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Essential Services in Support of the Counterinsurgency During
Operation Iraqi Freedom

by

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Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

23 October 2006

Abstract

Essential Services in Support of the Counterinsurgency during Operation Iraq Freedom

Success in counterinsurgency operations is dependent to a good degree on how well a government in power or occupying force can provide essential services for the local populace. These services are a key element to building legitimacy of the government by restoring dignity to its citizens. The operational factors of time and force in delivering these services can be expressed by the window of opportunity that needs to be exploited in meeting public expectations as well as how the local populace is employed and treated during this mission. Operation Iraqi Freedom is a good case to both measure the Coalition Forces' performance and to analyze how well the operational commander has adhered to several proposed imperatives for success. The paper also discusses some measures instituted after the initial Coalition Forces occupation to aid the operational commander. Finally, the paper offers recommendations to further enhance delivery of essential services and concludes that adapting these measures will positively impact on the success of the counterinsurgency in Iraq as a whole.

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Introduction

One does not have to search very far in today's news regardless of source to immediately encounter criticism of the Coalition Forces' performance in conducting Stability Security Transition and Reconstruction Operations (SSTR) at the completion of major combat operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom. SSTR has been on-going for over three years and has cost the Coalition Nations, principally the United States, about $100 billion each year when including the troop deployment costs as well as those specific costs of the relief and reconstruction effort.[1] More significantly has been the sacrifice of our young men and women over this period of time, almost three thousand service members killed since the end of major combat operations.
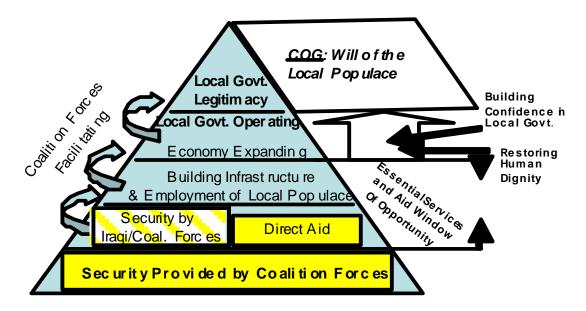
Although there have been a myriad reasons offered for the difficulty encountered in providing stability to Iraq by way of a new legitimate government, it is worth examining one particular area that is arguably a vital component to ensuring legitimacy of any fledging government. That is the ability for that government to provide essential services as well as humanitarian aid to the local population in a timely and consistent manner. Analysis is warranted of the early efforts of Coalition Forces in supporting Iraq's essential services requirements, as is understanding of some imperatives that will aid operational commanders in conducting stability operations under a similar scenario in the future. This analysis will lead one to understand that essential services are of paramount importance, and the improvements discussed in how we deliver these services will contribute significantly to counterinsurgency success.

Defining Essential Services and Their Significance

For the purpose of this analysis, essential services encompass those civic or municipal support functions that the local populace had relatively permissive access to using in the period prior to the commencement of the war in early 2003. Most significant of those services are electricity, potable water, sewage and basic sanitation. Humanitarian aid, particularly the delivery of food, warrants mention as well as it was a significant requirement for the Iraqi people even before the war. Estimates of dependence on some type of food rations from the UN Oil for Food Program are approximately 60% of the population.[2]

In the context of the critical operational factors of time and force, these essential services provide a window of opportunity to strengthen legitimacy of the government for three basic reasons. First, they will meet the essential needs of the local populace and go a long way to restoring their individual dignity. Second, they will provide a platform for the local government to create employment opportunities for its citizens in order to stimulate the economy. Finally, a combination of effectively managing these first two reasons will demonstrate that the local government truly can effectively administer to the needs of the people. The following graphic illustration (Figure 1) better depicts that window of opportunity as well as where it lies in the sequencing of priorities by the operational commander explained below.

Hierarchy of Needs for
a Legitimate Local Iraqi Government

COG: *Will of the Local Populace*

Local Govt. Legitimacy

Local Govt. Operating

Economy Expanding

Building Infrastructure & Employment of Local Populace

Security by Iraqi/Coal. Forces

Direct Aid

Security Provided by Coalition Forces

Coalition Forces Facilitating

Building Confidence in Local Govt.

