

Targeting in Postconflict Operations in Iraq

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ON 26 MARCH 2003, the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment (2-503d) (“The Rock”), 173d Airborne Brigade, deployed from Aviano Airbase, Italy, to conduct a nighttime parachute assault on Bashur Airfield in Iraq. The mission was to open Operation Iraqi Freedom’s northern front.

Two weeks later, with special operations forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga (“those who face death”) militia, the brigade attacked south to seize Kirkuk. After 10 April 2003, when Kirkuk was liberated, the 2-503d conducted raids against anticoalition forces; day and night combat patrols; civil reconnaissance and surveillance; and established a police force to bolster the region’s security. The battalion’s paratroopers were vigilant, protected Kirkuk’s civilian population, and demonstrated that they were a capable force that could tailor itself to the mission at hand.

Field Manual 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 30 September 1997), defines rules of engagement (ROE) as “directives issued by competent authority, which delineate the circumstances and limitations with which U.S. forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered.”

Most U.S. Army units have a firm grasp of rules of engagement as they apply before and during combat operations. In fact, most units have developed effective tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to disseminate ROE and enforce them. The 2-503d had a clear understanding of the rules of engage-

Do the same rules printed on the 3- by 5-inch laminated ROE card that the Army issues to each U.S. soldier still apply? With regard to force protection, the answer is “yes,” but in terms of delineating “the circumstances and limitations with which U.S. forces will initiate and/or continue combat” engagements, the answer is “not quite.”

ment for combat operations in Iraq for the period of 26 March to 1 September 2003, but what of postconflict operations (in Iraq commonly referred to as Phase IV operations) where coalition forces had to deal with targets in a “nonkinetic” manner? Do the same rules printed on the 3- by 5-inch laminated ROE card that the Army issues to each U.S. soldier still apply? With regard to force protection, the answer is “yes,” but in terms of delineating “the circumstances and limitations with which U.S. forces will initiate and/or continue combat” engagements, the answer is “not quite.”

At the strategic level, one hopes commanders have properly identified an end state before the initial phases of an operation. A tactical unit does not have that luxury. At the conclusion of combat operations, the unit must quickly identify an achievable end state, hopefully as part of a war-termination strategy, focus its efforts, and properly develop postconflict rules of engagement.

In addition to standing or evolving ROE, commander’s guidance must also evolve. Rules of engagement cannot stand alone; the commander must

inject actions, and directives for nonaction, to achieve the desired end state. End states vary from region to region depending on security, the mission, and the higher commander's intent.

The 2-503d's end state for Kirkuk was to ensure that the Kirkuk police force, the local government, and public service organizations could perform effectively and independently. Coalition forces were to remain in a custodial role, teaching, coaching, and mentoring community leaders.

Community Rapport

Developing a rapport with the Kirkuk community was decisive to success. After arrival in Kirkuk, the 2-503d delineated company sectors, established safe houses, and instituted an aggressive patrolling schedule. Interface with the community involved three key elements: disarmament, presence, and involvement.

Disarmament. The 2-503d began immediately to disarm all warring political factions. Combat ROE allowed the battalion's companies to take aggressive actions early in the fight. Any Iraqi caught with a weapon for any reason was brought to the brigade's enemy prisoner of war collection point regardless of the type of weapon he was carrying or using. The 2-503d's soldiers destroyed large-caliber weapons and explosives and confiscated small arms to outfit Kirkuk's fledgling police force. As the security situation changed, so did the methods used for disarmament. The battalion commander's initial guidance allowed company commanders to determine whether to detain persons for weapons violations and has since progressed to the point that possession of illegal weapons is strictly a civil affair handled by Kirkuk police.

Presence. The 2-503d established a visible, credible presence in the city the moment it left the Bashur airbase. Each company, including headquarters and headquarters company (which was employed as a maneuver force), established safe houses as bases of operations. The 2-503d sent patrols to all corners of the city at all hours. Although the Kirkuk airbase remained the logistical hub for the battalion, units maximized patrolling opportunities by using different routes each time they traveled.

