



# Providing Security Force Assistance in an Economy of Force Battle

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**T**HE 1ST BATTALION, 35th Armor (Task Force Conqueror), fought an economy of force mission for most of the Battle of Ramadi during the summer and fall of 2006. This narrative highlights lessons learned from the deployment. Through a combination of partnering with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), tribal engagement, aggressive Iraqi Police recruiting, and targeted U.S.-led operations, the task force was able to—

- Reestablish the Iraqi Police in Ramadi.
- Increase the capability of our partnered Iraqi Army battalion.
- Link the sheiks of Anbar with the government of Iraq fostering the Anbar Awakening.

## Overview

The Battle of Ramadi had a clear beginning but no clear-cut end, and it was a battle fought on two main fronts. The first front was an incredibly lethal fight to wrest control of Ramadi back from Al-Qaeda; the second was a battle to link the population with the government of Iraq. In the end, it was a victory for the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines of the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division (Ready First Combat Team). The battle proved to be a blueprint for the emerging counterinsurgency doctrine, U.S. Army and Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, which was being developed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. While many of the actions of the Ready First now seem like simple application of doctrine, at the time, the following concepts ran counter to the prevailing conventional wisdom:

- Living in small combat outposts.
- Focusing on protecting the population.
- Investing in the Iraqi Security Forces.
- Working with tribal leaders.

In May of 2006, the situation in Ramadi was dire. Al-Qaeda had declared Ramadi the capital of a so-called “new Islamic caliphate,” and it was destroying all vestiges of government services that the duly elected government provided. From the destruction of cell phone towers to assassination of governmental leaders, Al-Qaeda was systematically attacking the city’s infrastructure to exert control over the population. It waged a highly successful murder and

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PHOTO: 1SG David Shaw, B/2-6 IN, Task Force Conqueror, Ramadi, Iraq, training Iraqi MPs in dismounted patrolling at Camp Blue Diamond, 2 September 2006. (DOD, TSGT Jeremy Lock)

***Al-Qaeda had declared Ramadi the capital of a so-called “new Islamic caliphate,” ...***

intimidation campaign against Al Anbar provincial government leaders, the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi Police, and the population of Ramadi in general. The provincial government had collapsed, and the ISF were ineffective. Al-Qaeda had co-opted the hard-core Sunni rejectionists, as well as the mujahedeen (the honorable resistance), and was in control of large portions of Ramadi.

Governor Mamoon Sami Rashid was the elected leader of Al Anbar, but it was questionable if he was the choice of the people. The December 2005 Iraqi national election was widely boycotted in Al Anbar. Although the election turnout was statistically higher than the previous election, the actual voter turnout was less than 30 percent of the population. The local sheiks' opinion of Governor Mamoon ranged from the belief that he was an ineffective leader to the suspicion that he was a card-carrying member of Al-Qaeda.

Coalition forces in Ramadi, operating out of large forward operating bases predominately on the outskirts of the city, were capable of short-duration offensive surge operations. However, they were essentially fixed in securing the lines of communications to Ramadi through a series of static checkpoints along Routes Michigan, Mobile, and Long Island. Large portions of Ramadi and surrounding tribal areas had little to no coalition presence for an extended period, in effect giving Al-Qaeda freedom of movement throughout the area of operations.

**Bringing the team together.** Task Force Conqueror was part of the brigade-sized Central Command operational reserve, the Call Forward Force, stationed at Camp Buehring, Kuwait. We had been in Kuwait since 15 November 2005, training and waiting orders to deploy somewhere in the Central Command area of responsibility. Fortunately, the task force's planning effort focused on Al Anbar, Iraq, and we had the opportunity to conduct an area orientation in March of 2006. After a series of false starts, Task Force Conqueror and 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry (Task Force Regular), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dan Walrath, received orders in

late May 2006 to deploy to Ramadi. The task forces linked up in Ramadi with the Ready First brigade headquarters (a legacy brigade). Other combat team members included 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry (Task Force Currahee); 1st Battalion, 37th Armor (Task Force Bandit); 2d Battalion, 3d Field Artillery (2-3 FA); 16th Engineer Battalion (-); 501st Forward Support Battalion (501st FSB); 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (3/8 Marines); a detachment of U.S. Navy Seals; and other enablers that were already in place in Ramadi. The Ready First Combat Team's immediate mission was to conduct a relief in place with 2nd Brigade, 28th Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard. This “mini-surge” from the Call Forward Force provided the additional forces necessary to project combat power into Ramadi and to protect the population from Al-Qaeda.