Restoring Human Dignity

Essential Services and Aid Window Of Opportunity

Figure 1

Subsequent justification will be made for the absolute necessity of providing security within local areas of operation by Coalition Forces. Then, however, providing minimum levels of essential services as well as direct aid is critical in making initial contact with the local populace followed by actual infrastructure projects that will both enhance capacity for providing essential services as well as employ the local populace. This model, which supports the current "clear, hold, build" strategy of the Coalition forces, is extremely sensitive to timing. [3] The window of opportunity may have to wait for a sufficient establishment of security, but overall success of the counterinsurgency may well depend on

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how quickly coalition forces can effectively provide these services and aid with the objective of strengthening the local government.

As a note of clarification one may often hear the term reconstruction mentioned interchangeably with essential services. Reconstruction is normally associated with the overall program of rebuilding Iraq to include support to military bases and long-term infrastructure projects. For the purpose of this study, essential services will be treated as a sub-program and, on occasion, a resultant benefit of the certain types of physical reconstruction as it creates capacity. Subsequent information in terms of spending will reveal that essential services are actually a small portion of the overall reconstruction effort.

The emphasis of essential services is important because a better sense of priority and leader focus in analysis of the plan to deliver essential services at the operational level will help exploit that window of opportunity and better support the overall counterinsurgency effort. In other words, show the local populace that what they are receiving now is better than what they had received before under their old regime, or more importantly, what they would have under any potential regime now orchestrating the insurgency. This should ultimately contribute to the will of the people supporting the government in place that has now gained legitimacy in their eyes.

Problems with Essential Services at the End of "Major Combat Operations"

There has been no shortage of analysis and criticism in how successfully Coalition Forces have performed in either providing essential services in their own right or supporting the new Iraqi government in doing so during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Perhaps the single commodity that has received the largest attention in gauging human satisfaction has been the

access to electricity. It is an example of Coalition Forces failing to manage public expectations as well as a symbol of what Iraqis most identify with when they discuss the slow pace of reconstruction.[4] This is a metric that at face value appears easy to measure and compare to prior periods of time. It is necessary to make particular point of using the verb "access" as opposed to "produce" or to a lesser extent, produce capacity. Here lies a significant difference where there have been cases of the Coalition Forces clearly showing progress in building capacity, particularly in the size and scope of projects, and even progress in production. However, that building of capacity has not translated to an overall increase in consistency of access to electricity by the local populace, particularly within the city of Baghdad, which as recent as this year still received less electricity than before the war despite an increased demand.[5] This is significant because it is the relative deprivation perceived by the people of access to the electricity that really matters, not how much more is being produced. The lessons derived from production of electricity can be applied to other cases of providing essential services as well. It is the impact on the citizen in the lower economic classes that must be gauged, compared to what they have been conditioned to receive in the past, which will determine their overall satisfaction with the government.

At the conclusion of major combat operations in Iraq in April 2003, a number of conditions, many pre-existing the invasion, would make the delivery of utilities such as electricity most challenging for the Operational Commander when considering the traditional operational factors of force, space and time.

In terms of space, the land, particularly urban areas and the infrastructure that supports them had been a victim of neglect over the previous twenty years. It is therefore not just an issue of reconstruction of what we may have destroyed in our kinetic operations,

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moreover it was construction of a capacity that was lacking for many years in the first place.[6]

Some of the assumptions and planning at the strategic level in terms of forces available have made the mission of the operational commander particularly challenging. The forces available in this context are the local Iraqi workforce and not the Coalition Forces available. For several reasons, the local populace was a potentially invaluable resource of which the operational commander was deprived in running essential services. First, the actual outcome of widespread government disarray put additional strain on the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and Coalition Forces in general.[7] Second, was the successor to ORHA, the Coalition Provisional Authority's total "deBaathification" of the Iraqi government. This particular directive not only removed some of the most skilled and experienced officials from some critical infrastructure and utility positions, it sent a message to the Sunnis that they will not be employed in key positions in Iraq.[8] With that, the whole concept of local personnel employed to provide their own essential services, as outlined in their hierarchy of needs, is dismantled. They are no longer part of the government solution.

