

Building Civil Capacity in Iraq

By Colonel Scott F. "Rock" Donahue and Major Daniel L. Higgins

"Modern man's capacity for destruction is quixotic evidence of humanity's capacity for reconstruction. The powerful technological agents we have unleashed against the environment include many of the agents we require for its reconstruction."

—George F. Will

On 14 February 2008, the United States Army's XVIII Airborne Corps assumed command of Multinational Corps–Iraq (MNC–I) from III Corps. Operation Iraqi Freedom was at a critical turning point, nearing the end of the "surge" of more than 25,000 troops. From April to August 2008, the five surge brigade combat teams (BCTs) departed the Iraqi theater of operations. With improved security and a refined approach to counter-insurgency operations, the new operational environment was characterized by vast economic growth opportunities and an explosive demand for essential services. Against this backdrop, MNC–I focused on deliberate planning and execution of its third line of operation (LOO)—building civil capacity.

The holistic approach to developing civil capacity involved coordinating and synchronizing the capacity-building efforts of multiple stakeholders, including coalition forces, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs); international organizations; and most important, local,

provincial, and national Iraqi government agencies. This article documents MNC–I's processes, best practices, and lessons learned in coordinating the joint, interagency, inter-governmental, and multinational initiatives necessary to successfully transition civil capacity development to a capable Iraqi government with support from PRTs and international organizations.

Evolution of Nonlethal Effects

"An organization's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage."

—Jack Welch

From 2007 to 2008, improved security significantly increased public expectations for government-provided services. In May 2008, XVIII Airborne Corps envisioned a conceptual framework for civil capacity development and transition in Iraq as depicted in Figure 1. XVIII Airborne Corps and its subordinate units played a key role in providing minimum essential services such as sewer, water, electricity, trash disposal, refined fuel products, and health care to the Iraqi population while the Iraqi government steadily developed its own capability, enabled by U.S. government agencies, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

