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THESIS

**BETTER LUCKY THAN GOOD: A THEORY OF
UNCONVENTIONAL MINDS AND THE POWER OF
“WHO”**

by

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December 2009

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A THEORY OF UNCONVENTIONAL MINDS AND THE POWER OF “WHO”**

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ABSTRACT

The irregular nature of the Long War, coupled with the contemporary experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, are forcing the Department of Defense (DOD) to reexamine its institutional ability to conduct irregular warfare. The subject has become a major area of focus for the defense establishment. A number of scholars have proposed that the American military establishment is culturally and structurally predisposed to conduct regular warfare; other experts submit that America's failures are due to failure to apply counterinsurgency principles tactically and operationally. This thesis offers another perspective to correcting America's irregular malady and builds on a currently unpublished paper by Professor Anna Simons. It argues that the power of "Who" is more important than "How," or "What," when it comes to succeeding in irregular warfare.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AO	Area of Operations
AOB	Advanced Operational Base
AQAM	Al-Qaeda and Associated Movements
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BOS	Battlefield Operating Systems
CBI	China, Burma, India
CENTCOM	Central Command
CJSOTF	Combined-Joint Special Operations Task Force
COG	Center of Gravity
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CONOP	Concept of the Operation
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPATT	Civilian Police Assistance Training Team
CSS	Combat Service Support
DET	Detachment
DoD	Department of Defense
DP	Desert Protectors
ERV	Euphrates River Valley
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FM	Field Manual
HN	Host Nation
ICDC	Iraqi Civil Defense Corps
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ING	Iraqi National Guard
IP	Iraqi Police
IPLO	International Police Liaison Officers
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
LOC	Line of Communication
MARDIV	Marine Division

MAW	Marine Air Wing
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MiTT	Military Transition Team
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps-Iraq
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
MNSTC-I	Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
ODA	Operational Detachment-Alpha
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OODA	Orient – Observe – Decision - Action
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PTT	Police Transition Team
POI	Program of Instruction
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
RPD	Recognition-Primed Decision
SAA	Sawar al Anbar
SF	Special Forces
SFAS	Special Forces Assessment and Selection
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SO/LIC	Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict
SVBIED	Suicide Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics
TAA	Thawar al Anbar
TF	Task Force
TTP	Tactic, Techniques, and Procedures
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
VBIED	Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Device

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have changed the names of the Special Forces Soldiers I write about in the following case studies, as well as the numbers for Operational Detachments to protect their anonymity. I have also changed the names of many of the Iraqis described in what follows.

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I. INTRODUCTION: AN UNCONVENTIONAL KIND OF MIND?

A. BACKGROUND

If a certain kind of mind or talent exists that predisposes people to succeed at irregular warfare (IW), the U.S. military needs to exploit it.¹ Instead of planning for mediocrity, the military should be scouting for the talent that already exists within the ranks and better utilizing it, or maybe even seeking out people with desired talents and recruiting them. The analogy in sports would be fielding the first string of a football team. The first string consists of the regular players, not the substitutes. The first string consists of the players who have talent for the game. They are the players in whose minds events on the field slow down and take on a special clarity, allowing them to exploit opportunities and disrupt opponents—to effect strategy. These players intuitively adapt to the changing circumstances on the field and make plays that win the game. In contrast, the second, third, and fourth string players do not typically have the same level of talent, skill, or feel for the competition and cannot “know” what the other team is doing or how the other team will react. Arguably, the military too should focus less on the playbook, and more on finding, developing, and using the right players.

The irregular nature of the Long War, coupled with contemporary warfare experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, are forcing the Department of Defense (DoD) to reexamine its institutional ability to compete in the irregular warfare arena. The subject has become a major area of focus for the defense establishment. A number of scholars have proposed that the American military establishment is culturally and structurally predisposed to conduct regular warfare; other experts submit that America’s failures are simply due to a failure to apply counterinsurgency principles tactically and operationally.

Regarding counterinsurgency (COIN), these diagnostic assessments have given way to a prognostic frame that stresses inculcating our troops with doses of cultural

¹ Irregular warfare—A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will. Also called IW. Joint Publication 1–02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms: April 2001.

sensitivity and empathy in order to moderate troops' ethno-centric biases and enhance their cross-cultural perceptions and communication. The new prognostic frame also prescribes that correct tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and specific methods that represent *the solution* in counterinsurgency warfare, irrespective of local conditions.

This thesis offers another perspective to correcting America's irregular malady and builds on a currently unpublished paper by Professor Anna Simons. It argues that the power of "Who" is more important than "How," or "What," when it comes to succeeding in irregular warfare.²

B. THEORY OF AN UNCONVENTIONAL MIND

Simons suggests that succeeding in irregular warfare, especially when operating in foreign cultures and with "Others," requires something that cannot be taught—or trained. The right "kind" of mind is necessary. She makes it clear that this is an important distinction. It is not temporal, like a frame of mind. It is a permanent kind of mind.³ It's an unconventional kind of mind.

To understand what an unconventional kind of mind is, it is important to first understand what a conventional kind of mind is. Given a conventional kind of mind, an individual's ability to evaluate, process, and contend with new or different situations is bounded by domain and wedded to past actions. An individual with an unconventional kind of mind is not bound by these constraints. Someone with an unconventional kind of mind is capable of synthesizing across domains or innovating in order to solve problems while orienting and adapting to new circumstances or changing conditions.

This thesis posits that success in an irregular warfare environment requires individuals with an unconventional kind of mind; some individuals naturally think unconventionally, or irregularly, compared to everyone else. These individuals have a natural ability to, as Simons writes:

² Anna Simons and Mike Weathers, "Anthropology and Irregular Warfare – India," (Unpublished paper, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), 20.

³ Simons and Weathers, "Anthropology and Irregular Warfare," 20.

...intuitively think in terms of branches and sequels, and therefore don't need to ask themselves what the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th order effects of an action might be—they've already factored that in *without* consciously factoring it in. Or they have the ability to see angles *from* angles that remain obtuse to others.⁴

These are the first-stringers that America should be seeking to employ in irregular warfare.

C. APPROACH

Since COIN is a subset of IW, and since COIN is at the center of the current national security debate thanks to Iraq and Afghanistan, COIN will be used as the vehicle for examining this notion of unconventional minds. This thesis drills down into the stories of two United States Army Special Forces team sergeants and their counterinsurgency experiences in Iraq. The stories behind their success will be examined in depth. It is the intent of this thesis to get past TTPs and see what the real factors were that led these two men to be so successful, because in many cases, they did not conduct COIN in accordance with doctrine or popular convention and, even when they did, they had to adapt the methods they applied to their particular situations. In unpacking their stories, this thesis attempts to illuminate how unconventionally minded these men were—and are—and how their unconventional mindset contributed to their success.

Chapter II lays out different schools of thought about COIN and poses the question: “what is missing from current perspectives about COIN?”

Chapter III presents a general history of coalition counterinsurgency efforts in al Anbar province, Iraq from 2003 to 2008. This chapter provides the backdrop for the two case studies and serves to illustrate what can and cannot be learned from conventional historical narratives. The chronology offered is drawn from numerous sources: journals, magazine, and newspaper articles; books; and Web sites.

Chapters IV and V, appropriately entitled “William’s War” and “Robert’s War,” trace the counterinsurgency experiences of William and Robert in Hit district, al Anbar

⁴ Simons and Weathers, “Anthropology and Irregular Warfare,” 20–21.

province, Iraq. These chapters are written based on my experiences working with these men; extensive interviews with each as well as discussions with members of the Operational Detachments (ODA) they led; and personal notes and writings that William kept. These chapters illustrate how inherently messy, serendipitous yet contrived, and context-specific success in counterinsurgency really is. These chapters should demonstrate the importance of getting the background straight and appreciating the sequence and interrelatedness of events, the trial and error aspects of COIN, the importance of recognizing and exploiting unforeseen opportunities, the significance of the skills and abilities needed by counterinsurgents, and the fit of key individuals to their particular situations. All of these factors are routinely absent from conventional narratives. One typically only finds attention paid to these factors in biographical accounts, and usually only in passing as part of the larger story.

This methodology was chosen for one primary reason: to be able to highlight what a conventional historical narrative *does not* tell us about the actual complex messiness of on-the-ground reality. Team sergeants and their ODAs are the focus of this thesis for several reasons. First, and foremost, I had access. I specifically concentrate on older Special Forces soldiers because they brought with them to Iraq experience operating in other cultures and in ambiguous environments. At the same time, ODAs did not own battlespace. Therefore, they had to contend with interesting constraints. On the surface, it may seem to the casual observer that constraints would have limited the ODAs' ability to innovate and adapt; however, in reality, I found that by innovating and adapting to overcome these constraints, the ODAs ended up reshaping their environments in beneficial ways. Lastly, studying team sergeants and their ODAs should also reveal the value of being able to mix talents within a small group and achieve supra-individual effects.

Chapter VI draws on current theories about intelligence, naturalistic decision making, strategy, and other concepts, along with historic examples of unconventional warriors, to help place William and Robert's choices and actions in a broader context.

This chapter will also raise questions about the role their backgrounds and experiences may have played in making them the right persons for the situations in which they found themselves.

Chapter VII, the last chapter, does what must always be done; it generalizes the findings of this thesis to provide recommendations for how to improve Special Force's effectiveness at irregular warfare. Although this thesis concentrates on Army Special Forces, the lessons learned can surely be applied to other branches of the Army and to the other Services.

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II. PARADIGMS OF COIN

A. THEORIES OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

Counterinsurgency (COIN) has received no shortage of academic deliberation in the last half-century given the frequency of revolutions, civil wars, and wars of national liberation or secession. A profound new interest in counterinsurgency was inspired in the wake of America's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Different people have taken different approaches when studying these internal wars, and theories abound to explain both their causes and their resolution. Despite various socio-political theories and theories about strategic interaction, such as Ivan Arreguin-Toft's comparison of direct versus indirect strategies, two major views about counterinsurgency dominate the discussion. One school of thought favors a population-centric approach. A second promotes an enemy-centric approach. A third is emerging which pushes a leader-centric focus. Each of these three schools of thought differs over where to place the greatest emphasis when it comes to directing counterinsurgents' attention and energy.

Population-centric counterinsurgency is sometimes referred to as classic counterinsurgency and as "winning hearts and minds." Population-centric COIN most notably traces its roots back to David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Population-centric COIN maintains that the population is the center of gravity; the population's support is essential to victory.⁵ Galula says that use of the population enables insurgents to counter-balance the state's natural advantages.⁶ In cases where insurgents try to make use of the population, the state needs to try to separate the population from the insurgents by addressing legitimate political and social grievances, and by improving the quality of life through economic development and modernization.

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication: Joint Operations*, 13 February 2008 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), IV-10. "A COG is the source of moral or physical strength, power, and resistance — what Clausewitz called "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends . . . the point at which all our energies should be directed." A COG comprises the source of power that provides freedom of action, physical strength, and will to fight. COGs exist in an adversarial context involving a clash of moral wills and/or physical strengths."

⁶ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 4.

The American military has ostensibly folded these aspects of population-centric COIN together under the larger umbrella of nation-building. Security forces are not used to destroy the insurgents, only to secure the population from insurgent influence, and protect them from harm.⁷ According to FM 3–24, the population’s “protection and welfare is the center of gravity for friendly forces.”⁸

In contrast, enemy-centric COIN holds that defeating insurgents requires attacking or destroying them, their strategy, their will, their capabilities, and/or a combination thereof. Enemy-centric COIN is often considered an attrition-based strategy. Although attrition typically calls to mind “a tangible, linear decrease in men and material,” and can be said to have defined America’s involvement, and failure, in Vietnam, enemy-centric COIN does not necessarily have to make killing paramount.⁹ Strategic, or moral, attrition consists of wearing down an adversary’s will to fight.¹⁰ This can be achieved by being creative and even accommodating. History has shown that violence often hardens an opponent’s resolve. As Sun Tzu noted, attacking the enemy’s strategy is of supreme importance in war. Next in importance is disrupting an enemy’s alliances.¹¹ Enemy-centric COIN can thus lead one to target other potential centers of gravity, to include the insurgents’ strategy, leaders or elites, alliances, image, etc.

Leader-centric COIN, meanwhile, posits that the successful outcome of counterinsurgency rests on a counterinsurgent leader’s ability to best his insurgent counterparts, period. Mark Moyar, in his new book, *A Question of Command*, defines leader-centric COIN as, “a contest between elites in which the elite with superiority in certain leadership attributes usually wins. The better elite gains the assistance of more people and uses them to subdue or destroy the enemy elite and its supporters.”¹² In

⁷ Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3.

⁸ United States Army & United States Marine Corps, *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, FM 3–24* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1–24.

⁹ James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77–78.

¹² Moyar, *A Question of Command*, 3.

situations like Iraq and Afghanistan, the counterinsurgent elites consist of American military and civilian leaders, as well as their indigenous counterparts. If the host nation (HN) government cannot produce leadership equal to or better than that of the insurgents, then it cannot sustain successes obtained by third-party participants, such as the United States. Moyar further maintains that people, no matter how aggrieved, do not turn to insurgency on their own: "...they become insurgents only by following an elite that has decided to lead an insurgency, and only if that elite appears to be more virtuous and capable than the governmental elite."¹³ Moyar does not explicitly say so, but one may infer from his book, that insurgent elites are the center of gravity in an insurgency.

B. WHAT'S MISSING FROM THESE THEORIES?

From a certain angle, one could say the military's current infatuation with population-centric COIN is no less a function of the bureaucratic nature of the armed services than was its previous obsession with tactical, attrition-oriented, enemy-centric COIN. The basic premise of population-centric COIN is that applying the right methods, or TTPs, is the key to success in counterinsurgency. That is why proponents of population-centric COIN continually try to cull transferable solutions from past and recent successes. Because it is a bureaucracy, the military assumes that mechanistic processes can replace wisdom, experience, and good judgment and compensate for potential incompetence and lack of discipline or experience. However, the problems of incompetence, inexperience, and/or incompatibility for the most part will go away if you have the right people in place.¹⁴

Perhaps COIN and IW as a whole are so complicated, or each case is so unique, that there is no overarching theory that can adequately deliver on the promise of victory and a corresponding framework for how to achieve it. If so, then Dr. Moyar has a point in addressing leadership, although his "theory" explains little. He argues, somewhat simplistically that certain attributes matter most. If one were to follow this argument to its logical conclusion, one would only focus on leadership when looking at war, which

¹³ Moyar, *A Question of Command*, 3.

¹⁴ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 121.

leaves out too many other factors. For instance, he never mentions the importance of cross-cultural insight, which is different from empathy. Cross-cultural insight means knowing something about the enemy—something that matters in war.¹⁵

This thesis agrees with Dr. Moyar that leaders and having the right leaders matters, but disagrees that the right leader can be determined simply by recognizing individuals with a certain set of leadership attributes. For one, this suggests that leaders possessing the qualities of leadership that Moyar lists can succeed anywhere. But can they? Would T. E. Lawrence have been as wildly successful anywhere other than Arabia? Or General Joseph Stillwell somewhere other than the Chinese, Burma, and India theater? Perhaps, but it is not likely. When one looks at individuals like these in the round, it is apparent that each was uniquely fit for the role they played and *where* they played it. The point is, there is much more to what makes an individual the right leader or the right “Who” than leadership attributes alone.

¹⁵ Anna Simons, “Unity of Vision: What it is and Why it Matters,” Presentation, Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces & Society Biennial Conference, October 2009.

III. THE WAR IN AL ANBAR: A CONVENTIONAL HISTORY

A. A ROUGH BEGINNING

To begin at the beginning in al Anbar, the war started slowly. The invasion all but bypassed the province. Army Rangers seized the hydroelectric dam over the Euphrates in Haditha, and Army Special Forces fanned out across the desert searching for SCUD missile launching sites, but there were no climatic battles or “thunder runs.” The Sunni of al Anbar were, in a sense, never defeated prior to occupation, not in a way that they acknowledged or recognized.

The Marines assumed responsibility for al Anbar in early 2004 after relieving elements of the 82nd Airborne Division and 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.¹⁶ This transition incurred a bit of notoriety because the Marines publicly vaunted that they disapproved of the Army’s methods, which they considered too heavy-handed, and promised that they would attack the problem with a more measured approach. The Marines never really had a chance, however. Tensions that had been simmering for nearly a year warmed to a rolling boil in March after a mob killed four Blackwater security contractors in Fallujah, their bodies mutilated, burned, and hung from a bridge across the Euphrates.¹⁷

The Blackwater incident was simply one of many indicators that Fallujah, and al Anbar, were slipping out of coalition control. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) chose to try to reassert its influence by ordering the Marines to assault Fallujah, resulting

¹⁶ A Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commanded by a Lieutenant General serves as the deployed higher headquarters for Marine Corps forces in theater. A Marine division (MARDIV) commanded by a Major General is the ground combat element for the MEF; it is further composed of regimental combat teams (RCT). The U.S. Marine Corps, represented by a Marine Expeditionary Force, is responsible for Multi-National Division-West in Iraq.

¹⁷ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 331.

in Operation Vigilant Resolve, launched on April 5, 2004.¹⁸ The Marines effectively laid siege to the city until the CPA ordered a ceasefire at the behest of Sunni members of the governing council. But American forces failed to capture the Blackwater killers and reestablish law and order; insurgents continued to control the city. This battle turned into a physical and moral victory for the enemy and only added fuel to the fire of what was becoming a complex and amorphous insurgency.

The Sunni tribesmen of al Anbar perceived that they had very little reason to support the coalition. In addition to dishonor and indignity suffered because of coalition forces' cultural ignorance and, at the time, insensitivity, the Sunnis' world was turned upside down through the loss of income, status, and influence with the fall of Saddam's regime.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there were attempts early on by tribal leaders to reach out to the Americans. For instance, Sheikh Bizea al-Gaaoud of the Albu Nimr tribe offered a force of several hundred tribesmen to guard tribal areas if the U.S. would arm and support them.²⁰ The CPA rebuffed Bizea; in its view, working with the tribes was antithetical to democratization and the development of Iraq.²¹ Additionally, towns such as Fallujah were regarded as Baathist bastions. Ironically, the CPA's decision helped ensure that al Anbar became a place of transit and refuge for foreign jihadists who entered Iraq from Syria and Jordan along traditional smuggling routes. Geography and demographics thus destined al Anbar province to become the heart of the insurgency. Yet, the coalition presence was reduced to an economy of force mission, leaving the Marines under-resourced and under-manned.

¹⁸ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco*, 333. According to Thomas Ricks' account, both the MEF commander, Lt. Gen James Conway, and the MARDIV commander, Maj. Gen. James Mattis, advised against this course of action and instead recommended that the Marines be allowed to continue with their measured approach of pacification, confident that supporting operations would expose the perpetrators of the Blackwater killings for future targeting. The order to assault the city likely originated from either the White House or the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

¹⁹ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 244.

²⁰ West credits Bizea with reaching out; a recent article by David Rose in *Vanity Fair* offers a very in-depth account of similar outreach by Talal al-Gaaoud. It is unclear whether the two authors are speaking of the same or separate incidents. Talal was Bizea's son and most likely the key broker in any attempted outreach to the coalition; Talal died of heart failure several years ago. The author is well acquainted with the al-Gaaoud family, having met with Bizea several times (but not Talal); the *Vanity Fair* article is consistent with other overtures that Bizea made personally to the author and members of ODA 504.

²¹ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe* (New York: Random House, 2008), 24.

B. DESCENT INTO CHAOS

One product of the ceasefire negotiations in Fallujah was an auxiliary unit formed from local inhabitants known as the Fallujah Brigade. The Fallujah Brigade was ostensibly created to police the city as a sort of surrogate force for the Marines. However, according to Ali Allawi, former Iraqi Minister of Defense for the Governing Council, the Fallujah Brigade quickly, “began to act as the core of a national liberation army.”²² Fallujah thus remained a violent insurgent stronghold until November 2004. At that point, General George Casey, having replaced General Ricardo Sanchez as the commander of forces in Iraq, decided that Fallujah would be one of the first insurgent safehavens he would reduce before Iraq’s parliamentary elections in 2005.²³ Journalists and historians have described the Second Battle of Fallujah as the site of the fiercest fighting that the United States Marine Corps had faced since the Battle of Hue City in 1968.²⁴ In contrast to the First Battle of Fallujah, there was no ceasefire. The Marines and U.S. Army surrounded the city and cleared it house-by-house, block-by-block.

Meanwhile, the remainder of al Anbar continued its descent into chaos. Killings and kidnappings of government officials, police, and Iraqi Civil Defense Corps/Iraqi National Guard members proliferated across the province.²⁵ Local and regional government ceased to function, crippled by the violence. The insurgency evolved into what John Robb calls “open-source warfare.”²⁶ Groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Ansar al-Sunna, the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade, Jaish Mohammad, and others tapped into local populations for manpower. Low-level fighters often had no idea who they

²² Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 279.

²³ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 398.

²⁴ The Free Library by Farlex, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Second+Battle+of+Fallujah--urban+operations+in+a+new+kind+of+war.-a0145698933> (accessed August 9, 2009).

²⁵ The coalition formed local national guard type militias early on in the war. These units were originally known as the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps before the name was changed to Iraqi National Guard.

²⁶ John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2007), 116.

were working for, motivated instead by earning enough money to put food on the table. Al Anbar's greater than 70 percent unemployment rate helped fuel the blossoming insurgency.²⁷

Al Anbar rates second only to Baghdad in the total number of Coalition casualties incurred over the course of the war, and is a very close second at that.²⁸ This is significant given the much higher concentration of U.S. troops in Baghdad throughout the war. As Bing West points out, "Although Anbar was the setting for almost half the fighting and dying in Iraq and the sanctuary of foreign fighters, the province in 2005 had 20 percent of the coalition forces and 5 percent of the Iraqi Army."²⁹ Anbar was so dangerous that American Marines and Soldiers dubbed it, "The Wild West;" the only law and order to be had was through the barrel of a gun. A Sunni tribesman from near Hit summed it up this way, "There is no governance west of Baghdad, and there is no god west of Ramadi."³⁰

The Marines, admittedly lacking resources, did not have an effective counterinsurgency strategy. Instead, they conducted large search and destroy and cordon and search operations to try to meet with and destroy the enemy. The Marines would temporarily marshal forces in operations like New Market, Rivergate, Spear, and Matador in order to clear an area. Afterwards, however, the insurgents would seep back in. Bing West quotes Colonel Stephen Davis, commander of the 2nd Marine Regiment (RCT 2) and responsible for the Euphrates River Valley from Hit to al Qaim in 2005, as saying that the goal was to find insurgents, not seize territory.³¹

The Marines also placed little emphasis on developing the fledgling Iraqi National Guard (ING) and Iraqi police (IP). Both organizations were thoroughly infiltrated;

²⁷ K. L. Vantran, "Security Situation in Al Anbar Improving Says 82nd Airborne Commander," *Armed Forces Press Service*, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=27761> (accessed August 14, 2009).

²⁸ "Iraqi Coalition Casualty Count," ICasualties.org, www.icasualties.org/Iraq/ProvinceMap.aspx (accessed August 14, 2009).

²⁹ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 74.

³⁰ William, interview by author, Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, July 5, 2009.

³¹ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 98.

honest members were forced into silence and acquiescence through threats and intimidation. In some places, their demise was quite violent. Insurgents overran the IP station in Haditha in the fall of 2004. Many IPs who surrendered were murdered on the town's soccer field.³² The IPs thoroughly disintegrated throughout the province after succumbing to insurgent forces, and by 2005, there were only a few left in Ramadi. The ING was also a failure and was disbanded in June 2005. The only successful coalition effort to stand up an indigenous force in Anbar, prior to 2005, was a provisional unit of Albu Nimr tribesmen that Army Special Forces, working with the direct support of General James Mattis, created in 2004. Unfortunately, after the transfer of authority to the interim Iraqi government in June 2004, funding was withdrawn for the unit and it was disbanded. Unit members were given the option of joining the ING, but most refused.

Ultimately, AQI's fundamentalist religious views did not sit well with the people of Anbar, whose tribal mores long predated Islam.³³ AQI had gotten by early on by reaching out to the tribes and convincing them that, as Sunnis, they had a mutual interest in opposing the Americans and the Shia. This mutualism did not last, however. The Sunni tribes, in light of the Second Battle of Fallujah and after having boycotted the January 2005 constitutional assembly elections, began to reconsider the political process, which promised more opportunity than simply fighting.³⁴

AQI's violent campaign of intimidation leveraged against tribal leaders is often said to be the catalyst for the tribes' later decision to align with coalition forces. But this is not so; it was a consequence, not a catalyst. AQI lashed out with a fearful campaign of

³² Michael R. Gordon, "Wary Iraqis are Recruited as Policemen," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2006. The story was related to this author on multiple occasions during a tour in Anbar in 2005. Gordon reports that the policemen were shot. In every accounting that I heard of the incident it was said that at least some of the policemen were beheaded. Although I did not personally interview anyone who had witnessed the incident first-hand, I heard the story in various places along the Euphrates River Valley between Ramadi and Haditha, and all accountings were essentially identical.

³³ Recent journal articles and books have provided several reasons why the tribes eventually came into conflict with AQI. Some have said that AQI demanded that the tribes provide women for marriage, others that AQI began taking over the tribe's illicit activities such as smuggling, and still others that the tribes rejected AQI's extreme interpretation of Islam. These can all be considered ancillary to the fact that AQI began overturning the natural order of tribal authoritative structures and targeting tribal leadership once the tribes decided to rejoin the ongoing political process in Baghdad.

³⁴ Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival* 50, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 77. <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed August 14, 2009).

repression to try to force the tribes to re-align with it. Fortunately, as time went on and AQI's tactics became ever more violent and repressive toward the tribes, the coalition became more accommodating and inclusive. This eventually led to the al Anbar Awakening. However, much had to happen prior to this.

The first rounds of open tribal warfare against AQI occurred in the al Qaim region.³⁵ There, a small tribe called the Albu Mahal, fought with AQI at the end of 2004 and into the spring of 2005.³⁶ The Mahal, needing help, reached out to the larger and more influential Albu Nimr tribe. Faisal al Gaaoud, a member of the Albu Nimr's most prominent family, and a former governor of al Anbar, sought the Marines' assistance.³⁷ Instead, RCT 2, led by Colonel Davis, launched a pre-planned offensive in May called Operation Matador that was directed against the string of towns along the Upper Euphrates that included al Qaim, near the Syrian border. As John McCary recounts, "...indiscriminate U. S. forces came crashing down on al Qa'im near the Syrian border, killing and capturing insurgents, al Qaeda, and al-Gaoud's [sic] tribesmen alike."³⁸ The Marines did not attempt to coordinate with the Mahal's Hamza battalion and, inevitably, some Hamza forces were mistaken for AQI and other hostile tribal forces.³⁹

Ironically, the Combined-Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF), the headquarters responsible for overseeing Special Forces and Navy SEAL elements in Iraq, and manned by 10th Special Forces Group at the time, had withdrawn its operational

³⁵ The term "al Qaim region" is used to signify the string of towns and villages along the upper Euphrates near the Iraq-Syrian border that includes al Qaim, Husaybah, Karabilah, Rumana, Ubaydi, and others.

³⁶ The confrontation between the Mahal and AQI has most often been attributed simply to the AQI treading over the Mahal's cross-border smuggling operations into Syria; the Mahal also resented the large influx of AQI into their area. The Mahal had initially contested coalition forces for some of the same fears at the beginning of the war.

³⁷ Long, "The Anbar Awakening," 78.

³⁸ John. A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly*, 32, no.1: 48. Al-Gaaoud refers to Faisal al-Gaaoud, former governor of al Anbar in 2003 and 2004. Faisal is of the Albu Nimr tribe and has been credited with reaching out to the coalition on behalf of the beleaguered Mahal in al Qa'im.

³⁹ The Mahal tribe's armed contingent battling AQI was called the Hamza battalion.

detachments from Anbar in the fall of 2004.⁴⁰ Detachments operating out of al Qaim and al Asad had had tribal connectivity with the Mahal and Nimr tribes previously. These detachments would have known about the impending conflict between the tribes and AQI, and would have been positioned to exploit it. Since Special Forces were no longer positioned in al Anbar, there was no one to coordinate between the Marines and the tribes, or to prevent “friendly fire” incidents.

Matador was similar to previous operations: the Marines cleared the towns of Karabila, Rumana, and Ubaydi near al Qaim and then moved on.⁴¹ Afterwards, AQI and its tribal allies, chiefly the Kharbouli, overwhelmed the Mahal and forced them to retreat to the town of Akashat, roughly 100 kilometers southwest of al Qaim and deep in the desert. Coalition forces were extremely slow to assist tribes like the Mahal, whose attitudes toward AQI were clearly changing. For instance, tribal sheikhs in Ramadi approached the Marine Commander there, Colonel Dunford, and offered to provide local men to secure tribal areas within the city, hunt AQI, and stop improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from being emplaced. Dunford’s response to them was that the sheikhs could support the Iraqi government by having their men enlist in the new Iraqi Army. The sheikhs rejected this option because it did nothing to alleviate the violence plaguing their city. It would have pulled men from the tribal areas and committed them to serving a national government in which the Sunnis had yet to develop a meaningful stake.⁴² Furthermore, it made no sense to the Sunni sheikhs to give up their men when the tribes were living under the gun, fearful of violent AQI retribution.

⁴⁰ Thomas Searle explains in an article entitled “Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces” that the decision to reduce SOF presence in Anbar was due to concern over whether the tactical gains of working with the tribes were, at the time, worth the operational and strategic risks and thus the best application of scarce SOF resources. It was also most likely a decision influenced by personal perceptions of the war by various commanders. As an organization, 5th Special Forces Group felt it was a mistake to reduce the SOF presence in Anbar and increased the SOF presence there after resuming control of the CJSOTF in June, 2005.

⁴¹ Kevin Flower, Enes Dulami and Kianne Sadeq, “Hunt for insurgents near Syria ends,” *CNN.com* (May 14, 2005), <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/05/14/iraq.main/index.html> (accessed August 11, 2009).

⁴² West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 97.

Other tribal sheikhs likewise tried to take a stand against AQI in late 2005 and early 2006. The most noted was Sheikh Nasr al-Fahdawi. Sheikh Nasr encouraged his tribe, the Albu Fahd, to begin distancing itself from AQI. AQI retaliated by assassinating Nasr and other prominent tribal members. A captured AQI document declared, “....cousins of Sheikh Nasr came to the Mujahidin begging, announcing their repentance and innocence, saying, we’re with you, we’ll do whatever you want.”⁴³

Clearly, then, opportunities existed in 2004, 2005, and early 2006 that coalition forces could have exploited, had commanders on the ground—with license from higher—had the foresight to do so.

C. TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

Tribal engagement has been defined as, “overt activities between coalition military and foreign civilian personnel for the purpose of obtaining information, influencing behavior, or building an indigenous base of support for coalition objectives.”⁴⁴ Tribal engagement has since been credited with playing a prominent role in the reversal of fortunes in al Anbar. However, tribal engagement was rejected early on as a viable methodology by the coalition.

The coalition was reluctant to engage the tribes for several reasons. The CPA, under Paul Bremer, deemed the tribes to be vestiges of the past, and working through them was considered contrary to the creation of a modern, democratic state.⁴⁵ This attitude persisted. The coalition failed to appreciate the timelessness and importance of tribal social structures in places like Anbar. There were also myriad concerns that engaging the tribes could potentially empower them to resist the national government. These particular fears were being fanned at the same time tribal leaders were blamed for lacking the ability to sway their tribal constituents to quit the insurgency. No one seemed

⁴³ Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” 79–80.

⁴⁴ Michael Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned,” *Military Review*, September–October 2007, 16.

⁴⁵ McCary, “The Anbar Awakening,” 45.

to notice this discrepancy in logic. The coalition's decision making was also complicated by the fact that the Iraqi government was initially hostile to any attempts to arm the tribes against AQI.

D. THE DESERT PROTECTORS: A FIRST GO AT SANCTIONED TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

By the fall of 2005 MNF-I authorized the CJSOTF and Marines to stand up an indigenous tribal force called the Desert Protectors. Both commands realized that the decimation of the Mahal tribe at the hands of AQI and tribes aligned with AQI presented an opportunity, one that should have been exploited as early as Operation Matador in May 2005. The Desert Protector initiative was the first unified effort at tribal engagement sanctioned and supported by both the Iraqi government and MNF-I. As Thomas Searle writes, "The initial vision was that the Desert Protectors would bridge the gap between the government's forces and tribal militias by creating a government-sanctioned tribal force."⁴⁶

The first iteration of Desert Protectors consisted of two cohorts, approximately 85 tribesmen recruited out of the Albu Mahal in Akashat and the al Qaim region.⁴⁷ Recruitment of this force was a joint venture undertaken by an Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA), Marines, and a team from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. The Desert Protectors received an initial 30-day basic training from Navy SEALs and members of the ODA at Camp Fallujah. Other members of the ODA established a base of operations at the train station in al Qaim and prepared to train, advise, and assist the Desert Protectors full time upon their return from basic training.

After the Desert Protectors returned to al Qaim, the ODA oversaw their integration in Operation Steel Curtain. Steel Curtain was the last major operation of Colonel Davis' Upper Euphrates campaign. Steel Curtain was a singular success, less for the operation itself than for what came afterwards. Lieutenant-Colonel Dale Alford,

⁴⁶ Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 50, 3rd Quarter, 2008. Retrieved from http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i50/16.pdf Accessed on August 12, 2009, 64–65.

⁴⁷ ODA member 1, interview by author, Clarksville, TN, July 8, 2009.

commander of 3-6 Marines, directly responsible for executing Steel Curtain, concluded the operation by collaborating with an Iraqi Army Battalion to establish combat outposts throughout the cleared areas. In gaining and maintaining control this way, Lieutenant-Colonel Alford was effectively utilizing the inkblot approach to pacify al Qaim. The Desert Protectors were instrumental in identifying known insurgents, caches, and safe houses. More importantly, the Desert Protectors served as a bridge to the Abu Mahal tribe, which, led by Sheikh Kurdi, joined with Lieutenant-Colonel Alford's Marines in maintaining stability and security. AQI suddenly had nowhere to hide. Unfortunately, Lieutenant-Colonel Alford has never enjoyed the same level of public credit for his efforts as Colonel McMaster in Tal Afar or Colonel Sean MacFarland in Ramadi.

E. AL ANBAR SPINS OUT OF CONTROL

Although the Marines made progress in al Qaim, the rest of Anbar continued to spin out of control. AQI controlled Haditha right under the noses of the Americans based at the Haditha Dam complex. Insurgents instituted sharia law and publicly executed Iraqis accused of being American agents on the Haqlaniya Bridge.⁴⁸ RCT 2 conducted several clearing operations such as Operation Quick Strike and Operation Rivergate, but these operations were temporary in nature and insurgents reemerged to retake control of Haditha at the conclusion of each operation. Coalition forces maintained two firm bases and a combat outpost in Hit, but did not and could not control the town simply by mounting patrols out of those bases. Hit was a battleground. Ramadi was equally a no man's land. Insurgents, not coalition forces, controlled the city. AQI cowed the tribes by executing a campaign of assassination and intimidation against tribal leaders. In August 2006, the I MEF G-2, intelligence section, released an official report essentially declaring that al Anbar was lost. According to this report, "The social and political situation has

⁴⁸ Omar Mahdi and Rory Carrol, "Under U.S. noses, brutal insurgents rule Sunni citadel," *The Guardian*, (Monday, August 22, 2005), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/aug/22/iraq.rorycarroll1> (accessed October 22, 2009).

deteriorated to a point that MNF [Multi-National Forces] and ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] are no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in al-Anbar.”⁴⁹

But, in fact, all was not lost. The war in al Anbar was already taking a different turn before the release of this report. Conditions were being set in Ramadi and elsewhere that would facilitate the Awakening.

F. THE AWAKENING

The First Brigade Combat Team (BCT), First Armored Division (AD), led by Colonel Sean MacFarland, was attached to the Marine Expeditionary Force in June 2006 and given responsibility for Ramadi. When First BCT assumed control of the Ramadi battlespace in June, it found its predecessors operating like most Army and Marine forces at that time—from large bases where they dispatched routine patrols to drive through the battlespace. First BCT’s predecessors did not even patrol some areas because it was deemed too dangerous. Colonel MacFarland adopted an approach similar to that of Colonel McMaster’s Third Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar and Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Alford’s in al Qaim. First BCT had initially deployed to Tal Afar before receiving a change of mission to move to Ramadi and work for the Marines. McMaster’s accomplishments and methods served as a very fresh and very functional model for Colonel MacFarland. Colonel MacFarland dispersed his forces throughout the battlespace, placing them in small outposts, and providing a 24-hour presence. Colonel MacFarland made identifying and protecting tribal elites, and potential allies, a priority. This decision, and First BCT’s actions, signaled to tribal elites eager for an opportunity to rally against AQI that an opportunity to do so was opening.

⁴⁹ Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 331. I absolutely agree with Colonel Devlin, the author of the report—however, from a different perspective. I do not believe that American forces were ever capable of defeating the insurgency in al Anbar, only the Anbaris were capable of defeating the insurgency in Anbar. This is a very particular and nuanced point which will become more dramatically evident further on in the thesis. This point highlights a dichotomy in counterinsurgency theory. There are those who believe that an insurgency can be defeated by outside forces, and there are those who believe that an insurgency can only be defeated by the host nation population. In other words, the United States is only capable of winning a counterinsurgency fight on its own soil; anywhere else it can only help empower the host nation to do so.

AQI retaliated. First BCT had to fight its way into many neighborhoods and fight to hang on through the construction phase of its outposts. AQI also tried amping up its campaign of repression against the tribes to keep them in line. In August, AQI assassinated Sheikh Ali Jassim, one of the first tribal leaders to publicly side with MacFarland.⁵⁰ This story has become central to the popular narrative of how the Awakening was conceived. After killing Sheikh Ali Jassim, AQI hid his body for four days, intentionally preventing his family from following Islamic traditions and burying him by nightfall the day he died. Local tribal elites were enraged by AQI's deliberate violation of such a sacrosanct tradition. Sheikh Sittar Albu Risha convened a council of sheikhs. The sheikhs called this the "Awakening Council," and it marked the beginning of the Awakening movement that would eventually spread through al Anbar and beyond.

Marine Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Hobbs, a staff officer with RCT 2 in 2005, best summarizes the common perception of why coalition forces failed in al Anbar prior to the Awakening. With the notable exception of 3–6 Marines in al Qaim, "We tallied insurgents killed as victory . . . We targeted insurgent cells, versus separating the people from the insurgents."⁵¹ If al Qaim was the harbinger of effective population-centric COIN, then Ramadi served as validation. Coalition forces now had sufficient reason to question the old paradigm—enemy-centric COIN—and ask why things were the way they were before the Awakening. The answer the popular narrative offers is that the coalition had not secured the population. Ergo, population-centric COIN is credited with enabling the Awakening.

G. ADAPTATION?

The transformation of the war in al Anbar seemed to come together during the fall of 2006 and early 2007. In 2006, all had been declared lost. At the same time, al Anbar was the most dangerous province in Iraq. But, by September 1, 2008, after experiencing a 90 percent decrease in insurgent attacks, the Marine Corps turned formal responsibility

⁵⁰ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 66.

⁵¹ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 101.

for securing the province over to the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police.⁵² Unfortunately, the popular narrative, which appears in current accounts about the Surge and the Awakening, oversimplifies events. Most accounts trace the fundamental changes in al Anbar to Colonel Sean MacFarland's embrace of Sheikh Sittar, his application of the clear, hold, build approach in Ramadi, and a supposed cascading effect that events in Ramadi had on the remainder of the province. Linda Robinson exemplifies this notion in her book, *Tell Me How This Ends*: "The sheikhs felt disrespected and the population was treated like the enemy for three years, until a joint army-marine force finally turned the province by adopting an entirely different approach."⁵³

It is true that coalition forces adapted, making significant organizational changes in choosing to embrace the tribes and the al Anbar Awakening, and by shifting from large clearing operations to a population-centric, inkblot approach. Interestingly, the premise of Nagl's book, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, is that only learning organizations can adapt to the exigencies of counterinsurgency warfare. Similarly, in a recent interview, David Kilcullen stated that the United States took the historically standard period of time—three to four years—to reorient itself to the war in Iraq. This is in comparison to the British in Malaya and the U.S. in Vietnam who, Kilcullen said, also took three to four years.⁵⁴ Kilcullen's comment underscores Nagl's suggestion that adaption occurs as a natural process of acclimation to the vagaries of counterinsurgency. However, it does not take into account other potential explanations.

The first, in the case of the United States Army and Marine Corps in Anbar, is that units were not able to adapt because leaders were still too affected by the risk-averse, zero-defect military culture that defined the U.S. military in the 1980s and 90s. Only when confronted by the realities of prolonged conflict did our military leaders in the field

⁵² Dexter Filkins, "U.S. Hands Off Pacified Anbar, Once Heart of Iraq Insurgency," *New York Times*, Sep 2, 2008. A.1.

⁵³ Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 272.

⁵⁴ Carlos Lozada, "A Conversation with David Kilcullen," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-yn/content/article/2009/03/19/AR2009031903038.html> (accessed September 16, 2009).

decide, perhaps, that staying alive, keeping their men alive, and winning, were worth more than promotion or other career enhancing moves associated with maintaining the cultural status quo. The specter of certain loss doubtless helped boil away some of the previous risk aversion. It thus seems more probable that adaption occurred as a result of both factors: a change in military attitude *and* desperateness at the U.S. position in Iraq in 2006.

But these explanations are only relevant when trying to understand the length of time it took the Army and Marines to adapt to the counterinsurgency fight in al Anbar. Looking deeper we see individuals like Lieutenant-Colonel Alford, or members of the Special Forces detachments who adapted far sooner than the larger organization, or even than their peers. It could be that these individuals possessed such a different kind of mind, talent, or significantly astute feel for the culture and environment that they did not need to “evolve.” Maybe they were able to analyze the specifics of their particular situations and figure out what to do without guidance from “higher;” maybe they require doctrine and TTPs. However, conventional historical narratives ignore these possibilities. There are hints that individuals mattered, but the natural tendency is to try to generalize events into replicable TTPs and regard the impact of individuals as a consequence of their utilizing proper TTPs or possessing the ‘right’ leadership attributes. Typically, no attempt is made to try to discern what impact key individuals—**key individuals**—had on success. It could very well be that without having the right people with the right frames of mind and abilities in the right places at the right times, the successes in al Qaim, Ramadi, and elsewhere would not have been possible.

IV. WILLIAM'S WAR⁵⁵

A. WILLIAM

William's story reflects a brutal commonsense approach to "presentation of self" characteristic of people from certain parts of Appalachia, especially West Virginia, where he was born and raised. Well versed in American history, William has perfected the art of selling himself as "just a dumb hillbilly," to borrow his words, though he is anything but. When William returned to Iraq in January 2004 for Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF II), he was beginning his fourteenth consecutive year in the 5th Special Forces Group and had already chalked up four previous combat deployments in the first Gulf War, Somalia, Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. All told, William had accumulated over seven years' time on the ground in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and Africa over numerous deployments. He also speaks Arabic. Much of how William approached the war in al Anbar will now appear axiomatic in light of what has been written about the Awakening and the coalition's subsequent embrace of tribal engagement, but it must be remembered, in 2004 such an approach was still novel.

William's first mission in 2004 was not counterinsurgency. It was to identify and exploit opportunities to split al Qaeda elements from nationalist strands of the insurgency or, as it was called, the resistance. The 5th Special Forces Group headquarters had theorized that this was possible in Sunni-dominated al Anbar early on. The idea was that exposing and encouraging such a rift would reveal reconcilable elements of the insurgency that could be used to unmask and target irreconcilables. Second Battalion, Fifth Special Forces Group tasked William and his detachment, ODA 505, to confirm this hypothesis and to look for opportunities to exploit. William described this mission simply as "looking for guys to gun up against AQI."

What is important to note is the vagueness of ODA 505's initial mission. The command acknowledged that it did not have a complete enough picture of the situation in

⁵⁵ This chapter is a narrative drawn from the author's own experiences and interviews with William, a Special Forces Master Sergeant. The quotes contained in this chapter are William's unless specifically cited as otherwise. Interview conducted by author at Ft. Campbell, KY, July 5, 2009.

Anbar to further refine a mission statement for ODA 505. William, in turn, understood that he was going to have to be patient and take time to orient the team to the local situation before determining a more explicit course of action. This sequence ultimately led William to craft a concept of operations, or a plan, that was specifically contoured to the conditions on the ground.

B. OIF II

ODA 505 operated from al Asad Airbase during the OIF II rotation. Al Asad was centrally located in the ODA's area of operations (AO), which extended along the ERV for approximately 150 miles from Rawah, southeast to the Highway 10/12 split near Mohammedi, and included vast swathes of desert on either side of the river corridor. Third Armored Cavalry Regiment (Third ACR) was initially responsible for the battlespace that encompassed 505's AO when the team arrived in January 2004, but Third ACR was replaced by RCT 7 in February.

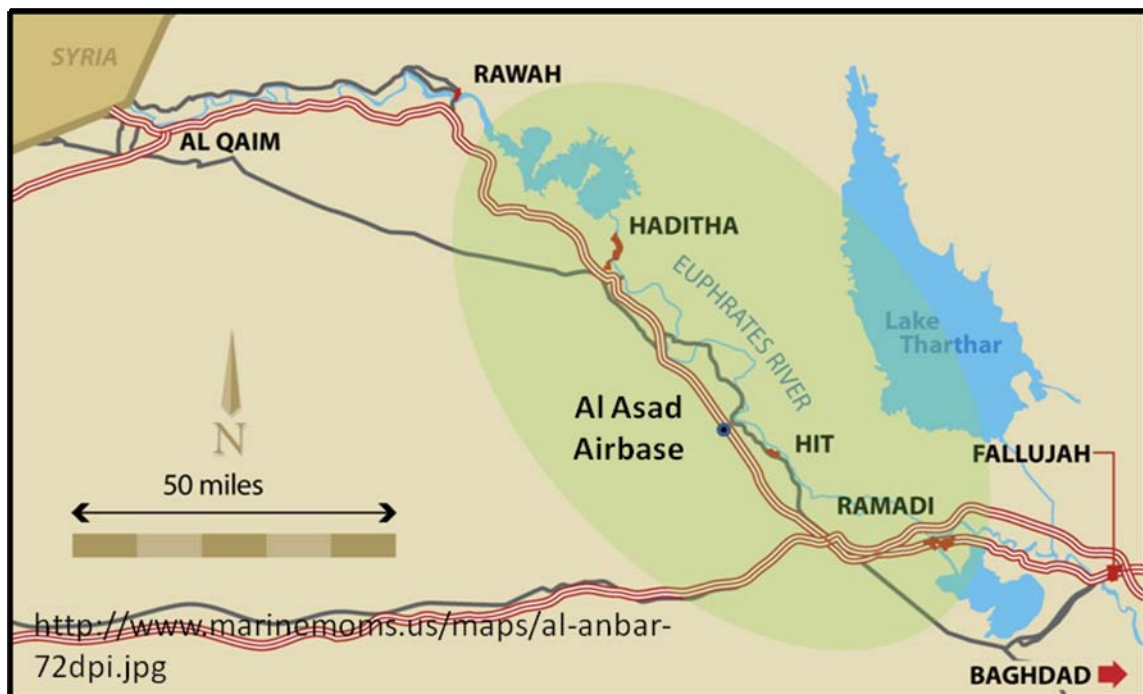


Figure 1. ODA 505's Area of Operations, 2004

1. First Contact

Police forces and city councils were the institutions that American commanders in Anbar first worked through in order to influence local populations. This was an automatic response for coalition forces told to build and support local governance by the CPA. American commanders also likely defaulted toward these institutions because they seemed familiar. Few American units vetted the local police and city councils in the aftermath of the invasion; police and council members were assumed to be legitimate. It was as if Americans assumed that armed men wearing blue shirts were police just because they were armed men wearing blue shirts.

William and ODA 505, on the other hand, took a different approach. William's thoughts were:

We [the coalition] just completely changed out a whole government! Who's to say who's a good cop, or who's a bad cop? We did not know what or who was considered legitimate by the people in Anbar at that point, although we made an assumption that the tribes were still a legitimate source of power that held influence. Saddam, after all, had had to manage the tribes, not police forces and city councils.

William knew, based on experience in the Middle East and a basic understanding of tribalism in Anbar, that legitimacy emanated from power and prestige, not titles and uniforms, and his assessment of the situation indicated that the intersection of power and prestige lay with the tribes.⁵⁶

William decided that if he was going to make any real progress toward his mission, then it would have to be along tribal lines. He learned in Somalia and Afghanistan that tribes could be very powerful mobilization structures and very necessary ones when it came to forming a consolidated indigenous front against AQI. William also assumed that he would be competing with AQI and other insurgent groups for the support of the tribes and their intrinsic mobilizing structures. Reflecting on this, William and ODA 505 formulated a basic plan for tribal engagement that could be refined as more

⁵⁶ Power being defined as the ability to compel people to follow, and prestige as the ability to impel people to follow.

information became available. The plan was simple: identify the most powerful tribe in the AO and co-opt it. How exactly cooption would be executed would depend on what the ODA could learn, how relationships developed, and what the situation permitted or suggested.

ODA 505 soon learned that a significant population of Albu Nimr, one of the largest tribes of the Dulami Tribal Confederation that dominates al Anbar, resided in its AO. William also discovered that one of the informants that ODA 505 inherited from the previous ODA was from the Albu Nimr tribe. William nicknamed this informant Nubs, and Nubs became William's entry point into the Nimr. Nubs was from the poor Shamal clan. Nubs was, by profession, a fisherman, but he supplemented his income during Saddam's reign through smuggling. According to Nubs, and others who knew him, he had survived numerous regime attempts to arrest or kill him. One story held that Nubs had mailed the hand of a would be assassin back to the authorities. True or not, Nubs was exactly the type of individual William wanted to "gun up." Nubs was competent, wily, and resourceful.

William, working with the direct support of the CJSOTF and General Mattis, used Nubs as a starting point to create a provisional company of Shamal-Albu Nimr tribesmen from the town of Tal Aswad in the al Phurat area, Hit district.⁵⁷ This Nimr unit successfully conducted operations for the Marines in Rawah and other places. Most significantly, the provisional Nimr company ensured that Route Uranium was cleared of IEDs, allowing Marine reinforcements to flow from al Asad to Fallujah in support of Operation Vigilant Resolve (the First Battle of Fallujah) unimpeded.

⁵⁷ General Mattis was the 1st Marine Division Commander, and responsible for operations in Anbar under the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force commanded by Lieutenant General Conway. William's company headquarters, the AOB worked closely with General Mattis and his staff. Iraqis have local names for small geographic areas that often encompass several towns or villages. Al Phurat was one such area. It consisted of the villages of Jubayl, Zuwayyah, Tal Aswad, and the areas between.

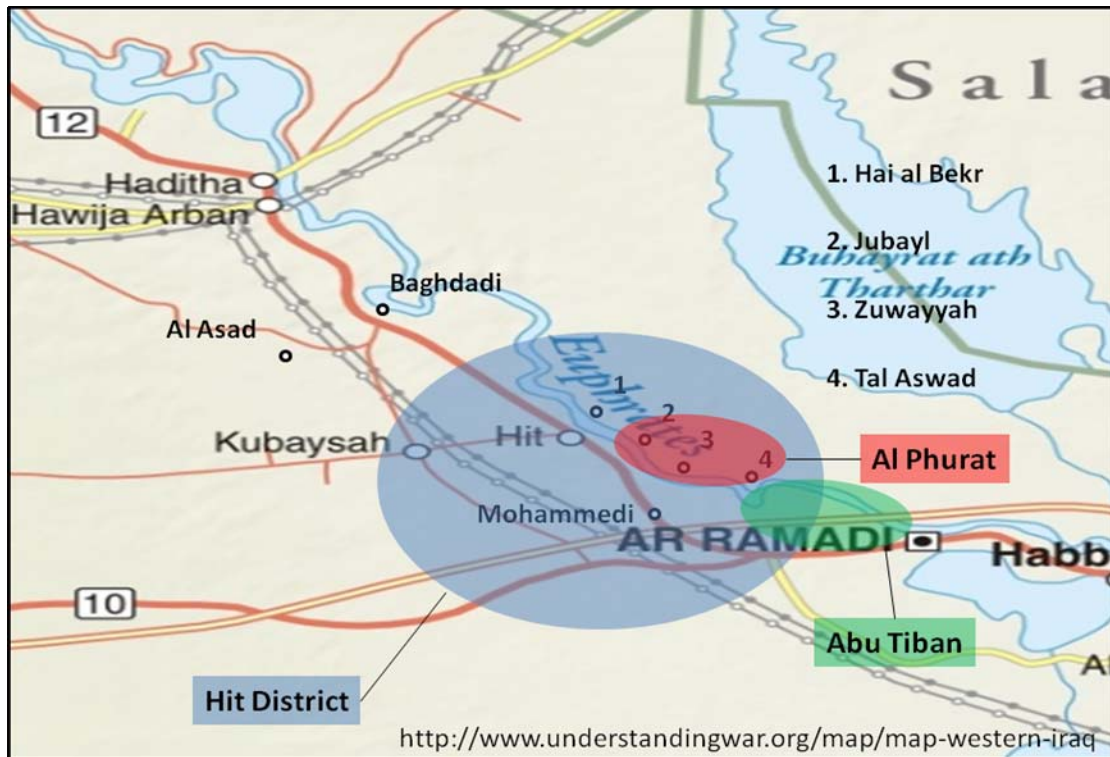


Figure 2. Hit District and Al Phurat

William solidified his rapport with the Nimr provisionals by conducting small civil affairs projects in Tal Aswad. These projects were never about winning hearts and minds. They were instead designed to reciprocate trust, respect, and commitment in a positive reinforcement of tit-for-tat. William shaped events to orchestrate a meaningful first contact with Nimr tribal elders so that they would approach him on his terms, but in accordance with their customs and traditions. In doing so, he deliberately adopted an indirect approach designed to gain the confidence of Albu Nimr tribal leaders. He calculated that the ODA's infusion of money and power into the Tal Aswad community would attract the attention of influential sheikhs since Tal Aswad was a poor Shamal community consisting of farmers and fishermen. William understood that patronage was a significant aspect of how sheikhs maintained power and influence over their tribal constituents. The sheikhs could not allow the residents of Tal Aswad to prosper independently of their patronage system because this would undermine them. Sheikh Reshad, the paramount sheikh of the Albu Nimr, called William by telephone and asked for an introductory meeting. William invited Sheikh Reshad to meet him at al Asad

Airbase, and Sheikh Reshad accepted. Not only did William succeed in maneuvering Sheikh Reshad into making the initial approach—meeting on William’s terms—but also on William’s ground. William thus began their relationship from a position of dominance.

ODA 505 traveled extensively throughout its AO in the opening days of its rotation and had local informants in almost all of the major populated areas. Nonetheless, the Nimr opening presented the most viable opportunity for sustained exploitation. William did not hesitate. He knew he could accomplish more by focusing his efforts on the Nimr piece, and designated tribal engagement with the Nimr as ODA 505’s main effort.⁵⁸

2. A Conventional Foil

The following is an attempt to condense William’s description of what his ODA did. William’s approach may seem strikingly commonsensical, almost as if he did not think it through. Yet, William continuously assessed and reassessed the ODA’s plan and, again, did so well in advance of the Awakening and the development of the Sons of Iraq.

Listen, we didn’t start out to conduct counterinsurgency. We [ODA 505] started out trying to find a way to get good guys to kill bad guys. That meant that we could not waste our time looking for bad guys, we needed to find the good guys first. Find the good guys, help them secure their lives and prosper, and they will find the bad guys for you because they want to protect what they have.

There are different ways to go about this. We did it by organizing a provisional unit based on tribal and geographic cohesion. That way, once guys committed to the unit, they had a stake in protecting each other and their town. We also didn’t assume that we had the right guys. We constantly looked for indicators that either confirmed or denied that what we were doing was working. Threats and attacks against the Nimr were a very good sign that we were being successful. The key event occurred in May 2004, when someone threw a bomb over the wall into Sheikh Reshad’s compound. That not only was an indicator that our efforts were a threat to AQI, it also pushed Sheikh Reshad further in line with the coalition.

⁵⁸ Michael Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lessons,” 16. Tribal engagement: “. . . overt interactions between coalition military and foreign civilian personnel for the purpose of obtaining information, influencing behavior, or building an indigenous base of support for coalition objectives.”

We also listened to the Nimr's concerns. Their primary concern was safeguarding their families and property. They wanted to do it themselves. In that respect, it was no different from colonial militias in our country before the Revolutionary war. They were not interested in serving in any other area in Anbar, or chasing bad guys if it meant leaving their homes unguarded. We reached a compromise with them where one third of the provisional company would conduct offensive operations for me as long as we left the other two-thirds to guard the home front. Our *wasta* went up by finding a way to work within their concerns.⁵⁹ In counterinsurgency, you have to give in to the reasonable demands of the population, if you can, if you want to get their support.

The Marines, on the other hand, didn't take this approach. The Marines were technically correct in their approach, but intuitively wrong. The first thing is that they [Marines] never worked with the right people while I was there. I will use Hit district as an example. 2-7 Marines focused their engagement efforts on the city council and police who were controlled, influenced, and/or manipulated by the insurgents. There were plenty of indicators. One was that the police would call the Marines up, within 30 minutes usually, after a mortar attack on Camp Hit, where 2-7 was based, and say they knew who was responsible. But the police never, ever caught who was responsible. How's that? The police were just providing throw-away names to appease the Marines.

The city council members were also not the right people to be dealing with. They were under insurgent control and were not the most powerful entity in the district to begin with. The Nimr were. I remember some representatives from 2-7 Marines telling me about a Hit city council meeting they attended. This meeting occurred two days after Sheikh Reshad's family compound in Zuwayyah was bombed. The Marines said that Sheikh Reshad strode in like he owned the place and told them [the council] that if any Nimr were hurt, he would level the city. The Marines said that some of those council members shook in their boots. This event told me two things. One, Sheikh Reshad knew that the council had extremist or AQI ties. They were someone's puppets through whom he was sending a message. If not, he wouldn't have chosen to direct his threat towards them. Second, being told of the visceral reaction of many of the council members, I knew they feared organized tribal retaliation by the Nimr. These two observations proved to me that I had chosen to back the right player. That being said, 2-7 Marines continued trying to work through the police and city council.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Wasta—an Arabic word whose meaning is an amalgamation of the terms: influence, clout, and prestige.

⁶⁰ William and members of ODA 505 spoke with Sheikh Reshad's nephew who was in attendance at the city council meeting. His version of events matched the story related to William by the Marines.

The Irregular Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) were also a mess. The reason was, again, they were not the right people, and they were not properly employed. The name Irregular Civil Defense Corps, or even the later name, Iraqi National Guard, suggests a local militia, which it was not. The ICDC recruits were not vetted through the tribes. Neither were the police or the city council. The tribal structures were the only ones available that could do three things we needed: 1) vet recruits, 2) provide leverage to keep recruits in line, and 3) provide community leaders who could be held accountable for the actions of the recruits. The other major factor in the ICDC's failure was that ICDC units were not employed in safeguarding their own tribal and community areas.

For example, ICDC recruits from Hit were used in Haditha. This action also had a number of negative consequences. ICDC members had no incentive to safeguard someone else's hometown. Employing the ICDC outside of their communities also negated the tribe as a mechanism for maintaining accountability. It was thought that employing ICDC elsewhere would limit corruption and graft. The truth was this action encouraged extortion and pilfering. We removed the Iraqis' own system of social accountability by employing tribesmen in tribal areas other than their own. There was also another fundamental flaw in employing Anbaris, who are tribesmen, in other tribesmen's areas. The local populace does not consider them legitimate. Think of the Texas Rangers. They were Texans, working in Texas. The Rangers didn't hire men from Oklahoma, and they didn't try to enforce the law outside of Texas. What is so hard to understand?

It's funny, the Marines said that the ICDC were disbanded because they failed to meet expectations. Everyone blames the Iraqis. No one pays attention to the fact that the Marines were responsible for running the program, training and advising the ICDC. The Marines failed because they made mistakes in how they recruited and employed the ICDC.

3. Figuring It Out

William spent an extraordinary amount of time just trying to understand exactly how AQI and other extremist elements were functioning within ODA 505's AO; he complained that almost every intelligence officer (S2) he met with or heard brief only described the enemy's actions.⁶¹ An S2, for example, might brief that the enemy was

⁶¹ S2— intelligence officer and corresponding intelligence section of a commander's staff.

planting IEDs in a particular area or that the enemy was using violence and coercion to influence the population, but never include assumptions as to why that might be or for what purpose it was being done.

