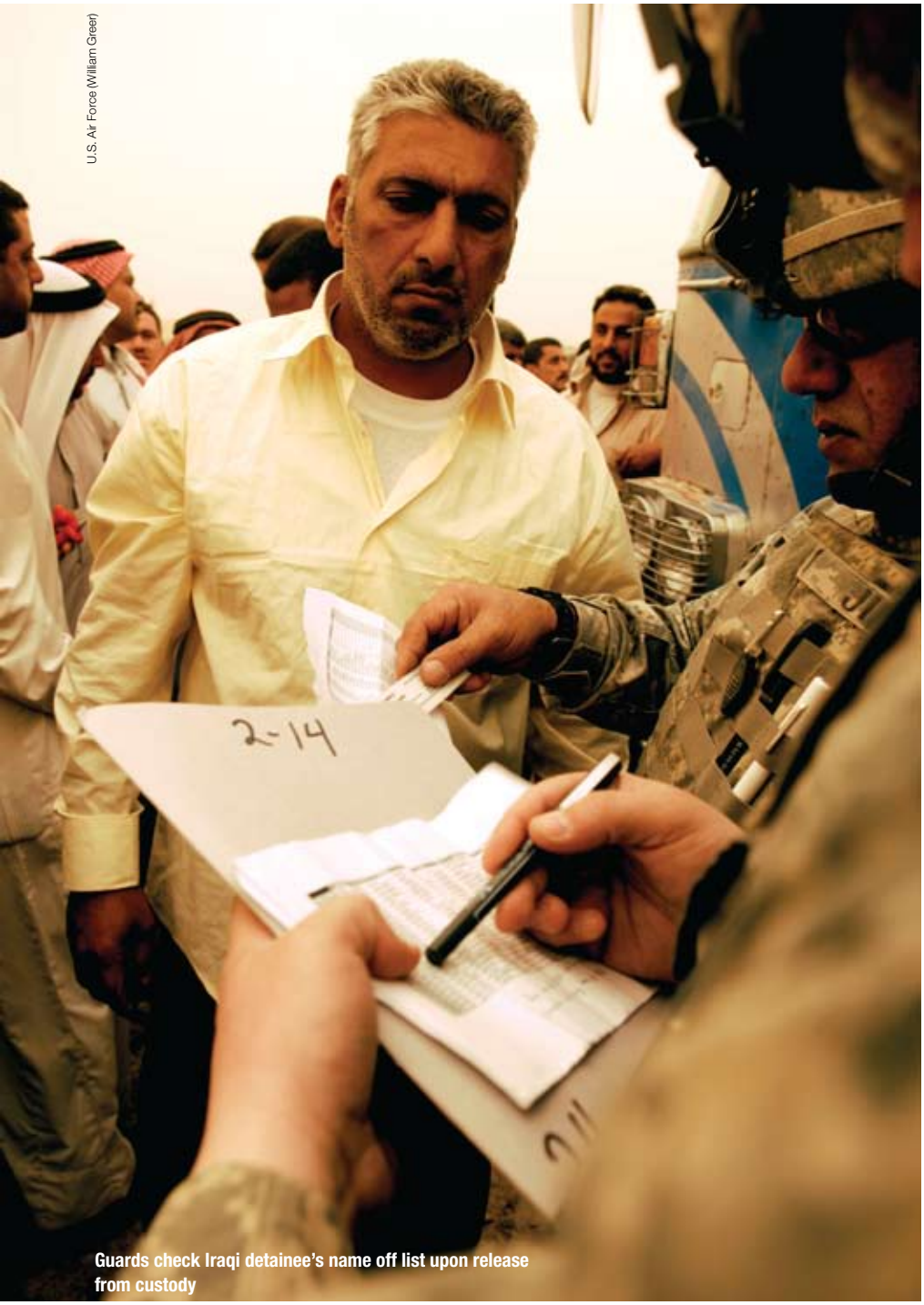
Inside the Detention Camps *A New Campaign in Iraq*

By MASON BROOKS *and* DREW MILLER



U.S. Air Force (William Greer)

Guards check Iraqi detainee's name off list upon release from custody

The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 without a detailed plan for handling large numbers of detainees in counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare. One consequence of this situation was the debacle at Abu Ghraib prison that surfaced in 2004. Since then, the United States has struggled to regain the moral "high ground" and the trust of the Iraqi people.