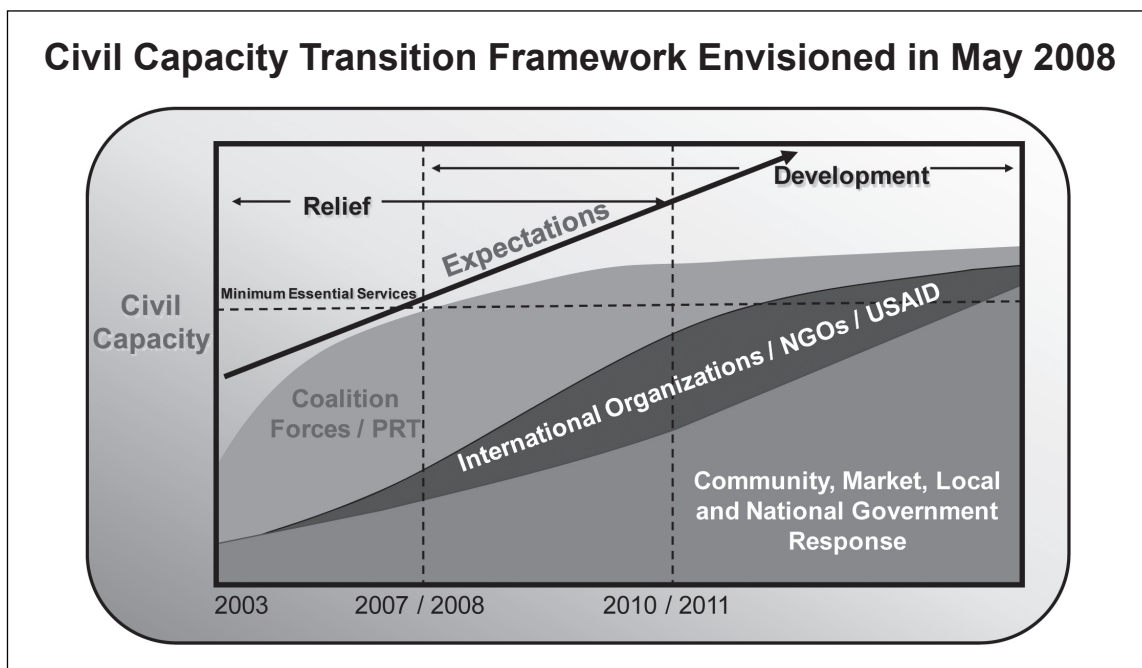


Figure 1

Report Documentation Page

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MNC-I was made acutely aware of this shift on 26 June 2008, when a Multinational Force-West (MNF-W) weekly situation report articulated the need for a comprehensive, fully integrated approach to achieve lethal and nonlethal effects in Anbar Province. The approach would require tactical- to strategic-level key leader engagement with the Iraqi government. Coordination and planning for nonlethal effects at this stage of the campaign were primarily synchronized by the soft-power joint planning team (JPT) led by MNC-I's engineer staff section (C7) and consisting of elements from the following organizations:

- Future operations (FUOPS [C35])
- C7 Infrastructure Protection and Reconstruction section
- Staff Judge Advocate (SJA)
- Civil affairs (C9), Economics and Governance section
- MNC-I surgeon
- Others

The June MNF-W situation report reinforced the need for an MNC-I civil capacity champion—a corps-level lead—to provide a broader, deeper approach to integrating civil capacity with lethal operations aimed at achieving sustainable security and developing Iraqi Security Force (ISF) capability.

On 1 July 2008, the soft-power JPT convened to address the issues raised by MNF-W. Concurrently, MNC-I senior leaders and staff principals collaborated to formalize a more robust and enduring approach to synchronizing civil capacity initiatives. Complexity frustrated this process as the civil capacity LOO consisted of four prioritized objectives involving three primary staff sections:

- Transparent and accountable governance (C9)
- Sustainable economic development (C9)
- Provision of essential services (C7)
- Firmly established rule of law (SJA)

The operational objective of the civil capacity LOO focused on effectively executing tasks required by these four discrete objectives to reinforce security gains and legitimize the Iraqi government.

July 2008 involved several planning iterations to integrate and synchronize civil capacity within the XVIII Airborne Corps planning cycle, since the best approach had yet to be determined. This process ran parallel with the soft-power JPT mission analysis and course of action (COA) development for Anbar civil capacity integration (CCI). To adequately plan for robust Anbar CCI, the soft-power JPT expanded to a larger, more permanent group called the Civil Capacity Integration Team (CCIT), led by the director of MNC-I C7. The group received planning guidance and direct oversight from the MNC-I deputy commanding general (DCG) and the DCG for Coalition and Infrastructure. Tasks for the CCIT were—

- Exploit security gains through the civil capacity LOO.
- Synchronize nonlethal enablers to complement lethal operations.
- Conduct nonlethal targeting by incorporating nonlethal enablers in support of operational priorities.

Sensing a need for a more permanent staff section principally dedicated to the nonlethal portion of the campaign, the MNC-I chief of staff and the operations (C3) section formed a nondoctrinal staff section called C3 Nonkinetic (nonlethal) FUOPS, or C35 NK. This emerging organization was manned by permanently assigned officers from MNC-I coordinating and special staff sections and major subordinate commands already involved in civil capacity development. These were primarily the C9, C7, SJA, and 304th Civil Affairs Brigade. The C35 NK mission was to coordinate and synchronize MNC-I's nonlethal enablers according to the priorities of the MNC-I commander to—

- Exploit security gains.
- Deny resurgence of violent extremists.
- Build civil capacity.
- Advance sustainable security in Iraq.

C35 NK was formally established on 28 July 2008 and was staffed as shown in Figure 2, page 54. With a clear mission and an increasingly important LOO to synchronize and integrate, C35 NK set out to facilitate civil capacity planning in support of MNC-I's named operations.

Making the Civil Capacity Mission Operational

"I must study politics and war that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy."

—John Adams

Designed to plan nonlethal operations in parallel with the XVIII Airborne Corps FUOPS section, C35 NK spent its first few months establishing a niche within the existing corps staff framework and operational battle rhythm. Immediate effort went into developing civil-military operations plans for execution during post-lethal operations in the northern Tigris and Diyala River Valleys in support of Operation Glad Tidings of Benevolence (GTOB). August through October 2008 was a challenging period as C35 NK endured the uncertainty of organizational change. Planning efforts for the northern Tigris and Diyala River Valleys failed to gain widespread acceptance at the division level, where subordinate commanders and staff were skeptical of infusing higher-level follow-on nonlethal direct support into previously planned division operations. Nevertheless, MNC-I and its subordinate commands steadily made nonlethal gains, although C35 NK's role was somewhat limited. Eventually, C35 NK's functions transformed from purely planning to synchronizing efforts in support of the civil capacity LOO.