ROE dictated that patrols interact with the population and mandated that an interpreter accompany each patrol. Soldiers could thus talk with Kirkuk residents and other locals, determine their problems, and understand their culture. Because misunderstanding breeds mistrust, no other action at such a low cost has done more to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations.

Involvement. Involvement in the community is the next logical step in establishing a presence. Involvement entails doing far more than just driving around and enforcing laws. Involvement means participating in community events such as weddings and funerals; building soccer fields and forming a team

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to challenge the local champs; and meeting periodically with local leaders to better understand their needs. The 2-503d contacted mullahs, muktars (community leaders), unofficial leaders, and government officials. United States Air Force command guidance in Kirkuk prohibits airmen from venturing off the base; the 2-503d's guidance mandated it.

How did building rapport with a community help the 2-503d reach its end state? It built relationships. To teach, coach, and mentor community leaders, the 2-503d's leaders built personal relationships with individual Iraqis. The rapport the battalion established helped it understand issues, lead by example, inspire confidence, and instill ethics.

A New Kind of Targeting

The most dramatic change to the 2-503d's ROE, as it shifted from combat to postconflict operations, was a fundamental change of focus in the targeting process. The targeting process leads units to a given location and determines their subsequent actions. Traditional targeting procedures focus on exploiting weaknesses to delay, disrupt, destroy, or defeat enemy forces. Postconflict targeting is completely the opposite. During postconflict operations, the 2-503d's goal was to identify weaknesses and then leverage its forces not to defeat but to strengthen local capabilities.

But the 2-503d had to establish a safe, secure environment for postconflict operations, which meant targeting individuals and organizations. This required a significant mental shift. During a raid, conventional ROE often become, "Shoot first, and ask questions later." This is not the case in the postconflict phase.

Police recruits trained by the 2-503d in basic soldiering skills await their graduation at Magdad Stadium, Kirkuk, Iraq, 6 November 2003.



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The development of suspects for apprehension; inadequate or nonexistent local services; the potential for ethnic strife; and times and places where the battalion was vulnerable drove the ROE.

The 2-503d conducted most direct-action raids based on human intelligence (HUMINT). At times, multiple HUMINT sources corroborated intelligence information; sometimes only one person did so. When the battalion received intelligence, the intelligence officer (S2) checked the information against previous reports for similarities in names and locations to try to determine the validity of accusations and charges against a suspect. If the staff decided to conduct a direct-action raid or "hit," it developed a detailed target packet using available imagery, descriptions, and threat assessments.

Raids. During combat operations, the 2-503d habitually took HUMINT and other information and

conducted raids, but when the 2-503d transitioned to a Phase IV stance, the command required a higher threshold of certainty in deciding when to act. Also, the battalion augmented raids with immediate civil action to maintain the local community's trust and confidence.

To raise the threshold for direct-action operations, the 2-503d developed simple ROE for postconflict operations. The 2-503d's guidance was: "With single-source information or a low-threat target, knock on the door. With multiple-source information or a high-threat target, kick in the door." This was not a hard-and-fast rule. The nature of the target determined how much force to use. For example, if intelligence reports described the target as a Saddam Fedayeen (Saddam's "Men of Sacrifice") terrorist, the battalion would be prepared to kick in the door whether the information was corroborated or not. If the



Local Iraqi prisoners peering from behind the bars of the newly renovated Al Magdad Police Station in Kirkuk, 2 November 2003. The structure was badly damaged by looters after the city fell to coalition forces.

Police stations had no electricity, and because of looting, they also had no windows, doors, or even plumbing. Kirkuk's new police officers had no weapons, uniforms, police cars, or citywide communication. To equip a new police force, the 2-503d had to begin from scratch.

target was a propagandist who simply painted anticoalition graffiti on walls and public property, the battalion usually decided to “go soft” on the target from the outset. In either case, after any action, 2-503d soldiers followed up within 12 hours to repair any damaged property, talk with the target’s neighbors, explain the unit’s reasons for conducting the raid, and perform other civic actions to maintain a good rapport with the community.