The operational factor of time can be defined by the timing of this window of opportunity presenting itself to the Coalition Forces. It represents a momentum that may be easily lost, according to Senator Jack Reed of the Senate Armed Services Committee.[9] Exploiting this window of opportunity has been so difficult due the pressure on one end for immediate and tangible results that are in direct conflict with the long delays in reconstruction due in part to the bureaucratic process and the need to provide sufficient security.

As in other aspects of stability operations, the successful commander will have to pay

particular attention to several imperatives to ensure that providing the essential services best exploits counterinsurgency theory and practice.

Analysis of Command Imperatives in Providing Essential Services

    Security

Perhaps the most significant challenge faced by the Coalition Forces in providing essential services in Iraq is overall security of their area of operations, particularly, the very sources and instruments of those services. This can be explained in operational terms of the enemy, in this case the insurgency, focusing his effort on our center of gravity. That center of gravity is the will of the people, the local populace. The critical vulnerability of Coalition Forces has been that they have not been able to adequately protect both the physical infrastructure and capacity they are creating (i.e. power plants, treatment plants, pipelines etc.) and the Iraqi citizens themselves as potential producers of essential services.

According to the Government Accountability Office, inadequate security has led to cancellation or significant delay of various projects as well as the diversion of millions of dollars from actual direct building in order to provide that security by contract sources.[10] Even the basic and relatively unskilled mission of picking up trash on a regular basis has been an enormous challenge given the current security situation, largely due to the threat of hidden explosive devices within the huge mountains of debris.[11] The failure in this simple task of picking up the trash is leaving an indelible image on the minds of the local populace with regards to the Coalition Forces occupation. It has reinforced a feeling of hopelessness in that the basic quality of life support will not soon return to at least the pre-invasion level on

their streets. It attacks the sense of human dignity and thus damages legitimacy of the governing force.

The frequent and savage attacks by insurgents on members of this local populace working on rebuilding their own country can be found to be particularly disturbing. However, Dr. Ahmed Hashim has clearly depicted the insurgents' well-thought motivation for doing this: "The key motivation here is to prevent the Coalition infrastructure and military forces - which rely heavily on Iraqi employees ranging from blue collar to white collar - from functioning effectively." [12] The insurgents want to cut off our vital link with the citizen-workers through death, destruction and more significantly, intimidation. The only way to counter this up-front is an overwhelming force to provide security that will result in confidence of the people that Coalition Forces will protect their efforts. This is why security should not simply be looked at as first in a sense of sequential order. It should be viewed as always and at the base of the hierarchy. Whether it is provided by Coalition Forces, as may be the case in the early stages of SSTR, or by the host nation, security is indispensable regardless of capacity to provide essential services.

Leader Initiative

The overall attitude of the operational commander towards how he values the delivery of essential services is significant to mission success. The quality of essential services provided in a given area of operations (AO) bears a correlation to the priority given it by the local operational commander in that AO. We have seen varying degrees of success where direct leadership at the general officer level has made a significant difference. Perhaps one of the best examples of a successful leadership approach to essential services is within the

area of operations of the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul during most of 2003 led by MG

David Petraeus. A combination of ensuring payment of the local workforce coupled with

active participation of the local community leadership in decisions created an ownership-type

of environment. Petraeus has professed that empowerment of Iraqis to do the job themselves

is imperative. More specifically he states "do not try to do too much with your own

hands."[13] The clear sense of essential services as a priority was also made the following year

in the city of Baghdad by the first Cavalry Division led MG Pete Chiarelli. Several actions

he had undertaken, such as exposing his senior commanders to U.S. industry specialists

dealing with municipal services prior to their deployment in preparation for rebuilding cities

and their key infrastructure. Chiarelli's attention to and analysis of sewage, water,

electricity, trash and information (SWETI) operations underscored the inherent responsibility

he perceived as administrator to the largest city in Iraq. [14]

Perhaps the reason these two aforementioned commanders, who were immediate

subordinates to the overall operational commander in Iraq at the time were successful while

others at the same time were less successful, is explained by what some have called the

"outbox mentality."[15] That is, these commanders perceived essential services as their

responsibility, not something that they were going to pass off to another agency or

subsequent commander in too little time for them to make an impact. They realized that the

window of opportunity was open for them and it was their responsibility to seize the

initiative.