Organizational Structure of MNC-I's C35 NK Staff Section Established in Late July 2008

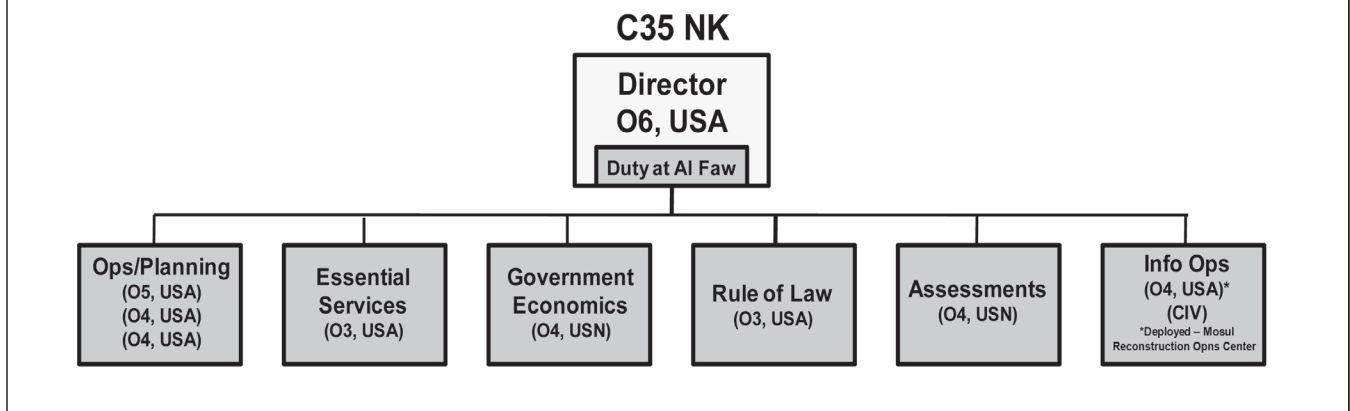


Figure 2

In its refined role, C35 NK provided responsive staff support to MNC-I senior leadership, coordination and synchronization to MNC-I primary staff sections responsible for lethal operations, and coordinating support to inter-agency partners. Integration of nonlethal effects during and after lethal operations was fundamental to the success of MNC-I's counterinsurgency operations. This was particularly true as the ISF increasingly took the lead in lethal operations, although they hadn't thoroughly developed nonlethal aspects to complement these operations. Civil capacity projects, through the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) and the Iraqi Commanders Emergency Response Program (I-CERP), achieved success in Diyala Province during Operation GTOB. These programs improved the delivery of essential services and changed the perspective of Iraqi citizens about the top problems in their neighborhoods.

Operation GTOB was the first major combined operation collaboratively developed by MNC-I and Iraqi Ground Force Command planners. The operation revealed the increased demand for essential services once security was established. It also provided a number of nonlethal lessons learned for inclusion in future operations to achieve sustainable security.

Refining for Success: Synchronizing Civil Capacity Stakeholders and Partners

"Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work."

— Peter Drucker

As the Iraq campaign continued to unfold during the summer and fall of 2008, MNC-I started planning a new operations order (OPORD) to accommodate the rapidly changing operating environment. The civil capacity working group assembled in late August and began mission analysis. Several key factors influenced

the planning process for the civil capacity LOO. The most compelling change was the expiration of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1754 on 31 December 2008. The new MNC-I OPORD would require coalition forces to work by, with, and through ISF and a sovereign Iraqi government under an emerging yet undefined security arrangement.