In July 2003, the 2-503d’s Battle Company conducted two raids. The first, based on a single report developed by a 173d Airborne Brigade tactical HUMINT team, targeted Mohamoud Aziz, an Iraqi who was reportedly an ex-Saddam Fedayeen member. After the company’s 2d platoon isolated the target’s house, the platoon leader, an interpreter, and a fire team knocked on the front gate of the house. A middle-aged Arab man quickly came out of the house to meet them while a woman and several small children looked on. The man, subsequently identified as the target’s brother, told the platoon leader that Aziz was not home and asked the platoon leader to come in for a cup of tea. The pla-

toon leader accepted. While the platoon leader, the interpreter, and Aziz’s brother drank tea together in one room, the platoon searched the premises. When he and his guests finished drinking tea, he told the platoon leader he would have Aziz turn himself in the next morning to coalition forces. The following morning, Aziz did just that.

The platoon later conducted another raid that was dramatically different from the first. The target was a man multiple intelligence sources claimed was an Al Aouda (Return Party) member planning attacks on coalition forces. Again, the platoon isolated the target’s house, but this time, the platoon breached the front gate of the property with demolitions, rushed in through the breach, and cleared the house in minutes. When the objective was secure, the platoon had three male suspects under coalition control and had confiscated numerous small arms and several rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

These vignettes illustrate two methods of accomplishing the same type of task. In both instances, soldiers took potentially dangerous individuals off the streets. The rules of engagement and accompany-

ing guidance that the battalion established during targeting meetings gave subordinate commanders tactical flexibility but also curbed young infantrymen's innate desires to kick in every door, every time. As one might expect, Kirkuk residents would tend to react more favorably to a knock on their front door than to the detonation of C4 explosives.

Patrolling. A change in ROE was also necessary for basic patrolling operations in the post-conflict period. Throughout the early phases of the war, the 2-503d found that traffic control points (TCPs) were the key to effective urban patrolling and a bastion of sorts in the battalion's effort to disarm Kirkuk. Unlike military police, most infantry units have little to no experience with TCPs, so the 2-503d developed ROE that were a mixture of TTPs, force-protection measures, and paratrooper ingenuity.

With multiple avenues of approach in abundance in Kirkuk's urban environment, static TCPs quickly lost their effectiveness when locals (subversive or otherwise) eventually found alternate routes around them. To catch the stray anticoalition infiltrator, 2-503d platoons set up "snap TCPs" throughout Kirkuk that operated for only about 15 to 20 minutes. As a car approached a TCP, a blocking force standing behind concertina wire would stop the vehicle while an overwatch section with standoff capability provided security. The 2-503d adjusted its ROE to allow soldiers to shoot at vehicles that tried to run the TCP or were obviously turning away quickly to avoid being stopped.

The 2-503d adjusted ROE as the security situation improved. When the local police force became more proficient, the 2-503d turned over more and more TCPs to them. This handover limited the ex-

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Soldiers subdue a man who attempted to assault an Iraqi police officer, Kirkuk, 31 December 2003.

The nature of the target determined how much force to use. For example, if intelligence reports described the target as a Saddam Fedayeen, the battalion would be prepared to kick in the door whether the information was corroborated or not. If the target was a propagandist who simply painted anticoalition graffiti on walls and public property, the battalion usually decided to "go soft" on the target from the outset.

posure of U.S. troops to danger and brought the 2-503d closer to accomplishing one of its goals, creating an independent police force.