This sense of inherent responsibility and initiative, however, needs to extend

throughout the entire chain of command and across the region in order to be successful. This

is particularly relevant during this conflict, compared to more conventional conflicts because

the junior leader may be expected to often act with little guidance and make decisions at his level that have operational or operational-strategic implications. Unfortunately, according to Mr. Leonard Wong of the Strategic Studies Institute, the Army as an institution may not have prepared them in developing their adaptive capacity.[16] However, the nature of the missions these young officers and non-commissioned officers have faced over the previous three years coupled with the collaborative lessons learned facilitated by dynamic factors such as the internet have actually changed their attitudes to SSTR in general. One could argue that the cultural change evident in paying significant attention to issues like essential services has been a "grass roots" movement as these young leaders have seen the effects on the local populace more clearly on a daily basis and have subsequently influenced their superiors.

Leveraging Information Operations (IO)

Information operations has proven to be essential throughout the entire process of providing essential services, as it must be for all military operations. At times, however, only the most forward thinking of operational commanders have really exploited IO since it requires a sound integration of intelligence on the social networks and institutions of the local populace. The understanding by the current Army and Marine Corps leadership of the importance of social network analysis is evident in the level of attention it has received in their most recent counterinsurgency field manual, particularly in highlighting the importance of cultural beliefs, identities and values. Even the forces of economic power and essential services are nested as an integral part of social structure. [17]

In accordance with the thoughts of Counterinsurgency expert, Dr. David Kilcullen: "Every action in a counterinsurgency sends a message; the purpose of the information

campaign is to consolidate and unify that message."[18] This can simply equate to knowing one's customer and appropriately leads one to believe that equally important to what is being accomplished by the Coalition Forces in delivering essential services is how it is being accomplished and what really is the message being communicated by our front line forces to our customer. In this realm, the commander must realize that there is a benefit to thinking in terms of leading a customer service mission since perception of the local populace is immensely critical to success. Dr. Ahmed Hashim infers that the lack of awareness of the cultural significance of our behavior toward the local Iraqi population, particularly during SSTR-type operations, is not doing much to win "hearts and minds".[19]

 The overall process of gathering and disseminating intelligence on various societal groups based on region of the country can be complex and often labor intensive. But the new field manual will serve as a good guideline for future training of our front line forces. Moreover it is both the commander's intent and personal actions of our most senior leaders that likely have the most influence on how well information operations are woven into essential services operations.

Utilizing the Total Force

Unfortunately, the limits on force structure have made it a challenge for commanders to effectively implement all of the essential services required. This challenge can be met, however, if that commander truly utilizes the total force available to include the appropriate mix of experienced military, professional government civilian, contract, and most importantly, local national personnel. This utilization is highly dependent on contracting and local employment policies of which the operational commander should have a direct

influence. Shortly after major combat operations, it had been the nature of the Coalition

Forces to default to large-scale non-Iraqi contractors for a majority of the critical projects in

repairing infrastructure in numerous cities. This can be problematic for the long term

stability of Iraq. One principal way is that the revenue generated by these contractors is not

being funneled back into the Iraqi economy to any significant degree. One of the great

benefits negated by using U.S.-based or third country contractors is the potential for funds

that can be pumped into the local economy by way of salaries which leads to the issue of

employment itself.

During the early months of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the aforementioned contractors

had not demonstrated any degree of resolve to hire local Iraqi citizens on their projects. There

is obvious demand for all skill levels of labor on many of these projects. Utilizing

particularly lower and mid skill levels of the Iraqi work force would help stimulate the local

economies as well as provide some level of personal satisfaction, fulfillment and sense of

well-being and dignity which is all too important in combating insurgency. As previously

noted, the process of de-Bathification and its impact on the mid and higher levels of

workforce management cannot be ignored. [20]   This blanket de-Bathification policy should

have been amended to provide an opportunity to reach out to citizens of Iraq that may have

been part of the "old regime" by association. The Coalition forces could have adopted some

sort of vetting process, similar to what was done in post-war Germany, to build a total force

that will increase the ownership pool in the governing process.