Securing the Iraqi population and training and equipping the ISF remained MNC-I's priority, but building civil capacity was steadily increasing in importance. Demand for services continued as security gains allowed displaced persons to return to their homes. Consequently, demand for essential services such as electricity and potable water was outpacing the growing supply. Ultimately, the director of MNC-I C7 assumed ownership of the civil capacity LOO for the development of MNC-I OPORD 09-01. He directed his deputy director for operations, plans, and logistics to lead the civil capacity JPT. The team quickly discovered that there was no standard definition of "civil capacity." An exhaustive search of Army field manuals (FMs), joint publications, and numerous references confirmed this assessment. Consolidating inputs from all of these sources, the team eventually developed a definition that the MNC-I commander ultimately approved:

Transparent and accountable Iraqi provincial and local governments providing essential services to their citizens, and characterized by a firmly established rule of law and sustainable, growing economy.

That definition was derived from the—

- Joint campaign plan.
- Strategic framework.
- Draft unified common plan.
- FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.
- FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*.

The experienced team rapidly assimilated lessons learned during previous planning efforts which helped shape the mission analysis and COA development for MNC-I OPORD 09-01. Throughout September and October 2008, the JPT met three times per week to develop the MNC-I civil capacity strategy. The planning effort also included key partners from the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These team members provided invaluable insight from the Department of State (DOS) perspective, assuring DOS and PRT objectives were fully integrated.

The MNC-I commander approved the recommended COA for the civil capacity LOO on 8 November 2008. The LOO consisted of four objectives linked to, and nested with, OPA's five lines of action and Multinational Force-Iraq's (MNF-I's) five LOOs in the joint campaign plan. These objectives were similar to MNC-I's OPORD 08-02 objectives but were refined to reflect two key factors:

- The DOS would be the supported agency for civil capacity development in Iraq.
- Coalition force capacity-building efforts would focus on cementing the security gains made to date.