After the Abu Ghraib scandal, the U.S. military mainly concentrated on enforcing conventional "care and treatment" standards for the humane handling of detainees.[1] Insurgents, on the other hand, challenged coalition force (CF) authority in the camps and worked to recruit and train insurgents inside U.S. detention facilities. But in the past year, the handling of detainees has undergone a transformation. The new approach encourages detainees to embrace a more moderate view of Islam, reject violence, and support the government of Iraq. While the jury remains out on the reorientation effort's long-term effect (curbing recidivism or cramping insurgent recruitment, for example), it provides a useful case study of adaptation in war.

Today, the detention situation in Iraq is improved over a year ago. A calmed situation in the camps, coupled with a belief that faster release could yield political advantages, sparked a proposal to accelerate detainees' release. Polls, interviews, and other sources showed that Iraqis (especially Sunnis) overwhelmingly see CF detention and detainee treatment as unfair. Former Iraqi Minister of Defense and Finance Ali Allawi noted, "Heavy-handed security measures . . . played a large part in crystallizing anti-Coalition

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feelings in the Sunni areas."[2] Anger stemming from perceptions of unfair detention by "occupiers" provides support for insurgents and fertile ground for recruiting. Accelerated release of detainees can reduce this alienation effect and meet political demands to free Iraqis, but it also risks having them rejoin the insurgency and could jeopardize fragile security gains.

Pressed to inform General David Petraeus of complicated decision aspects, the Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I) staff directed an assessment of the proposal's risks and benefits. This article describes the new detainee policies, summarizes the effort to assess benefits and risks, highlights the reaction to that assessment, and explains early (and expected) campaign impacts.

New Detainee Policies

Major General Douglas Stone, USMCR, assumed command of Task Force 134 (TF–134) in 2007, with responsibility for the detention of thousands of Iraqis captured by U.S. forces. He brought to the job a new approach—something he credits to his experience as a successful businessman and entrepreneur. Stone stresses practical problemsolving and initiative, along with listening to detainees to understand their motivations. He speaks Arabic and routinely studies the Koran to enhance his grasp of Iraqi culture.

General Stone began by separating insurgent agitators from other detainees, giving moderates in the camps the freedom to choose a path other than violence. The result convinced the general that at least a third of all detainees could be influenced to reject insurgency within the camps' controlled detention setting. A new goal emerged: turning detainees into cooperative moderates. A multilayered process aimed at attaining that goal is summarized in figure 1 and elaborated below.

Separation of Moderates from Irreconcilables. TF–134 uses information from detainee entrance screening at a transition barracks to identify moderates and extremists. While resource-intensive, this screening and resulting isolation of extremists improve camp security by giving moderates the freedom to avoid and reject extremist views and activities. It also enables detainees to volunteer for education programs, cooperate with guards, and transform their outlook and behavior.

Opportunity for Religious, Academic, and Vocational Education. Programs address the lack of education and training in Iraq. Using local *imam*s to teach and discuss moderate interpretations of Islam exposes detainees to nonviolent thinking. While voluntary, these sessions are well attended, and many participants say that this is their first exposure to moderate religious views. Job training and education classes target basic learning and labor skills to enhance employment possibilities—a leading cause of recidivism. Detention facilities now offer classes on sewing, masonry, and carpentry.[3]

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Exploiting Tribal Influences. Iraqi tribes form a societal hierarchy accommodating the political, security, and social needs of members. Tribes help shape individual behavior and are therefore essential to reintegrating released detainees back into society.[4] (TF–134-sponsored studies show stronger societal bonds afford even a single detained Iraqi the potential to influence over 100 other Iraqis.) To exploit this effect, the task force works closely with Iraqi *imam*s and others to apply Iraqi cultural operating codes, such as shame and honor and patronage,[5] to develop programs that further objectives.

Figure 1. Summary of Key TF–134 Programs

- Transition Barracks In: Initially assesses motivation for joining the insurgency, criminal history, religious status, education/job skills
- Religious Discussion Program: Voluntary, but used to determine extent of religion in detainees' lives and to develop a moderate view of Islam
- Dar al-Hikmah (Basic Education): Chance to get a minimum 5th-grade education
- Vocational Education: Job skills training
- Work Program: Compensated for voluntary work activities (for example, sewing center, mud brick facility, working parties)
- Individual Assessments: Occurs before their Multi-National Force Review Committee hearing to consider mental health, religious ideology, education, work program performance, guard force input
- Family Advocacy and Outreach: Includes family in the rehabilitation process and grants greater access based on progress
- Lion's Spirit: Continuing moderate religious education and training for those desiring to become an *imam*
- Transition Barracks Out: May spend up to a week in this program that includes courses on civics, public health, and reintegration into Iraqi society and with the family

Source: MNF–I TF–300 Theater Internment Facility Regional Center, brief, n.d.