While the employment of the task forces from the Call Forward Force was an operational secret, numerous reports of an impending large-scale attack on Ramadi were in the Arab media. This allowed Al-Qaeda elements to prepare their defenses for the impending battle. Large, deep-buried improvised explosive devices were implanted throughout the city along with arms and ammunition cached for the impending fight. As the relief in place began, civilians were leaving the city in droves, packing as many of their worldly possessions in their vehicles as they could. There was an overall feeling of apprehension among the populace.

**The plan.** There was to be a fight for Ramadi, but not the fight that Al-Qaeda expected. The Ready First, commanded by then-Colonel Sean MacFarland, took back Ramadi in a way that led to a lasting success and served as a template for operations during the “surge” in the spring of 2007. Given vague guidance to “Take back Ramadi, but don't make it another Fallujah,” MacFarland had the latitude to conduct operations in a different way. Instead of operating from large forward operating bases, the Ready First would push forces out into smaller combat outposts and execute a “clear-hold-build” strategy that focused on securing the population of Ramadi.

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Initially, Task Force Conqueror was the brigade's main effort and would secure the western and southern approaches to Ramadi by establishing combat outposts in the suburb of Tam'eem and near Al Anbar University. Task Force Regular would clear the tribal areas north of Ramadi, while Task Force Curahee and 3/8 Marines would expand out from their current combat outposts inside of Ramadi. Task Force Bandit was in reserve and, on order, would assume the main effort and attack into southern Ramadi, establishing multiple combat outposts. The main effort would then rotate between the task forces in order to keep Al-Qaeda off guard until eventually ringing the interior of Ramadi with combat outposts, thus eliminating Al-Qaeda's freedom of maneuver to attack coalition forces and to subjugate the population of Ramadi.

## **Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority**

On 1 June 2006, Task Force Conqueror and Task Force Regular began conducting a "relief in place/transfer of authority" with 1st Battalion, 172 Armor, Vermont Army National Guard (Task Force 1-172), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mark Lovejoy. Task Force 1-172 was a four-company battalion task force that had spent a year in Ramadi with an enormous area of operations, fighting against an increasingly emboldened enemy. Task Force Conqueror and Task Force Regular split Task Force 1-172's area of operations. The split allowed each task force staff to focus on issues specific to the diverse tribal area north and west of the city of Ramadi.

The relief in place occurred under heavy enemy contact, during which Task Force Conqueror incurred high casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small-arms fire. Additionally, a devastating suicide vehicle-borne IED attack in southern Tam'eem effectively destroyed an Iraqi Army checkpoint, Entry Control Point 3. Al-Qaeda was attempting to inflict high casualties to disrupt coalition attacks, make the coalition casualty-adverse, and provoke a violent overreaction, further separating us from the population.

On 7 June 2006, the actual day of the task force relief in place/transfer of authority, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, died during a coalition airstrike near Baghdad. With the leadership of Al-Qaeda in Iraq decapitated, Colonel Mac-

Farland decided to attack immediately into Ramadi. Ready First's relief in place/transfer of authority was completed on 14 June 2006. Task Force Bandit assumed the brigade's main effort and, on 18 June 2006, it attacked over an abandoned railroad bridge from Tam'eem into southern Ramadi.

From there, MacFarland used a swing force of three maneuver companies and an engineer company to weight the main effort. By shifting the main effort between battalion task forces and establishing a series of combat outposts, he continued to put pressure on Al-Qaeda and ensured an enduring coalition presence in the city. Task Force Conqueror reverted to an economy of force mission operating west of Ramadi. To offset the shortage of U.S. combat power, we received operational control of the 1st Battalion/1 Brigade, 7th Iraqi Division (1/1/7 Iraqi Army), Iraqi Police from the Al Horea Police station, and Iraqi Highway Police Station 4. Over time, we also received a T-72 tank company from the 9th Iraqi Army Division, the 7th Iraqi Military Police Company, and police from the Tway Iraqi Police Station. The lack of available U.S. combat power forced us into a close relationship with the Iraqi forces and self-generating or augmenting transition teams for each Iraqi security force unit. This support provided to the ISF would likely not have occurred if U.S. forces had been more robust.

**Building ISF capacity.** At relief in place/transfer of authority, we immediately began investing in the Iraqi Security Forces. Supporting the 1/1/7 Iraqi Army was a 10-man Marine military transition team (MiTT) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kris Stillings. Following the precedent set by Task Force 1-172, Task Force Conqueror augmented the MiTT with 10 noncommissioned officers. I was initially reluctant to assign task force Soldiers to the MiTT, but Stillings told me succinctly, "If you give me 10 guys, I can give you 300." It turned out to be the best decision I made during the entire deployment. By augmenting the military transition team, we maintained a constant coalition presence with the Iraqi Army at the static checkpoints, accompanied every Iraqi Army patrol, and were able to mentor and develop the Iraqi Army commanders and staff. Despite suffering nearly 50 percent casualties over the course of six months, the MiTT was continuously effective because of its established relationship of trust with the Iraqi Army. They were the

catalyst for the marked improvement of the 1/1/7 Iraqi Army over the course of the summer.