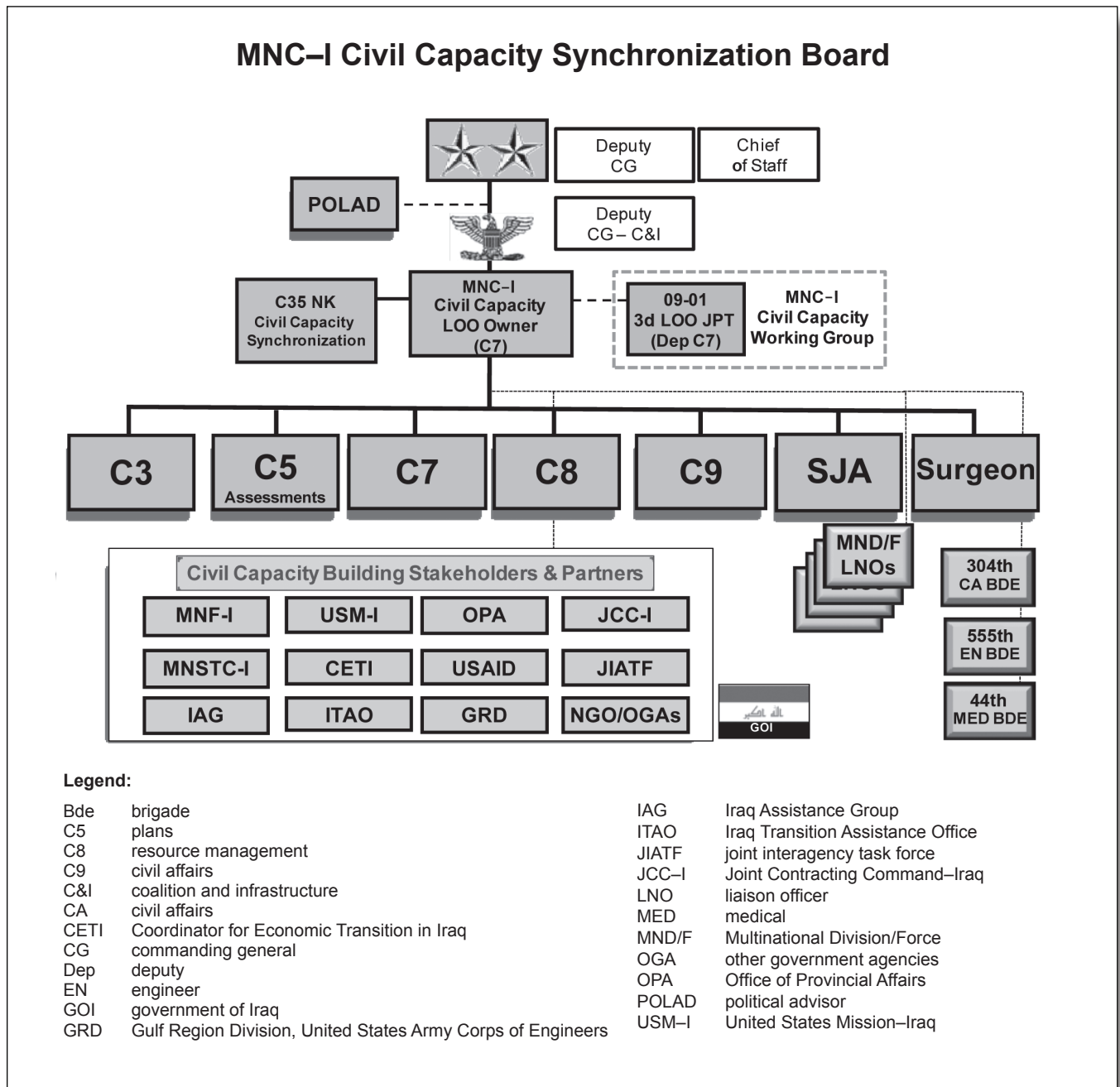


Figure 3

Concurrent with MNC-I OPOD 09-01 planning, the MNC-I civil capacity LOO senior leadership introduced a new idea for a synchronization forum, which became known as the Civil Capacity Synchronization Board (CCSB), chaired by the MNC-I DCG and facilitated by the MNC-I DCG for Coalition and Infrastructure. The intent was to augment the existing corps planning framework and support the C7 civil capacity LOO owner by providing general officer guidance and a single forum for all stakeholders to present initiatives in support of the multinational divisions (MNDs). The MNC-I commanding general approved the concept and the CCSB convened for the first time on 4 November 2008. The forum immediately proved invaluable in providing guidance for executing MNC-I's civil capacity LOO, as well as ensuring the coordination and synchronization of DOS partners. The CCSB ultimately evolved into the premier venue for MNC-I civil capacity integration with major subordinate commands, the United States embassy, MNF-I, OPA, and international organizations such as the United Nations Assistance Mission-Iraq. Figure 3 depicts the organizational structure of the CCSB and lists the participating stakeholders.

“MNC-I focused on deliberate planning and execution of its third line of operation—building civil capacity.”

The final coordination mechanism to codify civil capacity development initiatives was formalizing the relationship at the operational level between OPA and MNC-I. At the strategic level, MNF-I was guided by the joint campaign plan and strategic framework agreement with the U.S. embassy. The strategic framework agreement also established a coordinator for economic transition in Iraq and directed the development of unified common plans at the MNC-I and MND levels. At the tactical level, MNDs and BCTs developed joint campaign plans with their paired PRTs, but no formal operational-level arrangement existed between MNC-I and OPA.

In late November 2008, a new JPT formed with OPA to draft a unified common plan amenable to both organizations and to formalize the support MNC-I would provide OPA as lead U.S. government agency for civil capacity development in Iraq. It also defined the mechanisms to coordinate planning and to eliminate conflicts in the employment of U.S. resources. Ultimately, the objective was to provide unity of effort across DOS and DOD entities at the operational level. Furthermore, the unified common plan sought to provide a civil capacity common operating picture, shared expectations, synchronized guidance, and prioritized U.S. resources. It also refined the process for subordinate unit plans—MNDs/PRTs and battlefield owners/embedded PRTs—by defining a new provincial unified common plan framework and coordinating guidance. The plans generated by the PRTs as part of this process were coordinated and synchronized across the theater of operations by DOS and DOD elements alike.

Civil Capacity Handover to I Corps

“Our job is not to build it for them; our job is to help them build the capacity so that they can use their own substantial resources to do things for themselves.”

—Ambassador Joseph Saloom

In the final analysis, MNC-I's civil capacity-building efforts were remarkably successful. Its successful management of the postsurge security environment enabled the subsequent transition to Iraqi-led security operations as the ISF continued to grow in experience and capability. As of April 2009, attacks and casualties were down to 2003 pre-insurgency levels. The ability of Al Qaeda in Iraq to conduct sustained operations was severely degraded. The improved security also enabled MNC-I to focus on stability operations and capacity-building throughout most of the theater of operations. The provincial elections held on 31 January 2009 occurred under Iraqi control without incident, and the process to seat the new provincial governments proceeded as planned.

