

## **Force Multiplier**

By Hans Binnendijk and Bing West

The reassessment of U.S. strategy in Iraq should radically alter the combat mission of the American troops serving there. The key policy change is to embed five times as many U.S. combat advisers into Iraqi battalions. This will, on the one hand, reduce the size and casualties of U.S. forces, and on the other, strengthen the Iraqi army -- the only institution that can stop the creeping civil war. A war of that order will eventually degenerate into a regional catastrophe. The U.S. has three unpalatable choices: withdraw, choose sides or make a last effort to avoid it. Withdrawing now will trigger that war. Choosing sides with Shiites against Sunnis will label America as a murderer when the inevitable atrocities take place.

So what would comprise a serious final effort? The diplomatic elements include discussions with Syria and Iran, multilateral aid and enfranchising Sunnis by sharing oil revenues, amnesty and moderation of the de-Baathification rules.

But any diplomatic package will fail unless Iraq's security forces restore order. The only way to rapidly do that is to shift platoons from American battalions into 140 Iraqi army battalions and critical police stations. Currently the U.S. has about a dozen military advisers working in each Iraqi battalion. These advisers spend their time as managers. They are too few to give combat advice and moral reassurance out on the streets during daily operations.

As a result, Iraqi platoons, lacking self-confidence, restrict their patrolling in the dangerous areas where they are most needed. To infuse combat confidence in each Iraqi battalion, we propose embedding about 60 advisers -- by transferring a reinforced platoon from every U.S. infantry battalion in Iraq. Each American soldier and Marine so deployed would be a force multiplier, greatly increasing the effectiveness of the Iraqi soldiers. The total number of advisers would expand to 20,000, plus additional support. Air and artillery strikes would be on call. Additional U.S. battalions would be needed to provide Quick Reaction Forces should the embedded forces need them. Special Forces commandos would still seek out al Qaeda operatives anywhere. U.S. units would maintain security in parts of Baghdad and 10 other key cities.

The huge increase in advisers would be offset by a drawdown of American conventional battalions and base support units. American-only patrols are becoming counterproductive, with fewer direct enemy engagements, more sniper and IED attacks, and more alienated Iraqis. In return for the embedding, the U.S. would insist that Iraqi officers accused of malfeasance by their advisory teams be relieved of duty.

By shifting missions from American-only patrolling to embedded combat advisers, the overall U.S. troop requirement might be cut nearly in half during the coming year. But the effectiveness of the mission should increase, based on past experience. In Vietnam, the Marine Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program deployed over 100 squads to live in hamlets with Popular Force units. Large areas were patrolled at low cost and 60% of the Marines involved extended at the end of their tours. Last year in northwest Iraq, the American commander in al Qaim replicated the CAP experience by integrating his battalion into local police and army forces and driving al Qaeda out of the city.

Many U.S. commanders will resist a major structural change that breaks down battalion combat teams. The embedded units will patrol heavily in dangerous areas. The Iraqi Army has to take on the militias and the police units who side with them. If the U.S. dramatically increases the advisory effort, strengthening the army, the risk emerges of creating a strong man, not a Western-style democracy; yet given the consequences of failure, these risks must be taken.

Restoring security in Iraq trumps all else. In the spring of 2004, Lt. Gen. James N. Mattis, then commanding the Marine division in Anbar province, intended to initiate the combined platoon program on a major basis. The eruption of the extended battle for Fallujah precluded that. Combined platoons were a good idea 30 months ago; today, they are vital.

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