The 1/1/7 Iraqi Army had been conducting independent operations in the city of “5 Kilo” since February of 2006. The battalion was manned at less than 50 percent strength, with the officers of the unit predominately Sunni and the soldiers Shi’a. Most of the soldiers had not attended basic training. Despite these issues, they were an effective unit, but they were near the tipping point of melting away due to an increasing AWOL problem. In addition to a host of administrative and logistical shortfalls, they were subjected to an intense murder and intimidation campaign both on duty in Ramadi and in their homes in Baghdad while they were on leave. Al-Qaeda beheaded the first sergeant of First Company in his home in front of his family in early June 2005, further undermining unit morale and increasing the AWOL problem.

Living conditions for the Iraqi Army at the static checkpoints were horrible, and the construction was substandard. Building on lessons from the destruction of Entry Control Point 3, we immediately increased force protection of all static positions within the Task Force area and began improving the living conditions at the remaining ISF positions. Our engineers (C/40th), led by Captain John Hiltz and First Sergeant Jerry Bailey, and the Task Force Engineer Platoon, led by Lieutenant Toby Watson, renovated Check Point 293. Once the Iraqi Army saw the investment we were making, the rate of Iraqi Army soldiers going AWOL decreased dramatically and their proficiency began to increase.

The Iraqi Police station in Al Horea was located in the city of 5 Kilo, which was relatively quiet. The supporting U.S. police transition team was not under Task Force Conqueror or Ready First control, and it did not maintain a constant presence at this station. Nor did it ever develop personal relationship between the transition team and the Iraqi Police. Lack of effective advisors presented problems

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that hampered the development of the Iraqi Police throughout the deployment. Iraqi Police in Al Horea therefore did not develop at the rate the 1/1/7 Iraqi Army did. While the Iraqi Police that reported for duty wanted to fight Al-Qaeda, they simply did not have the requisite skills to do so effectively.

Additionally, the T-72 tank company from the 9th Iraqi Army rotated to Ramadi on a three week basis. Each T-72 company brought its own MiTT for the three-week rotation. There seemed to be a good relationship between the MiTT and the tank companies, but we never had the continuity needed to bring the tank company, the MiTT, and the task force into true partnership with each other. Although we used the Iraqi Army’s T-72s predominately for highly visible static checkpoints, they also participated in major urban clearing operations. They proved to be a highly effective unit, especially in conveying the message that we were in Iraq to help establish the Iraqi government, not occupy Iraq. Seeing Iraqi tanks with a large Iraqi flag flying from the turret was a source of national pride, a 41-ton billboard for the Iraqi government.

Task Force Conqueror received the 7th Iraqi Army Division Military Police Company for the clearance of Al Anbar University at the end of July 2006. Initially, the company had a division-level MiTT, which we quickly replaced with a self-generated team led by Captain Jason Crow and augmented with a section of the Ready First’s female search platoon, Team Lioness. Due to the sensitive nature of occupying an Iraqi University, ensuring this Iraqi Army company’s success was critical. Their success, thanks in large part to the internally resourced MiTT team, prevented Al-Qaeda from exploiting the university as a recruiting base and training center. The Iraqi Army was seen taking back their own university, a theme we exploited in media messages and key leader engagements. Clearing and holding Al Anbar University led to a reduction in violence west of Ramadi.

**Fighting the economy of force battle.** Task Force Conqueror had three distinct areas of operation (AO). Charlie Company, 1-35 AR (Team Comanche), consisted of a tank company headquarters, a tank platoon, the battalion scout platoon, and the battalion mortar platoon augmented with tankers from the battalion HHC. Its AO encompassed Camp Ramadi and consisted of the agrarian tribal region of Zangora to the north; Routes Michigan and Mobile to the west; and

the desert regions to the south, including Al Anbar University. Team Comanche assumed responsibility for eight static vehicular observation posts, and was responsible for keeping Routes Michigan, Mobile, and Long Island open. Captain Mike Schoenfeldt—followed by Captain Matt Alden—and First Sergeant Robin Bolmer led Comanche, which also had a partner relationship with the Iraqi Highway Patrol Station located on Route Mobile and a relationship with numerous tribal leaders in Zangora. Over time, Comanche began using Iraqi Army forces in combined operations in Zangora. There were very few attacks against coalition forces in this area of operations, but we suspected that Al-Qaeda operatives were living in the region and commuting to conduct attacks in Ramadi. Overall, the tribal sheiks and the residents of Zangora were supportive of the coalition efforts and there were signs of commerce; it was the only glimmer of hope in the entire Ramadi region.

