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Teaching Notes for CHAPTER 8: Right and Wrong, Balanced on the Edge of a Spear: U.S. Forces at a Mosque in Baghdad

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TEACHING NOTES

Right and Wrong, Balanced on the Edge of a Spear: U.S. Forces at a Mosque in Baghdad

By Joshua Potter*

The purpose of this case is to provide a framework to understand the complex operational environment facing a U.S. advisor team, and to equip the student to ask the right questions that will help him or her to be prepared.

This case study will take students through the leadership challenges faced by an advisor team in Iraq. The discussions are intended to provide an understanding of local politics, including an appreciation for the expectations and needs of the people; to identify signs of corruption among host-nation partners; and to assess how military assets and resources can be used to improve the chances of operational success.

Target Audience:

- military advisors;
- members of a coalition military force;
- international or military law students; and
- cultural anthropologists assigned to Human Terrain Teams (HTTs).

Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes to Be Developed

Knowledge

- multicultural dimensions to complex problems in a conflict zone;
- subtext of how Iraqi security forces intend to exercise authority and to change their commanders;
- indicators of a baited ambush;
- impact of Sharia law on society; and
- mosques as sites protected by international law, though that status can be tested.

Skills

- use of influence with host-nation counterpart;
- tactical decision-making;
- force protection in a time-constrained environment;
- preparation for possible counterattacks from the civilian population; and
- understanding Iraqi military culture.

Attitudes

- use host-nation forces (rather than U.S. forces) to clear a dangerous area;
- enhance the legitimacy of host-nation security forces;

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- achieve credibility in the eyes of the indigenous people; and
- Build respect for protected sites.

ANALYSIS AND PROCESS

Challenge the target audience to adopt different roles in order to understand different perspectives and critical issues.

Perspectives to Consider

- The Iraqi patrol leader
- The Iraqi commander;
- The U.S. commander;
- An embedded media reporter who arrives on location to interview the members of the Iraqi Security Forces and U.S. forces working together
- The U.S. transition team chief (SHADOW 6); and
- The people of Abu Descheer, observing the unfolding operation.

Questions to Ask

Role of an Advisor

What is the relationship between the U.S. and Iraqi security forces?

How do we support and develop the host-nation security forces?

Perception of Legitimacy

Who holds the power in this scenario?

Are you willing to abdicate power for self-preservation?

Impact of Attacks against Civilians

Who wins when the bodies are left in the street?

Military Use of a Recognized Protected Site

What are the rules of engagement for a protected site (mosque).

Teaching Plan

Before class, distribute Handout 1. This handout provides situational reports faced by the SHADOW team leader.

Handouts 2 and 3 can be distributed at the end of the case discussion and can lead the case debrief.

An epilogue and report by the actual SHADOW 6 leader could serve as useful reference points for class participants.

Introduction

Give the case to the class, and allow five minutes to read the material.

At the conclusion, show the video clip of the SHADOW team leader who faced this situation.

Identify the Actors: U.S. and Iraqi

Opening Questions

What is the situation?

What should SHADOW 6 do?

Change the Perspective

Place students in the role of the different actors identified above. What is the actor's perspective? Is the actor's perspective influenced by other actors? How would the other actors react to any action of SHADOW 6?

Follow up Questions

What rules of engagement should be applied?

Who holds the power in this scenario?

How can information operations (creative use by the media) be exploited in this scenario—from all sides?¹

Closure

Ask, "What is the 'right' answer?"

Distribute Handouts 2 and 3. Allow the class time to read the material, either for immediate class discussion or for use in the case debriefing session.

Debriefing

Conduct a debriefing to capture lessons learned—a board plan is provided below. These lessons may prove helpful in future training iterations.

Conclude the debriefing by answering the question, How did this case study change or shape my perceptions or actions?

BOARD PLAN

BOARD 1: SHADOW 6 response and driving factors

BOARD 2: Implications of rules of engagement and who holds the power

BOARD 3: Use of information operations

BOARD 4: Additional considerations for further discussion, if time permits

BOARD 5: Lessons learned

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

The following provides responses to frequently raised points by the students when the author ran the case. These responses may prove interesting in conducting the discussion.

Request additional U.S. military support.

It is not available. The U.S. commander in the area did not want to add to the quick reaction force, other than the four Bradley fighting vehicles. The U.S. commander did not want to

force a decisive engagement in a mosque involving U.S. forces, and four heavily armored Bradley fighting vehicles were deemed sufficient to rescue the U.S. MiTT if the situation required an immediate extraction.

Request additional Iraqi military support.

It is not available. The Iraqi battalion commander was called by SHADOW 6 to explain why his meager patrol force seemed ill-prepared for a serious raid that would likely end up with heavy casualties without a sufficient show of force or back up force in the area. The Iraqi battalion commander (from the Third Battalion, Fourth Public Order Brigade) ultimately cried and said that he was sorry: “I am not permitted to send the right people to do this job.”

SHADOW 6 believed the public order brigade commander prevented sending a better Iraqi force, with the full understanding that the raid mission would be handicapped from the start.

Request U.S. aircraft to support the operation.

Not available. The MiTT is not equipped with unmanned aerial vehicles, which are often used in surveillance for this type of raid or urban assault missions. The U.S. attack helicopters were not on station during this time frame—though they did appear around 1:00 a.m., when the Iraqi special operations forces element attempted to conduct a raid on the same mosque. They revealed several built-up bunkers in and around the mosque, which were considered well-prepared defensive positions.

Was the public order brigade openly affiliated with Jayish al-Mahdi?

Yes. Less than six weeks prior to this incident, the MiTT leadership had proved direct ties between this public order battalion and Muqtada al-Sadr’s militia, Jayish al-Mahdi. The public order brigade commander was replaced with Colonel Muhammed (from the case study). This was a source of friction between the MiTT and the public order brigade leadership; however, the MiTT and Colonel Muhammed had an excellent working relationship. On the day following the Golden Shrine bombing, Jayish al-Mahdi agents attacked and beat Colonel Muhammed’s eighteen-year-old son. This was a direct act of intimidation, though SHADOW 6 and Colonel Muhammed worked well together.

¹From Chapter 3, Counterinsurgency Operations, Section IV Information Operations: “The Army defines information operations as the employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to affect or defend information and information systems, and to influence decision making (FM 3-13). The goal of IO is to gain and maintain information superiority at decisive points.” See <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-07-22/ch3-iv.htm> (accessed April 14, 2010).