No S2, that William remembers, ever presented a concept of what AQ or the insurgents' goals were, how they were trying to achieve those goals, and what resources they needed to achieve them. This conversely meant that conventional operations were mis-focused and, sometimes, operations simply had nothing to do with the enemy situation at all. William likened it to boxing. A boxer has to know what his opponent is doing before he can counter it. A good boxer does not keep trying to block the jab while right crosses are pounding him.

William summarized this very pointedly by recounting a briefing he sat in on with 2-7 Marines:

I sat in on one brief in which the S2 said that the enemy was using violence and coercion to influence the population. The S3 [operations officer] then got up and explained how the unit was going to conduct a patrol in order to hand out soccer balls and demonstrate a presence. What part of the S2's brief did he miss? How is handing out soccer balls going to defeat coercion? It can't. At no time did anyone provide an explicit plan for how to defeat the enemy.

William very consciously avoided conducting operations simply for the sake of conducting operations. William avoided the operations-intelligence trap that many operational detachments and units fall into, when units conduct direct action operations to capture or kill insurgents. In theory, these operations are said to produce more intelligence that leads to more operations, and so on, in a perpetual cycle. But this cycle can become a trap if not coordinated to support a greater end-state. Instead of focusing on individuals, William instead concentrated on trying to define what it was that AQI was trying to achieve in ODA 505's AO, and how it was trying to achieve it. William, armed with that knowledge, then sought to counter AQI's efforts.

William and ODA 505's assistant operations sergeant developed a model, depicted in Figure 1, to explain how AQI and other anti-coalition groups were operating in Anbar. They developed this model drawing on facts accumulated from observation,

reporting, confidential informants, and information obtained from locals. The model illustrates some key points. First, AQI attempted to dominate or co-opt the tribes; and second, these groups made use of civic leaders and civic institutions to support their operations and to misdirect coalition forces.

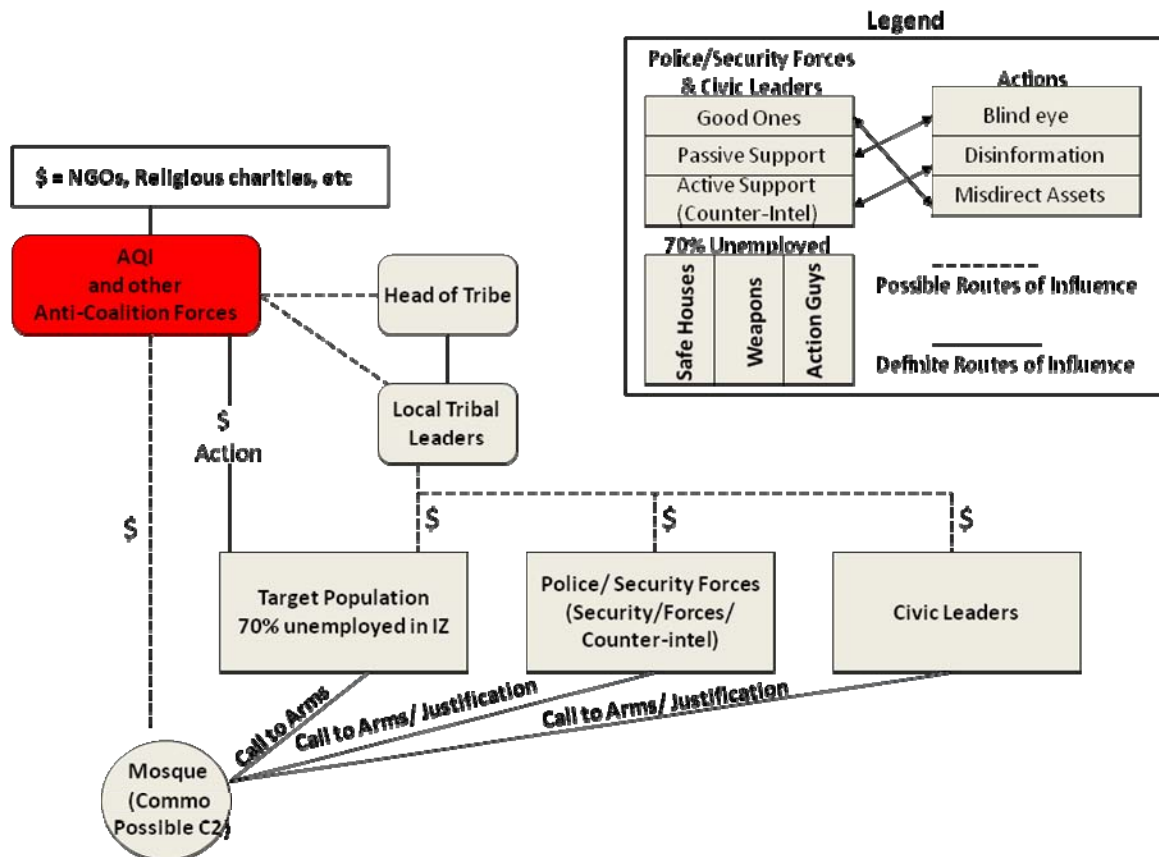


Figure 3. Counterinsurgency Model and Enemy Course of Action Template for Special Operations Area West-Juliet (January–July 2004)

This model illustrates how AQI and others used IPs in a counterintelligence role to impede coalition progress. An IP force consists of three types of individuals: active insurgents or supporters, passive supporters who simply ignore insurgent activity, and honest policemen. The active insurgent component of the police force collects valuable intelligence by observing and coordinating with coalition forces. The active insurgent component conducts counterintelligence by providing disinformation to the coalition, to the population, and to honest cops with the aim of subverting coalition stabilization

efforts. The active insurgent component also makes use of unwitting, honest policemen by using them to misdirect police efforts in support of insurgent activity.

In short, William's model depicts an insurgent framework designed to control the coalition's use of its preferred connective nodes, chiefly the police and city councils, with the intent of destroying coalition efforts to gain the local population's support and trust. The insurgents thus completely controlled the tempo of the fight in Anbar, and effectively parried coalition efforts to contain it. The insurgency, as amorphous as it was, had few difficulties shaping coalition perceptions and affecting coalition forces' reactions to events.⁶²

However, by refusing to work with the IPs or Hit city council, and by conducting tribal engagement, William disrupted AQI's ability to control the tempo of the counterinsurgency fight in al Phurat and Hit district. Even though William started small, with just one Nimr tribesman from Tal Aswad, his influence grew throughout the Nimr population of al Phurat. William developed excellent relations with Sheikhs Reshad, Bizea, Faisal (governor of Anbar), and others, while simultaneously developing a loyal following among the many members of the general Nimr population. In fact, William was competitively challenging AQI and other jihadists and salafists for dominance of the Phurat area.

4. Dirty Tricks

William additionally conducted other deliberate operations in support of his main effort with the Nimr and to disrupt AQI. He created events, either to shape the battlefield, or just to see what would happen in order to test assumptions and improve his understanding of how the enemy was operating and influencing the locals.

William did not consider Hit or other surrounding areas ripe for fruitful tribal engagement during his OIF II tour, but he also did not ignore them. ODA 505 still had to react to intelligence leads on known insurgents and requests from "higher," but William always tried to ensure that he conducted operations in ways that helped shape the

⁶² Grant T. Hammond, *The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 147.

battlefield toward facilitating accomplishment of his overall mission. He cleverly developed and executed concepts to impact insurgent decision cycles and their perceptions. William largely did this by mirroring the insurgents' tactics.

ODA 505 conducted some operations in ways that masked its identity as the sponsor. These operations presented an image to local insurgents that there were other, unknown Iraqis living around them in their communities who supported coalition objectives. These operations, combined with overt operational displays by the Nimr provisional company, enhanced insurgents' fears about the threat of coalition and tribal cooperation. ODA 505 also choreographed dissemination of disinformation through informants to amplify the perception that Iraqis were rejecting AQI and the resistance.

These operations effectively created doubt and uncertainty within the ranks of the insurgents. In one incident, a man turned his son over to the ODA. The son had been the target of a recent raid that failed to capture him. In another incident, the ODA observed two groups of Iraqis engage in a frenetic firefight with one another after the ODA had departed its target. ODA 505 received information from informants about other intra-Iraqi violence as well. Some of the violence was between competing insurgent factions, and some resulted from local Iraqis defending themselves against AQI. In this way, ODA 505 introduced something far more dangerous and threatening to the insurgents than coalition forces; it created the idea that there were local Iraqis, who the insurgents didn't know and couldn't identify or control, targeting AQI and elements of the local resistance.

Sadly, despite ODA 505's best efforts, its OIF II tour did not end as expected. After the Transfer of Authority on June 30, 2004, ODA 505 no longer had the authority to continue to pay the Nimr provisional company. The only option left was to absorb the provisional company into the 503rd ICDC Battalion at Camp Hit. William knew the provisional unit members would reject this overture because the 503rd was corrupt; it had also been penetrated. The Nimr were aware that they would be forfeiting their tribal security net if integrated into heterogeneous platoons as a Nimr minority. ODA 505 protested the disbanding of the provisional unit, but to no avail.

William and his men had cultivated a close enough relationship with the Nimr that they were beyond Nimr reproach, but the disbandment of the provisionals unquestionably affected the Nimr's view of the coalition and the Shia-dominated Interim Iraqi Government. It cost the coalition loss of rapport with a pro-coalition tribal community. Worse, the withdrawal of Special Forces from Anbar in the fall of 2004 cemented a sense of abandonment among the Tal Aswad Nimr.

C. THE INTERIM: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

While William's original mission had been to exploit fissures in the insurgency in order to encourage Iraqis to reject AQI, William had, in effect, conducted counterinsurgency. William himself acknowledges that he did not mentally make the paradigmatic shift to counterinsurgency until after the end of his OIF II tour. But all this really means is that he did not step back to consider his approach analytically, so as to give it a label. It was only when he realized the magnitude of the loss of the Nimr provisional unit that William began reassessing the events of his OIF II tour in a broader context.

Once home, William's battalion commander asked him to activate and train a new ODA. In doing so, William resolved to prepare his new ODA for a counterinsurgency role in Anbar. William sincerely believed the key to defeating AQI and managing the national resistance lay in al Anbar, despite its relegation to an economy of force effort. He desperately wanted to return to al Anbar. In the interim, he formulated a plan based on his experiences, observations, and analysis, which he shared with me.

I met William in August 2004 when our battalion commander told me that we would be teaming up with to activate ODA 504. William and I had many long discussions as he recounted his experiences in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and described how he was drawing from all of them to develop a tribal engagement-based counterinsurgency strategy should 504 go back to Anbar. William explained his strategy, beginning with three simple models.

1. Model I

The first model William described is an extension of William's counterinsurgency model. William borrowed the framework for this model directly from U.S. Army doctrine. The Army utilizes the term Battlefield Operating Systems (BOS) to refer to the physical means by which a force executes its concept of operations. The Army classifies these physical means into seven operating systems: intelligence, maneuver, fire support, air defense, mobility/countermobility/survivability, combat service support (CSS), and command and control.⁶³ The U.S. Army utilizes its own operating systems to target the enemy's. William simply applied the BOS overlay to insurgent forces to identify what constituted their systems, and what was thus targetable.

Figure 2 depicts what William determined to be AQI's operating systems in Anbar, and what he deemed targetable. The figure shows that William regarded AQI's combat service support as the only viable BOS worthy of targeting that could decisively lead to AQI's defeat in Anbar. The term "combat service support" refers to all of the essential activities necessary to sustain AQI and the insurgency.⁶⁴ In Iraq, CSS came from the population either freely or through coercion and intimidation. Classic counterinsurgency theory maintains that isolating insurgents from the population is necessary to defeat the insurgency.

⁶³ The term, Battlefield Operating Systems, has been formally replaced by the term, Elements of Combat Power, of which there are eight: leadership, information, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, command and control, and protection. *Field Manual 3-0 Operations* (February 2008).

⁶⁴ *Field Manual 101-5-1 Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1997), 1-31.








BOS	AQ Equivalent	Targetable
Intelligence	Human assets capable of gathering information through observation, coercion, and penetration	
Maneuver	Able to move through and blend with the population	
Fire Support/Psyops	Carbombs and IEDs/ Imams and media	
Air Defense	Blending in to local populations	
Mobility/countermobility /survivability	Able to move through and blend with the population	
Combat Service Support	Population	
Command and Control	Mosques, traveling imams and leadership	

Figure 4. AQI Battlefield Operating Systems in Iraq

William reasoned the same thing, but from an enemy-centric perspective for how to defeat the enemy. The remaining six systems were not untarargetable, but targeting them would be insufficient and would not inflict lasting damage to AQI or the insurgency.

2. Model II

William used his second model when explaining to others how to target the population. William always says that this model is not based on his observations, but he borrowed from something a State Department staffer told him years earlier. William's own experiences throughout the Middle East, however, confirmed the validity of the staffer's observations. This model captures how people identify themselves within the Arab psyche. According to this model, Arab identity begins with the immediate family and then proceeds along the following trajectory: Family, Clan, Tribe, Muslims like me, Muslims not like me, national identity.

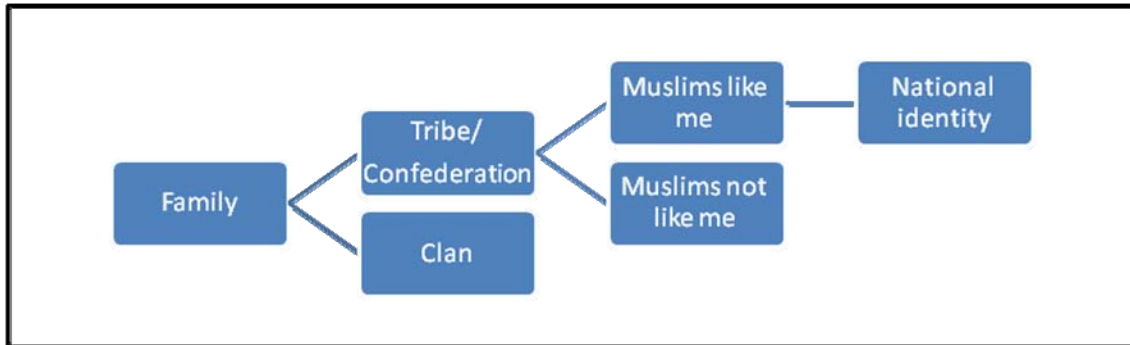


Figure 5. Trajectory of Arab Identification

William used this model to explain to others that the most effective way to non-kinetically target Anbaris was through tribal engagement. Anbaris' identity begins with the family and tribe. That is why Anbaris often attach an adjectival form of their tribal name to their given name. By doing so, they are informing others about their familial lineage and tribe. From William's point of view, because family and tribe were so central to Anbaris' identity, tribal engagement would continue to be the most viable means by which to influence local populations in Anbar.

3. Model III

William gained valuable insights from his time in Somalia and Afghanistan. From these experiences, William determined that there are three conditions AQ needs if it is to succeed in establishing an Islamic state. These conditions are:

1. A predominantly Muslim population
2. Social chaos (breakdown of normal societal structures)
3. Economic failure or near failure

When these conditions persist, they create a climate in which the populace becomes so worn down that it will accept whatever form of government prevails, even if this is Taliban-like Islamic government, so long as it brings some form of stability. Because it is also crucial that traditional societal structures be broken down to the point that their

influence becomes subordinate to that of AQI and religious authorities, these conditions can really only be created by war or through some other catastrophic event.

William used this model to explain the importance of not allowing Iraq to devolve into civil war and to demonstrate the importance of reinforcing existing social structures. Reinforcing existing social structures was also necessary to prevent AQI from undermining them for its own purposes. Otherwise, AQI could hijack social structures to serve as mobilizing structures to support its goals, while undermining or destroying structures it couldn't hijack. William determined that AQI was doing both. For example, AQI used Kharbouli tribal structures to mobilize in al Qaim, but in Ramadi AQI assassinated senior sheikhs of the Albu Fahd in order to undermine tribal leaders and make the tribe more pliant.

If coalition forces could out-compete AQI to obtain the support of tribal structures, then that would force AQI to have to rely on violent coercion and repression to force tribal acquiescence. According to William, "You want AQ to become like a cancer and start attacking the body [the population, its own base of support, or CSS]." For William, AQI-inspired violence against the tribes implied three things. First, it was an indicator that coalition and government forces' actions were threatening AQI. Second, it signaled an opportunity to align tribal needs with coalition goals if those tribes could be helped to secure themselves. And third, it indicated that the population's goals were divergent from AQI's.

4. The Model City Approach

William took his ideas and synthesized them into what he termed the "model city" approach. This is a form of the famous inkblot or oil-slick approach to counterinsurgency, the basic premise of which is to gain access to a village or town by creating jobs and security through the establishment of a local security force and using selective humanitarian or civil affairs projects to improve residents' quality of life. Once a successful initiative is underway to secure and stabilize local life from within, the locality then serves as a model for surrounding tribal populations. The surrounding populations can, in turn, improve their own security and economic prospects by

mimicking the model city and joining broader stabilization efforts. Any tribal leader who refuses to cooperate is denied economic and security benefits until he or his constituents choose to align themselves with the coalition and the host nation government on the side of stability.⁶⁵

With this approach, it becomes possible to empower local leaders and enhance their credibility in the eyes of the local community. This creates leverage over local leaders as their expanding status becomes ever more tied to support of coalition objectives. In order to facilitate long-term sustainment of their objectives, coalition forces must gradually tie support for local leaders back to the local, regional, and/or national government. However, sometimes, local leaders can be indirectly pressured into aligning themselves with pro-government forces.

William cites the western tribes as an example. Tribal leaders do not possess sovereign powers. They are largely “big men,” relying on prestige to influence their constituents.⁶⁶ William describes it in this way:

Picture a sheikh as if he is sitting atop of a pyramid. If the base of the pyramid moves, and the sheikh wants to remain on top, then he has to move with it. This is a natural democratic aspect of the tribes that not all people understand.

This is why William spent a great deal of time developing relationships and influence among the general Nimr population. It was his way of using *them* to manipulate the sheikhs.

A benefit of William’s model city approach is that it requires very few resources. In fact, gross over-spending on civil affairs projects or any entitlement-like contributions immediately undermine the entire effort. The key is to start small, spending little by under-promising on simple projects and over-performing in their completion. William’s model city approach can also succeed with limited application of manpower if the situation isn’t too far gone. If the environment is as violent as al Qaim was in 2005, then

⁶⁵ Searle, “Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province,” 64.

⁶⁶ “Big Men” is a term borrowed from anthropology to describe leaders who rely on prestige rather than power to lead.

external forces are needed to create and maintain stability until the local population is capable of doing this themselves. In areas where the violence is somewhat less, however, then even as small an element as an ODA can create security from within, working with the local inhabitants. Tal Aswad represents a prime example.

D. OIF III

I returned to Iraq in June 2005 for my OIF III rotation. I had deployed with 2nd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group previously during OIF II, but this was my inaugural trip as a team leader. William and I were at the helm of ODA 504 and eager to get to Anbar. We had to spend two months in Baghdad, though, waiting for the CJSOTF, composed of a 5th Group headquarters, to coordinate with MNC-I and II MEF to reintroduce Special Forces into Anbar.

One of the noteworthy things about William was the absolute faith that everyone up and down the chain of command had in him to go to al Anbar and succeed. William had a vision of what success looked like and a theory for how to get there. His vision looked remarkably like the Awakening, the main difference being that in William's vision, coalition forces were smart enough to create and manipulate conditions to inspire Awakening-like events. William shared his vision and his ideas with anyone who would listen. The battalion commander and the operations officer so believed that William could deliver that they pressed the CJSOTF to reintroduce teams back into al Anbar; they were as determined as William was to get him back there.

While waiting to get to al Anbar, one of the things I did was scour intelligence reports and other documents for current information about the situation there. I was intrigued by reporting that indicated that nationalist groups such as Mohammed's Army and the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade were fighting with AQI and other jihadist salafist organizations. This information substantiated what William discovered during his OIF II mission. Leveraging such fissures thus played a big part in our plans. The 1920th Revolutionary Brigade represented the reconcilable side of the resistance, an entity that could be politically 'vented off' and redirected against irreconcilable groups like AQAM. William also met some Iraqi soldiers serving in Baghdad who were Nimr from Tal

Aswad. They told us that they would soon desert because AQAM threatened to harm their family members back home because they had joined the army. This information validated the logic behind William's model city approach.

When William, 504, and I finally made it to Anbar in August, we chose to establish our teamhouse at Camp Hit due to its close proximity to al Phurat. Ideally, we would have established a teamhouse in al Phurat, but we did not know how receptive the Nimr would be to our presence given William's absence and Sheikh Reshad's death. Marines mistakenly killed Sheikh Reshad while he was fleeing a kidnapping attempt in early 2005. We thus did not know exactly where we stood and, in any event, if we were to have simply driven to Zuwayyah to meet with the Nimr sheikhs they would have presented us with a long list of grievances. Instead, William once again engineered a way to bring the sheikhs to us, working with the battlespace owners, 3-25 Marines.⁶⁷ 3-25 Marines, a Marine Reserve Battalion from Ohio, were responsible for the Euphrates River Valley (ERV) from Hit to Haditha.

3-25 Marines conducted a combat patrol shortly after we arrived to Hit in which they detained several members of the Burgess family, cousins to the al Gaaouds.⁶⁸ Several members of the al Gaaoud family, including the late Sheikh Reshad's brother, Sheikh Anis, came to Camp Hit to inquire about the Burgesses. This is when William made a demonstration of his former cordial relations with the Nimr and protested the Burgess' detainment on their behalf. He had worked this out in advance with 3-25 so that the 3-25 operations officer, who would be present, would relent, but not without protesting first. This event re-established William as an important advocate for the Nimr and a person of influence.

1. Ghost Patrols

Hit district was much more violent at the time of our arrival in August 2005 than it had been in OIF II. There were no police. The 503rd ICDC/ING had disintegrated earlier that year, and several of 3-25's combat patrols were attacked with Suicide Vehicle

⁶⁷ Appendix 2 lists the various coalition units that were responsible for Hit from 2003 until 2007.

⁶⁸ The Burgess family resided in Jubayl, a town that lay in al Phurat and our area of operations.

Born Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIED) prior to our arrival.⁶⁹ The ODA received grim reports from multiple informants that the entire situation in al Anbar was deteriorating rapidly. AQAM blew up the Telecom cell tower servicing Hit district and the surrounding areas in the latter part of August and the Albu Nimr reported an increase in threats, night letters, and attacks against Nimr tribesmen. The majority of the Albu Nimr tribe in the Hit district lived on the northeastern side of the Euphrates where there was no permanent coalition presence. It appeared that AQAM was conducting shaping operations to isolate the Nimr side of the river.

On the morning of September 4, 2005 AQAM conducted a multi-pronged SVBIED attack against a Marine firm base in Hit.⁷⁰ AQAM also simultaneously detonated an SVBIED on the Hit Bridge. The Hit Bridge was the only trafficable bridge over the Euphrates between Ramadi and Haditha. The SVBIED rendered the bridge impassable to vehicle traffic and effectively isolated the only pro-coalition tribal communities in the area, all of whom resided on the far side of the Euphrates from the Marine bases. Effectively, the Nimr were now on their own. The Nimr tribe's last line of defense was a loosely organized home guard militia that patrolled the tribal area looking for outsiders.

The Hit Bridge remained closed to vehicular traffic for three months, and for three months coalition forces were absent from the Nimr tribal areas on the far side of the river. ODA 504, during this time, drove down through Ramadi where we could cross the Euphrates and back up the river to al Phurat. We lived in the desert for a week at a time, traveling across the "jazeera" between Thar Thar Lake and the Euphrates River where we could avoid IEDs and ambushes, and maximize the range of our weapons.⁷¹ We "ghosted" out of the Jazeera at different times and along different vectors to visit villages and towns along the river and maintain relations with the Nimr tribe. Each time we did so we traveled with elements of the IA battalion also stationed at Camp Hit.

⁶⁹ Carter Malkasian, "Evidence from al Anbar," Joint Force Quarterly 46: 3rd Quarter (2007): 123.

⁷⁰ Firm Base—The Marine term for a permanent company-sized operating base.

⁷¹ "Jazeera" was the local name, in Arabic, given to the desert area lying between Thar Thar Lake and the Euphrates River.

We also conducted numerous combat patrols north along the river to maintain some sort of presence. Communities outside of the Nimr tribal area in al Phurat were mostly small and tribally heterogeneous. The people in these communities lacked a significant tribal security net that could protect them and, as a result, they were very cautious when the ODA patrolled through. A school principal from Dulab finally admitted to us that the coalition would never receive any cooperation without providing constant security to the villages. The people, he said, would support the insurgents because the insurgents were there constantly, whereas coalition and Iraqi security forces only patrolled through occasionally.

William modified his model city approach based on this information and other observations. We concluded that the most important thing we could do during this trip was to establish a solid base of support among the Albu Nimr in al Phurat. Our goal was to establish al Phurat as our base of support to prevent AQAM from using it for the same purposes. Al Phurat was the largest, most powerful, homogeneous tribal area between Ramadi and Haditha. After securing a base of support in al Phurat, we planned to methodically spread our tentacles through the smaller, tribal communities surrounding Hit, thereby choking it off before finally securing it with indigenous support.

This method ran opposite to typical western counterinsurgency practice, which often starts with the urban centers and spreads out. The situation in Hit district dictated otherwise. Hit became an alternate safe haven for insurgents fleeing Fallujah in November 2004, though it had actually been a sanctuary long before that.⁷² Hit's tribally heterogeneous population made the city vulnerable to incursions by AQAM. Outsiders could hide in Hit much more easily than they could in the rural tribal areas. Beginning a counterinsurgency effort in Hit would have been pitting our weaknesses against the enemy's strengths. The enemy had the informational advantage, combat service support, was hidden among the population, and had the strength of position. Coalition forces did not have enough troops to commit to a classical counterinsurgency approach in Hit. Starting an under-resourced counterinsurgency effort in Hit would have resulted in

⁷² Malkasian, "Evidence from al Anbar," 123.

coalition casualties, civilian casualties, and collateral damage that would invariably have contributed to AQAM's information operations (IO). As William noted, every coalition or Iraqi Security Force (ISF) casualty was an IO victory for the enemy.

William's plan to circumvent Hit and work through the tribes redounded to our credit. Once we were in the area it was clear that the model city/inkblot approach starting with Tal Aswad—not Hit—was the only way to proceed. The model city approach let us control the tempo, use the desert to avoid casualties, avoid collateral damage, target the enemy's CSS, and gain the informational advantage within our base of support. Perhaps not surprisingly, our biggest obstacle subsequently turned out not to be AQAM, but the fact that the bridge remained closed for three months and the coalition neglected to assist the only tribal communities that were somewhat pro-coalition.

2. The Albu Nimr Desert Protectors

In October 2005, shortly after the Desert Protector program was begun in al Qaim with the Albu Mahal, MNC-I and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense decided to stand up an Albu Nimr cohort in al Phurat. ODA 504 was tasked through command channels to support this initiative and recruit 200 Desert Protectors from the tribe. 2-114 Field Artillery of the Mississippi National Guard, the Hit battlespace owners at the time, were tasked to support the recruitment as well.⁷³

The environmental situation near Hit was vastly different from that of the Mahal in al Qaim. The Albu Nimr were not suffering a perceived existential threat from AQI as were the Mahal. The Nimr were also very cognizant of the implosion of the Iraqi National Guard and IPs along the upper Euphrates River Valley. They did not trust the coalition, and often cited the murder of the IPs on the Haditha soccer field as the consequence of working with coalition and government forces.

Matters were made worse because the coalition and Iraqi government would not reopen the Hit bridge or station troops on the Albu Nimr side of the river. The

⁷³ 2-114 was responsible for the area of operations (AO) that included Hit at that time. 2-114 was subordinated to RCT 2. The Hit area of operations was a revolving door for coalition units. Between August 2005 and January 2006 there were five units responsible for the Hit AO: 3-25 Marines, 3-6 Marines, 2-114 FA, 13th MEU, and 22nd MEU.

government and the coalition wanted the Nimr to trust the state with their menfolk and send them off for training, but with no show of faith or demonstration of support by the government and the coalition. William and I were caught in the middle. We wanted to recruit a tribal force and use it as a mechanism for building confidence between the Nimr and the government, but we were essentially being told to do so with no quid pro quo from the government and the coalition. Kasam, Sheikh Reshad's twenty-something year-old son and heir trusted us. But even he was reluctant to commit to the Desert Protectors.

It took some deft cajoling, but ODA 504 eventually received Kasam's blessing along with 200 recruits. The original plan put forth by MNC-I called for rotary-wing aircraft from the Marine Air Wing (MAW) at Al Asad to transport the recruits to Camp Fallujah for training once recruitment was complete.⁷⁴ RCT 2 tasked 2-114 FA to establish the landing zones (LZs) and provide security for both the LZs and the recruits. As 2-114 waited for the helicopters to arrive it received word via radio that the MAW would not be able to send aircraft until the following day, due to scheduled maintenance. That night insurgents operating on the far banks of the Euphrates mortared several of the Nimr villages. In response, the Nimr decided that they could not afford to lose 200 able-bodied fighting men by allowing them to travel to Fallujah for 30 days of basic training. In the end, the Nimr gave up 30 men while the rest returned home where they could be called upon to defend their villages if necessary. Unfortunately the Marines and MNC-I interpreted this incident to mean that the sheikhs were unable to rally support for tribal units and/or that the people were unwilling to follow their sheikhs.

3. Keeping It Together

It amazes me that the people of al Phurat remained friendly to our ODA. This was all due to William's efforts and his legacy. William established a remarkable reputation as a friend of the Nimr, a man of his word, and a warrior during his OIF II tour. William's reputation grew during those three trying months of living in the desert, out of trucks, which he insisted we do to maintain relations with the tribe. This act of

⁷⁴ The Nimr tribesmen were from isolated villages along the Euphrates between Hit and Ramadi. The safest and most expedient option was to consolidate them in the desert near the al Gaaoud family compound in the town of Zuwayyah.

commitment was vital to countering a growing sense of despair regarding the coalition. The Nimr were well aware of the situation of their beleaguered Mahal cousins in al Qaim, the murder and intimidation of the IPs and ICDC/ING along the ERV, and the growing levels of violence in the province. The disbandment of the Nimr provisional company in OIF II, the coalition's inability to reopen the Hit Bridge, the lack of coalition presence, and growing unemployment colored the Nimr's perspective. In September 2005, the Nimr's perspective was that the coalition was losing. We found it a continual challenge to maintain a positive counter-narrative to AQAM.