ADM Mullen views Camp Bucca detention center from observation tower

DOD (Chad J. McNeeley)

Family Advocacy. Capitalizing on the closest of Iraqi societal bonds, family advocacy offers visitation as a privilege to detainees who follow facility rules. Closer family interaction for cooperative detainees provides greater moral support and involves families in their transformation and reintegration efforts. This program consists of frequent on-site visitation—on average, about 300 families visit detention facilities each day, and this number is steadily increasing.[6]

Pledge and Guarantor Program. Having detainees sign a pledge prior to release is another new practice. Some with troubled backgrounds must also secure a guarantor, often a tribal leader, to assume responsibility for their post-release conduct. Iraqi judges formally administer this pledge, and violators of its provisions can be charged in Iraqi courts. Pledges are frequently part of TF–134 release ceremonies, under its Lion's Dawn program, in which Iraqi leaders recognize detainee achievements and reinforce the significance of being given a new start.[7] These actions, leveraging Iraqis' sense of honor and patronage, are also aimed at curbing recidivism.

Multilayered Release Policies. Multi-National Force Review Committee (MNFRC) boards are the cornerstone of a paradigm shift away from warehousing detainees and generic release policies to a multilayered risk assessment for each detainee. To achieve the goal of releasing only those detainees assessed as very low risk, these boards, manned by military members from in-theater headquarters and operational units, recommend release based on whether a detainee poses a security risk. In making these determinations, boards conduct face-to-face interviews with detainees and review evidence from internment facility guards, counselors, teachers, and evaluations, along with that from arresting units and other sources. MNFRC boards and other TF–134 processes align with the local Islamic custom of conducting communal, nonjudicial hearings for accused persons to air grievances and publicly present evidence.

TF–134 saw detainees' potential influence over friends and tribal members outside the camps as a way to extend the positive effects of its program to the Iraqi population. This thinking produced a more aggressive policy, with an expanded goal of "establish[ing] an alliance with and empower[ing] moderate Iraqis to effectively marginalize the violent extremists."[8] This policy promotes political reconciliation by extending positive moderate influences to more Iraqis with the aim of reducing support for insurgents and bolstering the government of Iraq.

In fall 2007, as Iraqi politicians renewed their call to grant amnesty to selected detainees, TF–134 proposed even more sweeping expansions.[9] If United Nations authority for U.S. detention of Iraqis was not renewed at the end of 2008, there could be a mass turnover of tens of thousands of U.S.-held detainees—potentially overwhelming Iraq's prison capacity and creating another problem for the Iraqi government. As a less risky alternative, TF–134 proposed increasing the number of moderate CF detainees released in the interim, while still stressing a general policy of *no* general mass releases and *no* release of any high-risk, irreconcilable detainee.

The proposal met strong opposition from some commanders, who were convinced Iraqis would feign moderation and resume attacking CF troops as soon as they were released. With deeply divided opinions and pressed to inform the commanding general's decision, the MNF–I staff called for a formal look to sort through all the issues. The impact on political reconciliation and insurgent ranks had to be assessed in only a few weeks.

Assessing Risks and Benefits

The assessment began by looking at how well the TF–134 approach to handling detainees aligned with the overall joint campaign plan for Iraq. COIN doctrine and literature agree that it is essential to drive a "wedge" between the hardened insurgent cadre and those less committed or motivated to support the insurgency.[10] TF–134 seeks to do this inside the camps. But the dramatic change in policy entails two other distinctive facets: leveraging detainees' influence over Iraqis outside the detention camps, and using the expanded release policy as a wedge to influence political dynamics. While both support COIN tenets of reducing insurgent forces and bolstering the government, implementing them is a bold and complicated step into uncharted territory.