Dismounted patrolling's mainstay was the stand-to that each company conducted at its safe house. Most infantrymen are accustomed to the traditional stand-to an hour before and after sunrise, but through pattern analysis, the 2-503d found most enemy attacks occurred between 0100 and 0400. The 2-503d conducted detailed threat analysis of the enemy's likely avenues of approach, RPG firing positions, mortar firing points, and weapon cache points near safe houses. During stand-tos, units set up ambushes and conducted aggressive patrolling in these high-threat areas. The ROE that authorized first strikes quickly made attacks on the battalion's safe houses too costly for the enemy to undertake.

Battalion TTPs evolved that included a mounted quick-reaction force located in a hide position outside the operating base; the use of Javelin night-sight

Iraqi firemen and Civil Defense Force personnel search through rubble to locate unexploded ordnance, December 2003.

Kirkuk's fire stations were thoroughly looted, but most firefighting equipment remained protected because the previous regime's firemen took great pride in their jobs and secured most of their equipment before the regime's collapse. . . . The battalion focused on synchronizing the firefighters' efforts with those of contractors, first responders, and police.

equipment on rooftops, which greatly increased standoff and situational awareness; and incorporating the local police in the patrolling plan, which became a great combat multiplier. As an added benefit, Kirkuk's police force soon began protecting its precinct houses in the same fashion during hours of vulnerability.

Curfews. The word curfew implies that martial law is in effect, and during the combat phase of Iraqi operations, the 2-503d did enforce a dusk-to-dawn curfew. After transitioning to postconflict operations, a Kirkuk city council was established and U.S. forces abolished the curfew.

Aware that enemy activity peaked between 0100 and 0400, Kirkuk's mayor, acting on behalf of the local government and not U.S. forces, declared a citywide curfew every night from 2359 to 0400. The mayor's declaration greatly reduced the enemy's greatest advantage—his ability to blend in with the local population. Because the mayor and not

U.S. forces declared the curfew, Kirkuk's residents resoundingly bought into the policy. They understood that fewer attacks would lead to a sense of security, which in turn, would promote a thriving economy. Because civilian authorities issued the curfew and the police department enforced it, the 2-503d was closer to achieving another declared end state, a functioning, independent city government.

Police force. The battalion's main effort was to develop a legitimate, independent Kirkuk police force. The collapse of Saddam's regime in Baghdad brought the collapse of civil government throughout Iraq. Looting was rampant and violent and petty crime the norm. Anarchy reigned. Nothing was more urgent than creating a police force to provide law and order. The need for security was paramount.

The 2-503d's first goal was to create a secure environment by establishing some semblance of a police force. Realizing that the initial police organi-

zation put in place would not be the final one, the 2-503d began recruiting, vetting, and hiring Iraqis based solely on their enthusiasm and willingness to work with coalition forces. The 2-503d chose vacant buildings near U.S. tactical boundaries as police stations and chose police leaders based on their force of personality or because battalion soldiers were familiar with them.

The new police recruits had no equipment, and the battalion's initial guidance to them was simple: do nothing without U.S. approval. Getting a visible Iraqi police presence on the street, in any form, was the 2-503d's immediate goal, and within a month, the 2-503d achieved that goal. Then the battalion developed a detailed, long-term campaign plan to man, equip, and train the Kirkuk police force.

Manning meant hiring a force that reflected Kirkuk's ethnic demographics. Commanders paid detailed attention to the ethnic composition of policemen at each station, appointed leaders from a variety of ethnic groups, and identified skill levels. This was not just a staffing action. It was a significant information operations campaign to legitimize the police force in the eyes of the Kirkuk community.

Unfortunately, the 2-503d found that many of Kirkuk's newly appointed police "generals" had been nothing more than watermelon salesmen a few weeks earlier. The 2-503d also discovered large numbers of the force had come from outside Kirkuk and were paid by factions to exert ethnic influence. The situation called for drastic measures. The 2-503d basically started over.