The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) temporarily reinforced RCT 2 in November. RCT 2 tasked the MEU to secure Hit in preparation for the December 2005 parliamentary elections and to repair and reopen the Hit Bridge to coalition vehicle traffic. The 13th MEU, following our recommendation, sent some of its forces around through Ramadi and back up the river to clear the far side, instead of repairing and punching directly across the bridge.⁷⁵ On December 2nd, we led these clearing forces in, and by doing so guided them around the Nimr areas so that they could begin clearing operations in the town of Hai al Bekr, the local name for the town directly opposite Hit, just across the Euphrates. The 13th MEU, fresh from the fight in al Qaim, where fighting had been house to house in some areas, took no chances. AQAM had booby trapped some houses near al Qaim with IEDs and dug fighting positions into others. The MEU ordered residents to vacate their homes and to leave their doors open to facilitate the Marines' clearing efforts. Marines escorted citizens to holding areas until the town was cleared.

William convinced Sheikh Kasam that it was only the ODA's influence that finally prompted the Marines to reopen the bridge. We also told Sheikh Kasam the truth—that it was the ODA that determined that the MEU's clearing operations would

⁷⁵ ODA 504 believed that the quarter-mile stretch of road leading from the eastern side of the bridge to the main road that paralleled the Euphrates was seeded with IEDs. The 13th MEU, based on the ODA's recommendation, cleared this section of road using a rocket projected explosive line charge called a Mine Clearing Line Charge (MCLIC). The MCLIC charges set off 16 secondary explosions from IEDs. These explosions destroyed much of the road and adjoining sections of palm grove. The damage was unavoidable given that the MCLIC was the safest way to clear a road on which insurgents had had three uninterrupted months to prepare an IED belt for when coalition forces eventually did repair the Hit Bridge.

begin in Hai al Bekr, and that only his tribe's friendly relations with us had spared the Nimr the inconvenience of being turned out of their homes. We designed the operation this way to deepen the trust between the ODA and the Nimr, as well as to communicate to the surrounding areas that it was best to work with the us and the coalition, and through their Desert Protectors (DPs).

The 30 Nimr DPs returned from their training in Fallujah a week before the 13th MEU's operation to clear Hai al Bekr and reopen the bridge. In addition to implementing William's tribal engagement, ODA 504 had begun training and advising the 30 Albu Nimr DPs during this timeframe. All of the DPs knew William from his OIF II rotation; he had instant rapport and it didn't take the rest of the ODA long to develop a relationship with the DPs. William and I made every effort to use our influence to tie the Nimr to the national government in as many ways as possible. As William advised, the more we could do to align the Nimr with the government, the more fruitful our counterinsurgency efforts would be. In this regard, we spent our last two months in Iraq pursuing three different lines of approach.

First, we began soliciting Sheikh Kasam, Kasam's influential family members, and other tribal leaders to support the December 2005 elections. Fortunately, the Sunni community, aware that boycotting the January 2005 elections had been a grave misstep, and freed by encouragement from the Association of Muslim Scholars and by Sunni nationalists to vote, were enthusiastic. Also, with the bridge open and the 22nd MEU providing security, the residents of Hit district felt much more secure going to the polls.⁷⁶ Sheikh Kasam's cousin, Hasan, arranged a convoy of approximately twenty vans at William's behest to ferry rural Nimr voters to the Hit bridge so that they could walk across and vote. ODA 504 and the DPs provided security at the loading point in al Phurat and escorted numerous convoys carrying approximately 1,500 voters all-told to Hit.

Second, we attempted to capitalize on the popular goodwill that was surging due to the Nimr-DP connection, the security environment established by the MEUs, and Sunni participation in the December 15 elections. The DPs *were* our information

⁷⁶ The 22nd MEU replaced the 13th MEU; reference Appendix 2.

operations. They let it be known that “they” helped the ODA guide the 13th MEU around, instead of through, their home villages, which built instant credibility for the DP program and illustrated the benefits of working with the coalition and the Iraqi government. The DPs also could take credit for securing the al Phurat city council building that was used as the loading/off-loading point for the election convoy. The DPs did a security sweep and secured the building the night before the elections. ODA 504 remained out of sight, in the desert, ready to act as a quick reaction force if necessary.

It was our intent that the Nimr community see the DPs acting unilaterally, and they did. The DPs also engaged in a firefight the night before the elections with insurgents trying to make their way across the river from Mohammedi into al Phurat. In the eyes of the local Nimr, the Desert Protectors lived up to their name. The election hype together with positive public perceptions of the DPs resulted in an out-pouring of public support and potential security force volunteers. In the weeks after the election, crowds of hundreds of young Nimr men clamoring to be DPs besieged the ODA whenever we went to al Phurat.⁷⁷

William negotiated intensely with Sheikh Kasam, Sheikh Anis—Kasam’s uncle, Sheikh Bizea, and others to arrive at an amenable means of channeling the post-election wave of sudden popular support. The Nimr and other tribes wanted to form an Army division consisting solely of Sunnis, preferably Anbaris, to operate in al Anbar. Sheikh Kasam and Bizea reported to us that they, and a coalition of other sheikhs, approached the Iraqi government through Sadun Dulami, the Minister of Defense, on this matter. However, it was obvious to us that the Iraqis would not be able to address local desires in a sufficiently timely manner. The Nimr sheikhs also recognized this and told William that if the Iraqi government conducted a recruiting drive in al Phurat that it was likely to be successful; however, they warned us that it was too dangerous for Nimr from al Phurat to travel to recruiting centers in Ramadi. We reported these facts and requested a mobile recruiting team. We knew such things were possible because the Ministry of Defense had dispatched one to al Phurat to recruit the Desert Protectors. However, no mobile

⁷⁷ Sadly, the Desert Protector program was prematurely terminated and we had little to offer them.

recruiting team was sent. Worse, the sheikhs' prediction came to pass and they disappointedly rebuked us when nine Nimr were killed on January 5, 2006 during Iraqi police recruitment at the glass factory in Ramadi.⁷⁸

In short, we were unable to capitalize on the surge of popular support that materialized in December 2005.

4. End of the Tour

We were able to see indicators of our success during the last two months of our tour in December 2005 and January 2006. William predicted that we would see increased threats, violence, and intimidation inspired by AQAM and directed towards Iraqis working with us. One of the DPs who lived on the outer edges of Tal Aswad along a tribal border area quit because unknown insurgents, coming from outside the tribal area, threatened his family. Several night letters listing names of some of the DPs surfaced in Tal Aswad.⁷⁹ Despite these threats, and despite being unpaid for the months of December and January, the DPs continued to work. It was unfortunate that arrangements for paying the DPs were apparently undermined from within the Ministry of Defense, or simply broke down thanks to ineptness and inefficiency.

Both the Nimr and the Mahal DP programs in al Qaim suffered from pay problems. Even so, in both locations most DPs continued to serve with distinction. We did what we could, within our means, to help provide for the DPs. The DPs, in turn, never publicly let on that they were not being paid. Several of the DPs approached William and explained that they had unanimously elected not to reveal the problem or their frustrations because they would have been ridiculed for working with coalition forces. This was not necessarily a reflection of the Nimr's support of us, but instead revealed a deep-seated mistrust of the coalition and the Iraqi government. Unfortunately,

⁷⁸ Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy Seals and the Winning of al-Anbar* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008) 71.

⁷⁹ Night letters are death threats, so called because they appear in the morning after having been left or tacked up on someone's door or often the door of the local mosque during the night.

often this mistrust was warranted, and we made every effort to counter it. The DPs also stated that their actions were, in part, founded on preserving the unit. They were proud of being Desert Protectors.⁸⁰

William was the first to notice and articulate another trend that we believed was an indicator of our successful efforts to undermine AQAM. Increased community support from the Nimr, and increased cooperation with the Gaaouds' leadership during the months of December 2005 and January 2006 corresponded with increased negative reporting about certain individuals working with us. We had no doubt that some of the individuals identified had direct links to segments of the national resistance, and possibly indirect links to AQAM through past associations, but that was the very reason we worked with them. Other individuals were simply our patrons within the Nimr who were indispensable to our tribal engagement activities. Our association with all of these individuals was by design. However, spikes in negative reporting against some of them seemed to indicate that AQAM was waging a counterintelligence effort aimed at derailing our tribal engagement activities.

The enemy was well aware of coalition forces' practice of using informants. It is naïve to think that by late 2005 coalition information-gathering networks were intact and had not been compromised. Legitimately or not, we were forced to redirect time and energy to protect some of our people from coalition targeting in response to the reports against them. We had to do this to protect our sources of information, but mostly to preserve our relationship with the tribe. Though these events created greater problems for us, they were, in accordance with William's assessment, indicators that we had successfully targeted AQAM's CSS system and disrupted their operations.

The last positive thing to come out of our deployment was the sanctioning of the Zuwayyah police department. We made a determined effort to get an unpaid police force maintained by the Nimr in Zuwayyah sanctioned by the government. There were multiple reasons we sought to do this. First, was the simple fact that police, because of

⁸⁰ Both the Nimr Provisional Company and the Desert Protectors succeeded because they filled a primal need common to men all over the world. The units gave their members a positive sense of self-worth and something to be proud of.

their relations with the local populace, were the most appropriate force for conducting counterinsurgency, as opposed to the army. Second, was to provide jobs. The police economically tied a segment of the Nimr to the local, regional, and national governments. Third, a tribally homogenous police force, if carefully developed, would be resistant to insurgent intimidation and infiltration. At the time, we strongly believed that any attempt to recruit police in Hit, or any other location in Hit district, would fail. Lastly, a local police force would have legitimacy in the eyes of the local populace whereas the predominantly Shia Iraqi Army battalion in Hit did not.

The Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT) was a subordinate command of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I). CPATT was responsible for the development of civil police within Iraq and we learned that they were going to open two new police departments in al Anbar. These would be the only departments outside of the coalition's heavy concentrations of forces in Ramadi and al Qaim. My team's warrant officer, Chief Pitt, formed a valuable relationship with the regional International Police Liaison Officers (IPLOs) office at Al Asad. The IPLOs were policemen contracted by the State Department to work with CPATT. Chief Pitt identified the IPLO administrator responsible for assessing prospective locations for establishing the new police departments and invited him to our teamhouse. We escorted the officer to Zuwayyah to observe ongoing security efforts and to meet some of the sheikhs. Our efforts resulted in al Zuwayyah being nominated as one of the two new departments in al Anbar. This was good news because it ensured that our replacement ODA—ODA 102—and coalition forces would have to commit time and resources to Zuwayyah, al Phurat, and the Nimr, thus locking them into furthering William's model city concept, and diverting them away from wasting all their resources on pursuing a losing strategy in Hit.

V. ROBERT'S WAR⁸¹

A. ROBERT

William was nearing retirement when we returned from OIF III. He was a team sergeant for more than five years, impressive given the fact that noncommissioned officers in Special Forces are managed much like officers. Master Sergeants typically serve as team sergeants for two years with the intent not to develop depth of experience, but breadth of experience before promoting them to be sergeants-major or moving them on to other positions. None of this appealed to William, so his retirement paperwork went in after we returned and he retired in October 2006. Robert was William's replacement.

Robert had 12 consecutive years serving in 2nd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group when he replaced William and had completed three previous tours to Iraq, as well as having visited every country within CENTCOM's area of responsibility.⁸² Robert spoke excellent Arabic and had an unusually good sense of the Iraqis. ODA 504 members often joked that Robert could "out-Iraqi" an Iraqi. Robert most likely acquired this ability during his previous three tours. Robert had spent much of OIF II and III working directly for the battalion conducting intelligence-gathering activities, which required him to live and work with a small group of trusted Iraqis. Robert was promoted to Master Sergeant at the end of OIF III, which made him eligible for a team sergeant position on an ODA. Both the battalion commander and the battalion operations officer, the same two who had such high confidence in William, specifically picked Robert to be William's replacement as the team sergeant of ODA 504.

First impressions suggest that Robert is almost William's diametric opposite personality-wise. William has a direct, in-your-face quality about him, whereas Robert is

⁸¹ This chapter is a narrative drawn from the author's own experiences and interviews with Robert, a Special Forces Master Sergeant. The quotes contained in this chapter are Robert's unless specifically cited as otherwise. Interview conducted by author at Clarksville, TN, August 20, 2009, follow-up interview conducted via email November 3, 2009.

⁸² CENTCOM: Central Command, the geographic combatant command with responsibility for the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

much more subtle. William taught the young guys on the team by example. Robert was much more Socratic. William was brusque, confrontational, and always shot straight to the heart of an issue or problem. He could instantly assess a situation, discard all irrelevant information, and then define the problem and its solution in irrefutable and simple terms. Like William, Robert had a “third eye” that enabled him to mentally strip away the nonessentials and effectively solve problems, but his approach with people was much different. Robert is a master of “mental-jujitsu.” Rather than confront people with an irrefutable answer, Robert instead leads them in conversations, manipulating their own arguments and logic to help them arrive at conclusions he has already formed.

B. OIF IV

Robert, ODA 504, and I returned to Hit in August 2006 for our OIF IV rotation. We found, much to our relief, that ODA 102 and the current battlespace owners, an army battalion—1–36 Infantry—had continued to work with the al Zuwayyah police.⁸³ When we left Iraq, we had only a promise that CPATT would commit resources and IPLOs to open the Zuwayyah IP station. CPATT fulfilled that promise, sanctioning the Zuwayyah IPs, and providing the authorization and resources to activate the station. ODA 102 took ownership of the fledgling force and acted as the Police Transition Team (PTT) until an official PTT arrived to take 102’s place. This coincided with our arrival.

PTTs are the police version of Military Transition Teams, or MiTTs. MiTTs are groups of 12–15 Soldiers or Marines assigned to advise Iraqi Army units. PTTs do the same, but with the police. One difference is that PTTs usually work with civilian counterparts. These civilians are law enforcement professionals from the United States working under contract for the State Department’s IPLO program. These civilians provide necessary real-world expertise about how to develop and run functioning police departments. Unfortunately, the relationship between MiTTs, PTTs, the Iraqi units, and conventional forces is convoluted and bears explaining.

⁸³ ODA 102 relieved us at the conclusion of our OIF III deployment. TF 1–36 was 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division. TF 1–36 replaced 22nd MEU in February 2005, RCT 7, having replaced RCT 2 was TF 1–36’s operational headquarters. See Annex 2.

1-36 was the battlespace owner for Hit district. This meant that 1-36 was responsible for managing all aspects of the war within that battlespace. Units such as ODAs 102 and 504, or Marine Force Recon, who are outside entities, are required to coordinate their activities in the battlespace with 1-36. This arrangement exists to harmonize units' activities, synergize efforts, and prevent fratricide. 1-36 is also responsible for supporting and partnering with Iraqi security forces operating within its AO, whether these are Iraqi Army (IA) or Iraqi Police. And here is where it gets interesting. The MiTTs and PTTs belong to separate chains of command within MNSTC-I, which is who they report to and take orders from. However, the MiTTs and PTTs are responsible for coordinating their activities with 1-36 because 1-36 is responsible for the Iraqi security forces as their coalition partners.

ODA 102 did well getting the al Phurat IPs started, but it was 1-36 that aggressively expanded the IP program. 1-36 opened an IP station in Tal Aswad, another in Hai al Bekr, and a third one in Kubaysa. 1-36 followed William's tribal model for recruitment, using the Albu Nimr, and followed William's model city scheme, establishing stations in coalition-friendly tribal areas.⁸⁴ Kubaysa was a weird exception.

Kubaysa is a small town that sits alone in the desert, about 20 kilometers west of Hit. Kubaysa was long considered an insurgent haven but, unlike Hit, it wasn't very violent. William and I intentionally neglected Kubaysa during OIF III because the people weren't very friendly and we did not have adequate contacts through whom to facilitate building a meaningful relationship. The IPs in Kubaysa were far less reliable than the Nimr IPs, but 1-36, like William, wanted to do everything possible to isolate Hit.

The situation in the city of Hit at the time of our arrival was grim. Parts of Hit, once a small teeming city along the Euphrates, were devastated. The following passage, taken from a letter by Captain Robert Secher, a Marine advisor to the IA, bluntly portrays Hit and the Iraqi people at the time:

Hit is a lawless town with most of the fight in the north (the insurgents control/influence the southern part) as we convoyed at high speeds thru

⁸⁴ This was uncoordinated; a natural result of ODA 504's efforts to get the Zuwayyah IPs sanctioned before rotating back to the U.S. at the end of its OIF III tour.

the town (speed is the best defense against IEDs) you could clearly see the look on [sic] the eyes of the people: sick and tired. First, a generation of Saddam, now insurgents and occupiers. Everyone makes promises and no one keeps them.⁸⁵

Captain Secher was killed by a sniper on October 8, 2006, while patrolling in Hit.

Route Mavericks runs through the northern part of Hit referred to by Captain Secher. Route Mavericks is the main thoroughfare from the highway, known as Route Bronze, through the city and across the Hit Bridge to Hai al Bekr village. Route Mavericks is anchored on one end, at Traffic Circle 1 where it intersects Highway 12 (Route Bronze), by a permanent, company size combat outpost known as a firm base. This one was called Firm Base 1. Mavericks is anchored on the other end, at the bridgehead, by a small combat outpost called COP 3, whose job it is to protect the approach to and from the bridge. The road itself, once made of asphalt, was ground to dust by tracked vehicles and was constantly flooded, creating sewage filled goo sometimes three feet deep. Insurgents repeatedly opened or blew up water mains to keep the street flooded in order to conceal IEDs and landmines.

When we arrived in August 2006, convoys moving down Mavericks had to be escorted by armor because of the ever-present threat of attack or IEDs. Armor not only provided firepower to deter any attacks, but thermal imaging devices useful in detecting IEDs. All of the buildings and shops along Route Mavericks and the riverfront near COP 3 were abandoned, most of them damaged by fighting, and some destroyed. These areas had once comprised the main commercial center of the city. It was now as William previously predicted: an insufficient counterinsurgency effort in Hit had ended in violence, destruction, and death, all reinforcing an image of strength for the insurgency and weakness for the coalition. To be fair to 1-36, it did not create the situation so much as inherit it. Five different units had been responsible for the Hit area of operations in just the six months prior to 1-36's arrival.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dan Ephron and Christian Caryl, A Centurion's Emails, *Newsweek*, November 6, 2006.

⁸⁶ Appendix 2 lists the various coalition units that were responsible for Hit from 2003 until 2007.



Figure 6. Hit

Things were not just bad in Hit, however. The situation appeared bleak all across al Anbar. The MEF G-2 released a now famous intelligence report the month of our arrival that declared the province lost to the insurgency. The personnel we encountered at RCT 7 headquarters in al Asad and 1-36 headquarters at Camp Hit did not necessarily echo or share this assessment, but it was evident to us by their demeanor that the situation in the AO was grim, and they were tired.

This was the situation in Hit that confronted Robert and the ODA. Like William, Robert had spent many nights before the tour mulling over the situation. William had shared all of his thoughts and theories with Robert, and Robert conducted his own extensive preparation, studying reports about the individuals and personalities who we would be dealing with once on the ground, and strategizing how best to counter the insurgents' efforts in Hit.



Figure 7. Looking Down Route Mavericks at Traffic Circle 2, Hit

This road had been paved prior to our OIF IV tour. It was reduced to mud and rubble by constant use of coalition tracked vehicles and constant IEDs. Insurgents deliberately blew the water mains to flood the street in order to conceal land mines and IEDs. Sometimes the insurgents were patient enough to slowly drag land mines into place utilizing string or twine in order to avoid being compromised.

C. ROBERT'S SPIN

As we saw in Chapter IV, William approached the counterinsurgency problem in Hit in his own way. So, too, did Robert. Robert used William's concept of targeting AQI's combat service support—the population—to target third party neutrals. 'Third party neutral' was the term that Robert used to describe segments of the population that were not ideologically committed to the insurgency. Third party neutrals consisted of tribal elites and common people alike who remained guarded and were fence sitters waiting to commit to the winning side—they made their choice based on who seemed most able to ensure their survival.

The following diagram is my attempt to graphically depict Robert's thoughts and ideas at the time. Robert used this diagram to brief our battalion commander about our concept for counterinsurgency in July 2006 prior to our August deployment.

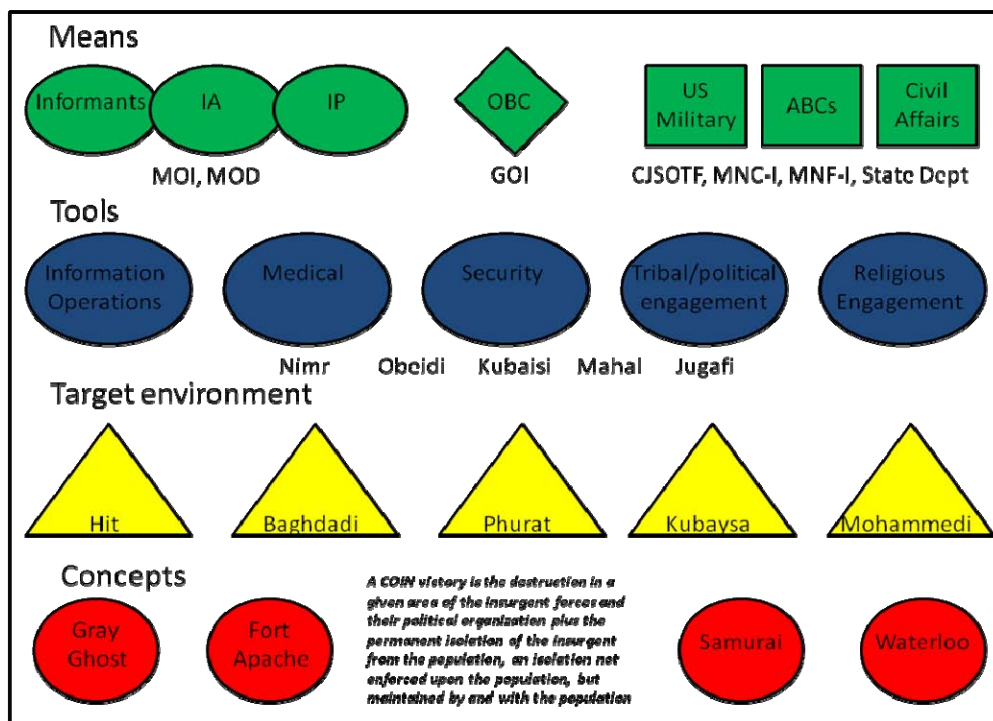


Figure 8. Targeting the Third Party Neutral (COIN)

Robert explained the diagram this way:

Our bottom line is to influence the third party neutral, the fence sitters. We believe, based on experience and conversations with Iraqis during the last tour, that the third party neutral makes up the majority of the population, even in Anbar. We have to somehow mobilize these people to support our goals.

Notice the bullet at the bottom center of the slide. It begins with the phrase, "...the destruction in a given area of the insurgent forces and their political organization..." Destruction isn't necessarily kinetic; it is by any means possible. Some insurgents will have to be killed, but most others have to be brought to the table. We have to redirect their energies towards something useful for us. A lot of these guys have legitimate grievances that we need to let them air out. If we do this and sway the third party neutral, then we can isolate the irreconcilables. The Iraqis will do it for us.

The first row depicts the assets available to us. We have indigenous assets such as the different security forces and our informants. The diamond in the center represents an office that doesn't yet exist. It doesn't really have a real name yet. OBC stands for "Office of Bitches and Complaints." This is an idea we have to provide an opportunity for the reconcilables to address their grievances.

In an ideal world, we get them to use litigation to pursue their goals as a peaceful process of contesting the government. But Iraq isn't there yet. Instead, we want to open a local office where people can formally declare their grievances and engage in an open dialogue. Realistically, this will start with us, the ODA, spending hours at a time sitting in the diwaniya [meeting house] hearing out the sheikhs and other mouthpieces for the insurgency. But eventually, we'd like to formalize the process. The remaining third of the row depicts the assets available to us through the coalition.

The second row depicts our ways or methods of engaging the population. Simple and straightforward. We want to maximize use of all available ways. The tribes named below are the tribes that we initially plan on engaging, but, of course, as opportunities arise we will branch out to other tribes.

The third row depicts our physical target environment, the towns and villages where these tribes predominantly live.

The bottom row requires explanation. Gaining the support of the population, isolating insurgents, and killing the really bad ones isn't going to unfold in a neat, linear way. It's going to occur at different times in different places. Some populations, like the Nimr, will be an easier sell

than other populations. These four circles represent some abstract goals that we seek to achieve that are both a part of the process and indicators that we are succeeding.

Gray Ghost refers to John Mosby. Mosby did his best to accord himself with honor. He built a tremendous reputation in the south, and when Union soldiers came looking for Mosby, he and his men just blended in among the people. No one turned them in. People respected him, but they also feared him because he was a man of action, a characteristic inseparable from his sense of honor.

How does this translate to us? We will be like the gray ghost. We will treat people fairly and honestly. We want Iraqis everywhere, even in the most virulent anti-coalition communities, to know us, and to say, “You know what, I hate Americans, but those guys have always been fair and honest with us.” We want friendly communities to openly support us and we want fence sitters to come to our side. However, it must be clear to all that we are men of action. We will resort to violence and kill people when the situation calls for it. We are dangerous.

Fort Apache. There may be places where we need to force the insurgents’ hand. We do this by establishing a security presence. We do it ourselves, in partnership with ISF, or through tribal surrogates, but we emplace ourselves where it disrupts the insurgents. They now have to factor us into their calculations. No matter how bad it gets, if we do this, we have to stick it out. We stay, we win. If we leave, the insurgents win.

Samurai. We’ll do this through ISF, the tribes, or both. The bottom line: we want Iraqis to start helping themselves and taking the fight to AQI and other irreconcilables on their own. We are going to make our own samurai who do this.

Waterloo. We want to create conditions and shape the battlefield so that we cannot be defeated. We want to bring the reconcilables to our side and isolate the remainder of the insurgency so it can be defeated.⁸⁷

Probably the most important thing that Robert did, or did not do, was to not reject William’s ideas. Robert recognized the validity of William’s ideas, especially William’s model city approach. Robert also recognized that in spite of the “badness” all around al Phurat and Hai al Bkr, all the “goodness” in those areas could be attributed to consistency of effort over several years. Robert’s concepts weren’t new; nor did they change anything. Robert’s concepts were his way of relating to the situation and

⁸⁷ Waterloo: Robert admits it is not a perfect analogy, but the correlation meant to be drawn is that if we could use amnesty and reconciliation to bring insurgents to our side it would put an end to AQAM, like Waterloo put an end to Napoleon’s reign.

continuing the general scheme that William had outlined in 2004: we would continue utilizing tribal engagement to create secure and stable communities that could be expanded over time, thereby squeezing out the insurgents.

D. ROBERT'S ASSESSMENT

Friendly:

Some commanders are so caught up in what they are doing that they cannot see the situation for what it is. They rely on whatever they've been trained. They forget what makes them a human being and how they do everything else in their life. They don't think problems through.

Enemy:

AQAM thought the Sunni population was ripe for exploiting against the Americans. They took them for granted and began violating or disregarding tribal and social norms and traditions, like influencing the young people against the sheikhs.

AQ didn't believe creating chaos would bring the people to them, but creating chaos for the Americans, by hitting the Americans, they were bringing the people to them.

Robert is fond of reminding people that in the Army's five-paragraph operations order, situation precedes mission. In Robert's opinion, too many units determined a course of action, or mission statement, without fully grasping or understanding their situation or the operational environment and, worse yet, continued to execute the decided upon mission statement with complete disregard for the situation.

Robert did not presume that he or anyone on ODA 504 fully understood the situation in Hit district even though the team had operated there just six months prior, with many team members on their third and fourth tours in Iraq. Under Robert's guidance, we therefore spent the first month reorienting. We drove all over the AO. Robert wanted to see every part of it, and meet with and get a sense of the locals in each area. Robert and I spent hours reacquainting ourselves with the Nimr; talking to and getting advice from 1-36's commander, operations officer, and staff; and observing 1-36's activities. When we weren't doing this, Robert and I dug through past reporting and made our team do the same.

Our honest appraisal of the situation was that the insurgents were winning in Hit. Coalition forces maintained a base of support in the Nimr tribal area of Phurat, but everywhere else, things were bad. 1-36 ended its tour with 24 soldiers killed in action, and a great many more wounded, not counting ISF or civilian casualties.⁸⁸ 1-36 was losing M1A1 Abrams and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles to huge IEDs. Civilians who cooperated with or provided information to coalition forces were killed. The sniper threat was so dangerous that after Captain Secher was killed, 1-36 and the IA stopped conducting cordon and searches in daylight.

When an insurgent sniper killed an American, an ISF member, or any Iraqi cooperating with the Americans, reporting often attributed it to insurgents' intimidation efforts or random violence directed against coalition and Iraqi forces. Robert's assessment was that the insurgency had reached a point where insurgents were committing violent acts against the coalition not by design, but simply because they were cocky. Robert was infuriated that 1-36 continued to engage Hit's civic leaders. It was obvious to Robert that the insurgency owned Hit's civic leaders. Robert questioned, why, after years of making no progress in Hit, coalition forces thought they should keep working with the same civic leadership. In Robert's estimation, coalition forces were empowering the very people who had already been fighting them far too long.

Robert's most direct criticism of 1-36 was that the commander did not divide the insurgents into those who were reconcilable and those who were irreconcilable. His failure to do so led him to continue dialoguing with entities who were reportedly, and in some cases known to be, irreconcilable people like Sheikh Yassin who was consistently alleged to have salafist ties to Ansar al Sunna.⁸⁹ As Robert said, "You can't be friends with everyone, that's not how you win counterinsurgency." In our experience, coalition commanders were too unwilling to cast unfavorable characters aside, to treat irreconcilables as obstacles, or bypass hard-core insurgent communities. We would run into this reluctance when we tried to cut the insurgent-controlled Hit city council out of

⁸⁸ "Hit, Iraq," Absoluteastronomy.com, http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hit,_Iraq (accessed September 16, 2009).

⁸⁹ Sheikh Yassin wasn't a tribal sheikh, but a religious leader residing in Hit. We considered Sheikh Yassin to be irreconcilable. Appendix 1 shows four general categories for Sunni insurgent groups. We considered jihadist salafist groups such as Ansar al Sunna irreconcilable.

the picture. Robert called people with such inflexible attitudes Ameri-can'ts; in Robert-speak, there was nothing worse than being an Ameri-can't.