Bravo Company, 2-6 IN (Team Dealer), was a mechanized infantry company with an attached tank platoon. Its AO was markedly different. The city of Tam'eem was a densely populated, blighted, incredibly violent urban area of 40,000. Tam'eem suffered an inordinately high number of attacks, had little economic activity, and the area was rife with despair. Captain Lou Lancon—followed by

Captain Matt Graham—and First Sergeant David Shaw led Team Dealer. Their unit was attacked with deep-buried and vehicle borne IEDs, sniper fire, and small-arms fire daily. We assumed that any route not physically observed had explosive devices on it. In response to a series of devastating deep-buried IED attacks, we limited coalition movement in the city to dismounted patrolling or in armored vehicles unless it was a large-scale operation or reaction to troops in contact. Team Dealer maintained a 24-hour presence in the city through mounted outposts and dismounted patrols. It conducted both intelligence-driven targeted raids and census operations. The census operations allowed us to have personal contact with the residents of Tam'eem and were an invaluable source of intelligence. Use of ISF in Tam'eem was limited because of high levels of violence. The Iraqi forces simply did not have the ability to maintain a long-term presence in Tam'eem.

We used our headquarters company, led by Captain Jonathan Cornett—followed by Captain Mike Schoenfeldt—and First Sergeant Kerry Dyer, to support the ISF. The Iraqi Security Force sector of 5 Kilo was a wealthy one where the upper levels of Ramadi society lived. The Iraqi Security Force's control of this town was always in question, but the level of violence was relatively low, especially compared to

Tam'eem. We thought it a haven for Sunni rejectionists and possibly Al-Qaeda operatives, but never had the intelligence to conduct decisive operations in this community. We also did not foster a good working relationship between the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police unit until very late into our deployment, further fracturing the command and control relationship in the city of 5 Kilo.

## The Awakening

We recognized that building capability within the Iraqi Security Forces was the only solution for long term success in Iraq. While an effective Iraqi Army was critical to the successful prosecution of the counterinsurgency fight, we thought the Iraqi Police



CPT Matt Alden, commander C/1-35 AR gives an operations order for a combined operation with the 2/1/1/7 Iraqi Army on 29 July 2006 at Camp Ramadi, Iraq.

would be a more effective weapon for our area of operations. Police recruiting could quickly provide success on a number of lines of effort. First, we would increase the economic development by providing respectable jobs to young men, thereby lessening the likelihood of Al-Qaeda paying them to attack coalition forces. Second, we would build the government's legitimacy by having the government pay the Iraqi Police salaries, making the populace less likely to dismiss the government as unrepresentative. Third, we would improve security by having buy-in of the local population in their own security. The locals knew who belonged in their area and who was doing harm to the coalition. They could identify the enemy when U.S. forces were simply incapable of doing so.

Our ability to see inside the Iraqi culture was extremely limited. Twelve-plus years of Saddam Hussein-orchestrated, anti-U.S. propaganda in the media and in the schools, combined with a deep sense of disenfranchisement among the Sunnis after the liberation of Iraq, had predisposed the population of Anbar against the coalition. Few residents of Ramadi were brave enough to speak openly to coalition forces. We also found that the locals would fight hard for their tribe or village but did not want to leave Ramadi. Initially, we thought the insurgents were operating outside of the cities in remote corners of the desert, but after a time we realized the enemy was moving through the population.

**Roots.** One family openly supportive of the coalition was the Bezia family of Abu Risha tribe. The family paid a high price for this support. Al-Qaeda operatives had killed the father and two sons in the previous three years. The three remaining sons, Sheiks Ahmed, Sattar, and Jabbar, would all play leading roles in the Anbar Awakening. In June 2006, Ahmed and his brother, Sattar, were influential leaders in the community. The Bezias, and the Ramadi sheiks in general, wanted to rid Ramadi of Al-Qaeda influence but did not have the means to do it alone. Police recruiting had come to a standstill since the failed "Al Anbar People's Council," formed by Dr. Muhammad Mahmud Latif Al-Fahadawi to evict Al-Qaeda in December 2005. This "tribal movement" arose without coalition support and quickly failed due to a devastating suicide bombing at the police-recruiting site on 5 January 2006 and an extremely effective murder and intimidation campaign against the sheiks by Al-Qaeda throughout January 2006.

