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Success of the Combined Forces in Iraq

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Abstract

In a recent article published in the AUSA newspaper Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commented on the use of combined forces in Iraq and the notable progress.

“Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted that a national intelligence estimate in January 2007 doubted whether Iraq could reconcile over 18 months”.

"Here we are 18 months later, and Iraq is a vastly different place," Mullen stated during the ceremony. "Attacks here are at their lowest point in four years, 11 of 18 provinces have been turned over - including the once written off Anbar province - to Iraqi security forces, who are increasingly capable and taking more of a lead in operations" (AUSA News 2008).

Success of the Combined Forces in Iraq

The use of combined forces in Iraq has been in the spotlight for the past seven years while our senior leadership continues to try and deal with the ever changing and unpredictable conditions on the ground. Use of these forces has been scrutinized and debated vigorously within our military senior leadership channels as well as our nation's civilian leadership all the way up to the President.

The use of combined forces can be subject to trial and error but nevertheless remains an important and necessary step in preparing a country to eventually take over their own security. How it's managed and avoiding errors in judgment remains a constant challenge for the current leadership. Worries of insurgent infiltration and influence remain, even today, a serious consideration when conducting operations with these forces.

We must analyze if the successes outweigh the failures and how effective the U.S. military would have been without using combined forces in order to conclude the validity of using them as coalition partners.

Coalition Forces

In the beginning of the Iraq war it was uncertain of exactly how Iraqi coalition forces would be used but understood that a coherent plan was necessary in order to begin the process of turning over the security of Iraq to the Iraqi government. It was difficult to clearly identify who the U.S. Military could trust, so our senior military leadership had their work cut out for them.

There were many arguments due to worries about possible insurgent infiltration which could not only threaten U.S. led operations but the safety and security of our own forces. Throughout all of the controversy it was ultimately agreed that it was necessary and chances would have to be taken due to some of the unorthodox choice of forces our military would be

working side by side with. Training forces would be done by trial and error but due to the hard and creative work of some of our Military Transition teams we had notable successes.

Success in Tal' Afar,Iraq

“Several years ago, Marines from the 1st Marine Division announced the revival of a successful program from the Vietnam War--the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) Program. (1) The United States began the CAP Program in 1965 by placing a squad of Marines in select villages throughout South Vietnam to train the village militias to defend their own areas. Although not a major component of the strategic plan during Vietnam, the CAP Program was extremely successful” (M. Weinbaum 2008). A young military police platoon leader in charge of a police transition team in Tal' Afar, Iraq took a chance and used this concept in the hopes it would prove to be effective once again. The platoon leader stated in his article “Iraqi police (IP) leadership is showing a strong entry into the third stage of operations – conducting training and missions on their own and making decisions in the absence of U.S. forces” and also stated “The success of the PTT model in western Nineveh is the result of a counterinsurgency strategy aimed at equipping and training a foreign force” (M. Weinbaum 2008).

Though the Tal' Afar success was notable there were other training teams that were not as successful. Robert Cole, a retired California police officer with 25 years on the force, took on the contract to oversee the training of the Iraqi police force in and around Bahgdad. Robert wrote a book on his experience that showed the difficulty of what he was tasked to accomplish. In his book some of his fellow American trainers were quoted saying “the IP take a lax approach to training, and the same lessons have to be repeated over and over.” Another trainer said “It was very hard to teach them to shoot” he said “The frustrating thing... was to get them to aim specific shots at the target, not just pulling the trigger and blasting away” Cole and Hogan

(2007). Frustrations grew as the trainers experienced a variety of other problems from the IP's not showing up on time to the IP's praying while they are supposed to be pulling security. Obviously things were not going as smooth with the IP's as our senior leadership would like to have seen. As violence escalated Gen. Petraeus realized that it would take much more than working with the IP's and Iraqi Army alone to face the increasing surge of insurgent attacks. The U.S. military was then introduced to an unexpected and unorthodox partner.

The Role of the "Sons of Iraq" in Improving Security

The Council on Foreign Relations web site stated: In August 2006, tribal sheikhs in Iraq's Anbar province turned against a chief U.S. threat: al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The decision to cut ties with the AQI was dubbed the "Anbar Awakening" by Iraq organizers, and has been hailed as a turning point in the U.S.-led war effort. Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, told lawmakers in Washington the uprising has reduced U.S. casualties, increased security, and even saved taxpayers money (Bruno 2008). This was an unexpected turn of events and raised a ton of skepticism amongst civilian and military leaders. Some of the SOI members were former insurgents so trust was definitely an issue. Though many argued and had heated debates on the SOI's use and effectiveness, the dramatic drop in violence cannot be disputed.

The Council on Foreign Relations also reported: "The Awakening movement quickly spread beyond Anbar. By spring 2008, it had reached nearly two-thirds of the country's provinces with Sunni volunteers—dubbed "Concerned Local Citizens" or "Sons of Iraq" by the U.S. military—in Nineveh, Diyala, Babil, Salahuddin, and Baghdad. In nearly every case, local security forces were created from the ground up, with sheikhs, tribal leaders, and other power brokers entering into security contracts with coalition forces" (Bruno 2008) and also stated "more than 95,000 citizens had joined the anti-al-Qaeda movement, according to Lt. Col.

Rudolph Burwell, a U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad. Roughly 80 percent of the forces are Sunni; 19 percent are Shiite. It is estimated that 91,000 are under contract with coalition forces” (Bruno 2008).

Iraqi’s working with the U.S. and going against the insurgency and conducting combined operations was key to Iraq’s current reduction in violence and insurgent attacks. In the book “The War Within” the National Security Advisor, Stephen J. Hadley, was quoted as saying “al-Qaeda had done the United States a favor. Its brutal tactics and violent, oppressive rule over many local communities had given the Iraqi population a reason to unify against it” (Woodward 2008, p. 420).

Analysis

As we compare the advantages to the disadvantages of using combined forces in Iraq we must answer this question: Could we have come this far without them? Weighing the options of our military going it alone or empowering the local people, armed forces and local civilian authorities my belief remains that the decisive point to bringing this war to a close is to empower the Iraqis. The advantages of making large security gains, crossing cultural gaps and developing a coalition force out-weigh the disadvantages and potential risks after seeing benchmark results.

Conclusion

Though using combined forces in Iraq did not always work out perfectly, its relevance still remains. Security and stability throughout Iraq depends greatly on our combined efforts to control sectarian violence and severely disrupt the insurgency. The AUSA news stated “Petraeus described the surge as having four prongs: the increase in U.S. forces, the increase in Iraqi forces [namely the "Sons of Iraq" Sunni militia groups], employment of counter-insurgency concepts and the strong signal given by the U.S. that it was committed to Iraq” (AUSA News

2008). This combination gave validity to the use of combined forces in Iraq which is solidified by the indisputable progress currently made today.

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