ones who knew what the individual Iraqi wanted and needed. As British Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster has noted, "Routine foot patrolling [is] a key means of interacting and thus gathering HUMINT [human intelligence] . . . ."[10] Soldiers could not gather this information while mounted on a vehicle; they had to get off and walk. They had to shake hands, drink chi, and eat rice with their fingers when invited to "have a lunch" if they expected the people to open up to them.

Soldiers also had to understand Iraqi customs and history and be able to speak a few words of Arabic to earn the people's respect. Colonel H.R. McMaster, commander of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, understood this and trained his unit accordingly prior to deployment. He ensured each squad-sized unit had someone who knew elementary Arabic, and he had his officers read about and study the region.[11] Basic steps like these help the force to demonstrate "strength and resolve without being perceived as threatening."[12]

In Mosul, developing habitual relationships was critical to earning trust. In fact, relationship-building was the decisive point of the stability operation. If the same Soldier stopped and talked to the same gas station attendant on a routine basis, the two developed a relationship. The Soldier came to understand the daily rituals of the Iraqi civilians through experience; he knew what a day in their life was like and he learned what problems they faced. The Iraqi civilians, in turn, got to know the Soldier as a human instead of as an imposing, rifle-wielding warrior in body armor. The Iraqis learned that the Soldier had a wife and two kids at home and other details that were seemingly insignificant in terms of mission success, but critical in humanizing the Soldier. Such exchanges helped us take a monumental step toward winning the hearts and minds of the local population—the locals no longer viewed us as occupiers, but rather as individuals.

One of our platoon leaders built such a relationship with two local propane salesmen, whom we nicknamed the "Smash Brothers" based on their uncharacteristically large physical stature. The two routinely invited the platoon leader to have chi and they often stopped by the platoon command post (CP) simply to visit.

As propane salesmen, the Smash Brothers were very concerned with black market sales of the coveted resource. At the time, propane was in short supply and was one of the largest concerns among local people since they required it for cooking. We were also concerned with black market activity since we were attempting to regulate sales to avoid price gouging and to ensure equal distribution through all of the neighborhoods.

During one of their routine visits, the Smash Brothers informed the platoon leader of multiple locations where people were conducting illegal

propane sales at four times the regulated price. The result was that propane was only available in the wealthier neighborhoods, and less fortunate citizens were forced to do without. Not coincidentally, insurgent recruiting efforts were focused on the destitute neighborhoods without propane. Disgruntled people who could not get propane were the ones who would accept quick cash for emplacing an improvised explosive device (IED). The Smash Brothers' intelligence resulted in the arrest of several black marketers and the confiscation of hundreds of bottles of propane, and it enabled us to properly regulate sales. It also helped to inhibit insurgent recruitment of bombers.

Gathering information like this wasn't possible without maintaining a consistent presence in the area. Simply patrolling was very different from having Soldiers patrol their areas to develop contacts. Because they lived in the neighborhoods they were responsible for, Soldiers were much better able to develop these contacts. Proximity thus provided a high degree of flexibility and gave small-unit leaders opportunities to exercise initiative. Additionally, locals saw our permanent presence as a deterrent to criminal activity.[13] Immersing units from the very beginning of stability operations helped to develop relationships before the locals could be negatively influenced by insurgent cadre.

...locals saw our permanent presence as a deterrent to criminal activity.

Centers of influence. We quickly realized the tremendous potential of local relationships and sought ways to expand and capitalize on our contacts. One initiative involved a company-wide plan for building what we termed centers of influence. We wanted to build a network of contacts throughout our AO that we could rely on, whether it be for intelligence regarding insurgent activity or just to be in tune with the community's opinion of our efforts. Each leader from squad to company level was responsible for developing at least one new center of influence each week. The centers were tailored to a level of responsibility such that squad leaders focused on coffee shop owners and street vendors; platoon leaders approached more influential people like bank managers and police station chiefs; and I, as the commander, contacted even more prominent individuals like the regional police chief and the head of the city's municipal works. Echelons of responsibility were important because the Iraqi people wanted to deal exclusively with the most senior Soldier they knew.