The battalion hired a new police force that fit Kirkuk's true ethnic demographics, appointed persons to leadership positions based on skill, and restructured the police rank system. The battalion identified one two-star general at police headquarters as the chief of police; designated a brigadier general

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Paramedic secures patient in an ambulance during an emergency response evaluation, Kirkuk, 25 September 2003.

Local EMS consisted of little more than a taxicab ride to a hospital that was barely able to dispense a band-aid. Kirkuk now operates a fleet of ambulances that routinely respond to emergencies throughout the city. Two hospitals can perform major, life-saving surgeries. To truly integrate the city's first responders, the battalion's medical platoon taught combat lifesaver courses to ambulance crews and to fire and police departments.

to serve as his deputy; appointed three colonels as assistants for internal affairs, operations, and support; and put a captain in charge of each station with lieutenants and sergeants to staff the stations and patrolmen to "walk their beats."

When Iraqi police officers received a demotion, it was a severe emotional event for them. To reduce the pain involved in a reduction in rank, the 2-503d replaced the familiar Iraqi military insignia on police uniforms with new insignia similar to those worn by members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Kirkuk's new policemen donned the emblems of their rank on the collars of new, blue police uniforms that looked less like Iraqi military uniforms. These changes made the changes in rank more tolerable to the police and the community. In the end, only Kirkuk residents who denied any association

with political factions were allowed to serve on the police force.

Equipping the force proved to be the greatest challenge. In the chaos that followed the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad, any property owned by the regime's former Kirkuk police force disappeared. Police stations had no electricity, and because of looting, they also had no

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The battalion's first step was to install or refurbish basic quality-of-life fixtures and facilities at each precinct house, an action that often entailed moving the station house to a new location that supported the neighborhood. To repair the stations, the 2-503d employed contractors who fit the ethnic make-up of each precinct's neighborhood or sector. Next, the 2-503d attacked the police force's lack of mobility. To avoid any perception of favoritism, the unit purchased and distributed police cars in a manner that gave each precinct an equal number of vehicles.

Because of war damage to complex and costly equipment, communications took the greatest time to improve. Again, the battalion took great care to distribute assets equally among the police precincts. The 2-503d "re-missioned" confiscated small arms to the Kirkuk police, greatly alleviating weapons shortages. In time, however, this procurement method lost its effectiveness; there were no more small arms left for the battalion to confiscate. Success tends to breed its own problems.

The 2-503d recognized the need for a standardized training program for the police force. Most modern cities have police academies with a detailed program of instruction (POI) that new recruits attend before ever walking a beat. The 2-503d did not have the luxury of training the entire Kirkuk police force

before activating it. The battalion set up a police academy with a 13-day POI focused on ethics and entry-level policing tasks. The goal was to cycle as many volunteers as possible through the POI to seed the force with trained policemen. The 2-503d introduced incentives of greater pay and rank to encourage attendance and completion of the POI, and in keeping with the coalition forces' goal of disengagement, the police academy soon offered an Iraqi-led POI with minimal U.S. oversight.

The battalion's most unusual challenge was building a police-force roster that accurately reflected neighborhood ethnic demographics. This was a perception problem in the Arab, Assyrian, and Turkish sectors, and the Kurds made a very real attempt to skew the balance. An ethnically balanced force was the goal, with each precinct reflecting the ethnic composition of the population in its surrounding neighborhood. For example, even though 42 percent of Kirkuk's population was Kurdish citywide, it made no sense to have 42 percent Kurdish police in a precinct in a neighborhood that was 98 percent Arab.

Today Kirkuk's police operate with a sense of autonomy that was previously unimaginable. The police routinely investigate and prevent crimes; respond to calls for assistance throughout the city; coordinate across precinct and other boundaries; and act on orders from higher headquarters. While continued coalition oversight and resources are still required, coalition forces are on the way to complete disengagement.