In August 2006, the insurgency was definitely stronger than the counterinsurgency in Hit. The enemy owned the city and the city council. The enemy owned the roads. They took away the coalition's freedom of maneuver in town through the use of snipers and IEDs. And, thanks to IEDs, the enemy also took away the coalition's freedom of maneuver on all the major lines of communication (LOC). The police were not being properly funded and resourced by the Iraqi government. And the IA battalion in Hit was vastly under-strength.

E. EXECUTION

1. Getting into Their Decision Cycle

Get into their decision cycles by finding places where you can make contact and engage, whether it's kinetic or not kinetic, then maneuver from there. You don't know exactly where you are going to maneuver to, but you know towards what. Keep doing this to maintain forward motion and stay ahead of the enemy. Disrupt them. Don't develop such a grand plan that you constrain yourself. Free flow. Be like water. Maintain contact constantly and stay in their decision cycle. Make them react.

During OIF IV, we consistently pursued three interrelated lines of operation, which often overlapped. Our main effort, as with previous rotations, was tribal engagement. We still had a Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mission to train, advise, and employ the local IA scout platoon. The platoon of Desert Protectors that we trained and advised during OIF III was fully integrated into the IA during our absence; the platoon of DPs was designated the battalion scout platoon. Later, our advisory mission transitioned to creating a Special Weapons and Tactics unit for the Hit district IPs. The last line of operations we pursued was kinetic. This consisted of targeted raids, comprised mostly of combat patrols and some clearing operations. I will tell Robert's story within the framework of these three lines of operation, but it is necessary to keep in mind that the tour unfolded in a non-linear, sometimes circular manner as we navigated towards our end state.

So, what was our end state? Truth be told, William always had a mental picture of something exactly like the Awakening happening. I can say this because I and everyone else on the team listened to him describe this during the latter half of 2004 and through all of 2005. It didn't take much for William to transmit this vision to Robert. Thanks to William, the rest of the team had already thought in Awakening-like terms. We had come to believe in this even before we deployed for OIF III, after hearing William constantly preach it. It was this belief that helped us stay the course during OIF III. We put out of our minds the idea that we were in Iraq to chalk up statistics: raids conducted, enemy killed or captured, etc. Our goal was to facilitate a tribal awakening. If we didn't fully accomplish this on that trip, then so be it. We would come back and try again, picking up where we left off.

Robert already possessed his own version of William's vision. One can see it outlined in Robert's operational concepts, which we articulated when briefing our concept for the deployment. There were persons present at the briefing who thought we were being overly optimistic. They failed to understand that we weren't being optimistic. Rather, based on our accumulated experiences on the ground we recognized what was possible in al Anbar. Ironically, our conviction—that the situation in Anbar was recoverable—put us in good stead with the RCT 7's chain of command when we met them for the first time. They were tired of hearing bad news and pessimistic assessments.⁹⁰

Robert, very early on in his assessment, decided that William had initiated an appropriate course of action in bypassing Hit. Frustrated that coalition forces continued to engage the Hit city council, to include Sheikh Yassin, a local religious figure with known ties to Ansar al Sunna, we decided to cut the Hit city council out of the picture by no longer empowering them.⁹¹ We also decided that Hasan, Sheikh Kasam's cousin, should be mayor. He was close to us. He was intelligent and had the right political, business, and other connections. He also had the Nimr behind him. Hasan was not eager

⁹⁰ RCT 7 commanded by Colonel Blake Crowe was responsible for al Anbar north and west of Ramadi when we returned for OIF IV.

⁹¹ Ansar al Sunna, considered a salafist group, was on our list of irreconcilables.

to fill this role, however. Robert spent countless hours with him and with his father (Anis), talking, listening, and no doubt using his mental jujitsu abilities to shape their thoughts. Over time, both Hasan and Anis came to accept that Hasan was the best choice for mayor. Over time, too, Robert developed a close enough personal relationship with Hasan that Hasan probably would have honored Robert's request no matter what.

Once we had selected a mayor, we now had to find a legitimate way to put him in position. Our worry wasn't that he would be rejected by the Iraqis, but that coalition forces would not accept his appointment. Over so many tours, no one bothered to question the legitimacy of those professing to be mayors or city council members and, in any event, it was virtually impossible to ascertain who had been what before the invasion. Yet, when we proposed our idea of making Hasan mayor to coalition forces, they scoffed. What we did next exemplified how we operated our entire deployment. When we met an obstacle, we went around it. If there was something that we could not effect, we effected it through the Iraqis, almost every time.

We made Hasan mayor by convening a council of sheikhs from the district who were friendly to us and encouraging them to establish a new mayor and city council, one that we could work with. And they did. Twenty-seven sheikhs and muktars nominated Hasan to be mayor and signed a declaration confirming their decision. Coalition forces, particularly RCT 7 and 1-36, were slow to accept this change of representation as we suspected they would be. However, after we persistently referred to Hasan as mayor at every opportunity and in every community engagement with coalition forces, and after pushing him to begin coordinating with the provincial government in Ramadi, coalition forces accepted Hasan as mayor.

Zahid, a Nimr from the Shamal clan, was hired as the district police chief during ODA 102's tenure. Zahid was to become a vital, yet problematic figure for us. Zahid hated the al Gaaouds. He claimed he hated them for their illicit relations with al Qaeda and other insurgents, but this was most likely exaggerated. We were told by older members of the tribe that the Shamal clan had once been a principal Nimr family, more important even than the Gaaouds, but that fortunes had changed and the Gaaouds supplanted them. This happened at least a century ago as recounted to us. But, whatever

the reason for Zahid's enmity toward the Gaaouds, it constituted both his greatest weakness and his greatest strength. His desire to undermine the Gaaouds, combined with his desire to avenge the death of his eldest son at the hands of AQAM, gave him the necessary willpower and fortitude to be a proactive police chief. The intra-tribal rivalry this spurred was difficult to manage at times, especially since Hasan was an al Gaaoud. It wasn't our design to have the two most powerful offices in Hit split between bickering clans, but we worked with what we had. Ironically, the overall situation ended up lending the ODA more leverage than it would have had otherwise over both clans.

Current doctrine, as per FM 3-24, recommends that forces be used to secure an area, facilitating the "clear, hold, build" approach, and that deterrent patrols be utilized to keep the enemy off balance, disrupt enemy attempts to dislodge counterinsurgent forces, and reassure the population.⁹² "Clear, hold, and build" and subsequent deterrent patrols were not options available to us. We did not own battlespace or forces. It did not seem likely that coalition forces would be able to conduct adequate "clear, hold, and build" operations in Hit given the lack of resources and troops available, coupled with established commitments to protect infrastructure, the IPs, etc. We instead guided our operations around these constraints, maintaining the model city approach.

To continue to build situational awareness and to begin pressuring insurgents who were hiding and operating in rural areas, we began conducting combat patrols with the IA Scouts (formerly the DPs). Conventional forces often patrolled the roads, but we patrolled by dismounting, which enabled us to prowl around, talk with locals, and thoroughly investigate areas. Our patrols served several purposes. One was to initiate Robert's Gray Ghost concept. We consistently strove to project the image that we were good, decent people, although a bit mischievous; we were not scared of anything; and we wanted to underscore that we believed in people. We also sought to emphasize our solidarity with the DPs. We integrated them into our guntruck crews and all aspects of our patrols. The intent was to plant seeds in people's minds that would make them more amenable to us as we strove to shift the balance with the insurgents.

⁹² *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 1997), A-5.

Another calculated aspect of our patrols was to demonstrate strength. Our early patrols led to several direct-fire engagements and attempted IED strikes. The combined ODA/ DP force aggressively counterattacked or pursued our attackers and, in each instance, the insurgents fled, often abandoning vehicles to escape across the Euphrates by boat or skiff. On these occasions, we conducted battlefield recovery, taking weapons and ammunition left behind, and giving them to the police. Cars and other materials we destroyed.

As these patrols continued, we also visited Colonel Sha'ban, of the al Obeidi tribe, and the police chief in Baghdadi. We wanted to establish a relationship with Sha'ban because he and his police embodied our Fort Apache concept and because we hoped to eventually harmonize his efforts with ours in Hit. Colonel Sha'ban and his police did not control Baghdadi. They lived in a stronghold of their own making at a military housing complex that formerly served the al Asad airbase under Saddam. Insurgents feared Colonel Sha'ban's influence and targeted his police and their families for kidnapping or murder if they left the compound. Thus, it only made sense for us to address Sha'ban's immediate needs. At the time, insurgent bandits were operating illegal checkpoints on Route Bronze between Hit and Baghdadi. The insurgents shook people down, stole goods and money, and also killed known coalition sympathizers – family members of the Sha'ban's IPs. Coalition forces never could catch the insurgents at their checkpoints because the insurgents established effective early warning nets. They would depart the area as soon as coalition vehicles were reported coming down the highway. We told Sha'ban that we could do something about this. We also conducted a three-day medical civic action program for Sha'ban's community and adhoc training for his IPs.

Sha'ban sent four of his most street-savvy IPs back to Hit with us. They stayed a week. During that time ODA 504, Sha'ban's IPs, and the Desert Protectors conducted numerous combat patrols and encountered several insurgent checkpoints. We sent IPs and Desert Protectors up the road in civilian vehicles to penetrate the insurgents' early warning net. The IPs and DPs shot up several checkpoints this way. This stopped them for a period, but we had to be careful because we couldn't keep replicating our Trojan horse tactic. Sha'ban's IPs were some of the most situationally aware Iraqis we worked

with. We took them on several other patrols. On one night patrol, one of our vehicles broke down. While we were repairing it two men rode up on motorcycles with their headlights off, unaware we were there. Sha'ban's IPs immediately identified them as insurgents on the Marines' target list. Sha'ban continued to help us throughout the tour. He even provided us with some IPs during Shurta Nasir, our culminating operation. Much of that was due to Robert. Robert was able to forge solid bonds with almost every Iraqi we worked with and this ability repeatedly paid dividends throughout our tour.

We also partnered with 1-36 and General Zahid to conduct larger clearing operations. Understandably, clearing operations have negative connotations in the COIN lexicon because they are associated with attrition-based strategies, but we found them useful when incorporated with our model city approach. Communities that actively supported reinstatement of the IPs and suppressed violence were exempt. Clearing operations conducted at night, coupled with our daytime combat patrols, afforded insurgents little rest. Effort that insurgents had to expend on early warning and relocating was effort that they could not spend on targeting coalition forces, ISF, or friendly populations. What we didn't do was what Robert called "Cop Rock:" we didn't raid for the sake of amassing statistics of enemy killed or captured, and materials destroyed.

2. Shaping

It's about navigating people. Most guys forget that and ignore the human aspects that influence the plan. They try to concretely execute planning concepts regardless of what the will of the people involved is. You have to change their will or adjust to it.

We treated each area and the people in it differently, yet consistently. We were always considerate, spoke Arabic, and were thorough without being culturally invasive, even when using coercive methods. We did everything in conjunction with local Iraqis. Robert stayed consistent throughout the entire tour, adhered to specific talking points he used, and made sure the team abided by them as well. He always told people that the situation in al Anbar was going to get better. Robert's intent was to plant mental seeds so that once conditions did improve, continued improvement would become a self-fulfilling prophecy as people turned out to assist the coalition and ISF. The only group Robert

condemned was AQAM. He did not condemn the resistance, but he did oppose its use of violence. In keeping with the idea of an Office of Bitches and Complaints (OBC), Robert publicized that we were willing to talk with members of the resistance at any time and listen to their grievances as well as forgive anyone willing to denounce continued participation in insurgent activity, so long as they did so in the presence of their local sheikh or imam. Even if we couldn't prove it, we knew that many of the sheikhs and police we talked to were direct or indirect conduits to national resistance groups like the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade. Robert crafted the following talking points to not only sway third party neutral segments toward our side, but to engage the resistance:

- The situation will improve
- AQAM is out to destroy your way of life
- More can be gained from political participation than violent contention
- The insurgency against the Iraqi government was strengthening Iran's influence in Iraq
- We were willing to sit down with any representatives of the resistance and hear them out
- Acts of insurgent violence were criminal acts against the Iraqi people.

In time, several older tribal sheikhs and imams began to vent to us. They lamented the social wreckage that AQAM was inflicting on traditional tribal society in Anbar. The older sheikhs voiced concern that they had lost control over the younger men in their tribes, the young twenty-somethings and teenagers. Sheikh Anis told us that AQAM manipulated young men by framing insurgent life as romantic and heroic, but also by giving meaning to their young lives. Robert instantly saw what was happening. Young men, dismayed by the lack of opportunity in their lives and, at a more basic level, needing to feel like men, were drawn in by AQAM's overtures. AQAM was able to fulfill psychological and physical needs in ways the sheikhs could not. AQAM was unraveling traditional social structures and replacing traditional nodes of influence: sheikhs, imams, and parents. Robert recognized that AQAM was overplaying its hand,

and this provided us with opportunity. Robert used this vulnerability to build solidarity with the sheikhs, and we used AQAM's own framing devices to build internal support for the IPs with the sheikh's consent and partnership.

There was choreography to Robert's deep discussions with tribal sheikhs and other elites. Robert called it the tarot card analogy, but it really was a means by which to initiate an honest dialogue. Robert would lay out the general situation then walk the person through what would happen if nothing changed. Robert would next walk the person through the second and third order effects and potential outcomes that would result from positive change and actions taken by the person to facilitate reconciliation. This approach represented a combination of war-gaming, counseling, and listening. Robert engaged in a conversation, not a lecture. The dialogue always evolved into a two-way discussion of potential issues, complaints, and solutions. In describing it, Robert said, "It came down to a discussion of the future as we saw it together. I got them to trouble-shoot solutions with me."

A significant turning point occurred for us in October 10-12, 2006.⁹³ We struggled as we tried to integrate the Nimr DPs into the local IA battalion as the scout platoon. Petty jealousies, the DPs' unique relationship with the ODA, and the DPs' own intransigence created animosity between the DPs and the IA battalion commander. The situation required our constant attention. The IA battalion commander, eager to demonstrate his authority over the DPs, instigated confrontations through unfair treatment of them. The DPs, in response, behaved flippantly and threatened to desert. The Marine MTT, responsible for advising the IA battalion, held a battalion formation to rehearse a memorial service for Captain Secher, a MiTT member who was killed on October 9. The formation was struck by three incoming mortar rounds, which killed five Iraqi soldiers, wounded 34, and wounded one of the Marine advisors.⁹⁴

We heard the explosions of the incoming rounds from our compound adjacent to the Iraqi camp. Being mortared at Camp Hit was a regular occurrence and we didn't

⁹³ The dates are approximate. It occurred a day to a few days after Captain Secher was killed.

⁹⁴ Robert remembers evacuating 53 people; 34 wounded is the number that required extended hospitalization for their wounds and were not returned to duty after treatment.

think anything of it until two of the DPs, wounded, came staggering into our compound. ODA members immediately jumped in trucks and rushed to the impact site in the Iraqi camp to begin treating the wounded. The remaining ODA members went to 1-36's battalion aid station where we knew the wounded would be brought and triaged for medevac. We assisted with medical treatment and translation. All of the members on ODA 504 could speak at least passable Arabic. Some of the wounded were screaming and others, not wounded, wandered around looking for their comrades. We helped the battalion surgeon and medics by translating, brought order by calming down the unwounded Iraqis, and comforted some of the more seriously wounded. This really helped the ODA later on. The Iraqis saw our "Iraqiness," and came to see us less as outsiders.⁹⁵

The attack happened just as night was falling. Of the 28 Nimr DPs in the scout platoon, two were killed and six wounded. Robert and I were quick to take control of our two dead Nimr soldiers, so we could deliver them to their families for burial. Early the next morning, Robert, the ODA, and I escorted the bodies of our fallen Nimr to Tal Aswad, so that their families could bury them before sundown in keeping with Islamic tradition. The surviving Nimr DPs were outraged. They were not upset over the losses per se, but over the useless nature of their losses. Even illiterate farmers and fishermen recognized the stupidity of holding a large troop formation in a camp that was regularly targeted by mortar and rocket fire. We knew word about the casualties would spread quickly, like a contagion. That is why Robert and I decided to take the bodies to the Tal Aswad police station and ask the police chief, Chief Ghanim, to contact the families and escort them to the station to receive the bodies. Family and friends quickly descended on the police station, openly grieving and railing at coalition and Iraqi forces because of the senseless nature of the deaths. There was no point in trying to allay their grief. We had brought the surviving DPs with us. We released them on leave and left.

⁹⁵ On ODA 504, we had developed a list of 600 key Arabic words that every detachment member had to learn. We conducted all of our FID training without the aid of interpreters, were able to intermix Iraqis into our truck crews, and conduct combat operations without interpreters if they were not available. We did this deliberately because once a unit become reliant on interpreters, the host nation forces turned to the interpreter for guidance because he was the communicator. We always wanted the Iraqis to turn to us first in any situation, thus we implemented intensive language training on ODA 504.

Before doing so, we traveled to Sheikh Anis's to pay our respects and personally tell him what had happened before he heard a distorted version from the grieving relatives. We expressed our sympathies for the families and acknowledged that we understood their frustrations. Most importantly, we asked for his advice about how to handle the situation. Sheikh Anis, in a very grandfatherly manner, counseled us about what to do. Then, as we prepared to leave, he took me by the arm and whispered, "Do not worry. You will soon receive the help that you need."

One of our goals had been to form a Hit district SWAT using the DPs. We had repeatedly requested that RCT 7 work to get the DPs released from the Iraqi Army to serve as the foundation for SWAT. We cited the persistent poor treatment of the DPs by the IA battalion commander and explained that he had alienated the DPs to the point that they would never be fully integrated into the predominantly Shia battalion. Our requests were continually denied. After the mortar attack, it was clear that the DPs would desert. We tried to get the DPs hired into the local IPs after they quit the army. Some went to work as security for the al Gaaouds.

In the weeks that followed, we spent more and more time in non-kinetic engagement. Robert dedicated hours to listening and talking with sheikhs, with General Zahid, and with others. We often invited General Zahid, Hasan, and members of their inner circle to stay the night at our team house. The ODA members spent the evenings entertaining and conversing with our guests, always guided by Robert's talking points. Robert also developed specific talking points to guide ODA members when we wanted to influence our guests in a particular direction. Robert had endurance for marathon dialogues that far surpassed what anyone else on the team was capable of. He would talk long into the night with our guests, without the aid of an interpreter.⁹⁶

Words, though, are meaningless without action. We lived General Mattis's dictum: "No worse enemy, no better friend," which was both calculated and sincere. In terms of non-kinetic engagement with the sheikhs, with friendly populations, and with

⁹⁶ We had to frequently invite Zahid to stay. Because of his initial willingness to fight AQAM and because of his stature among the Shamal, who made up most of the police, Zahid was an important figure. However, his erratic behavior, narcissism, and contempt for the Gaaouds required continued care so that he didn't instigate intra-tribal conflict or make irresponsible decisions regarding the IPs just to serve his personal purposes.

third-party neutrals we, in Robert's words, "...slowly delivered on everything like a girl dating a guy, and wanting to ensure the relationship ends in marriage, not just a one night stand—slowly." In other words, we did not promise or quickly deliver on large civil affairs contracts or other significant projects; we did not reduce our leverage.⁹⁷ We also demonstrated that we would respond swiftly and decisively when engaged, and would just as quickly come to the defense of our Iraqi allies.

In time, both the Shamal and Gaaouds acted as gateways through which we expanded our tribal engagement. In some cases we reached out, in others the tribes approached us. Sheikhs from Ramadi to Haditha requested audiences with us, and Robert used these contacts to actualize his Waterloo concept. It was our goal to facilitate cooperation among the tribes against AQAM and, in the process, siphon off the reconcilable segments of the resistance.

We knew about the Awakening in its early days as it coalesced under the banner of Sawar al Anbar (SAA). We followed events in Ramadi through reporting, but also learned much from our Iraqi friends. In late summer/early fall 2006, the coalition believed the Awakening was a localized event in Ramadi. We assumed otherwise after noticing indicators that General Zahid was connected to Thawar al Anbar (TAA), the militant action arm of the SAA, Sheikh Sittar's Awakening movement. Robert handled this development in much the same way he did when trying to reach out to the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade via certain sheikhs and other intermediaries. No Iraqi, save one contact, ever openly acknowledged that he had ties to the resistance. Conversations always tap-danced around the issue with insinuations like, "I know that you know that I know..." But our prodding resulted in an invitation, via Zahid, to meet with Sittar at his compound in Ramadi, an invitation we honored.

By December 2005, we had developed good rapport with several Nimr sheikhs from Barwanna, the Obeidi in Baghdadi, the Albu Soda from Abu Tiban and Ramadi, the

⁹⁷ This worked well for us until we were undercut by RCT 2. RCT 2's Civil Affairs element offered large civil affairs contracts to Sheikh Kasam, mostly as a method to buy cooperation. We built relationships then very carefully used projects as subtle leverage in an escalating game of tit-for-tat, just as William had done in OIF II. We also used dentcaps (dental civic action programs), humanitarian assistance, and medical assistance as tools in building our relationships with the tribes.

Mahal, the Albu Risha, and a smattering of other tribes. Sheikh Kasam hosted periodic councils at his compound in Zuwayyah where we effected both the OBC and Waterloo concepts. Leadership from RCT 7 (later RCT 2) and the MEF attended several councils. These meetings were especially important to us because we provided the sheikhs with talking points beforehand so that they could engage the Marine leadership in order to further our counterinsurgency concepts.⁹⁸ Several sheikhs, to include Sittar on one occasion, asked us for advice in dealing with coalition forces. Robert and Chief Pitt skillfully used these instances, combined with assessments sent via our daily situation reports, to influence all sides toward common goals.

Sheikh Bizea was one of many older sheikhs who had sought refuge in Jordan after the invasion. He and his sons, Talal and Jalal, along with other expatriate sheikhs and businessmen, maintained an on-again, off-again dialogue with the coalition. Robert believed that Bizea and other expatriate sheikhs were maneuvering to stay relevant. Prior to the Awakening, expatriates like Bizea maintained power and influence, and profited from the war by playing all sides: the coalition, the resistance, and AQAM. Coalition forces helped exacerbate this situation when the CPA rejected overtures from Bizea and his son Talal in 2004 to create tribal security forces.⁹⁹ The Awakening, which was an emergent grass roots movement, threatened to marginalize the expatriate sheikhs as the balance of power and influence started to shift to the sheikhs who had remained in Iraq, and now began aligning with the coalition.

The complexity of all of these relationships was amazing. Sheikh Bizea provided long distance counsel to Sheikh Kasam who was of the same family, but he sent an envoy to court General Zahid whose hatred of Kasam was no secret. Sheikh Sittar initially communicated with Zahid through the SAA, but then established a direct link to Sheikh Kasam in accordance with tribal conventions, and assuaged Kasam's concerns about Zahid by promising to manage Zahid via SAA channels. The web of interactions and

⁹⁸ In several instances, when we wanted to influence coalition forces in certain directions, we translated talking points into Arabic and had the sheikhs rehearse.

⁹⁹ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 24.

duplicity went on and on. What they signified was that even amidst the fight for survival against AQAM, there was intense inter and intra-tribal maneuvering, all aimed at control of resources, coalition support, contracts, IPs, etc.

Whereas many other Americans would have picked a side, Robert worked all of them. Robert recognized the value of acting as a central node among competing entities. We manipulated the competition and used resources to influence, enhance, and sometimes force cooperation toward our counterinsurgency goals. For example, an astute Army Civil Affairs Major working for 504's AOB realized that his team could enjoin the Albu Sadi near Baghdadi to support coalition goals if directed by their paramount sheikh, Sheikh Rad. Unfortunately, Rad was incarcerated at Camp Bucca for allegedly participating in the killing of a Nimr man. Rad was most likely the victim of an intra-tribal power play and had been set up. The AOB recommended his release, which the Marines also supported it. Although we were able to demonstrate that the charges were very likely false, we still had to make sure that the Nimr would be okay with Rad's release.

We also needed to gain Sheikh Rad's friendship and support in the face of the fact that he had spent approximately two years in confinement for a crime he didn't commit. To accomplish both we decided to take control of Rad upon his release and sequester him for three days with tribal allies who would follow a prearranged repatriation program designed to bring Rad up to date on the status of the Awakening and secure his support, and hence his tribe's support. We initially approached Sheikh Sittar with our repatriation idea, then told Sheikhs Anis and Kasam that we were going to work through Sittar to avoid conflict with the Nimr. Anis and Kasam's responses were to promise reconciliation between the tribes. They then requested the opportunity to repatriate Sheikh Rad, which we happily agreed to.

Even as we were training and advising the IA scouts (DPs), we and 1-36 put together a plan to create a SWAT element for the district IPs. Our ODA goal was to create a local, legitimate band of samurai to go after AQAM, while 1-36 wanted the IPs to have a direct action capability. The ODA and 1-36 collaborated to create the SWAT, which proved to be a significant logistical challenge. The phenomenal expansion of the

Hit District IPs meant that 1–36 and the Marine PTT assigned to the IPs could not adequately equip the IPs they were already overseeing, let alone provide the necessary tactical gear to outfit the SWAT. Consequently, Robert and Chief Pitt solicited support from Hasan al Gaaoud and the Gaaoud family. The Gaaouds helped by purchasing and donating uniforms, plate carriers, AK-47 chest rigs, and other items.¹⁰⁰

We put the Hit SWAT through a mini selection and an intensive 30-day training regimen beginning in October. By December 2006, we had two SWAT platoons capable of conducting unilateral operations. On one of their first unilateral forays, the SWAT uncovered an impressive arms cache that included two SA-14 man-portable surface-to-air missiles. The SWAT routinely mobilized and conducted unilateral patrols or raids based on walk-in informants. The SWAT captured a Yemeni foreign fighter transiting the desert routes that lay between the Euphrates and Thar Thar Lake. Not to be outdone, the Tal Aswad IPs responded by mounting their own aggressive patrols. Led by Chief Ghanim, the Tal Aswad IPs captured several insurgents and foreign fighters along these routes and drove others off in running gunfights. The SWAT's success inspired emulation and jealousy within the rank-and-file IPs. General Zahid constantly tried to undermine the SWAT because we would not allow SWAT to become his dedicated praetorian guard. We conditioned the SWAT to serve the people and not cater to Zahid's nepotistic wishes. This would later come back to bite us.

Robert had, by December 2006, realized all of his concepts to some degree. The OBC existed, not formally, but in concept as we routinely held councils with sheikhs and other elites. The Hit SWAT were our samurai and there was evidence that TAA was beginning to actively target AQAM in the Hit area, which also achieved our samurai concept.¹⁰¹ The Fort Apache concept existed in the communities that aligned with us: Barwanna, Baghdadi, Hai al Bekr, al Phurat, Abu Tiban, etc.¹⁰² The Gray Ghost concept

¹⁰⁰ The items were purchased through business associates in Baghdad.

¹⁰¹ As noted, the Tal Aswad and Baghdadi IPs became more aggressive as well.

¹⁰² We did not work in Barwanna; the Marines and our sister ODA, 502 did. The Barwanna Nimr sheikhs first approached us seeking to establish a relationship and to emulate the coalition-tribal collaboration in our AO. We met with them routinely at our councils, but handed them off to ODA 502 to work with directly.

was manifest in these communities and in areas in between. The Waterloo concept also began to materialize. Several individuals began to attend our councils in Zuwayyah who I recognized from previously having been on our target list and we knew that every time we spoke with certain individuals our message was being carried to nationalist resistance groups like Mohammed's Army, 1920th Revolutionary Brigade, Baathist entities, and others.

We also had multiple indicators that the fruits of Robert's endeavors were negatively impacting the enemy. AQAM tried to disrupt our tribal alliances and target our tribal allies. Robert, Hasan, and I were targeted with an IED after leaving a Hit city council meeting. An SVBIED tried to strike the Zuwayyah police station. A suicide bomber dressed in a burka attacked the IPs at the Hit Bridge, and the IPs and their families were targeted for murder or kidnapping if they departed our base areas. Additionally, we had indications that we, along with the emergent Awakening movement, were swaying third party neutrals. The Albu Soda and other tribes living in Abu Tiban established an unofficial tribal police force to protect their community, but observed the legitimacy of the Hit district IPs by coordinating their actions with General Zahid. Tribal leaders from areas outside of Hit district came to us at various points to seek advice on how to achieve the same level of collaboration with coalition forces that we had in Hit district.

3. Culmination

We were transparent to the people: 'Here is what we believe is good and bad. We believe in your way of life.' We always made it clear that we worked with people; they did not work for us. We never built resentment and we never made threats that we couldn't keep.

Despite our progress among the tribes outside of Hit, Hit continued to be a cesspool of insurgent activity. The only Iraqi civilian medical facility in the area was the Hit hospital. The Hit hospital lay deep in one of the insurgent-controlled neighborhoods. Coalition forces routinely came under fire in that area. Pro-coalition civilians could not contemplate even going to the hospital. Several people from the pro-coalition communities on the northeast side of the Euphrates died as a result of lack of medical

care. The lack of access to good medical care began to weigh heavily on the minds of some of the IPs. In response, we, working with a Civil Affairs team, initiated the building of a clinic in al Phurat. Although the clinic was not finished before our tour was completed, the psychological effect of at least seeming to respond to the immediate needs of our tribal allies was extremely positive.

We bypassed doing anything ourselves in Hit for reasons previously described, and because we did not want to be drawn into making Hit a battlefield, something that the insurgents sought. However, beginning in November, we began making routine excursions into the city at night with the SWAT. Sometimes we had targeted intelligence. Most of our informants had made their final break with the insurgency and had come over to our side. Through them, we knew where the families of some of the hard-core insurgents lived. We treated these locations, along with their safe houses, like fishing holes, visiting them to put more pressure on the enemy. We also prowled around to prevent the emplacement of IEDs; we reported or cut the wires on IEDs that we found; and, on one occasion, the night before a planned 1–36 daylight operation, we discovered an IED factory with IEDs ready to go.

General Zahid also began sending nightly IP patrols through Hit. The purpose of these patrols, besides making it more difficult for the enemy to rest, was to boost the confidence of the IPs and to enhance their sense that they had control over the situation, and over the enemy. All of this was critical preparation for an eventual showdown and the “reconquest” of Hit.

Robert envisioned an operation in which the IPs, supported by coalition forces, would sweep through Hit, driving out AQAM, and reclaiming permanent control of the city. Robert planted the idea in Hasan’s and Zahid’s minds very early in our tour and routinely revisited the subject, sometimes subtly, other times more directly. Robert played upon Zahid’s narcissism, manipulating his desire to be a revered public figure, equal to the sheikhs in stature and respect. Hasan, because of his loyalty—or maybe his pragmatism, we will never truly know—was easier to work with.