Our immediate goals were to learn what the people's problems and concerns were and then work with the people to develop joint solutions. We knew that we needed to act overtly, but we also needed to know where to focus our efforts. I often challenged subordinates to make themselves "more useful to the Iraqis alive than dead" to motivate them to find and fix problems plaguing those Iraqis who had yet to decide between supporting U.S. forces or the insurgency. The long-term goal was to develop trust so that we could move the whole city in a positive direction by sharing information and working toward mutually beneficial goals. In practice, we addressed the entire gamut of local concerns, from simple tasks like fixing potholes to complicated projects like designing a garbage-collection system and rebuilding a police station.

B/1-502's experience with "Butchers' Row" highlights the potential impact of developing centers of influence. When we were assigned the city center in Mosul, it was a cluttered mess of sidewalk vendors and shops that served thousands of pedestrian shoppers hourly. In the absence of authority, the vendors disregarded any sanitation standards in order to save time and money. This was especially true in Butchers' Row, a series of 22 brick-and-mortar shops selling every imaginable portion of a cow or goat.

Butchers capitalized on the lack of authority to bypass traditional regulations that mandated buying meat exclusively from the slaughterhouse. In the traditional scheme, a farmer would take the live animal to the slaughterhouse where it would be slaughtered, packaged, and stamped prior to being loaded on a special vehicle for transport to butcher shops throughout town. The butchers paid a fee for the process. In the absence of supervision, the butchers saved the fee by buying the animals directly from the farmers and slaughtering them in the street in front of their stores. Each morning the

streets were red with blood as the butchers busily slaughtered and skinned the animals.

To compound matters, the butchers did not want to pay disposal fees for cleaning up the animal carcasses, so they simply swept the remains into a centralized pile in front of Butchers' Row. The smell alone could turn your stomach from 100 meters, never mind the danger of disease. I had spoken multiple times with members of the city's trash department (the beladia) and with members of the local medical community who had expressed concern about the unsanitary conditions. Through my translator I began speaking with the butchers to find out why the situation had deteriorated and to develop a solution.

I explained that the situation was entirely unacceptable, but told the butchers I wanted them, along with the veterinary specialists, the beladia, the slaughterhouse, the local police, and the transport drivers, to develop their own solution. I told them I would help mediate the process and would assist the police and veterinary office with enforcing the rules that they jointly established, but that the solution had to be theirs, not mine—if I dictated the solution, it might not hold for the long term. Over the next 2 weeks, we held 4 joint meetings to which we invited the senior butcher from all of the butcher markets across the city. We developed a three-page document with rules explaining the entire process, from the farmers delivering animals to the slaughterhouse to the beladia cleaning up the butchers' scraps at the end of a day. All of the participating members signed the document with the understanding that enforcement would begin after a 1-week grace period.

U.S. Army

A butcher in the Gazlani Market in Mosul proudly displays his certificate of compliance with sanitation rules.

U.S. Army

An Iraqi veterinarian accompanies the author as he visits vendors on "Butchers' Row" at the city center in Mosul. The veterinarian is explaining the rules established to improve sanitation and implement standard procedures for handling meat.

From that point on, I always made it a point to stop by and talk with the butchers along Butchers' Row, the veterinary officials, the police, and the beladia employees. From simple conversations about the weather to more detailed discussions of progress in the marketplace, we spoke daily. We all quickly began to see the benefits of the program we had jointly developed, and we were satisfied that we were fixing a real problem that affected each of us. Through our efforts, we developed mutual trust.

At this point I began to see the second-order effects of our hard work. While the streets were considerably cleaner, the greater benefit was that the local nationals now trusted me. During one of my patrols, a butcher slipped me a note along with a pat on the back. He communicated through my translator, Muhammad, not to look at the note until I was in a safe place. After the patrol, I had Muhammad translate the message, which indicated that one of the other butcher's sons was dealing weapons to suspected insurgents. After about a week's worth of investigative work, we were convinced that the tip was accurate and we arrested the individual. We would never have known about the activity without the information. I am convinced that our success

was a direct result of the trusting relationship I had developed through close personal interaction.

Street-smart intelligence. By regularly patrolling their area, our Soldiers learned about the people who live and work in the neighborhood. Not only did this help them develop a rapport with the locals, but it also made them cognizant of anomalous and potentially dangerous activity. In the marketplace, we became accustomed to seeing the same people at the same location every day. Even though vendor stands in the market weren't regulated, the same vendors occupied the same locations daily. We learned their faces and we came to expect to see the daily routine. If that routine was in some way different, we became suspicious. On one particular patrol, a sergeant noticed from across the street that the regular watermelon salesman had been replaced by a younger man. Curious, the sergeant crossed the street to ask why the regular man had relinquished his spot on the corner. As the patrol approached, the new vendor abandoned his stand and fled quickly into the densely packed area we referred to as the "Deep Market." The sergeant examined the stand closely and found three grenades hidden under the watermelons.