We approached Sheik Ahmed with a proposition. If the tribal leaders could get their young men to join the Iraqi Police, then the coalition would establish a police station in the tribal area. This request had come out of necessity. The Iraqi Police recruiting drives were failing to produce the necessary numbers to reinvigorate the police force, and the U.S. combat power required to protect the recruiting site surpassed what Task Force Conqueror could muster without giving up a constant presence in Tam'eem. By holding the recruiting drive in the tribal area as opposed to the traditional Camp Ramadi site, we would need fewer coalition forces to secure the site. By working through the tribal leaders, we could target where the security and economic impact of the recruiting drive would take place and maintain a level of operational security since we would not need a large-scale information campaign to notify potential recruits.

For the sheiks, this was a great proposal. The Sunnis wanted to secure their families and villages and hold jobs that were prestigious in their communities, such as military officers or police officers. (Previously, coalition forces had offered them jobs as garbage collectors or street cleaners.) They wanted Al-Qaeda out of Anbar, but were unable to fight them alone. The sheiks had constantly asked for authorization to arm militias to fight Al-Qaeda, a proposal that was unacceptable to the coalition. By putting the young men into the Iraqi Police, we linked the tribes with the central government, and began investing Sunnis into the political process, which paid dividends later.

The first tribal-backed recruiting drive took place on 4 July 2006, at the Bezia compound. It was also the first time that recruits would report directly to training at the Police Academy. Previously, recruits would sign up, but never report to move out for training. Al-Qaeda would intimidate them while they waited to attend training, and they simply would not come back. Lieutenant Colonel Jim Lechner, the Ready First deputy commander, proved

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himself invaluable in fighting through bureaucracy by eliminating the requirement to ship and screen recruits on separate days. While this sounds like a simple solution to a complex problem, bureaucratic nay-saying made it extremely difficult. In the end, this small procedural change paid enormous dividends in reducing the no-show rate for recruits.

The sheiks produced the recruits and helped provide local security in cooperation with Team Comanche. Recruits went through the induction process and those who passed went to the Police Training Academy in Jordan. Mid-morning mortar attacks on the Bezia compound damaged only a few coalition vehicles while it stiffened the resolve of the recruits and the sheiks. After the attacks, we asked Sheik Ahmed and Sheik Sattar if they wanted to continue the recruiting drive, since their families were put in imminent danger. The answer was yes. We were impressed that they would take such risks to try to save Anbar.

The total number of recruits that day was around 80. While not the hundreds promised, it still increased the police force in Ramadi by nearly 100 percent. We continued conducting recruiting drives over the course of the summer with increasing success. The exception was September, which brought only 20 recruits. When pressed, the sheiks admitted that they had “donor fatigue.” They had run out of young men to put into the police force until the others returned from the police academy. They needed to keep some young men back to protect their homes and run their businesses. October brought in over 400 recruits. Momentum was gaining, but a tough fight still lay ahead.

**Stationing of the Iraqi Police.** As in America, police should live and work in the same community in order to be effective. Thousands of young men had signed up to become police officers in Ramadi from 2003-2006, but few were still reporting for duty. We were only beginning to understand the insular nature of the Anbar communities. To the locals, a “foreign fighter” may be from somewhere no farther than two villages away. A tribal member will protect his village, but may not feel the need to protect the next village or the larger city. Establishing a police station in the tribal region was a source of pride for the locals. While eager to rid Anbar of Al-Qaeda, the recruits wanted to secure their homes and families first. A large police presence was necessary in the city

of Ramadi to build on hard-fought gains, but Ready First’s leaders established the police station in Tway and reinforced the Jazeria Iraqi Police station first, rather than rushing the new recruits into established but abandoned police stations in Ramadi. Had we rushed the recruits into the urban stations, the recruits and the reenergized police force would have melted away before they had time to become effective.

The establishment of the Tway police station also required overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. There was tremendous organizational resistance to establishing a new Iraqi Police station, regardless of the tactical importance or strategic significance. In time, we declared the Tway station a substation of the Al Horea police station, which satisfied the bureaucrats. Through the hard work of Captain Nick Franklin and Captain Navin Kalicharan, we created a primitive police sub-station similar to a combat outpost by creating an out-of-hide police transition team, composed of Captain Jonathan Cornett; 2nd Lieutenant Stephen Winter, an MP officer; and a squad of military police. Construction ended just in time to house the initial group of returning Iraqi Police recruits and to facilitate the beginning of the Anbar Awakening.