The issue of when the conditions would permit a successful reconquest was a topic of intense debate within the team. By November, we had developed sufficient contacts who had access to the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade and even some other fringe elements that we thought we could ensure a successful operation. Without these contacts, the enemy owned the information, and without these contacts, we wouldn't be able to turn the Hit population to our side to turn on additional spigots of information.

The first break came in November when Zahid asked us to secure the release of a man named Ma'mun. Ma'mun worked for Zahid as an informant and was detained by coalition forces. We obtained Ma'mun's release. He subsequently had a falling out with Zahid and began providing us information directly. Ma'mun came from an established family in Hit and was a "former" member of the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade. The second break came when Ma'mun introduced us to an imam whom we called Abu Abdullah. Abu Abdullah had extensive knowledge of the insurgency between Hit and Baghdadi. He had operated a rural mosque and insurgents met there routinely to plan, pray, or hide. He had abandoned his duty caretaking the mosque because both coalition forces and the insurgents were after him. Each side suspected him of working for the other. He finally came to us. The Gaaouds provided Abu Abdullah with sanctuary and served as a go-between with Ma'mun. This action led to an even deeper rift with Zahid, but could not be helped.¹⁰³

The last break came when Robert met with a man named Ibrahim Medani. Medani was an influential sheikh who resided in what is called the Teacher's district of Hit. Robert met Medani while the ODA and SWAT were supporting a 1-36 operation in Hit. 1-36 conducted a major daylight operation along Cherry Street in December. We split the ODA into three cells and each cell teamed up with a SWAT element and patrolled into the city to cover the flanks of the 1-36 main effort. Since he was patrolling through Medani's neighborhood, Robert decided to drop in on Medani. As Robert remembered it:

¹⁰³ Reflecting back on Sheikh Anis's statement, "You will soon receive the help that you need," it appeared to Robert and I that the Nimr, and really the Gaaouds, were facilitating the personal connections that later made our culminating operation, Shurta Nasir, possible.

Sheikh Medani was always portrayed as a sickly old man by the 1/36 Cdr, but when I met him he was a vibrant, wise, and interestingly intelligent older gentleman. His tribal area was the Teacher's district, nearly a third of the town. It had a large number of personnel involved in JTJ and that is why they had no problems conducting attacks on Iraqis down by the hospital. It was interesting that no big players resided in the area of town by the hospital, but all of the carnage occurred there. The main thing with Medani was that innocent people were getting hurt and it was mainly the Americans doing the hurting after being shot. He was the main venue for reconciliation prior to Shurta Nasir. Medani cooperated by keeping his word and pushing for a 1920th ceasefire; he leveled the playing field for us. He was all grins when I visited him later, during Shurta Nasir.

Medani admitted that Robert impressed him by casually sitting with him and conversing in Arabic despite having an interpreter present. Medani told Robert that he had never met another American like him, and wished they had met sooner. Up until this point, Medani hadn't really figured into our planning. We had previously had only vague information about him. Robert realized how influential Medani really was at this impromptu meeting and took the time to pull Medani in and obtain his cooperation.

We finally agreed that by December 2006, conditions would be sufficient to retake the city, but the decision was ultimately settled by forces outside our direct control, the battlespace owners. 1-36 suffered a long hard tour in Hit, with many casualties. It had built a 700 man district police force and opened four additional police stations, expanding far beyond the al Phurat police force in Zuwayyah. 1-36's final major operation was to establish a permanent police station in Hit near Traffic Circle 2, in the vicinity of the market and astride Route Mavericks. We would have liked to have convinced 1-36 to reconquer Hit with us, but we could sense that 1-36's commander was unwilling. Given the circumstances of 1-36's tour and the unit's imminent redeployment, this was perfectly understandable. We began thinking about how to convince the incoming unit, 2-7 Infantry, to support our plan.¹⁰⁴

Task Force 2-7 assumed control of the battlespace from 1-36 in January 2007. We decided to try the same indirect approach with them that had served us so well throughout our tour. Because of Sheikh Sittar's growing stature and the incipient

¹⁰⁴ 2-7 Infantry: 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

Awakening, coalition forces were enamored with the idea of the Sunnis rising up against AQAM. We took advantage of this fixation. We coached Hasan and Zahid to present a unified plan to the 2-7 commander for reclaiming Hit. It took considerable time and effort to bring these two together in a coordinated pitch to 2-7.

Robert, Chief Pitt, and I sat with 2-7's commander, Ma'mun, Hasan, and Zahid in Zahid's office at the district IP station, and Hasan and Zahid presented "their" idea. Zahid, either due to his extreme narcissism, or maybe his confidence really was this unshakable, told the 2-7 commander that he could rid Hit of all "terrorists" in two days time, but required coalition support for logistics and to cordon off the city. The 2-7 commander looked to us for confirmation of Zahid's ability to carry this out. We affirmed that he could, but suggested four days might be better. The resulting operation was named Shurta Nasir.

Two popular, abbreviated accounts of Operation Shurta Nasir are found on the next two pages. One is the official MNC-I press release and the other taken from Wikipedia. These accounts, while never complete nor entirely accurate, nonetheless provide a sense of the scale of support that coalition forces provided the IPs. 2-7, in short order, developed a plan to completely isolate Hit by cordoning it off, but 2-7's most impressive action, by far was in the realm of logistical support. 2-7 built and pre-staged logistical packages and assets so that as soon as the IPs had secured template locations for the establishment of additional IP stations, fortification and reinforcement of these sites could begin.

Despite the significant logistical challenges, the most difficult part of the operation proved to be maintaining solidarity amongst the key Iraqi players. Unbeknownst to most observers, General Zahid almost derailed the entire operation. The day before the operation Zahid decided to arrest Ma'mun, not for valid reasons, but because Ma'mun had somewhat out-shown Zahid during the planning for Operation Shurta Nasir. Ma'mun was our resident "insider," and therefore provided crucial advice about how to best execute Operation Shurta Nasir without alienating Hit's citizens. But Ma'mun had also made the "mistake" of developing a closer relationship with Hasan than with Zahid.

Zahid wanted more than anything to be thought of as the conquering hero, and in dramatic fashion typical of his behavior, threatened to not participate. The whole point of the operation was to support an Iraqi-led, Iraqi-executed plan with minimal numbers of Americans in the background, and with the ODA and the PTT advising the IPs. While it would have been possible to continue without Zahid, to do so would have undermined these efforts to reinforce and utilize the Iraqi chain of command. Robert worked hard to keep Zahid on board. He invited Zahid to stay at the team house and consequently stayed up all night talking Zahid in circles until Zahid convinced himself to be the “better man” and set aside his differences with Hasan for the good of the community.

Task Force 2–7 began sealing off Hit on February 15, 2007. On the morning of the 16th General Zahid, the IPs, IP SWAT, the ODA, and the PTT were to begin the main effort. The operation was supposed to unfold in the following sequence: first, 2–7 would isolate the city, controlling all entry and exit. Next, the SWAT would seize the main mosque in Hai al Bekr and the Green Mosque in Hit, located in the market 200 meters from the bridge. Zahid would then begin broadcasting instructions from both mosques. He was to declare a 72-hour curfew, instruct all civilians to remain in their homes, and announce that any vehicles seen moving on the streets would be considered hostile.¹⁰⁵ After that, the SWAT would begin targeted raids in Hit, and clear neighborhoods considered insurgent sanctuaries. Robert and an ODA cell would accompany the SWAT.¹⁰⁶ Robert was also going to use this opportunity to meet with key tribal and religious figures in the city, visiting them in their homes.

¹⁰⁵ Zahid took seriously the threat of SVBIEDs; he also concurred with us that previous sniper attacks had most likely been executed from a car.

¹⁰⁶ ODA 504 was trained to operate in independent three-man cells depending on mission requirements.

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Multi-National Force – West PAO

Iraqi Police Conduct Operation Shurta Nasir to clear Hit of Insurgents

Hit, Iraq – Nearly 500 Iraqi Police from Hit recently conducted Operation Shurta Nasir (Police Victory) meant to clear the town of terrorists and identify new locations for new police stations.

Iraqi police planned and led this large scale operation, the first this year in western Iraq, which included nearly 100 recent graduates from the Jordanian International Police Training Academy. A combined force of 1,000 soldiers from 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division and U.S. Army soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Mechanized Infantry, also known as Task Force 2-7, cordoned off the area to assist the police during the operation.

Hit Police captured 13 known terrorists and one large weapons cache in raids and targeted searches through the city of roughly 100,000 inhabitants. It is believed that a number of terrorists went into hiding once the operation began. With the assistance of Police Transition Teams, the Iraqi Police also began construction of two new police stations to meet the demands of the growing department.

Figure 9. MNC-I Press Release of Operation Shurta Nasir¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Multi-National Corps – Iraq, press release, “Iraqi Police Conduct Operation Shurta Nasir to clear Hit of Insurgents,” http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10117&Itemid=128 (accessed October 14, 2009).

... Almost immediately following the transfer of authority, the local Iraqi leaders pressed the TF 2-7 IN for an operation to clear Hit due to the high level of insurgents believed to be in the city. LTC Crissman, the TF commander, agreed to a clearance operation and OPERATION SHURTA NASIR was created.

Operation Shurta Nasir (Police Victory) was TF 2-7IN's first Task Force level operation and set the stage for stability and security within AO Hit. The intent of the operation was to clear the city of AIF and assist the Iraqi Police (IP's) in establishing police stations within the city. Before the operation the Hit Police were over run while trying to establish new police station in the city. TF 2-7IN elements provided an outer cordon (with IA assistance), construction assets, and ground and air QRF support, while the IP's conducted clearing operations and occupied new police stations. The operation began on 15 February, 2007 with a support package consisting of sustainment, medical and construction assets being pushed forward to FB4, as well as a platoon-sized QRF element.

On 16 February, the TF TAC was moved to FB1 as a forward C2 element. Six blocking positions were occupied, preventing vehicle and pedestrian traffic into and out of the city, and a curfew was announced. RCT-2 Heavy Engineers, escorted by 2nd Plt E/2-7IN, began berming operations near the southern blocking positions to assist in enforcing the cordon. Once the cordon was set, IP's established TCP's within the city to enforce the curfew and began to occupy the two new IP stations in conjunction with the PTT.

Blocking positions were established by platoons led by 1LT Scott T. Freas and 1LT Eric Perkins and IP's began conducting clearing operations, beginning in the northwestern portion of Hit and moving toward the southern blocking positions, ultimately resulting in over twenty detainees and shifting the power in favor of the newly legitimized police force. At the conclusion of the four day operation, two new Iraqi Police stations were established. . . . Police checkpoints were also established at the hospital and several key intersections, and the city was free of insurgents. The operation was finalized by a walk down the one time most dangerous street in Hit, "Cherry Street", by LTC Crissman, the Hit IP chief GEN. Hamid, Mayor Hikmat and an entourage of Hit citizens. Cherry Street runs through the center of the city and is the home of the Hit outdoor market.

Figure 10. Excerpt from Wikipedia on Operation Shurta Nasir¹⁰⁸

Chief Pitt led an ODA cell, some SWAT, and IPs, and patrolled into Hit to establish a forward command post near the city center. This provided direct over-watch along Cherry Street and Hit's southernmost neighborhood. Cherry Street had been Hit's most dangerous street and the southern neighborhood was an insurgent sanctuary. It was on Cherry Street and the approaches to this neighborhood that 1-36 had suffered the most catastrophic IED strikes. The plan was to put a police station midway along Cherry Street and another in the middle of this neighborhood.

¹⁰⁸ Wikipedia, "Hit During the War," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C4%ABt_during_the_Iraq_War (accessed October 14, 2009). Reference the comment in paragraph two where the contributor states, "Before the operation the Hit Police were overrun while trying to establish new police station in the city"—neither I nor any of the persons I interviewed know what this comment refers to. Insurgents did conduct a coordinated attack on the IP station at Traffic Circle 2 shortly after it was established, but the attack was beaten back. There were no other sustained attempts to attack that IP station during ODA 504's OIF IV tour.

As this was unfolding, I was supposed to take General Zahid and a large force of IPs to patrol the area between Hit and Mohammedi. This area was comprised of palm groves, quarries, junk yards, and chicken farms that were commonly used by all manner of criminals and insurgents. We knew that, despite pained efforts to maintain operational security, insurgents in Hit would have sensed “something” going on and fled to these areas.

Lastly, after the SWAT had cleared and secured the proposed IP station sites, Robert would call in the PTTs who would arrive with IPs, logistical packages, and assets to begin building the IP stations. We gave ourselves four days to conclude the entire operation and begin restoring a controlled normalcy to the city.¹⁰⁹

That was the plan. Here is what happened: General Zahid was hours late marshaling his IPs, and then seemed to stall.¹¹⁰ We suffered the delay as long as we could, but finally launched the SWAT to seize the mosques and begin announcing the curfew. This inspired several aggressive younger officers who worked for Zahid. They rounded up IPs, manned IP pick-up trucks, and drove straight to all of the insurgent-affiliated mosques in Hit. They cleared the mosques and began announcing the curfew. Robert, his cell, and the SWAT seized the building on Cherry Street that was to become the Cherry Street IP station and turned it over to the IPs. After that, Robert and his gang spent 96 hours clearing and raiding throughout the entire city, acting on information provided by Ma'mun and citizens who began to come forward.

Robert cleared the whole city without a shot being fired. It seemed evident that Medani had made good on his word, but we believed that Zahid also had something to do with the lack of insurgent resistance. The 2-7 PTT commander—a young engineer captain and someone who excelled at working with Iraqis—and I, as patiently as we

¹⁰⁹ Another challenging aspect of the operation was to keep the IPs working four straight days. Something so simple actually caused great consternation among many of the IPs. There were no such issues with the SWAT.

¹¹⁰ The IPs were predominantly Nimr and all came from the Tal Aswad, Zuwayyah, Hail al Bekr, and Hit stations. The Kubaysa IPs did not want to participate and, at any rate, were less capable and certainly less reliable. The PTT and Zahid had carefully worked out how many IPs would be left behind to man the IP stations in Tal Aswad, Zuwayyah, and Hai al Bekr, and patrol their jurisdictions.

could, worked on assembling enough IPs to perform our tasks.¹¹¹ Zahid was still stalling. It was apparent that he did not want to conduct his patrol outside of Hit. Instead, I redirected him to seize the IP station in the southern neighborhood along with the hospital.

I could have “played hardball” and forced Zahid to help us conduct the patrol between Hit and Mohammedi, but then I wouldn’t have been confident about him if we made contact with the enemy. It would have been me, two other members of 504, a Civil Affairs team, and a host of IPs whom we knew, but had not trained. Zahid had handpicked many of these IPs for their loyalty to him. Robert and I have since discussed these events at length, and we strongly believe that Zahid cut a deal that allowed him to take the city unopposed so that he could play the part of conquering hero, while the insurgents in turn avoided capture or death. This would explain why he was so cocksure about being able to clear the city in two days. Worth noting is that in a city that for months had been the nucleus of insurgent activity and violence—to the extent that 1–36 had lost Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles to IEDs and foot patrols usually ended in firefights—we took the city without a shot fired. Then there were Zahid’s stalling tactics, which prevented him from having to patrol insurgent havens south of town.

We didn’t believe that Zahid’s motives were nefarious so much as they were designed to protect his image. He had taken to carrying an ax handle and dispensing tough rhetoric, a caricature of Sheriff Buford Pusser as portrayed in the semi-biopic movie *Walking Tall*. Why chance spoiling his image by potentially getting his nose bloodied in a fight with insurgents? Besides, even Zahid understood that the tide in Anbar was turning, and that by letting the insurgents run away he could still win. Of course, it could also be that he was able to win without fighting because with his connections to TAA, he would have constituted a credible threat in the insurgents’ eyes. He may have used this to his advantage and given the insurgents a way out without their having to fight, again because if they ran and he stayed, he won.

¹¹¹ There were two PTTs, one a Marine PTT from CPATT, and the other a PTT constituted of soldiers from 2–7, led by this young captain.

William always said, “If we stay and they [insurgents] go, we win.” Robert and I said it again during planning to remind ourselves not to become too fixated on statistics.¹¹² After Operation Shurta Nasir, the coalition and ISF controlled Hit. We had three IP stations in town, checkpoints at key locations, a permanent outpost at the hospital, and permanent checkpoints controlling the major roads into Hit. We left the minor roads permanently blocked. General Petraeus visited several weeks after the operation and he, 2–7’s commander, Zahid, and Hasan strolled down Cherry Street—something that was inconceivable just a month before. In a final bit of irony, Zahid and Hasan used an ODA tactic on General Petraeus. They were supposed to be present at the Cherry Street IP station awaiting him and the 2–7 commander, but on the one and only occasion Zahid and Hasan willingly worked together, they slipped out and went for a walk. They deliberately returned late, after General Petraeus’ arrival, so that he would have to stand to greet them.

F. AFTERMATH

Make them [enemy] wonder what’s going to happen next—this is hard for conventional forces. Conventional forces tend to stay static after they secure an area. They do not kinetically/non-kinetically continue to pursue the enemy, staying within his decision cycle. They become too concerned with building the support of the population. They assume the cancer is in remission when it may not be.

The ODA, members of our company headquarters, the SWAT, and a handful of other IPs launched into the areas south of Hit on the last day of Shurta Nasir. Our first stop was a chicken farm. Chicken farms were notorious for their use by insurgents. We went to this one because an IP had taken me aside that morning and told me he knew of a cache located at the chicken farm. He took me right to it. Each of the chicken houses had a water tank perched on a cinderblock pedestal; the pedestals were hollow, containing large caches of weapons, ammunition, explosives, and other items. We would have never

¹¹² RCT 2, which had replaced RCT 7, was openly disappointed with the lack of detainees to come from the operation. They were further frustrated that several detainees whom informants identified as known insurgents could not be processed because of lack of evidence.

On a separate note, “we stay, they run,” must be reinforced with an aggressive IO campaign. The public has to understand what had to happen so victory could be complete.

found them on our own.¹¹³ As my cell was uncovering the caches, Robert's cell and some of the SWAT continued on to another nearby chicken farm. There they were met by gunfire and in an ensuing firefight killed two Syrian foreign fighters. This event seemed to confirm our suspicions that Zahid had brokered a deal. We would continue to visit this area in the near future.

After Shurta Nasir, we waited for the insurgents' counterstrike. We were sure that it was only a matter of time before SVBIEDs started coming our way, and that they would come from the south. We worked hard to gather specific information that would help us stave off the inevitable, but we mostly encountered rumors. It seemed that most people in Hit were thinking the same thing that we were and, as a result, the rumor mill was running full time. Sure enough, within a few days an SVBIED traveling north on Route Bronze from Mohammedi struck an IP checkpoint that was established as part of an outer net to interdict just such an attack.

Ma'mun told Robert that he heard there were at least two more car bombs prepped and hidden near Mohammedi. The ODA conducted repeated combat patrols into this area, and Robert tenaciously ferreted out two VBIEDs hidden in a maze of desert recesses formed by quarries and wadis. Almost any other person would have given up. But not Robert. Robert also had the ability to patrol the same area that conventional forces had covered a hundred times and find something. The difference was that Robert never simply "patrolled through" an area. Robert investigated. He talked, questioned, and poked around. Robert knew Iraqis well enough that he could sense when something wasn't right, and he would keep digging until he found out what it was. Finding the other two SVBIEDs was important. It signaled to the IPs that they weren't just cannon fodder for checkpoints, but that we—and the SWAT—were trying to protect them.

We only had six weeks left in our tour when Shurta Nasir concluded. It was a busy six weeks. Before Shurta Nasir, we had begun reaching out to a Mahal sheikh living in Mohammedi, who had brutally lost two sons to AQAM, to see what the possibility of flipping Mohammedi might be. He was too intimidated to even speak with

¹¹³ I remember thinking that I was glad that this IP switched sides and gave up the goods. There was no doubt that many of our IPs had done the same; that was the point of the whole exercise.

us. After Shurta Nasir, however, people from Mohammedi contacted Zahid and requested help establishing a police force and IP station. Mohammedi was on the verge of tipping, and Zahid, trapped by the image that he had created, did not want to say “no.” He asked the ODA for advice, knowing that any new IP stations or forces ultimately had to be sanctioned through coalition forces, the provincial government, and the Ministry of the Interior. But, flipping Mohammedi was an opportunity not to be squandered, which would have happened had we left the opening of a new IP station to bureaucratic processes. So we told Zahid to just do it, and he did. He took a contingent of Hit IPs and stuck them in Mohammedi to get things going. We reported it, adding that it would be foolish for coalition forces not to support communities openly defying the insurgency and aligning themselves with the Iraqi government. 2–7 was thus obligated to establish a presence in Mohammedi to support the new IP station. Shortly thereafter, Zahid repeated his actions in Abu Tiban.

The opening of IP stations in Mohammedi and Abu Tiban was fortunate because this automatically brought tribes other than the Nimr into the Hit District IP force. Now that the district was secured, the Nimr advised us to begin integrating in these other tribes. The Nimr intuitively understood that the IPs’ legitimacy in Hit depended on having Hit citizens on the force. This was a matter that could not wait. The immediate problem was that, until now, IPs were supposed to attend the Iraqi Police Academy, hosted in Jordan. This meant subjecting recruits to an unnecessarily long process that didn’t meet situational requirements to quickly integrate the force. The ODA presented an idea to 2–7 to instead recruit IPs from Hit and put them through an intensive 40-hour basic training course at Camp Hit with the SWAT acting as cadre. The new IPs could then be rotated through the police academy at a later date. We also presented a complete 40-hour program of instruction (POI).¹¹⁴ Both 2–7 and RCT 2 supported implementation of this idea. 2–7 recruited 150 IPs from Hit proper, and the ODA oversaw the SWAT as it put the first 50 recruits through the 40-hour POI two weeks before we rotated home.

Two PTT teams worked with the Hit IPs. CPATT provided the official PTT that was responsible for overall administrative oversight of the IPs, to include their pay. The

¹¹⁴ This was an idea we had tried to implement at a much earlier date, but could not get accepted.

second PTT team was organized by 2-7, taken out of hide, to supplement the CPATT PTT due to expanding requirements associated with growing the IP force. The CPATT PTT's tour ended shortly before Shurta Nasir. We later learned from their replacements that our SWAT was not on the IP payroll. Managing the payroll had produced constant problems for the preceding PTT because Zahid continually tried to hire and fire IPs. Evidently, he had at some point stricken the SWAT from the roll. The previous PTT had consistently paid the SWAT, but had not adjusted the books. The new PTT refused to pay the SWAT.

This is what we were left with: the SWAT, the least corrupt element of the district IPs, an element that was capable of unilateral action, and had borne the brunt of the heavy lifting during Shurta Nasir—had helped locate SVBIEDs intended to strike the IPs and coalition forces, and was now running the forty-hour IP basic training—was being left high and dry. The legitimate process of reinstating SWAT members as official IPs and getting them back on the payroll was, according to the PTT, a difficult process because the district was already over-strength for IPs. We implored the 2-7 commander and RCT 2 to intervene and find a way to reinstate the SWAT, or at least find the necessary funds, but we received no support. No one was willing to say that the system was broken, acknowledge that the right thing to do was to take care of the SWAT, and then make an effort to do that. We were stonewalled by “Ameri-can’ts.”

Robert was furious. 2-7's reputation was built on the SWAT, but 2-7 failed to acknowledge this truth and now chose to look at the issue in black and white terms. The SWAT consequently worked for us for two months without pay. We did what we could to help them. Even Hasan provided what he could to financially help support the SWAT's families. Zahid, meanwhile, cleverly convinced the SWAT that Hasan was at fault for their situation, not him. Even more frustrating, this situation came to a head during our changeover with the ODA replacing us. We weren't able to see it through, correct it, and take care of “our guys.” Worse yet, we handed over a bad situation to our replacements.

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VI. ANALYSIS: HOW TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF WHY WILLIAM AND ROBERT DID WHAT THEY DID

A. WHERE DOES AN UNCONVENTIONAL MIND COME FROM?

Howard Gardner, in *Frames of Mind*, challenges the common assumption that intelligence is a single general capacity that every person possesses to varying degrees. Instead, Gardner presents the idea that there are multiple intelligences and that each person has his or her own unique cognitive profile, which is a result of natural proclivities and undergoing the right experiences to develop those proclivities. Gardner posits that there are at least seven different interdependent frames of intelligence, which may be combined in adaptive ways if a person has the right acumen.

One of the intelligences Gardner identifies is “personal intelligence.” Personal intelligence is essentially an acute sense of self, the ability to read people and situations, and adapt one’s self to them. There is also an inward aspect that involves understanding one’s own emotive and cognitive functions. Together, these skills enable individuals to read particular social situations correctly, determine the likely behavior of others and the consequences of their own behavior, and subsequently execute the right sequence of moves to achieve their goals.¹¹⁵ Psychologist Robert Sternberg calls this practical intelligence, because it involves possessing knowledge not for its own sake, but for specific, practical purposes.¹¹⁶ In many instances, people with this ability know how to do something without knowing why they know how to do it or being able to explain how they know what to do.

A person’s proclivity for practical intelligence is biological, but application of intelligence requires knowledge and knowledge is learned. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell demonstrates through several short case studies that practical intelligence amounts to social savvy that is part attitude, part skill, and part knowledge. Gladwell contends that the basis for practical intelligence is genetic, but social savvy is

¹¹⁵ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 254.

¹¹⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2008), 101.

mostly learned from those around a person when he or she is growing up. In most cases, this is family. Furthermore, culture matters. For example, a person growing up in the heart of the Appalachians of West Virginia and a person growing up in eastern Washington State will share fundamental similarities determined by a common American culture, but with added local wrinkles, since “on top” of personality “are tendencies and assumptions and reflexes handed down to us by the history of the community we grew up in...”¹¹⁷ In other words, some individuals’ development places them to the far right of the spectrum, eclipsing most others in terms of their capacity in a particular intelligence or skill.

Malcolm Gladwell asserts that natural gifts and hard work are not enough to explain extraordinarily successful individuals. Outliers, those who deviate from the mean, are the result of individual proclivities and “hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot.”¹¹⁸ He additionally proposes that, “It makes a difference where and when we grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forbears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to imagine. It’s not enough to ask what successful people are like, in other words. It is only by asking where they are from that we can unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who doesn’t.”¹¹⁹

Gardner also identifies several higher-level cognitive operations that some individuals seem to possess to an unusually high degree. These are: common sense, “the ability to deal with problems in an intuitive, rapid, and perhaps unexpectedly accurate manner;” originality, “the skill of fashioning an unfamiliar and yet worthy product;” metaphorical capacity, the ability “to perceive analogies and to cut across various intellectual domains in the process of forging illuminating connections;” and wisdom, “general synthesizing power.”¹²⁰ More than anything else, these higher-order cognitive

¹¹⁷ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 204.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁰ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 286–293.

abilities, because they are rare, and even more difficult to explain, may be indicative of an unconventional kind of mind. Again, as Gladwell suggests, the only way to understand why someone possesses one or more of these higher-order abilities is to unpack that person's experiences, relationships, and development.

B. HOW DO PEOPLE WITH UNCONVENTIONAL MINDS THINK?

In his book, *Sources of Power*, Gary Klein observes that most studies in decision making have focused on human limitations—why people make poor decisions—and what type of systems can be employed to help people make better decisions. This, he points out, is the conventional approach. Klein labels the abilities that people draw on to help them make decisions “sources of power.” For Klein, deductive logical thinking, analysis of probabilities, and statistical methods represent conventional sources of power. In contrast, Klein's research focuses on naturalistic decision making. Naturalistic decision making is decision making in a field environment, and draws on different sources of power: the power of intuition, metaphor, mental simulation, and storytelling.¹²¹

People often misconceive intuition as a ‘gut’ feel or reaction. But in fact, each of the unconventional sources of power Klein describes depends on a person's experience bank. Experts naturally have deeper experience banks than non-experts. Current conventional wisdom holds that it takes ten years or 10,000 hours of practice to make an expert, and the conventional perspective is that experts have more facts or rules at their disposal as result of their practice or experience. However, according to Klein, facts, knowledge, and rules are incidental to becoming an expert; what really defines an expert is being able to perceive. Yes, experts have refined their ability to perceive through practice and experience, but they can still perceive more; they can see *different shades of black*.¹²² They can see more shades of black thanks to their ability to think across seemingly unrelated domains.

¹²¹ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 4. Cue learning: the need to perceive patterns and make distinctions (identify mismatches in the situation and/or environment) Intuition is the ability to size up situations quickly. Metaphor means using experience to draw parallels between current situations and past experiences or other domains. In mental simulation individuals imagine how a course of action might be executed and what its effects will likely be. Storytelling is consolidating one's experiences to make them available to others or one's self in the future

¹²² Klein, *Sources of Power*, 168.

Klein's *recognition-primed decision (RPD) model* illustrates this. Klein explains that there are three variations to the model. Variation 1 is the basic model, applied in the simplest situations. A decision maker recognizes a problem is typical, understands what he wants to achieve, which cues are important to pay attention to, what to expect, and therefore pursues a course of action that is likely to succeed.¹²³ Klein notes, "The recognition of goals, cues, expectancies, and actions is part of what it means to recognize a situation."¹²⁴

Variation 2 occurs when more time is required to diagnose the situation. The decision maker gathers information until he is able to make a diagnosis. Mentally, this requires identifying specific features of the problem and comparing them to past experiences. Once a decision is made and a course of action implemented, the decision maker watches to see where there is a mismatch between what he expects to occur and what occurs. Many people fall into a trap at this point. Rather than recognizing signs that a strategy is failing, people often try to explain them away; they build a story to explain discrepancies while maintaining a failing strategy.