Soldiers cannot develop this level of awareness until they are intimately familiar with their environment; in other words, they can't identify subtle indicators until they know what "normal" looks like. Once they do, however, small changes to their area become noticeable.

Because the insurgents severely punish those who assist our Soldiers, law-abiding citizens may be scared to tell us about enemy activity. They can, however, provide information indirectly through small changes in their routines. On one particular mission, our company cordoned off a section of the market that had been covertly selling weapons and ammunition. With typical Iraqi curiosity, a large crowd developed along the edge of our cordon to watch. About an hour into the mission, an NCO noticed that several civilians he knew from the crowd had left the scene. Suspicious of the change, he ordered his men to take cover while he figured out why the locals had left. Within a minute of his issuing the order, a grenade landed and detonated in the vicinity of his platoon. This NCOs' experience in the marketplace had taught him that most Iraqis would never leave the scene while there was activity; their natural curiosity was too strong. The fact that many people he personally knew had departed the area served as an indicator that something was not right. His ability to detect such subtle behavior undoubtedly saved his platoon members from injury or death.

Rebuilding

When Soldiers move into a city that has been recently devastated by war and looting, they face an overwhelming number of problems that need to be fixed. In such a situation, a commander's ability to focus efforts on the most critical problems first can greatly enhance the people's perception of the reconstruction effort. Obviously, unit immersion in the AO can help to identify the most pressing problems, but it also can inject a sense of empathy and urgency into the reconstruction process. Soldiers immersed in the same environment suffer from the same shortcomings as the people they are helping: Lack of electricity, absence of drinking water, raw sewage flowing in the streets, and traffic congestion caused by fuel lines all directly affect the Soldiers' lives too. They are therefore more motivated to correct the problems, and do so in a prioritized fashion that promotes "citizen-driven, bottom-up economic activity."[14]

While we never consciously want our Soldiers to suffer, being able to relate to the local people helps tremendously in earning their respect. Just as leaders lead by example within our Army, they need to lead by example in their neighborhoods during the move to stability. Many Iraqis logically questioned why a superpower could not provide generators to restore their electricity. What perception would it foster if we lived in an isolated base camp equipped with running water and powered by generators while we left the civilians to suffer in isolation? Shadid's interviews suggest that this very behavior fueled hatred of Americans among many Iraqis.[15]

In Mosul, we lived among the people so we could focus on real problems. Unit leaders sought out government leaders who were responsible for maintaining the city's infrastructure, and together they assessed the problems. Leaders didn't have to try to understand the problems from an outside perspective; immersion gave them insight and, at the same time, legitimized their efforts. Leaders

helped lead and focus the efforts of government employees with the support of the neighborhood residents. Upon determining an appropriate course of action, the leaders provided resources to support the implementation of the host nation's solutions.

The people of Al Mansour, a middle class neighborhood in our AO, lived without running water for long stretches of time. Our company CP was serviced by the same pipeline and we received water only intermittently. First Platoon was responsible for patrolling Al Mansour and its Soldiers became acutely aware of the water situation as everyone complained to them during their patrols. Ostensibly, it seemed that the solution was tied to a large water tower that sat atop a hill in the center of Al Mansour, so this was where we focused our efforts initially. We sought out the head of the city's water department and took him to the tower for an assessment. He explained in laymen's terms how he would rectify the situation by fixing the pump at the base of the water tower. Having personally attended his briefing, I felt confident that we could restore water flow quickly.

U.S. Army

During a foot patrol, the author pauses to assure an Iraqi civilian that running water will be restored to the Al Mansour neighborhood.

First Platoon continued patrolling through the area, and its platoon leader told the people what we were doing to fix their problem. They all seemed pleased that we were trying to help. Problems arose, however, when we saw no developments over the next week. The patrols targeted the water tower specifically to check on progress and provide oversight, but they never saw any workers. The people in the neighborhood questioned our efforts and seemed to doubt whether we were really going to help them. The situation was tenuous because saying you will do something and not following through can have a severely detrimental impact on your relationship with the people. As FM 3-07 notes: "Psychologically, the populace must be assured continuously and effectively that conditions are becoming better to counter insurgent propaganda."[16]

After a week without any action on the tower, I returned to the water department to speak with one of the engineers. I was armed with many details provided by First Platoon's routine patrols of the area. An engineer explained that the man I had spoken with didn't know what he was talking about and that the water tower had not been operational in 20 years—water arrived in Al Mansour via a pipeline. The real problem was that Al Mansour was at the end of the pipeline and that people in other neighborhoods were adjusting valves illegally to divert water for themselves. By the time the water arrived at Al Mansour, the water pressure was played out.