Al-Qaeda also recognized the importance of this station and attacked it daily with suicide vehicle-borne IEDs and indirect fire. Although under constant attack, the Iraqi Police were not intimidated. They now saw themselves as fighting the real enemy, Al-Qaeda. Recruiting soared to all-time highs. To the general population of Ramadi and to the mujahedeen, it was now “honorable” to fight Al-Qaeda and not the coalition.

By November 2006, nearly 3,000 men were either in the Iraqi Police, in training at police academies, or awaiting shipment to them—a 30-fold increase from May 2006. Other men wanting to protect their homes but, ineligible to join the Iraqi Police, formed Neighborhood Watch programs as unpaid but regulated volunteers in their tribal areas. Eventually, the outpouring of local support to join the

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Iraqi Police and fight Al-Qaeda surpassed the Iraqi Police authorization, resulting in the Iraqi national government establishing emergency response units in Ramadi to fight Al-Qaeda.

**Setting conditions.** Throughout the summer of 2006, Task Force Conqueror conducted intelligence-driven operations and an aggressive information engagement strategy with the sheiks, orchestrated by Captains Pat Fagan and Sean Frerking. The sheiks and the population recognized that Al-Qaeda’s hold was being broken across Ramadi, and that coalition forces were trying to protect the population.

The local government in Ramadi had collapsed. Governor Mamoon was under the constant protection of a Marine Corps rifle company, and the government center in Ramadi was subject to large scale, complex attacks, seemingly daily. The area surrounding the government center was a no-man’s land of rubble and unexploded ordinance. While Mamoom came to work daily, the Anbar director generals, the true facilitators of governmental legitimacy and reconstruction, did not. They had well-founded safety concerns and were subject to an intense murder and intimidation campaign as well.

Through daily information engagements with the sheiks, we attempted to use tribal pressures to get the director generals back to work. We emphasized to the sheiks the importance of participating in the democratic process and stressed that the only way to restore a decent standard of living in Ramadi was to get the government back into operation. We understood that we needed to tie the population to the government of Iraq to achieve long-term success, and spent a tremendous amount of time and effort in educating the tribal leadership that the only way to a peaceful future was through a democratic government.

On 26 August, Task Force Conqueror executive officer Major Chuck Bergman and I held a meeting at the Bezia compound to get an update from the sheiks on police recruiting. We found sheik Sattar abu Risha and a group of 10 other sheiks meeting in the house. They told us that sheik Khaled A’rak

Ehtami Al-A’layawi’a of the Abu Ali Jassim tribe had gone to speak with members of the Abu Aetha Tribe about rejecting Al-Qaeda, but was killed and his body was being held hostage. This act of disrespect by Al-Qaeda enraged the sheiks and the local populace.

The population’s support for Al-Qaeda was already dwindling. In response to the Iraqi Army checkpoint established at Al Anbar University, Al-Qaeda had issued a decree that they would kill the children of Anbar if they attended school. Al-Qaeda was also attempting to implement strict sharia law throughout Ramadi, including a ban on smoking, which caused an uproar with the local population. Al-Qaeda’s disrespect of the people, combined with the coalition’s efforts to protect the population, turned public opinion against them and set the conditions for the Anbar Emergency Council.

## **The Anbar Emergency Council**

On 2 September 2006, Task Force Conqueror operations officer Major David Raugh and I met with about 20 sheiks at the Bezia compound. They had come to us with a proposal. They were declaring an “Emergency Council” to bring peace to Al Anbar. They claimed that the Iraqi Constitution authorized formation of an Emergency Council and brought out lawyers with copies of the Iraqi Constitution to prove their point. The sheiks stated their desire to work with coalition forces to rid Al Anbar of Al-Qaeda and to restore peace in the region. They wanted to work openly with the coalition forces and the government. What we had been trying to do with the sheiks for months was now on the table.

They also called for the ouster of Governor Mamoom, a demand that the coalition could not accept. We applauded them for their commitment, but told them that a declaration such as this had an impact far beyond the Task Force Conqueror’s area of operations, and we would have to take it to our chain of command.

We immediately told Colonel MacFarland that the sheiks wanted to work openly with coalition forces and that they wanted Governor Mammon replaced. We set up a meeting between MacFarland and the sheiks for 9 September. As we continued engaging the sheiks, our message was that removal of a sitting governor by coalition forces in a sovereign Iraq was not likely to happen. The best course of action was to work with the existing government to improve

the situation in Ramadi. While the sheiks still did not trust Governor Mamoom, they respected the advice given to them and were willing to take us on our word that the situation would turn out all right.