¹²³ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 25.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

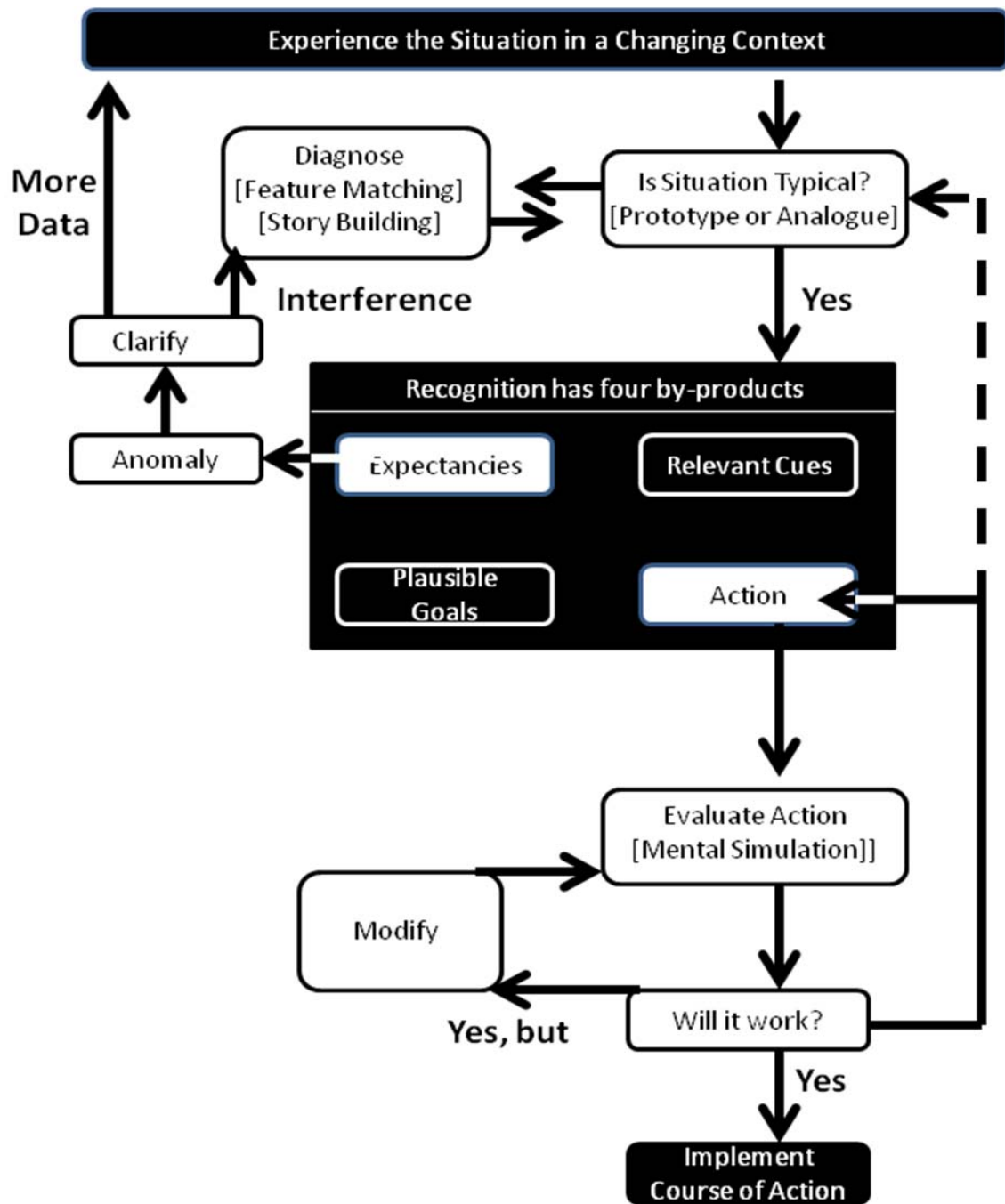


Figure 11. Recognition-Primed Decision Model¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 27.

Variation 3 occurs when a decision maker mentally evaluates a single course of action and its possible outcomes. He mentally simulates the entire process to determine whether the course of action needs to be modified or replaced before it is even implemented.

Another model that many people in the military are familiar with represents a higher order of the RPD model—the OODA loop. John Boyd, creator of the OODA loop, believed that operating within an opponent’s decision cycle was the key to success in combat. At its simplest the key to the OODA loop’s success lies in executing the observe, orient, decide, act loop at a higher speed than one’s adversary. For our purposes, the OODA loop is helpful for synthesizing Klein’s and Gladwell’s ideas.

The modified OODA loop illustrates that a person’s thinking is organic to him or her. A person’s ability to think conventionally or unconventionally is a function of his or her cognitive profile, which is largely determined by factors beyond his or her control like genetic heritage, social and cultural legacies, hidden advantages, extraordinary opportunities, and intrinsic personality traits. Ultimately, it is hidden advantages, extraordinary opportunities, and intrinsic personality traits affect an individual’s ability to develop his or her genetic potential and put his or her social and cultural legacies to use.

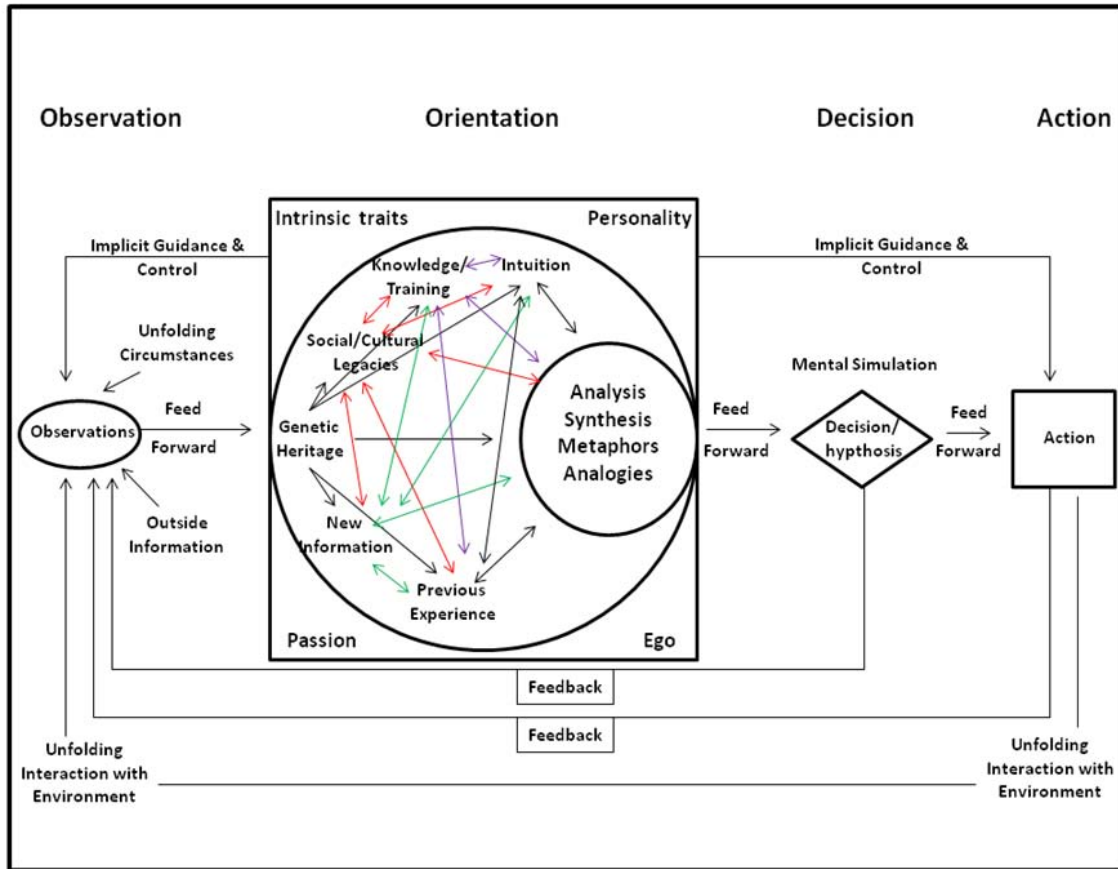


Figure 12. The Modified OODA Loop¹²⁶

Note how orientation shapes observation, shapes decision, shapes action, and in turn is shaped by the feedback and other phenomena coming into our sensing or observing window. Also, note how the entire “loop” (not just orientation) is an ongoing many-sided implicit cross-referencing process of projection, empathy, correlation, and rejection.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Defense and the National Interest, “Boyd’s OODA Loop,” <http://www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/boyd-and-military-strategy/> (accessed November 15, 2009).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

C. UNCONVENTIONAL WARRIORS¹²⁸

Now that we have examined different theories and explanations for why some people are able to think and act unconventionally, we will look briefly at four unconventional warriors, all of them excelled at a certain form of irregular warfare. Three of these four unconventional warriors acted in counterinsurgent roles at differing times in American history and help illustrate how important it is to go beyond Malaya and Vietnam when canvassing counterinsurgency experiences and to look at the individuals involved, not just their methods.

1. General George Crook



Figure 13. General George Crook¹²⁹

Historians have aptly dubbed General George Crook “the greatest Indian fighter in the history of the United States.” Crook subdued the fierce Apache in the Department

¹²⁸ Some of the individuals and ideas discussed in this section are discussed in the Military Advisor course at the Naval Postgraduate School, taught by Anna Simons. This section draws on material presented in that class.

¹²⁹ PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/images/crook1.jpg>

of Arizona, forcing their surrender in 1873.¹³⁰ In 1875, Crook left his Arizona command to take over the Department of the Platte where he defeated the mighty Sioux and their legendary chieftains, Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse. In 1882, Crook resumed command of the Department of the Arizona to readdress the Apache problem. In his absence, the Apache had quit the reservations and taken to the hills to resume a guerrilla war against the whites.¹³¹ Crook, once again, brought them to heel.

Crook was raised on an Ohio farm. He only happened to attend West Point because Robert P. Scheneck, a state representative and a friend of the family, needed to fill a vacancy at the school.¹³² Crook graduated in 1852, near the bottom of his class; later, when he did make Major General, he was the lowest-ranking cadet at the time to ever rise to that rank.¹³³ Crook had 19 years of experience fighting Indians and enduring frontier privations when he took command of the Department of Arizona in 1871. He also had both guerrilla and counter-guerrilla experience fighting for the Union in West Virginia during the Civil War. Indeed, Crook was considered one of the Union's best counterinsurgents.¹³⁴

The best insights into General Crook come from a book entitled *On the Border with Crook*.¹³⁵ *On the Border* is a seminal ethnographic account written by John G. Bourke, a cavalry officer who served 15 years alongside Crook through the Indian wars. According to Bourke, Crook was the consummate outdoorsman, an expert at reading sign, a sharpshooter, an expert at Indian sign language, and as tough as they come. As Bourke notes, even the Indians admitted that Crook could out-Indian them, and they were in awe of how well he understood them and how well he, being a white man, learned what they had to teach. Crook knew his adversaries inside and out and put this to good

¹³⁰ George Crook, *General George Crook: His Autobiography*, ed. Martin F. Schmitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 179.

¹³¹ Crook, *General George Crook*, 243.

¹³² Ibid., xxii.

¹³³ Ibid., xxiii.

¹³⁴ Moyer, *A Question of Command*, 18.

¹³⁵ I highly recommend reading, *On the Border*. I would venture to say that until one reads this book, his or her knowledge and understanding of America's Indian wars is incomplete. This book is a vivid first-hand account of the major Indian conflicts of the post-Civil War era.

stead manipulating tribal rivalries to his advantage, forming tribal alliances, and using Indian forces to run hostile tribes to ground. When Crook made use of Indian scouts and allied tribes, he never tried to get them to conform to Western practices of war. He let them fight in their own ways and factored that into his planning. General Crook was, normally, very objective and not emotional in his decision making. He was capable of extreme violence when necessary to subdue hostile Indians and defeat them in battle but, upon their surrender, he was always extremely magnanimous and did his best to treat them in accord with their own sense of warrior virtue.¹³⁶

2. General John “Black Jack” Pershing



Figure 14. General John Pershing¹³⁷

General Pershing is most famous for leading the punitive expedition into Mexico after famed bandit Pancho Villa, and for serving as General of the National Army, responsible for mobilizing the United States Army for World War I (WWI) and commanding it in battle. General Pershing was promoted to General of the Armies in 1919 in recognition of his WWI service. But what really launched Pershing’s career was his success as an effective counterinsurgent fighting the Moros on Mindanao and Jolo islands in the Philippines from 1899–1903.

¹³⁶ John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971).

¹³⁷ Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CAPTJPershing.jpg>.

Pershing grew up in northern Missouri. He was remembered as a quiet, determined young man and it wasn't until after he left home that people figured out just how mischievous he had been. He worked the family farm as a young man and entered West Point much later than most. Pershing stated that he was 22, just under the maximum age limit, but it is believed that he was older and lied about his age.¹³⁸ Pershing graduated in 1886 and spent the next five years on the frontier. He commanded a company of Sioux Indian scouts for a time before serving as the commandant of cadets at the University of Nebraska from 1891–1895. After that, he assumed command of a troop in the 10th Cavalry, a Black regiment. Pershing went on to serve as a tactical officer at West Point and to fight in the Spanish-American War before his first tour in the Philippines. Working with Indians and Blacks appears to have prepared Pershing for working with foreign “Others” before arriving in the Philippines in 1899.

Pershing spent his first two years in the Philippines as the Adjutant-General of the Department of Mindanao-Jolo and handled mostly service support duties. In 1901, with 15 years active duty behind him, he assumed command of a combined regiment of infantry and cavalry. Unlike most of his peers, Pershing did not approach the Moro insurgency as a military problem, but regarded it as, “...a human problem.”¹³⁹ In solving this human problem, Pershing did not try to bully his way into the Moro communities using blunt force. He was patient and utilized an indirect approach, eventually developing relationships with tribal leaders, all the while suffering attacks on his own troops. Other Americans viewed Pershing's actions as pacifist, but his patience and forbearance gained him great leverage within the Moro communities. Peaceful Moros viewed Pershing as having no choice when he later committed to violent action against hostile Moro villages.

Pershing worked hard to create meaningful relationships with the Moro people. He operated within their cultural norms and traditions, but was always careful to project an image of courage and decisiveness. Pershing did not force results. He let nature take

¹³⁸ Donald Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior: The Early Life of John J. Pershing* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 6.

¹³⁹ Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior*, 68.

its course, but influenced outcomes by seeking friendship rather than confrontation. He identified the sources of Moro fear and mistrust and countered them, thereby reassuring the Moros. Pershing was so successful that he was put in charge of Camp Vicars and its attending forces, a job usually reserved for a full colonel—Pershing was but a captain. Brigadier General George W. Davis was forced to explain this to the War Department:

The situation in one respect has been anomalous—the assignment of a captain to so large and important command as that of Vicars—but it was in my opinion absolutely indispensable that the man to command on the spot should possess certain qualities not easy to find combined in one man: capacity for command, physical and mental vigor, infinite patience in dealing with these fanatical semi-savages, wise discretion, a zealous desire to accomplish the work set for him and knowledge of the Moro character.¹⁴⁰

3. Carl F. Eifler



Figure 15. Carl F. Eifler in the PI¹⁴¹ and As Commander of DET 101¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior*, 80–81.

¹⁴¹ CIA Library, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/fall_winter_2001/graphics/shortephippi.jpg.

¹⁴² Laytone, http://laytoneiflergroup.com/images/portrait_mrv1.jpg.

Carl Eifler was the first commander of famed Detachment 101 (DET 101), an Office of Strategic Services contingent assigned to the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater under General Joseph Stillwell, another person of unconventional mind. Stillwell charged Eifler and 101 with conducting intelligence-gathering operations behind Japanese lines in Burma and with raising guerrilla forces to harass the enemy. DET 101 also branched out into rescuing downed allied pilots and identifying enemy targets for allied bombers. DET 101 arguably became the most successful unconventional unit to operate in World War II although much more is made of the Jedburghs and OSS operations in France.

Eifler's life before DET 101 followed an unusual trajectory. The picture on the left above shows Eifler at age 15 in the Philippines with an Army aerial photography unit. Eifler lied about his age to join the Army; he was eventually found out, sent back to the United States and discharged at the ripe old age of 17. Eifler went on to become a Los Angeles policeman and after that a customs agent in Mexico. In 1934, he began tracking a group of 400 Japanese Imperial Naval officers stationed in Mexico and an alleged Japanese plot to lure Mexico onto Japan's side in a potential war with America.¹⁴³ Eifler, a member of the Army reserve at the time, sent a report of his findings to his unit's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Stillwell. Eifler maintained contact with Stillwell in the intervening years before World War II. Stillwell later selected him to command DET 101.

Eifler's task—to set up a unit that specialized in unconventional warfare—hadn't been done before. There was no doctrine and there was no playbook. Eifler immediately recruited men that he knew, men he could trust, and men whom he felt were suited to the challenge at hand. Together they made it up as they went along. Eifler knew his end state—help General Stillwell defeat Japanese forces in Burma—and he guided his men in their use of imagination and talent. In today's parlance, DET 101 could be described as an organic, learning organization. Eifler and his men applied the modified OODA loop in everything they did, from resupply and gaining air transport assets to guerrilla combat.

¹⁴³ Tom Moon, *This Grim and Savage Game: OSS and the Beginning of U.S. Covert Operations in World War II* (Los Angeles: Burning Gate Press, 1991), 3.

Sometimes the cues indicating that a particular course of action was unfit were undeniable—the loss of men’s lives when a team of agents was killed or captured by the Japanese, for instance.

Eifler managed the men in his unit according to talent and proper fit. Not every person he recruited was destined to be a behind-the-lines operator. He recruited some men solely for their expertise in areas of support, while he often let operators select their own teams. Eifler and his staff also drew heavily on Anglo-Burmese and displaced Englishmen who had resided in Burma before the Japanese occupation. He sought out subject matter experts and integrated them into the organization. DET 101 started with approximately 25 American officers and NCOs and never had more than a few hundred Americans at its zenith, but controlled up to 10,000 Burmese tribesmen in the field.¹⁴⁴

Some of DET 101’s tangible achievements include:¹⁴⁵

Japanese killed (known)	5,428
Japanese killed or seriously wounded (estimated)	10,000
Japanese captured	75
Bridges destroyed	51
Supplies destroyed	3,000 tons
Supplies captured	700 tons
U.S. Air Force personnel rescued	232
Other Allies rescued or flown out	342

¹⁴⁴ William R. Peers and Dean Brelis, *Behind the Burma Road: the Story of America’s Most Successful Guerrilla Force* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1963).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

4. Edward Lansdale

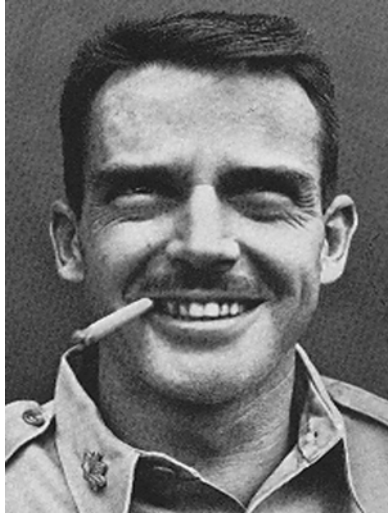


Figure 16. Edward Lansdale¹⁴⁶

Edward Lansdale, the gregarious and mischievous harmonica-playing maverick, is perhaps best known for his role in advising Philippine Minister of Defense, Ramon Magsaysay during the Huk Rebellion of the 1950s. Lansdale's success in the Philippines was so spectacular that it inevitably shadowed the rest of his career.

Lansdale lived the typical early 20th century American boyhood, growing up in Los Angeles, California. He really wasn't all that interested school, making it through high school with a B average, but he was a voracious reader of history and developed a strong work ethic doing odd jobs and tending paper routes. He participated in ROTC during high school and college and found that he liked writing and working on creative endeavors like the school paper and yearbook staff.¹⁴⁷ Lansdale aspired to be a journalist when he graduated from UCLA; however, he attended college at the height of the Great Depression and was so preoccupied with trying to pay the bills that he eventually left

¹⁴⁶ BibliotecaPleyades,
http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/secretgoldtreaty/lansdale_picture.jpg.

¹⁴⁷ Lansdale was a notoriously poor shot. According to Cecil B. Currey in' *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American*, Lansdale never did qualify with a rifle. It may be that his inability to shoot coupled with his other natural abilities drove him toward the creative side of problem solving using his mind and developing a penchant for psychological warfare over more traditional methods of using force.

school. Lansdale moved out east for a while, but returned to California and through a combination of hard work and good luck made his way into marketing.¹⁴⁸ Lansdale joined the Army Reserve as a second lieutenant in 1932, but later resigned in disgust and disappointment with the Reserves. Lansdale requested reinstatement of his commission in December 1941.

Lansdale spent World War II working in a supporting role for the OSS, mostly stateside. The OSS leadership quickly assessed that Lansdale had a special talent for working with people, especially “other peoples” and exploited his talent to gather information from minority groups within the U.S. to help OSS operations abroad. Much of what Lansdale did helped prepare him for the future. Lansdale was very intuitive, yet calculating when dealing with other people. He first went to the Philippines in 1945 as chief of the Analysis Branch, Intelligence Division, for the Armed Forces Western Pacific headquarters.¹⁴⁹ It was during this tour that he learned to play traditional Filipino songs on his harmonica because he figured this was an effective way to get Filipinos to open up.

In assessing the Philippine government and the Huk rebellion in the early 1950s Lansdale observed that, given their strength in numbers and material resources, the government should have been able to crush the Huks. As Cecil Currey, his biographer writes, “They [Philippine government] had not even come close, however, and Lansdale put his finger on the reason: while the Huks were running a revolution, the Philippine government was fighting them as though they were formal enemy armed forces.”¹⁵⁰ Rather than simply confronting the Huk rebellion head on, Lansdale asked, “Why are they rebelling?” He made every effort to understand the Huk rebellion from the inside out, instead of the outside in.

Lansdale pioneered the concept of civic action in which the host nation military goes out and conducts humanitarian missions and civic projects itself. Lansdale observed

¹⁴⁸ Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1998).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

in the Philippines, and later in Vietnam, that each military compounded its problems because of its predatory behavior against the people. Lansdale believed whole-heartedly in the American democratic idea so eloquently captured by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg address, “government of the people by the people and for the people.” Embedded in this idea, according to Lansdale, was the realization that the military is also of the people and for the people and should exist to protect, not prey on them. Lansdale designed his concept of civic action to build a bond between the military and the people, to change the people’s view of the military, and to give them a reason to place trust and support in the military and not in insurgents.¹⁵¹

Everywhere Lansdale went he took to the local people. He traveled talked to everyone he met, and in doing so developed a sense of the local situation. He relished the game of competing with the enemy in a people’s war, and was sometimes quite devilish about it. Lansdale once scripted an operation that played on local vampire legends to scare the Huks. A Philippine psywar squad laid an ambush and snatched a lagging Huk after his patrol went by. The squad punctured the Huk’s neck, vampire fashion, and hung the corpse upside down on the trail, drained of blood, to be found by his comrades. After finding the hapless Huk the next morning, the entire Huk squadron packed up and left the area.¹⁵²

D. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER—UNDERSTANDING THROUGH WILLIAM AND ROBERT

1. Why

The trend common to both the individuals just discussed and William and Robert is that they all operated from an enemy-centric perspective. William and Robert both stated explicitly that the frame of reference they used was to figure out how to frustrate the enemy’s plans, intentions, and goals—the enemy’s strategy. William and Robert also noted that affecting the enemy’s strategy has to be a constant. When the enemy is proactive and the counterinsurgent is reactive, the counterinsurgent has to consider not

¹⁵¹ Currey, *The Unquiet American*.

¹⁵² Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), 72–73.

only how to counter the enemy's immediate moves, but also how to do so without contributing to the enemy's greater end state. This is akin to Pershing weathering Moro attacks until he had built sufficient relationships and inroads into Moro communities; Pershing knew the hostile Moros were trying to goad him into indiscriminate action.

According to William and Robert, counterinsurgents have to evaluate offensive efforts in terms of the effects they will have in countering the enemy's long-term strategy. Lansdale did this when he began proposing the use of civic action in the Philippines. Transforming the Philippine Armed Forces from a predatory organization into an organization that served and protected the population undercut the Huks' strategy and their argument that the government was the source of the people's ills.

However, what Crook, Pershing, Lansdale, William, and Robert were able to do required more than just thinking about the enemy. It involved understanding the enemy and being able to do so cross-culturally. They developed, as Dr. Simons says, a "*fingerspitzengefühl* (or fingertip feel) for another society organized significantly differently than their own."¹⁵³ What's more, they were able to use their insights to operational and strategic level effect.¹⁵⁴ Looking specifically at William and Robert, their ability to develop a deep understanding of Iraqis in Anbar was a function of their ability to orient to the people and their environment and, as a result, to understand events, behaviors, etc., in the appropriate context. One has to ask, though, what enabled them to do so? This question can only be answered, as Gladwell suggests, by unpacking who William and Robert are and how they got to where they were when each took over as team sergeant of ODA 504.

William grew up in Charleston, West Virginia—he was a west-sider. In the 1970s that meant he grew up rough. All the west side kids went to the same high school, but sub-divided into small gangs of kids—something easy to understand once you have driven around the west side of Charleston. The neighborhoods are built up and around the foothills surrounding the commercial and industrial areas of the city that lie on flat

¹⁵³ Anna Simons, "Unity of Vision: What it is and Why it Matters," (paper presented at the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces & Society Biennial Conference, October 2009).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

ground along the Elk River. Neighborhoods exist in pockets, and kids in each pocket tended to coalesce in a clannish way. As William describes it, “We grew up rough. We were on our own. You had yourself and your little gang of guys, but that was it. That was all you had. You didn’t go running to your mom and dad when there was trouble back then. You solved the problem.”¹⁵⁵ At that time, “solving the problem,” meant not getting beat up, stabbed, or shot at – and if you did, if you were beaten up, stabbed, or shot at you bided your time until conditions were right for payback.

After high school, William played football at a small college and graduated with a degree in physical education. He worked as a laborer for the next few years, and sometimes had to resort to poaching just to put food on the table for his family. William joined the Army when he was 25, enlisting as a cavalry scout. He spent three years at Ft. Hood, Texas before attending Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). William found himself to be incompatible with conventional forces; he was often older, wiser, and in possession of more common sense than the officers and non-commissioned officers above him. Thirty years old when he finished the Special Forces Qualification Course (Q Course) in October, 1990, William reported to 5th Special Forces Group and immediately deployed to join his team in Saudi Arabia, where it was getting ready for Desert Storm.

Robert grew up in central Washington State. Robert’s parents divorced when he was still quite young. His mom remarried when Robert was six or seven and shortly after that Robert’s stepdad took the family camping in the Cascade Mountains for the weekend, a weekend turned into an entire summer as Robert’s stepdad decided that the family should stay in the mountains. Robert fished for his supper and spent nights sleeping out in the open. He taught himself fieldcraft out of necessity as he sought ways to make himself even just slightly more comfortable. Robert’s family returned to a small town, and Robert sums up his junior and senior high years this way: “I grew up in a small town that had communist-like coaches in charge of everything. They started a conditioning club that started at 0630 each day and we lifted weights and stuff before

¹⁵⁵ William, interview by author, Ft. Campbell, KY, August 17, 2009.

school. The coaches constantly assessed the kids for later athletic endeavors. Our high school was good at athletics and there was a lot of discipline.”¹⁵⁶

After high school, Robert spent five years in college. He played college baseball—and drank, a lot. He finally left school without a degree and joined the Army, right at the outset of the Gulf War. Special Forces accepted E-4 specialists in the early 1990s and Robert spent only a year in the conventional Army. According to Robert, he was the only motivated soldier in his outfit at Ft. Riley, Kansas. On making it, he promptly submitted his packet to attend SFAS.

Despite the different paths that got each to 5th Special Forces Group, both William and Robert each spent more than a decade on operational detachments traveling throughout the Middle East, southwest Asia, and parts of Africa. It was during these years that William and Robert began to separate themselves from their peers. Most ODA members like guns, shooting, close-quarter combat training, and other skills commonly associated with being a commando. The number of SF guys who put forth the time and effort to learn a language like Arabic, however, is not very many, not even in 5th Special Forces Group. Yet, in addition to learning Arabic, both William and Robert spent countless hours reading and thinking. William loves Sun Tzu and carried a dog-eared copy of his writings with him whenever he deployed. Robert loves reading about Vietnam. Robert especially likes “real Green Beret stuff,” books about guys out in the middle of nowhere working with Montagnards or Nungs and figuring out—on their own—how to best the enemy.

Two other qualities about William and Robert surface in their narratives, William and Robert enjoy the game—that is, they relish the idea of getting up in the morning and trying to frustrate the enemy. I would argue that they have a passion for this. They also enjoyed working with Iraqis, and it was evident to other people that William and Robert somehow understood the Iraqis better than most. I have personally heard people acknowledge this by saying things like, “William gets it, he’s even more tribal than they [Iraqis] are,” or, “Robert can out-Iraqi the Iraqis.” Within the scope of my military

¹⁵⁶ Robert, follow-up interview by author via email, November 3, 2009.

experience, I have never heard statements like these made about anyone else. Nor have I met anyone else who I think could possibly warrant having those statements said about them—although, to be sure, there must be other Williams and Roberts out there.

2. How

In Chapter I, I suggested that unconventionally minded individuals have a natural ability to, as Simons writes, “intuitively think in terms of branches and sequels, and therefore don’t need to ask themselves what the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th order effects of an action might be—they’ve already factored that in *without* consciously factoring it in. Or they have the ability to see angles *from* angles that remain obtuse to others.”¹⁵⁷ Simons drew her insights from accounts written about and, by, figures like Crook and Lansdale. Interestingly, in the process of interviewing William and Robert, they unknowingly described what she discusses. They both described imagining or envisioning exactly what it was they wanted to achieve. They built mental models of what Hit and the surrounding areas should look like once the insurgency was beaten. Then, as William describes, it was simply a matter of navigating to that point. In explaining what this meant, William further described how he knew certain actions, positive or negative, would play out as he tried to navigate toward his goal.

In the process of navigating, William and Robert constantly looked for cues that informed them about the situation and their progress. For example, William was able to identify relevant cues from Sheikh Reshad’s confrontation with the Hit city council that others completely missed. Robert describes being like water adjusting to the will of the people, and never getting so far into an unknown situation that we couldn’t back out. This, in Gary Klein’s terms, is cue learning. Cue learning amounts to being able to read the environment by detecting patterns (of behavior, events, etc.). When patterns do not fit, when there are mismatches, these often represent decision points, and many times offer opportunity. One of the ODA members described Robert’s cue learning abilities this way:

¹⁵⁷ Simons and Weathers, “Anthropology and Irregular Warfare,” 20–21.