Prioritizing and Controlling Resources

When looking at numerous reports outlining the overall Iraqi reconstruction resource picture, the total amount of funding from all sources has been listed as high as $83 billion, of which $18.4 billion was specifically earmarked for appropriation by the U.S. government in November 2003. At face value this would seem to resource a substantial amount of infrastructure capacity and direct aid to facilitate successful delivery of essential services. However, as of June 28, 2006, only $11.4 billion of that $18.4 billion had been spent.[21] This casts some doubt on our ability to spend what we have in a timely manner when time is so critical. As MG Petraeus summed up the importance of cash: "in an endeavor like that in Iraq, money is ammunition", and subsequently: "Once money is available, the challenge is to spend it effectively and quickly to achieve measurable results."[22]

The other question is: what are Coalition Forces spending "reconstruction funding" for? Further examination reveals that much of the reconstruction funding is actually being spent on security forces. While this may seem to be a misuse of the intended funding, it can also be seen as an inherent cost to doing business if one concurs that "secure" is a prerequisite to "build". Still, much of the focus of reconstruction has been on improvement of Coalition Forces facilities vice the infrastructure within the local communities. While some of these construction expenditures are understandable, the citizens of Iraq and other critics have taken notice that the Coalition Forces reconstruction priorities may be skewed and contributing to their sense of deprivation.

An example of a resource tool that the commander can utilize is the Commanders Emergency Reconstruction Program (CERP). The key difference between CERP, which was originally resourced with captured Iraqi government assets but is now resourced with

appropriated funds, and other sources of reconstruction funds is in speed and flexibility.[23] A majority of the payments to Iraqis for projects to provide essential services normally fit the criteria for CERP and provide immediate and tangible rewards for their work and cooperation. Several areas in Iraq are now paying some vendors for projects funded through CERP in local currency, the New Iraqi Dinar, which should also help strengthen confidence in the use of this currency by the local population.[24] CERP permits the shift from large foreign contracts to pay for infrastructure projects to contracts that, although smaller, are local in nature. In summary, it keeps the money invested in providing essential services in the hands of Iraqi people.

Much attention has been paid to the widespread corruption within the fledging Iraqi government as an impediment to progress. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) estimates that corruption costs within the entire country could top $4 billion per year.[25] Although corruption is undesirable and actions must be taken by the Iraqi government to internally police and punish those culpable, the Coalition Forces must be resigned for some time to the fact that a certain degree of corruption will likely have to be tolerated for the greater good of advancing projects.

Improvements to Support the Operational Commander to Date

Several developments since late 2005 have demonstrated the U.S. government response to some of the challenges facing the operational commander in providing essential services. Most of these, understandably, are strategic decisions that now give the operational commander the tools he needs to more effectively operate.

In the all important area of Command and Control, both National Security Presidential Directive 44 of 11 May 2004 and Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 dated 28 November 2005 seem to better delineate roles and responsibilities of the Operational Commander as a representative of DoD in an AO as well as directing a priority be given to stability operations across the spectrum of DoD activities.[26] In addition, the Quadrennial Defense Review recommended institutionalizing the use of CERP. The review accurately recognized the importance of access to flexible funding through programs such as CERP.[27] The result is that CERP should now be immediately available for use in the theater of operations. More importantly, commanders and staffs should already be deeply familiar with capabilities and limitations of CERP so that essential services planning can incorporate it immediately.

In terms of Doctrine, the pending release of the Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency field manual will significantly assist in building institutional knowledge and critical understanding of the importance of essential services as well as providing effective tactics, techniques and procedures in executing the delivery of those services in future conflict and post-conflict operations. Most significant, however, is what is woven throughout the new manual - the concept that every leader and soldier is now a civil affairs officer. Finally, in the words of MG Petraeus: some of the paradoxes facing leaders that are presented as vignettes in the manual are designed to "provoke thought" instead of providing a stated solution to a problem.[28]

The newly created U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Military Affairs should also benefit operational commanders in their mission. USAID plans to place senior development professionals on the staffs of each of the geographic combatant

commands, participate in joint exercises and serve as a contact point between the military and non-government organizations. According to Michael Hess, assistant administrator of USAID's Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance: "Since the post-conflict reconstruction is a pillar of the U.S National Security Strategy, it is imperative for USAID to have an operational Link with the military on how to better coordinate strategic development goals."[29] Some may view this development with suspicion for fear of the military influencing the USAID mission, but overall it should provide a much needed conduit for information sharing. The benefit of nesting these two entities, representing the two principal players in reconstruction operations, is that it provides an invaluable synergy.