On 9 September 2006, MacFarland and the leaders of Task Force Conqueror met with the sheiks, led by Sattar Bezia, at the Bezia compound. The sheiks meant business, and this meeting was an opportunity to tie the greater population of Ramadi into the hard-earned tactical victories the Ready First had already achieved. While the sheiks initially wanted a coalition presence at the Emergency Council meeting, they ultimately agreed that this needed to be an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem. The coalition would support them anyway we could, but the Iraqis had to be in the lead.

## Anbar Awakens

On 14 September, three days after the release in the *Washington Post* of the Devlin Report announcing the Marine Expeditionary Force assessment that Al Anbar was lost, the Al Anbar Emergency Council meeting went off without a hitch. Task Force Conqueror and the Ready First provided outer security, and the sheiks provided security at the site. Forty-one sheiks signed the Emergency Council proclamation and swore to drive Al-Qaeda out of Anbar. Sheik Sattar abu Risha, a charismatic leader who ultimately became the face of the Anbar Awakening, was elected by the sheiks as the head of the council. While it seemed merely ceremonial to us at the time, the movement immediately gained traction throughout Al Anbar. Prior to the Anbar

## Tenets of the Awakening Meeting

- Return “honorable” status to Sheiks who did not support terrorism in any way or means to form the Anbar Sheik Council.
- Hold free elections for the members of the Rescue Anbar Province Council with all sons of Anbar democratically represented without illegal pressures.
- Form the police and army with Anbar sons by coordinate the hiring process and appointments with the sheiks, who will issue affidavits in which they confirm the good civil conduct of the recruits from their tribes.
- Provide security for highway travelers and for roads within tribal areas.
- Condemn terrorism, wherever and whenever it is found, and denounce any attacks against coalition forces to allow an open dialogue and draw a new road map for the province.
- Stop all arms holding in public streets, except for the police and the army.
- Respect the law and support the judicial system, so it can uphold the law.
- Open dialogue with ex-Ba’athist members who have not committed any crime against Iraqis and did not support terrorism, to help them get jobs.
- Immediately initiate industrial development, reopen commercial industries, and revive agricultural endeavors to lessen unemployment.
- After ratification of the proclamation by tribes, sheiks will hold responsible and surrender to the proper authorities any person who gives refuge to any terrorist, whether Arab, foreign, or Iraqi.
- Open dialogue with coalition forces to schedule their withdrawal from Anbar once the Anbar police and army forces are completely formed.



DOD, Mr. Sterling Jensen

**Initial meeting between the coalition forces and the leaders of the Anbar Awakening Council, 9 September 2006, Ramadi, Iraq. From the left, Sheik Jabbar abu Risha, LTC Tony Deane, Sheik Hamid al-Hais, Sheik Sattar abu Risha, COL Sean MacFarland, Sheik Moayed Ibrahim Hammadi, and Sheik Abd Al Kareem.**

Awakening, only nine of the 21 tribes in Ramadi were cooperative or neutral to coalition forces. By December 2006, that number had doubled to 18.

**Sheik Sattar.** Sheik Sattar was the obvious pick as the leader of the Anbar Awakening. While not high in the tribal hierarchy, Sattar was a dynamic natural leader and was unafraid of the numerous impending Al-Qaeda attempts on his life. Over the course of the fall of 2006, Sattar was engaged in a media battle

with Al-Qaeda in the Arab press. He understood the power of information operations and was a master of getting his message out. Sheik Sattar was also a man of the people with a vision of what Iraq could be. He remained the leader of the Awakening until his assassination by Al-Qaeda in September 2007.

Sheik Sattar, using intermediaries, contacted the Malaki government for backing, which he received in a few weeks. Police recruitment continued to rise, as did the efficiency of the police. With the establishment of the Tway station on 5 October 2006, we were beginning to see the fruits of the bitter battle the entire Ready First had been waging for the past four months. Al-Qaeda operatives increased their attacks, including a devastating and complex attack against the Al Horea police station.

Initially, coalition higher headquarters resisted supporting the Anbar Awakening. A series of reports portrayed the leaders of the movement as Al-Qaeda operatives not to be trusted; these assertions proved unfounded. Ideas surfaced such as providing the Awakening their own area of operations, but were quickly discounted. MacFarland and the Ready First leadership recognized that the Awakening needed to involve both the local population and the coalition, and that neither could eject Al-Qaeda without the other.