U.S. Army (Jason Adolphson)

Navy Judge Advocate General meets with Task Force 134 attorneys and paralegals at Camp Victory, Iraq

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The key question is whether insurgents get more recruits either from detainees who were released or from other Iraqis who join because of resentment over the detainee alienation effect (see figure 2). A recent *Joint Force Quarterly* article on detaining Iraqis noted that "many examples of arrests and internment [are creating] more insurgents than the arrests neutralize."[11] For Iraqi perspectives on the likely impacts, the study used in-theater Iraqi-American cultural advisors and native

Iraqis living in Baghdad who work for the United States.[12] The assessment used official MNF–I insurgent troop strength estimates, historical recidivism data, focus groups, and nationwide polls, as well as special surveys, working groups, and other subject matter expert inputs.[13] This research helped establish a plausible range of release rates, recidivism rates, and detainee alienation effects.

Rough estimates based on analyzing a number of cases with varying combinations of release, recidivism, and detainee alienation effect rates show that detainee alienation has the greater impact on insurgent force levels. In most cases examined, the number of released detainees who return to the insurgency is *less than* the number of insurgents created due to detainee alienation, even where there are high numbers of released detainees. Thus, the benefits from lower detainee alienation offset the risks of released detainees rejoining the insurgency—producing lower overall insurgent force levels. In addition, lower recidivism increases the probability and scope of these positive impacts. These results are consistent with other COIN studies and are reinforced by new COIN doctrine.[14]

To consider broader political, security, and other impacts, the analysis team adapted a method that visually framed key decision criteria (see figure 3).[15] This flexible, multicriteria decision support approach allowed dynamic weighting of rating factors.[16] Starting from a pre–change-of-policy base case and incrementally adding more detainee engagement steps and an aggressive information campaign plan (ICP) yielded positive results. The ICP included a range of actions to take advantage of detainee releases, including their return to localities and followup stories. A worst-case assumption was tested—reversing weightings for security and political criteria. The results still showed accelerated release as the best option for achieving joint campaign plan objectives.

These analyses pointed to an aggressive ICP and low recidivism as particularly important to achieving campaign goals. Lower recidivism seems dependent on training and education programs in detention facilities as well as effective reintegration of releasees back into society, including securing a job or job training, an education, and so forth. New policies being implemented, which might free at least half of the 23,000 detainees currently held, seem to be producing lower recidivism rates. In the months since the program's implementation, recidivism rates are less than 1 percent, substantially below historical rates of 6 to 9 percent.[17] The rate of change suggests recidivism will probably not return to previous higher levels, but more time (up to 18 months) is needed to see if these rates will hold. Interestingly, these factors indicate that while TF–134 efforts are vital, ultimate results may well depend on how other MNF–I subelements follow through on and synchronize the broader ICP and releasee reintegration implementation aspects.

Senior Reaction Results

General Petraeus approved the TF–134 moderation and early release program with the addition of a strong ICP to maximize political reconciliation benefits in December 2007, declaring the authors' assessment "very useful" and matching his own impressions. With the decision made, controversy over accelerated detainee release policy persists, with early results still inconclusive. The new TF–134 view that detainees not only can be moderated, but also can become a force for spreading moderate beliefs across Iraqi society, still faces opposition from some who believe it is best to keep detainees locked up as long as possible. Some commanders report opposition to detainee releases from locals who characterize detainees as criminals or fear their return to the insurgency. While some of those concerns are no doubt legitimate, they sometimes mask another problem. It is not uncommon for someone to steal another's home or property and provide bogus information to authorities, spurring a false arrest and detention. Fear of revenge therefore motivates some of the release program's most ardent opponents.

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The program is still experiencing growing pains, partly because no single entity has end-to-end responsibility for implementation or the result. As of August 2008, release rates were still lower than TF–134 initially proposed. ICP efforts to help spread the news of faster release and assist in transmitting moderate messages have only partially been developed. Local reintegration efforts, critical to curbing recidivism, are also fragmented. Some early disparities are to be expected, especially in a dynamic and uneven security environment. Despite the challenges, progress is being made to set up effectively coordi-

Figure 2. Insurgent Recruitment and Growth Model

Figure 3. MNF–I Assessment Detainee Policies and Priorities Scorecard

Defeating Anti-Iraqi Forces (AIF) 3							Political Reconciliation 5					Implementation feasibility 1	Implementation costs 1
Reduce # AIF 5			Free up Coalition Force assets 3		Interrogation/ Intelligence 1 (does not include possible improved post-release intelligence)	Iraqi turnover impact 1	Detainee enlightenment 1		GOI Support 3		Other SCIO Potential 1		
Detaining AIF 1	Recapture recidivism 1	Not provoking new AIF (Detainee Alienation Effect) 2	Fewer guards 1	Other military assets 1			Willingness to support GOI 1	AIF opposition 1	Fair treatment by GOI–Sunni 1	Fair treatment by GOI–Shia 1			

Key: GOI = Government of Iraq; SCIO = Strategic Communications Information Operations

nated, accelerated detainee evaluation and release processes.