Fire stations and emergency medical services (EMS). Like all government buildings, Kirkuk's fire stations were thoroughly looted, but most firefighting equipment remained protected because the previous regime's firemen took great pride in their jobs and secured most of their equipment before the regime's collapse. Also, the U.S. Agency for International Development spent a considerable sum of money to refurbish firefighting equipment and facilities. The battalion focused on synchronizing the firefighters' efforts with those of contractors, first responders, and police throughout Kirkuk.

Supported by the 173d Airborne Brigade's forward surgical team, Kirkuk's EMS steadily improved. As coalition forces came into the city, questions of how and when to treat local casualties were of great concern. Local EMS consisted of little more than a taxicab ride to a hospital that was barely able to dispense a band-aid. Kirkuk now operates a

fleet of ambulances that routinely respond to emergencies throughout the city. Two hospitals can perform major, life-saving surgeries. To truly integrate the city's first responders, the battalion's medical platoon taught combat lifesaver courses to ambulance crews and to fire and police departments.

In August 2003, a city bus caught fire in the southern sector of Kirkuk. Within 15 minutes, the fire department responded with trucks from two fire stations and began to extinguish the fire. Police from the local precinct responded, cordoned off the area, and investigated the incident. Three ambulances arrived to treat the wounded and evacuate the dead. All this occurred promptly and without the intervention or prompting of coalition forces.

Utilities. Restoring reliable electricity, water, and lines of communications were significant challenges; looters and coalition forces had hit these areas hard. The 2-503d focused its effort on restoring services to first responders. An antiquated power grid and looting hampered restoration of electricity. The 2-503d and the 173d Airborne Brigade had power-generation capabilities sufficient only for internal use. Even though the 2-503d knew that consistent power was a key to stability, it could not do much to actually restore electric power, but it could and did do much to alleviate local misconceptions.

After determining which areas had no power at all, whether from the city power grid or local generators, the 2-503d relayed this information to the brigade's civil affairs team which then directed money and equipment to that area. Realizing that extensive looting of high-tension power lines was occurring on the outskirts of the city, the 2-503d set up ambushes and conducted aggressive patrols. ROE allowed for direct-fire engagement, and the battalion killed several looters, captured saboteurs, and then rolled up the entire organization—from transporters and smelters to money brokers.

Running water is tied almost directly to restoring electric power. If there is no electric power, there is no running water, and most residents must rely on local wells and electrically powered pumps. Fortunately, multiple nongovernmental organizations were more than willing to help restore running water. The 2-503d's identification of capabilities and limitations, by neighborhood, was instrumental in rebuilding the systems.

Because of extensive damage to Kirkuk's infrastructure, restoring landline communications to first

responders was not an immediate option. The 2-503d overcame this obstacle by buying several satellite phones and distributing them to each service and by using commander's discretionary funds to purchase vehicle and hand-held radios. The police precinct

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captains could then dispatch patrols, communicate between stations, and control vehicles. When local phone lines became available, the 2-503d had one installed in its tactical operations center so it could bridge the communications gap between Iraqi services and coalition forces. The 2-503d's quick fixes enabled first responders to be effective.

Targeting for Success

The 2-503d's end state was to enable Kirkuk to function on its own. The 2-503d quickly realized that ROE developed for traditional combat operations were unsuitable in many situations in the postconflict environment. Quickly and deliberately adapting standing ROE, and in many instances, developing nontraditional ROE was difficult but absolutely necessary. For the 2-503d, using the criteria and discipline of the targeting process to focus on nontraditional targets like city infrastructure was the key to developing sound ROE and TTPs.

While the battalion's successes in postconflict operations in Kirkuk might lead some to think that they can reduce the 2-503d's experiences to a laundry list of duties that other units can replicate, the effort to superimpose such a list on any other city would probably be futile. Each city has its own challenges, its own ethnic diversity, and its own starting point on the road to self-government. Nevertheless, the 2-503d's successes in Kirkuk suggest that commanders should use the methodical targeting process to define problems and project combat power (both traditional and nontraditional) to develop effective ROE and TTPs in a postconflict environment. **MR**