**Getting the Iraqi Security Forces into the fight.** Task Force Conqueror's final task force-level mission was to establish Combat Outpost Dealer in

Tam'eem. Colonel MacFarland named it as a tribute to the unflinching valor shown by the members of Team Dealer, who despite suffering 25 percent casualties, took the fight to Al-Qaeda every day while still protecting the population. The operation began the week before relief in place/transition of authority with 1st Battalion, 77th Armor (Task Force Steel Tigers). The Steel Tigers had assumed the Call Forward Force mission and deployed early to Ramadi. They relieved Task Force Conqueror of its steady-state checkpoints in order for the task force to surge for the operation. Combat Outpost Dealer had a large Iraqi presence, including two Iraqi infantry battalions, a T-72 company, and for the first time a large contingent of Iraqi Police from the Tway Iraqi Police Station. As soon as Combat Outpost Dealer was established, the population began to come forward with information on the enemy or to inquire about joining the police. While a tough fight remained for Task Force Steel Tigers and the rest of the Ready First, they had a solid foothold in Tam'eem from which to operate.

## Lessons from Ramadi

A counterinsurgency is a cavalry fight. One fights for information and uses host-nation security forces as indirect fire to attack the enemy.

Development of host-nation security forces is a full spectrum fight. Personnel need to be recruited



courtesy of author

Sand table rehearsal for Operation Dealer, 10 October 2006, Camp Ramadi, Iraq.

and trained, then formed into units, which must be partnered with U.S. units until they are capable of sustaining independent operations. Constant direct mentorship and coaching from U.S. leaders at all levels is vital to the development of any host-nation security force.

Until the local population views the police force as a prestigious, legitimate organization, individual soldiers or police officers are vulnerable to coercion, bribery, and intimidation. If traditional power brokers such as sheiks are on board with the development of the police forces, then it will be a success; if not, it will fail.

Commanders must avoid both creating a host-nation culture of dependency on U.S. forces and putting the host-nation security force into the fight too soon. Both extremes lead to failure. Commanders must decide how much risk is acceptable in conjunction with the host-nation security force commander and then develop a plan for the host nation to accept more responsibility for security.

While a tremendous sacrifice was made by U.S. forces serving in Ramadi, investing in the Iraqi Security Forces, especially the Iraqi Police, was the key to success. For our part, Task Force Conqueror's augmentation of the MiTT and police transition teams with quality personnel fostered the rapid development of the Iraqi Security Forces. Having the local populace take charge of their own security, combined with an evenhanded approach to taking back the city by coalition forces focused on protecting the population, allowed us to capitalize on our information operations theme that improving the future of Iraq means supporting the Iraqi government and not Al-Qaeda. Once this message took hold, the population quickly turned against Al-Qaeda and began siding with the government, albeit more at the provincial level than the national level.

The residents of Ramadi quickly realized that a future with Al-Qaeda was not what they wanted, but they were unable to reject the insurgents once they had established themselves in the city. The Ready First leadership understood that a capable local security force was the key to success, but they realized that for it to be effective it needed robust coalition support until it was fully capable of independent action. The tactical successes gained by the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines assigned to the Ready First led to the ultimate strategic success evident in Ramadi today.

It was evident to us that winning the "hearts and minds" of the population simply by spending money on public works projects was futile. Reconstruction projects initiated over the previous years had brought little lasting progress towards a peaceful Ramadi. Linking the population to the process was the missing ingredient. Clearing and holding must be well underway before we move to the "build" stage.

We found that we could secure the population and convince them that the best hope for the future is through a democratic process. Al-Qaeda, which was religiously—not politically—motivated, was incapable of ever entering into any genuine political process. Its views were just too strident. We were therefore able to separate the population from Al-Qaeda, putting the population back into the realm of politics.

To quote Tip O'Neill, "all politics is local." In the end, we were able to tie the historical tribal power structure of the sheiks in Ramadi to the government of Iraq, first by having young men join the Iraqi Security Forces, then by having the sheiks work with the local provincial government, and ultimately by having sheiks run for elected office, a phenomenon seen in the recent provincial elections. Over time, this success spread across Iraq. If the population believes the government is responsive to its needs, and that political means settle grievances better than violence, then the seeds of democracy have taken root. Linking traditional power bases to central governments will be a problem that the Army will face in the future.

The December 2005 elections were a defining moment in Iraq, one often discounted. By September 2006, the Sunni sheiks recognized that for the first time in Iraq, there had been a free and fair election, not the rigged elections of the Saddam regime, and they had missed it. Although this recognition came late, the sheiks wanted to join the democratic process, and we provided them access to it. Iraqis seeing the opportunity for self-determination were as important to the success of the Anbar Awakening as any tactical operation conducted throughout the entire war. The sheiks were excited about having the chance for democracy, albeit six months late. As Sheik Sattar said in his speech at the Emergency Council, "Why can't this be like Germany or Japan, peaceful and prosperous?" **MR**