Important successes resulted from working with tribal chiefs outside the formal government and employing Iraqis, many of them former insurgents, as Concerned Local Citizens (also known as Sons of Iraq) to provide security. That sort of boldness opened doors of opportunity. It is still too early to assess whether the TF–134 initiatives will effectively complement the awakening to convince more Iraqis to reject extremist views. By itself, the task force's detention policy changes will not turn the insurgency around, but they do represent a new patch in the larger quilt of counterinsurgency studies. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] As used here, the term *care and treatment* refers to humane handling of detainees and conduct of detention personnel as established by the Geneva Convention and promulgated by U.S. Government guidance documents. For example, Department of Defense Directive 2310.01E, Enclosure 3, contains the verbatim text of Common Article 3 to the Geneva Convention of 1949. Enclosure 4 contains other requirements of the law of war essential to ensure humane care and treatment of all detainees.

[2] Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 187.

[3] Ibid.

[4] William S. McCallister, "COIN and Irregular Warfare in a Tribal Society," Applied Knowledge International pamphlet, 2007, 24, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/coinandiwinatribalsociety.pdf>; Elizabeth A. Nathan and Kevin M. Woods, "Saddam and the Tribes: How Captured Documents Explain Regime Adaptation to Internal Challenges (1979–2003)," Iraqi Perspective Project Series Phase II, Institute for Defense Analyses, Joint Advanced Warfighting Program Paper P–4263, August 2007, 37.

[5] McCallister, 14.

[6] MNF–I TF–300 Theater Internment Facility Regional Center, brief, n.d.

[7] MNF–I Battle Update Assessment briefing, February 14, 2007, slide 28.

[8] TF–134 document describing moderation programs and mission.

[9] Joshua Partlow and Amit R. Paley, "Maliki Renews Call to Give Some Insurgents Amnesty," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2007, A16.

[10] Besides other experts and sources specifically cited (including U.S. Army Field Manual 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*), this review included many U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Military Review Counterinsurgency Reader sources and other expert works by David Galula, James S. Corum, Brian Reed, John F. Hussey, and the 1968 RAND Vietnam Hamlet Evaluation System Study.

[11] Kyle B. Teamey, "Arresting Insurgency," *Joint Force Quarterly* 47 (4th Quarter, 2007), 117.

[12] Efforts to incorporate Iraqi perspectives include closely interacting with Iraqi-Americans working in Iraq who collect information and maintain a dialogue with a large network of Iraqis across the country and interacting with other Iraqis living in Baghdad and working in the International Zone for MNF–I open-source intelligence as media translators.

[13] Due to current instabilities in Iraq, coalition force (CF) recidivism is generally reported in terms of a person, detained in a theater internment facility as a threat to security, who is released and again becomes an insurgent. The main way of measuring recidivism is when recaptured detainees' identifying numbers are reactivated when they pass through the magistrate's cell at Camp Cropper. Detainee recidivists who are killed or those detained by Iraqi Security Forces whose identity is confirmed by biometric data from previous CF detention are also included in this measurement when the information is made available.

[14] Field Manual 3–24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006), table 1–1.

[15] U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command draft pamphlet 525–FW–X, version 3.0, *Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design*, is new doctrine (drawing systemic operational design and effects-based operations) that calls for better framing of the problem and conceptual approach by senior commanders.

[16] Campaign Assessment Methodology (CAM), developed by the authors for MNF–I, rates how selected factors affect Iraqi views and support for the government of Iraq by using campaign level objectives as criteria to weigh the desirability of actions based on how each promotes "tipping" Iraqis toward the government. Adapting it into a multicriteria decision support system (DSS) made it easier to reapply public opinion and "atmospherics" data from CAM into the Iraqi detention DSS situation. Both CAM and DSS use RAND's DynaRank multicriteria DSS. See Richard Hillestad and Paul K. Davis, *Resource Allocation for the New Defense Strategy: The DynaRank Decision Support System* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998).

[17] Yochi J. Dreazen, "U.S. Begins Freeing Thousands of Captives in Iraq: Detention Policies Have Been Source of Public Anger," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2008, 3.