Robert will change his mind three or four times on an issue as he is going. It isn't indecision; he is processing the situation and input of clues, etc. Robert will not take the time to explain what exactly is going on. He expects you to get it. If you don't, then you don't have a speaking role in this movie. It doesn't mean you are less valuable or not involved; you are just background, you don't deserve more until you get the big picture.¹⁵⁸

The other thing that surfaced in the course of my interviews is how much William and Robert thought in terms of metaphors and analogies to help them understand the environment around them, identify cues, and determine courses of action. The fluid use of metaphors and analogies is indicative of synthesis; "finding common features that are shared and connected across disciplines or fields of scientific endeavor helps create a new pattern, new insights."¹⁵⁹ For example, Robert looked at Hit and saw a sick patient. Our activities on the periphery were successful in isolating and treating certain aspects of the patient's disease or injury, but unless we could operate in time, the patient would die. That operation became Shurta Nasir.

a. *Fingerspitzengefühl*

I have made the case that William and Robert had a *fingerspitzengefühl* for the situation in Iraq, but what does this really mean? Among other things, they recognized and avoided more than just cross-cultural faux pas. In *The Gamble*, Thomas Ricks recounts a story in which an American soldier killed an Iraqi policeman. The soldier's commanders, instead of going straight to the IP's family to pay restitution, abided by local custom and went through a tribal intermediary. Ricks says that the commanders acted as if they were Iraqis.¹⁶⁰ This is not, however, *fingerspitzengefühl*.

The best way to understand *fingerspitzengefühl* is to refer back to Klein's assessment that accumulating facts and knowledge does not make someone an expert. An expert is someone who perceives more. *Fingerspitzengefühl* is the ability to

¹⁵⁸ ODA member 2, interview by author, Ft. Campbell, KY, August 21, 2009

¹⁵⁹ Hammond, *The Mind of War*, 171. When William or Robert used historical analogies it was limited in nature. They seldom fell into the trap of relying too much on a particular historical lens based on apparent similarities. William and Robert also paid attention to difference or contrasts in historical analogies used.

¹⁶⁰ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 219.

understand the world and perceive reality in the same ways as do members of another culture. William and Robert were good at factoring in both Iraqi and American cultural considerations. William and Robert also knew when to be Americans. They actively repressed and accentuated their own cultural and personal traits as the situation dictated. The effect this seems to have had is that the Iraqis did not recognize William and Robert so much for their American-ness or Iraqi-ness, as for their William-ness and Robert-ness.

b. Uncertainty

In *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell tells the story of Marine General Paul Van Riper and a military exercise called Millennium Challenge. Millennium Challenge was scripted to test the military's efficiency at systems warfare, and at severing the links among an adversary's infrastructure and communications systems in order to paralyze him and disrupt his ability to make war. The Blue Team, the good guys, represented U.S. armed forces and were equipped with the latest technology and systems, all designed to supposedly lift the fog of war, enabling the Blue Team to have *perfect* situational awareness. The Red Team, or the bad guys, simulated a rogue Middle Eastern nation and was led by General Riper. The Blue Team failed, catastrophically so.¹⁶¹

Gladwell makes the case that the Blue Team failed because it overloaded itself with irrelevant information. Essentially, the focus became production of information and, to paraphrase Gladwell, commanders became imprisoned by the idea that they had to know everything.¹⁶² Klein also addresses this phenomenon in *Sources of Power*. According to Klein, historical data show that the most effective battlefield commanders were effective because they accepted the fact that they could not know everything and, hence, were not paralyzed by doubt. Klein also notes that great commanders "possessed the ability to shape the battlefield, acting decisively and prudently at the same time."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 99–111.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶³ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 279.

The decision-making models presented at the beginning of this chapter suggest unconventional thinkers are able to move forward with decision making because they continually reorient to the environment/situation. Unconventional thinkers do not wait for complete information. They know what they want the situation to look like, and they use environmental cues to guide their actions as they navigate forward. Eifler is a great example of a man who thrived in an uncertain, ambiguous environment. He had to; he was a pioneer in unconventional warfare. William and Robert were equally comfortable with uncertainty. A simple unpacking of Robert's comment, "You don't know exactly where you are going to maneuver to, but you know towards what," implies using cue learning to guide actions.¹⁶⁴ As Robert further explains, he made decisions by never moving so fast or so far that he couldn't retract himself, but by moving methodically towards his envisioned end state he looked for clues along the way to guide him.¹⁶⁵

3. The Supra-Individual

The effects of unconventional thinking and talent are amplified in small teams. According to Klein, teams should be considered intelligent entities.¹⁶⁶ Experienced teams share a collective consciousness and reality that empowers them over any one individual. This is the inherent structural strength of Special Forces Operational Detachments. A strong team operates by the same organic process as depicted in the modified OODA Loop. A team that has a strong identity, shared understanding of the situation, and awareness of its own capabilities—which means that everyone on the team knows each other's strengths and weaknesses—can monitor its own performance and divide labor accordingly to maximize performance.¹⁶⁷ Such a team is able to draw on the

¹⁶⁴ Robert, interview by author, Clarksville, TN, August 20, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Klein, *Sources of Power*, 233.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 245.

experiences and strengths of each member in order to understand the operational environment and develop new solutions to existing problems.¹⁶⁸

E. SUMMARY

How William and Robert thought: Both men possessed acute practical intelligence, which Malcolm Gladwell defines as knowledge that helps you read situations correctly and get what you want.¹⁶⁹ Each was visionary. They used mental simulation to figure out where they were going. In essence, they could see what they wanted the future to look like, and could use that picture to help navigate to it. A consequence of mental simulation is that they thought big, which in turn led them to act big. When it came to working with Iraqis, they could often also see different shades of black.

How William and Robert reacted to the environment: Both men definitely thrived in ambiguous, uncertain environments, although each did so in his own way. Understanding the situation always came first. Neither man relied on dramatic action; he first sized up each situation, and then acted in a calculated manner. Both men also had different perceptive abilities than those around them. They knew more while seeing less and put that to work shaping the battlefield, or the environment, to their advantage. Remaining attuned to the environment was a perpetual process of deliberate re-orientation. Each man continually looked for cues and mismatches in the environment to guide him and help him identify opportunities

How William and Robert made decisions: Both men were willing to take risks, but always confronted the brutal facts when making decisions. Doubt that often comes with uncertainty did not block their decision-making ability. Both men recognized that the only certainty was that there *was* uncertainty, and each was comfortable with that. At times, each had the will and confidence to shape the battlefield in order to mitigate

¹⁶⁸ Team Sergeants like William and Robert recognize this and make use of it. It would require another thesis to explain the uses to which they were able to put ODA 504 and the critical contributions made by all the ODA's members.

¹⁶⁹ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 101.

uncertainty. But when they couldn't do this, it didn't paralyze them. Their first thoughts of the day were never about how to get by, but about how to frustrate the enemy and further their own plans.

How William and Robert led: Both men were modest leaders versus being egocentric leaders; it was about the mission, the men, and winning, not themselves. They were optimists, always keeping the faith, but always honest about the situation around them. Both were willing to confront failure, but that didn't equate to accepting failure. William and Robert led according to what I call the "Apache Principle." William articulated his idea of what determination is by describing Apache Indians who, when fighting the whites, would ride their horse until it died, then steal another and keep going. The Apache Principle denotes single-minded determination, the ability to do more with less, and the will to overcome obstacles in pursuit of a goal.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I request that in our recruiting program we make all of these conditions clear to any prospective government employee, so that he comes here with no illusions. It has been my experience that superior people are attracted only by challenge. By setting our standards low and making life soft, we have, quite automatically and unconsciously, assured ourselves of mediocre people.

Ambassador Gilbert MacWhite to the Secretary of State,
in *The Ugly American*.¹⁷⁰

A. SUMMARY OF IDEAS

It seems that individuals can be grouped into two different general cognitive categories, and those categories exist along a spectrum as shown in Figure 16. Leonardo da Vinci is the ideal example of an unconventional thinker at the far right of the spectrum—a genius. Probably no one in history better exemplifies a person adept at creative adaption and synthesis across multiple, seemingly unrelated domains. Opposite of da Vinci is Niccolò Paganini, the violin virtuoso. Paganini was a one-dimensional musical genius. Similarly, we could compare General Douglas MacArthur and General William Westmoreland. MacArthur was able to conceptualize dramatic military maneuvers like the Inchon landings, but also had an intuitive understanding of his adversaries, which he more than demonstrated years earlier fighting the Japanese. Many a conventional minded commander would have sacked Emperor Hirohito, but MacArthur had the insight to appreciate that leaving the Emperor in place to direct the Japanese people was literally the same as *getting God on the radio to tell them what to do*. In contrast, many would say General William Westmoreland could not adequately conceptualize the irregular threat in or to South Vietnam and developed no good way of handling his Vietnamese counterparts or redirecting strategy. Consequently, they would place him at the other end of the spectrum.

¹⁷⁰ William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958), 268.

Even just a short review of unconventional warriors, to include William and Robert, suggests that individuals toward the far right of the unconventional spectrum have to be considered outliers. They are gifted thanks to genetic heritage, social and cultural legacies, personal intelligence, uncommon common sense, etc. However, even with such gifts, a person's final place along the spectrum is a product of these multiplied by experiences, opportunities, advantages, passion, and hard work.

Even if a person is advantaged with unconventional thinking and *fingerspitzengefühl*, success downrange may yet be a consequence of "right place, right, time, and right chemistry." Consider William and Robert. The fact that each went to Hit when he did was due to fortune as much as design. Discussions with William, Robert, and the ODA members with whom they worked, reflect that all of them believe William and Robert to have been especially suited to the environment and circumstances of Hit at the very times each was there. William candidly admits that he doesn't think he could have done what Robert did, and that Robert was the right fit for the situation in Hit at the time he was there. It is also evident that, like Lansdale and Magsaysay, William had chemistry with the paramount Sheikh and Robert with the mayor. These relationships each made a difference.

To be sure, William's and Robert's battalion commander did have some influence over these events. The battalion commander recognized William's talent and experience in al Anbar and solicited the Group headquarters to ensure William's ODA was reintroduced into al Anbar in 2005 after Special Forces had been withdrawn. The battalion commander also recognized that Robert was an appropriate fit for William's ODA and to the mission in al Anbar. The battalion commander made a deliberate decision to backfill William with Robert. The chance involved was that William's and Robert's destinies happened to overlap in such a way that Robert was available to be team sergeant as William was retiring.

Organizational design theory contends that because organizations have natural structures, harmony among the parts is key to organizational success. At the same time, the organization's overall fit to its operating environment also matters. There are generally four ways to classify operating environments: simple and stable, complex and

stable, simple and dynamic, and complex and dynamic. A simple environment is defined by having only a few external interdependent variables, while a complex environment has many. A stable environment undergoes little change, while a dynamic one changes often and unpredictably.¹⁷¹

If different organizational structures are particularly suited to different operational environments, one should be able to draw the analogy that people with different cognitive profiles are optimally suited to operate in different environments as well. A conventional mind operates optimally in stable, structured environments with rules and conventions to guide decision making. An unconventional mind operates optimally in dynamic, complex environments, and thrives on ambiguity and uncertainty. Individuals with unconventional minds likely languish in stable, structured environments.¹⁷² Since individuals with unconventional minds feel unbound, they are more apt to try to reshape their environment to support their efforts at problem solving. This in turn suggests that individuals with unconventional minds have appropriately healthy egos. Thriving in uncertain environments, having the audacity to reject reality and recreate it, and possessing the confidence to rely on innovative yet unproven ideas requires a strong belief in one's self.¹⁷³

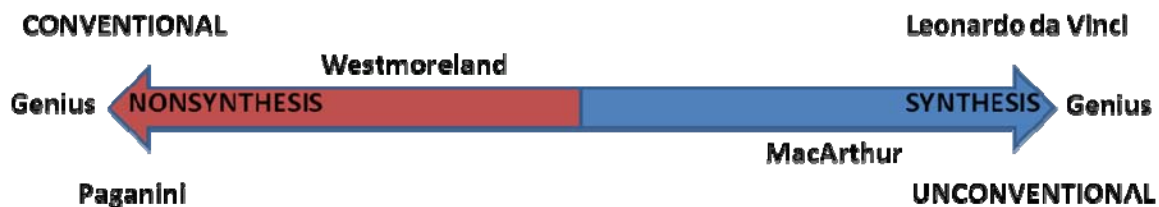


Figure 17. Kinds of Mind

¹⁷¹ Henry Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit," *Harvard Business Review* (January–February, 1981), 103–116.

¹⁷² Stories are not uncommon of soldiers, NCOs, and officers who seemed unfit during peacetime or in garrison, but excelled in war or during maneuvers.

¹⁷³ Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit," 103–116.

The simplest summary of the difference between those with conventional and unconventional minds is that when conventional thinkers do not know what to do, they do what they know. Unconventional thinkers innovate, adapt, and overcome.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARMY SPECIAL FORCES

Here we can draw a parallel to Colin Gray's argument that strategic genius is rare and that strategic talent, although also rare, is more common.¹⁷⁴ Talent can be improved, but genius is what it is. This thesis has tried to explain how unconventionally minded people think and why they think as they do. Perhaps the best way to conceptualize unconventional thinking is as talent. The Army defines talent as, "the intersection of three dimensions—skills, knowledge, and behaviors—that create an *optimal* level of individual performance, provided the individual is employed within their talent set."¹⁷⁵

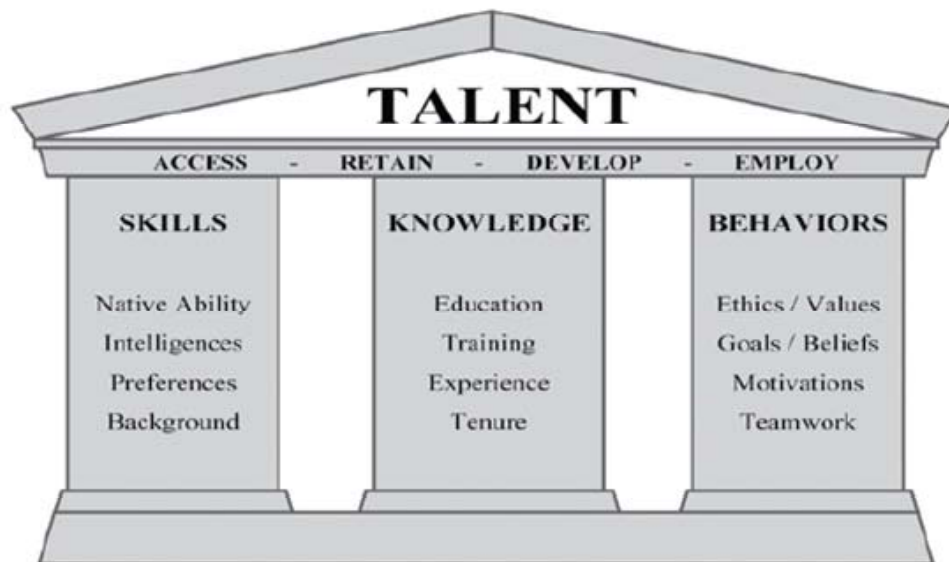


Figure 18. The Dimensions of Talent¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Colin Gray, "Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict," November, 2009, v.

¹⁷⁵ Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle & Michael J. Colarusso, "Talent: Implications for a U.S. Officer Corps Strategy," November, 2009, accessed 12 November 2009 from <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>, v.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.

There are many different kinds and levels of talent. Except in rare instances, an individual's threshold for a particular talent is established by how early the talent is discovered and how it is subsequently developed. In terms of irregular warfare, talent at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels is not the same and, because a person exhibits talent at the tactical level, does not mean he has it at the operational level, and so on. In addition, a person with *fingerspitzengefühl* may only possess it for one particular culture. It may very well be that having succeeded in a country or culture, an individual will forever use that experience as a lens through which to view situations in other countries and cultures. If that is so, his usefulness is restricted. This suggests that some unconventional minds might be as limited as they are unlimited. Genius, by definition, implies that a person can think intuitively, as Simons describes, at all levels—tactical, operational, and strategic and, across cultures.

1. Evaluating Unconventional Talent

Fortunately, as Gray notes, we can generally get by on talent. The biggest problem may be recognizing it. If, as this thesis has suggested and individuals with unconventional minds and talent are outliers suited to unknown and unforeseen circumstances, the only measure that counts is how they perform in the real world. The only way to evaluate individuals is to thus put them in situations and see how they do. The Q Course already does this to an extent. The Q Course culminates with the legendary Robin Sage exercise that places candidates in unconventional warfare scenarios and evaluates them on performance. Instructors assess candidates on whether they are good enough or not good enough. As of yet, there are no markers that can be used to identify those who are good enough. Thus, all Special Forces can really do is select out those who demonstrate a lack of ability. The shortcoming is that Robin Sage does not, for example, evaluate candidates' ability to understand, adapt to, and change the reality of the scenario/situation. The scenario is driven by tasks scripted to evaluate candidates on methods, TTPs, and doctrine taught throughout the course.

Robin Sage could be improved by devising scenarios that are driven by individual and team improvisation in the field.¹⁷⁷ Provide teams an end state, vague mission statement, and commander's intent and insert them into the scenario, see how they develop the situation and react to cues that develop as a consequence of the teams' actions. The U.S. has a unique and untapped resource in its American Indian populations that might offer an additional unconventional training venue for Robin Sage.¹⁷⁸ Eighty-five percent of the 7,500 residents of the Crow reservation in south-central Montana speak Crow as their first language.¹⁷⁹ Another option is the Blackfeet reservation. It abuts Glacier National Park and tribal members have been making systematic efforts to revive the Blackfoot language since 1987.¹⁸⁰ Conducting Robin Sage on these reservations would be like conducting FID or unconventional warfare in a foreign country, where people speak an unknown tribal language, and thus could be used to assess how candidates adapt to uncertainty and ambiguity while interacting with "Others" right here in the U.S.A. ¹⁸¹

It is important to use the Q Course and Robin Sage to identify unconventional talent early because talent, to a large extent, is grown—it does not spontaneously appear in a mature form years down the road. Special Forces Groups need to be prepared to cultivate incoming talent instead of leaving its development to chance. Chance is already a significant enough factor in the possession of talent as it is.

¹⁷⁷ Scenarios are driven, to a certain extent, by how teams interact with the 'guerrillas' or the 'G Chief.' The G chief will respond in accordance to the team's behavior, but instructors are still primarily looking for how well teams execute principles, concepts, and methods taught in the course.

¹⁷⁸ This idea was presented to me in a conversation with Professor Simons.

¹⁷⁹ "Crow," Montana Official State Travel Information Site, <http://indiannations.visitmt.com/crow.shtm> (accessed November 15, 2009).

¹⁸⁰ Michelle Nijhuis, "Native American Languages," Native Americans On-line, <http://www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-language.html> (accessed November 15, 2009).

¹⁸¹ I fully understand that this would initially require additional administrative and logistical pain, and that the reservations possibly couldn't service all of the training ODAs being evaluated in a Robin Sage cycle, but I still feel it is worth consideration. It is also worth consideration by the Groups as a training venue.

2. Managing Unconventional Talent within the Ranks

Managing talent in the ranks is mostly a task of creating an environment that fosters rather than inhibits the development of talent. It is therefore easier to think in terms of what not to do.

Individual Special Forces soldiers and ODAs must be made to increase the depth and breadth of their individual and collective experience banks. This means that teams should be made to do as much for themselves as possible, whether this is training in the back forty instead of going to contractor-run training sites or planning and coordinating their own pre-mission training. To deepen their experience bank requires individuals and teams to use creativity, develop people skills, innovate, and problem solve. Making teams do more for themselves also becomes its own evaluation tool. Teams and their members can be evaluated according to how well or poorly they rise to these tasks. Having passion, a work ethic, creativity, problem solving skills, etc. will surface and point to individual and collective talent.

A large percentage of Special Forces soldiers have joined the Regiment since 9/11. These soldiers did not experience the “lean” times in Special Forces when funding was minimal and innovation and creative adaptation were vital to making do despite resource shortfalls. An analogy can be drawn to industrial versus service-based economies. The older generation of Special Forces soldiers had to do things on their own; they “manufactured their own goods” and because of this, developed their own know-how. Since 9/11, Special Forces and Special Operations Forces (SOF) in general have been awash in funding. Today’s Special Forces soldiers are much more accustomed to getting what they want, when they want it, through acquisition channels. This includes paying for vendor training instead of training or cross-training themselves. A duality exists where, in Special Forces today, soldiers may have more and better stuff, to include training venues, but practical knowledge and know-how are eroding. This duality needs to be re-balanced.

“Keeping guys on teams as long as possible” has likewise taken on a new meaning. ‘Possible’ is whatever the system allows – currently, that is typically two to three years for instance. ODA 504 was activated in the fall of 2004 and not fully manned

until August 2005. Now, barely four years later, there is only one original member left on the team. The collective experience bank that developed and brought the team successfully through its two tours in Hit is gone, as is the supra-individual the team became. At every level, commanders need to fight to retain their people and to retain team integrity. Individuals and teams realize, develop, and actualize talent as their collective experiences deepen.

Special Forces suffer the same legacy of personnel management that plagues the Army: “legacy personnel management tools were designed to align faces and spaces rather than talents and competency requirements.”¹⁸² Nowhere is this more evident than in the management of team sergeants. Noncommissioned officers are managed like officers in that the Army strives to keep them moving on a constant upward trajectory of career progression through rank and position. The consequence is that talent is given less time to develop, and when talented individuals epitomize the right fit—like a William or a Robert—they are replaced after two years because that is what the system dictates, not what the team or unit needs. Many of the 5th Group teams that took part in the initial invasion of Afghanistan had soldiers who had served close to a decade or more on those teams; they had veteran team sergeants who had grown up on those teams. Special Forces used to grow its talent. Special Forces need to make a real effort to return to past practices.

Chemistry counts when managing talent. ODAs inherently possess their own unique team culture or personality and this, in turn, produces team chemistry. Some talents and some individuals complement specific ODAs; others do not. Truly professional soldiers are usually mature enough to ‘soldier’ through a bad fit on a team, counting on either the team culture evolving to a better fit or the opportunity to move to a team that better fits them. Overall, the issue of chemistry and fit is self-correcting, but ODAs would benefit if more attention were paid to the potential chemistry between key personnel like team sergeants and team leaders. Some commanders take this seriously,

¹⁸² Paula Broadwell, “The U.S. Army Officer Shortage and Talent Management,” Kings of War, <http://kingsofwar.wordpress.com/2009/10/24/the-u-s-army-officer-shortage-and-talent-managment/> (accessed October 28, 2009).

but many do not. Rarer are the commanders who recognize a bad fit and take action to correct it. Team leaders and team sergeants are often left to ‘soldier’ through bad chemistry on their own.

The best litmus test for the right fit of soldiers to teams and teams to missions is how much management they require. The right people and the right teams do not need managing; they simply need guidance to harmonize their actions with those of the rest of the unit and with the unit commander’s intent.¹⁸³ The right fit of personnel to teams, and teams to missions maximizes talent. If the right people cannot be found to fill vacant leadership positions those positions should be left vacant until the right person comes along. Conversely, because an individual does not fit a team, or a team does not fit a mission set, does not automatically mean “bad performers,” it may simply signify there is a mismatch.¹⁸⁴

Another function of fitting soldiers to the right job and fitting teams to the right mission is making use of passion: “Since intrinsic drives are the strongest, people will work most passionately and effectively on projects they choose for themselves.”¹⁸⁵ Special Forces should do a better job of exploiting individuals’ particular passions. At the same time, unconventional thinkers can be challenged, developed, and rewarded in a single stroke by utilizing opportunities made available through the Defense Language Institute, the Olmstead scholarship program, the Naval Postgraduate School Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) program, the Lawrence program, allied service schools, Army Civil Schooling (ACS), etc. Many junior noncommissioned officers and warrant officers hold four-year college degrees. Degree producing programs should be opened to these warrants and to NCOs who have the academic qualifications and demonstrate unconventional talents. There is room for Special Forces to do a better job of exploiting passion among its members; leaders need to be creative and the system needs to open up opportunities that are currently only available to officers.

¹⁸³ Collins, *Good to Great*, 56.

¹⁸⁴ At the same time, everything that doesn’t work shouldn’t be assumed to be the result of a mismatch. Sometimes there are individuals who slip through who should not serve on any team.

¹⁸⁵ Geoff Colvin, *Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2008), 194.

3. Managing Unconventional Talent in the Field

Unconventional talent thrives in uncertain and ambiguous environments. It also thrives when it is freed from oppressive command oversight. Unconventionally minded individuals are guided by cues and mismatches in the environment that inform them as they go. This is an iterative process and unconventional minds are at their best when they are free to pursue solving problems and exploiting opportunities at a pace they set.

The urge to command and control . . . is an impediment to creative adaption, true insight, imagination, and innovation. Creating a system that seems to respond intuitively to the challenges and opportunities it encounters is a far more effective way to proceed. Such a system emphasizes the organic, natural aspects of human relationships and interactions rather than the technology, which both connects and separates us from each other.¹⁸⁶

The current system demands that concepts of the operation (CONOPs) be submitted before ODAs leave their compounds, that multiple storyboards and operational summaries be submitted after every event, that there be daily situation reports and almost constant oversight at all levels of command. This is the antithesis of an organic system. The current system is not only disruptive of being able to respond to events as they occur but, more unforgivably often inhibits the exploitation of opportunity by operators on the scene.

An organic command and control system depends on implicit understanding, trust, and harmony. When it comes to understanding, subordinates must have a thorough understanding of the commander's intent, focus, direction, and what a final unified vision of success looks like. As for trust, commanders have to trust their ODAs. In terms of harmony, as ODAs modify their course of action through innovation, adaptation, exploitation of opportunities, and by shaping of the battlefield they must make certain that their actions are in keeping with the commander's focus and direction. An organic command and control system can only work in a unit with a solid culture of discipline.

A culture of discipline grants ODAs freedom and responsibility within a framework formed by the commander's focus and direction, while also drawing on the

¹⁸⁶ Hammond, *The Mind of War*, 167.

ethical standards expected of American soldiers. ODAs must be disciplined to consistently adhere to this framework.¹⁸⁷ ODAs must not act like “biker gangs.”

C. MAKING THE MOST OF UNCONVENTIONAL TALENT

Talent management is a mindset that goes beyond rhetoric toward a holistic and integrated approach to leveraging the greatest competitive advantage from people. It also refers to those special strategies an organization deploys to recruit, retain and develop its pool of top talent. It is key to leveraging a competitive advantage in peace and war.¹⁸⁸

Major-General Chiarelli, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, is chairing a Virtual Conference over the next year that examines managing the Army’s officer corps by managing talent. Typically, preservation of Army systems has been more important to the institution than practically anything else; this is one consequence of bureaucracy.¹⁸⁹ Ironically, one of the most bureaucratically entrenched systems in the Army is the personnel management system.

Special Forces have often been out in front of the Army in the development of new tactics, techniques, and procedures, and in incorporating new technologies into the fight. Special Forces now have the chance to be out front in how it manages its people. This will take a deliberate effort, however.

In her report, “Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Forces Go Mainstream,” Jessica Glicken Turnley notes that, “the core value of SOF [Special Operations Forces]—the importance of the quality of their people—is at great risk of being lost.”¹⁹⁰ As USSOCOM tries to organizationally look like other commands it has sought greater conformity in order to maintain its legitimacy. Conformity starts structurally, but eventually trickles down from the major command to infect subordinate

¹⁸⁷ Collins, *Good to Great*, 142.

¹⁸⁸ Paula Broadwell, “Talent Management.”

¹⁸⁹ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985)

¹⁹⁰ Jessica Glicken Turnley, “Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream,” 29.

components. Officers and non-commissioned officers who more closely represent the mainstream will move through the system much more easily, filling command positions and others of influence.

If the core value of SOF is the quality of its people, then the core value of Special Forces should be the quality of its unconventionally talented people. It remains to be seen how the Army will begin cataloging talent, but it should be clear that Special Forces needs to begin by distinguishing between those who can think unconventionally and to what degree, and those who think conventionally. The unconventional thinkers, the “Ameri-cans,” need to be identified now, wherever they are in the chain of command and in the force. Special Forces should not wait for the “system” to come up with a method for doing this because whatever the “system” comes up with will be inherently conventional.

This thesis sought to demonstrate that some individuals are uniquely suited to conduct counterinsurgency and other irregular warfare activities by virtue of their unconventional thinking. It has also explained what might lead these individuals to think more unconventionally than others. One thing that seems clear is that despite the attention paid to counterinsurgency theories and methods, what matters most in a counterinsurgency fight, and in irregular warfare in general, are people. The right people, possessing unconventional minds, *are* “sources of power.” If Special Forces can successfully mitigate organizational pressures to promote and reward conventional thinkers above unconventional thinkers, and if Special Forces can identify, develop, better utilize, and protect its unconventional thinkers, it will always retain its advantage, which is to successfully adapt to changing security environments such as those William, Robert, and hundreds of others of us have been sent to re-shape.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 205.

APPENDIX 1: INSURGENT NOTES

The insurgency in Iraq was and is unique due to its amorphous character. An insurgent is a person who takes part in armed rebellion against a constituted authority. For this paper, I have only dealt with the Sunni insurgents, which can be divided into four broad categories:¹⁹²

Nationalist Salafist	Jihadist Salafist	Baathist/Formal Regime Elements	Sunni Militias
Islamic Army in Iraq <i>al-Jaish al-Islami fil-Iraq</i>	Islamic State of Iraq , previously the Mujahideen Shura Council	The Return	1920 th Revolutionary Brigades
Mohammad's Army <i>Jaish Mohammad</i>	Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)	Fedayeen Saddam	Awakening Groups
	Ansar al Sunna	Facilities Protection Service	
	Disaster Brigades <i>al-Ahwal Brigades</i>		
	<i>Jama'at al Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ)</i>		

¹⁹² Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_Iraq.

In this thesis. I utilize the terms insurgents, insurgency, resistance, and Al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM). When using the terms “insurgents” or “insurgency” I am referencing all of the four categories of Sunni insurgent groups identified above. When I use the term AQAM, I am referring to nationalist salafists and jihadist salafists. When using the term “resistance,” I am primarily speaking of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades and any similar organizations. Baathist and former regime elements can also be included in this grouping.

APPENDIX 2: COALITION FORCE REGIMENTAL AND BATTALION TASK FORCE COMMANDS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIT

<u>Regimental Command</u>	<u>Hit Area of Operations</u>
3 rd ACR (March 2003-February 2004)	3 rd ACR (March 2003-February 2004)
RCT 7 (March 2004-March 2005)	2-7 Marines (February 2004-September 2004)
RCT 2 (March 2005-February 2006)	1-23 Marines (September 2004-April 2005)
	3-25 Marines (April 2005-September 2005)
	3-1 Marines (September 2005-October 2005)
	2-114 FA (October 2005-December 2005)
	13 th MEU (November 2005-December 2005)
	22 nd MEU (December 2005-February 2006)
RCT 7 (February 2006-January 2007)	TF 1-36 (February 2006-February 2007)
RCT 2 (January 2007-)	TF 2-7 (February 2007-)

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