As a result of our discovery, we recommended to brigade headquarters that we remove the head of the water department and replace him with a man who the Iraqi engineers felt would be the best choice. The new head developed a city-wide plan for controlling the pipeline by placing locked cages over the valves and monitoring them routinely. We offered support by adding the valve locations to our patrol routes, and within a week Al Mansour had running water for 6 hours each day. Through direct oversight, frequent patrols, and constant conversations with our Iraqi neighbors, we developed a temporary solution that directly improved the lives of many Iraqi civilians. Our ability to affect the situation only came through the habitual relationship First Platoon had developed with the water workers and the people

of Al Mansour. Walking across the street from the platoon CP to the neighborhood was central to this relationship. We gave the Iraqi engineers a sense of urgency, provided oversight of how Coalition funds were being used, and helped to put the right person at the helm of the government agency.

Defeating the Enemy

It is necessary to rebuild the host nation's infrastructure in order to restore stability, but establishing a secure environment is essential if reconstruction is to progress. U.S. forces should provide a "safe and secure environment at the local level and continuously [build] on the incremental success."[17] Immersed units can enhance safety and security by maintaining a dispersed footprint from which they conduct multiple patrols. These patrols can provide a constant deterrent and can rapidly converge on a critical location in the AO.

Blinding the insurgency. Insurgents maintain constant surveillance on Soldiers' activities. In the absence of countermeasures, they can easily determine when Soldiers are on patrol and when they are not. They can then adjust their activities accordingly to conceal any illicit behavior and appear innocent when Soldiers are present. We can defeat this surveillance if we establish a constant presence that gives the enemy no opportunity for activity. Continuous patrolling along varied routes at varied times, combined with a permanent command post providing constant surveillance in the neighborhood, can deter enemy activity.

Maintaining a CP eliminates the overhead associated with movement to and from the AO. Because the company handles mission coordination, platoons can conduct more patrols with greater flexibility. With no need to coordinate boundary crossing or external support, a patrol leader simply has to walk out the door with his unit and a radio. Small-unit leaders maintain personal initiative. They can still adjust patrols based on the situation, as they must be able to do to seize otherwise fleeting opportunities. By contrast, operating from a large forward operating base (FOB) makes us overly reliant on vehicles and allows the enemy to monitor our activity. Regardless of how much we vary our routes and routines, all our missions will be canalized to the limited number of roads leading to and from the FOB. The enemy only has to have a single operator with a cell phone at each exit to monitor our activity. In this environment, the enemy can always determine when Soldiers are coming; he will have ample time to hide his activity, and we will never be able to catch him.

Of equal importance, the enemy can affect our planning and thought processes by keeping us off balance. If we are forced to use a limited number of roads into and out of our AOs, the enemy can target these with IEDs, the deadliest and most effective weapon in their arsenal. We play into their hands by exposing ourselves to this weapon, which has accounted for 55 percent of U.S. military deaths in Iraq.[18] If insurgents know when we come and go and along which routes, it is only a matter of time before they hit us successfully. Reducing our reliance on vehicles will give the enemy fewer opportunities to attack us. When units live in their AOs, logistics distribution is the only mission that requires mounted activity, and even this mission can be controlled to minimize the threat of IEDs.

Massing combat power. Unit immersion also enables leaders to mass combat power at the decisive point in a mission. Units dispersed at multiple locations throughout an AO can maneuver quickly to support each other because a unit in contact doesn't have to wait for help from a squad dispatched from a single headquarters 15 blocks away. "Dispersed" is really a misleading term: the fact of the matter is that all of the company's combat power is forward-deployed. Although it takes coordination and practice, subordinate units can converge on a single location very rapidly from various locations.