A closer evaluation of MNC-I's civil capacity objectives confirms this assessment. With respect to improved governance, the successful provincial elections indicated the significant strides made by the Iraqis. Notwithstanding friction points such as Arab-Kurd tensions in the north and the proposed Iraq hydrocarbon law, results to date are noteworthy. Significant improvements in providing essential services during the corps's tenure, particularly in the critically important electrical sector, were also made. As of April 2009, electrical generation was at the highest point in Iraq's history, greater than 125,000 megawatt hours, and there are plans to add an additional 20 percent to the grid by the end of 2010.


Other essential services improved as well, and with PRT and coalition support will transition to capable Iraqi agencies. The rule of law continues to improve throughout Iraq, particularly in judicial security, detention operations, and the investigative capacity to support criminal prosecutions. Additional effort is required to reduce cultural tolerance for corruption, reform business laws, and increase transparency, but Iraqi leadership has expressed a willingness to do all three. Economic activity continues to expand in a number of sectors other than petroleum, which is critical for a broader Iraqi economy. The hospitality and service industries show positive signs in areas supporting religious tourism, and foreign direct investment to improve oil, gas, and electrical sectors appears imminent with a relatively low global price for oil. In summary, from the tactical to strategic levels, MNC-I's full spectrum civil capacity influence set positive conditions for handover to I Corps in April 2009, and for continued civil capacity development as U.S. forces withdraw by the end of 2011.

The primary tools used to facilitate civil capacity initiatives at the tactical level were the CERP and the Iraqi-funded version, I-CERP. These programs facilitated the civil capacity building projects that led to the success previously

described. Iraqi answers to polling questions about their top local concerns revealed a sense of normalcy that improved greatly from February 2008 to February 2009. Employment, rather than security, was the most important issue by a wide margin. Improving a diversified economy and providing jobs will be critical tasks as Iraq moves forward in 2009 and beyond.

To successfully move forward, MNC-I will continue to build on civil capacity best practices and the following key lessons learned:

- Ensure that nonlethal planning is fully integrated with lethal operations.
- Keep civil capacity projects small while security is tenuous and gradually transition to larger programs as conditions permit.
- Ensure that interagency planning and coordination are conducted from strategic to tactical levels.
- Coordinate with interagency partners to develop and maintain a civil capacity common operating picture.
- Expect explosive demand for essential services as soon as security is achieved.
- Prevent loss of momentum by ensuring a thorough civil capacity handover during and throughout transitions.

The final chapters in Operation Iraqi Freedom will be written over the next 24 months. Achieving sustainable security and transitioning the civil capacity mission to fully capable Iraqi government agencies will depend heavily on efforts to train Iraqi officials and continue building on the foundations laid in part by MNC-I during Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09. Improving security is the catalyst for continued gains, and with the assistance of the U.S. embassy, coalition forces, international organizations, foreign corporations, and Iraqis helping Iraqis, Iraq will remain free and flourish as the liberated democratic nation we set out to create. 

Colonel Donahue served as the XVIII Airborne Corps engineer and Director, MNC-I C7 from February 2008 through April 2009. He was responsible for coordinating, synchronizing, and executing full spectrum engineer support for coalition forces throughout the Iraqi Theater of Operations. He holds a bachelor's in civil engineering from the Virginia Military Institute, a master's in operations research from the Naval Postgraduate School, and a master's in strategic studies from the United States Army War College. He is also a registered professional engineer in Virginia.

Major Higgins, United States Army Reserve, is Deputy Commander, 733d Facility Engineer Detachment, based in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and served on the MNC-I C7 Infrastructure Protection and Reconstruction staff from September 2008 through July 2009 during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was the lead corps planner for the "Provision of Essential Services" objective implemented on 1 January 2009 and a contributor to the unified common plan between MNC-I and OPA. He holds a bachelor's in civil engineering from the United States Military Academy and a master's from the Helzberg School of Management at Rockhurst University.