The contracting process has also changed significantly since the early months of the conflict as a majority of contracts, particularly pertaining to infrastructure and essential services, are now awarded by Department of State. The percentage of contracts going to Iraqi vendors has also risen to the level of about 70-80%.[30]

A significant structural change that should aid the operational commander in providing essential services is implementation of the provincial reconstruction team (PRT) concept. The first two of these teams were launched in Iraq in November 2005. Their success in Afghanistan has had State Department officials particularly hopeful that they will be effective at assisting the new Iraqi government at the provincial level.[31] The main advantage of the teams is that they provide a more integrated approach and promote unity of effort among U.S. government agencies. They will focus on good governance so Iraqis can sustain the services they are providing now rather then depend on Coalition Forces' support. This good governance is at the higher levels of the needs hierarchy (Figure 1) where true success can then be realized. Also in accordance with the need to stress continuity has been

the recent appropriation of over $350 million specifically designated for Iraqis to operate, maintain and sustain completed projects.[32]

Recommendations

The following recommendations are actions that the operational commander can take without requiring change above DoD level. He can execute most within his command and with some basic assistance from component services. All apply to the imperatives previously discussed and will either have high payoff in terms of essential services success or help preserve the hard work that has already been done in theater.

The operational commander, when dealing with subordinates, other government entities, and most importantly, the local community leadership must continue to stress security as a prerequisite to significant infrastructure projects and essential services being initiated in a local area. It is a most fair pre-condition putting the ball, to some extent, in the court of the local populace to help themselves as beneficiaries of the services through their intolerance of insurgent attacks.

Greater priority of monetary investment needs to be focused at the local level. There is a different motivation when those protecting infrastructure assets are the ones, along with their families, receiving the direct benefits of those assets. The local level is where the delivery of essential goods and services can be tied to strengthening the legitimacy of one's government. There is a physical connection between the provider of services and the local populace. Monetary investment at the local level is least likely to have funding intentions diluted by bureaucratic overhead, corruption or competing interests. It also allows the local providers of essential services to have a more direct say into prioritization of projects.

Exploit resources for manpower needs in providing the essential services by encouraging local hiring. If contracts are awarded to foreign firms, they should be encouraged to hire local nationals with some type of incentive written into the contract. Understandably those workers vying for key positions in support of a contract may have to undergo some type of vetting process. But the majority will probably be suited to play a useful role in the economic engine which the local government is trying to build. Commanders should also exploit the use of CERP funds, now that it has been institutionalized, and challenge their staffs to identify and plan projects with the local Iraqi government that are good candidates for CERP.

Focus on training and developing our junior leaders to improve competencies and to instill cultural awareness that has an appreciation for the significance of essential services. The new Army-Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual is a good step in the right direction. Equally important are changes that should be implemented in the curriculum of the various leadership courses stressing cultural sensitivity and assistance to civil governance as a part of each leader's skill set. Army leadership should invest this effort at the most junior-level leadership courses so that the "strategic corporals" of our forces are armed with this critical knowledge and insight as well.

Conclusion

One cannot stress enough the need to address, at the earliest stages of planning a major military operation effective delivery of essential services, particularly one of the scope and with the economical/political conditions of Iraq. Access to essential services by the local populace is a key contributor to the sense of citizen dignity, which is such a vital

denominator to the legitimacy of the new government that the Coalition Forces are trying to

strengthen in the midst of an insurgency. Furthermore, adaptations at the operational level

of leadership to our current approach to how these services are provided can still have a

profoundly positive effect on the end state for Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as to future

counterinsurgency efforts.

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