The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's recent experiences in Tal Afar support this claim. One of the Regiment's battalion commanders has explained how the Regiment operated from 29 distinct checkpoints dispersed through the city, a deployment that

It is necessary to rebuild the host nation's infrastructure in order to restore stability, but establishing a secure environment is essential if reconstruction is to progress.

gave them "great agility to attack from two or three patrol bases instead of predictably rolling out of the front gate of [their] base."[19] This ability is critical because intelligence about insurgent activity is time-sensitive. There may not be time to muster units, load vehicles, and move to the designated location. If Soldiers are on patrol or in their dispersed CPs, they can move dismounted along separate avenues of approach to mass combat power without being detected by the enemy.

During one mission, B/1-502 cordoned off a section in the crowded Mosul market to search for weapons. We infiltrated the entire company from three separate CP locations along eight different dismounted and one mounted avenues of approach to arrive simultaneously and maintain the element of surprise. Knowing how crowded each route would be, knowing travel times along separate routes, and knowing which routes supported movement without arousing suspicion were critically important planning factors. We successfully moved 100 Soldiers into a confined area without tipping our hand. The significance of the mission lay not in the relatively small amount of weapons confiscated, but in the surprised faces of the locals who looked up to find themselves surrounded. They quickly understood what our forces were capable of and what it meant to the potential for conducting illegal activity in the area.

Counterinsurgent leaders also need the ability to respond immediately to threat activity. If Soldiers live in the AO, they do not have to be called on the radio to alert them to the situation; most will have heard or seen an incident firsthand and will already be prepared to move as orders are disseminated. Moreover, Soldiers become aware of much more activity. Incidents that cannot be heard or seen from an FOB, and would thus go unnoticed, will be within earshot of a CP or visible from rooftop surveillance posts. Soldiers can react right away to restore order and perhaps catch those responsible. Consider the perception of the local populace if no one responded to an illegal act and contrast that with a rapid, overt response by Soldiers with whom the people are already familiar. Proximity enables units to aggressively influence threat activity.

Defeating the enemy constitutes only part of mission success. Units must address all tenets of stability operations simultaneously as they transition from combat operations, because that is the best time to win the hearts and minds of the local populace and to assert governmental control. To prevent a protracted war against a firmly embedded threat element, we must keep the insurgency from developing by maintaining constant presence and authority in transition. We must be in the back alleys and coffee shops where an insurgency breeds. We must provide the authority that discourages looting and other crimes that demoralize an otherwise neutral population, that builds resentment against our forces, and that increases the disgruntlement that fuels an insurgency. Immersing tactical units into their AOs is the best way for Soldiers to learn the AO, build relationships with the people, identify priorities for making overt improvements, and take the fight to any threat element that exposes itself. Immersion, in short, is the most effective means to address all dimensions of a stability operation. ***MR***

NOTES

1. In a 20 September 2001 address to a joint session of Congress and the American people, President George W. Bush noted the environmental factors that shape an insurgency. The same information is contained in "The Nature of the Terrorist Threat Today," *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003.
2. Direct quotation from Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *RAND National Security Research Center OP-127-IPC/CMEPP,* June 2004. Dr. Thomas A. Marks explains the requirement for basic security and protection of the population in "Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for 'Democratic Security,'" *Journal of Counterterrorism & Homeland Security International* 10, 4, July 2005.
3. Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. Counterinsurgency Academy Giving Officers a New Mind-Set," *Washington Post*, 21 February 2006.
4. FM 3-07 (FM 100-20) *Stability Operations and Support Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 2003), Chapter 1.
5. Figure developed by CPT Luster Hobbs, January 2005.
6. FM 3-07, 2-19.
7. FM 3-07, 2-3.
8. See Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005). Iraqis made these claims in multiple interviews Shadid conducted in March 2003.
9. Ibid., chapters 3 and 4.
10. BG Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Military Review* 85, 6 (November-December 2005): 6.
11. Thomas E. Ricks, "The Lessons of Counterinsurgency," *Washington Post,* 16 February 2006.
12. FM 3-07, 1-5.
13. See Vance Serchuk and Tom Donnelly, "Nation Building, After All with the U.S. Military in Afghanistan," *The Weekly Standard,* 11 April 2005. Serchuk and Donnelly describe the negative perception Afghanis have of the U.S. military if Soldiers only periodically visit neighborhoods.
14. Department of Defense Directive, "Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations," Number 3000.05, 28 November 2005.
15. Shadid, 150.
16. FM 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2006), 2-3.
17. Ibid., 2-6
18. *USA Today*, 26 January 2006.
19. Ricks, 16 February 2006.