



Testing Galula in Ameriyah

The People Are the Key

Lieutenant Colonel Dale Kuehl, U.S. Army

CRITICS OF THE ARMY'S FOCUS on counterinsurgency operations (COIN) have argued recently that the Army has developed a dogmatic approach to COIN. In particular, they question the assertion in Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, that the insurgents' ability to sustain popular support [for their cause] or at least acquiescence [to it]" is essential for an effective insurgency in the long term and is usually one of the insurgent's centers of gravity.¹ However, based on 14 months of COIN operations in northwest Baghdad, including in the Sunni neighborhood of Ameriyah, I think the authors of FM 3-24 got it right. While some have argued that the Army is approaching COIN in a dogmatic fashion, I disagree. I, for one, had not completely read the new FM, since it came out after we deployed. However, based on my previous study of COIN, I saw that gaining the trust of the local populace was essential to our operations. At least for our unit, it worked.

When we returned stateside, I had time to reflect and further study COIN, this time with a level of personal experience. Recently, I read David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* for the first time and found that, while his essay focuses on communist and colonial insurgencies, much is relevant to our current fight in Iraq. Like the authors of FM 3-24, Galula sees the support of the population as essential to defeating an insurgency. He sets forth four laws for conducting a counterinsurgency campaign:

- The support of the population is as necessary for the counterinsurgent as for the insurgent.
- Support is gained through an active minority.
- Support from the population is conditional.
- Intensity of effort and vastness of means are essential.²

First Battalion, 5th Cavalry, deployed to Iraq in October 2006 and assumed responsibility for the neighborhoods of Khadra and Ameriyah and the Airport Road from 8th Squadron, 10th Cavalry in late November. Shortly after the transfer of authority, our area of operations expanded to three times its original size to encompass the entire Mansour Security District, from Camp Liberty to the International Zone. We fell under the command of Colonel J.B. Burton and the Dagger Brigade Combat Team, 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Our task organization included only two mechanized infantry company teams. We had detached two tank platoons and company headquarters to serve as a military transition team (MiTT), and one tank

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PHOTO: One of Baghdad's first Sons of Iraq in Ameriyah, June 2007. (U.S. Army, SGT Jack Androski)



Figure 1. Baghdad with Mansour Security District highlighted.³

company team was attached to another battalion. Our parent brigade, 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, also retained our engineer company. Burton provided us the brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT) with one platoon and a troop headquarters to help us with manpower challenges.

During the deployment, we faced the challenges of trying to moderate the sectarian violence permeating our operating environment. We benefitted from the increase in troops provided by the surge. Along with the other subordinate units of the Dagger Brigade, we pushed out into sector, establishing several combat outposts and joint security stations. We saw dramatic improvements in security when

dominated by Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Although I had not read Galula before we deployed, operations generally reflected his four laws.

Support of the Population

Galula argues that the crux of the problem for the counterinsurgent is not clearing the insurgent out of an area, because the counterinsurgent can always concentrate enough combat power to force the insurgent to move. The challenge is that once the concentration of forces ends, the insurgent returns unless the counterinsurgent is able to gain the support of the local population. As a result, the counterinsurgent struggles against the insurgent to gain that support. The insurgent has the advantage in this struggle since his organization is based at the grass-roots level among the people.⁵

We have seen this phenomenon throughout the war in Iraq. We have chased Al-Qaeda from one stronghold to another. During our time in Baghdad, Al-Qaeda insurgents were pushed out of Haifa Street, many relocating to Ameriyah. Over the past several years, several attempts were made to clear Ameriyah, from Operation Together Forward in August 2006 to Operation Arrow-



Figure 2. Mansour Security District.⁴

We just wanted them to trust us, the Iraqi Army, and the Iraqi government more than they trusted the insurgents...

head Strike 9 in April 2007. However, after each of these operations, Al-Qaeda insurgents returned because we still had not fully gained the trust of the population. The insurgents would either leave or blend into the population until the concentration of troops moved to another location. Gains were superficial and temporary. Al-Qaeda's local political and military organizations within the area remained intact.

The concept behind these operations was consistent with the clear-hold-build approach described in the *National Security Strategy for Victory in Iraq* and in FM 3-24.⁶ The intent was for a large concentration of U.S. troops and ISF to clear insurgents out of an area by conducting extensive cordon and search operations and precision raids.⁷ As the clearing force moved to another area, the stay-behind forces, relying heavily on the ISF, were to hold the area, providing security to the local populace and reestablishing an effective Iraqi government presence. With security established, we were to begin

reconstruction projects to build infrastructure, government capacity, and the local economy, and increase the locals' faith in the Iraqi government.

While this strategy is sound, we faced several problems with its execution. First, to be effective, clearing operations must rely on sufficiently detailed intelligence to allow for precision targeting and raids. We simply did not have this level of intelligence, so our clearing operations were a blunt instrument that had little long-term impact on insurgent activity. The operations disrupted insurgent activity for as long as the clearing force was present, but did nothing to attack the entrenched insurgent infrastructure. Second, the holding force was simply not capable of providing security to the population. We did not have enough U.S. troops, and the primarily Sunni local populace did not trust the Shi'a-dominated IA battalion. Finally, unable to secure the population, we were ineffective in moving forward with civic projects.

Support from an Active Minority

The challenge for the counterinsurgent is how to gain the support of the population. The counterinsurgent is not looking for just passive or moral support, but active support in fighting the insurgents. Galula argues that this support comes from a basic tenet in the exercise of political power: In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause.

To gain support for your side of the cause, you must rely on the favorable minority in order to rally the neutral majority and to neutralize or eliminate the hostile minority.⁸

We faced enormous challenges in Ameriyah. In truth, AQI controlled the neighborhood. While the majority of the population did not actively support them, AQI's active minority ruled the area with fear and intimidation. The barrier system we emplaced to control insurgent movement was ineffective because it had numerous holes in it that allowed virtually unencumbered routes of ingress



courtesy of author

Damaged buildings from fighting in Ameriyah in May/June 2007.

and egress. The local population did not trust the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi security forces, who they felt were driven by a sectarian agenda. Targeting by AQI drove the Iraqi Army to occupy static positions on the perimeter of the neighborhood, providing little protection to the population.

In May 2007, just after completion of clearing operations during Arrowhead Strike 9, Ameriyah became an extremely violent place. With the Iraqi Army effectively out of the picture, AQI turned its operations against U.S. forces and the local population. Deeply buried improvised explosive devices (IEDs) took their toll in three major explosions the first week of May that claimed the lives of five Soldiers and one interpreter. We also saw an increase in small-arms fire, which killed another Soldier. Due to the increased threat, I pulled combat power from other parts of the battalion's area of operations in Mansour to focus on Ameriyah. I also asked for and received a Stryker company, A/1-23 Infantry.

The additional combat power allowed us to increase patrolling in Ameriyah. We limited the number of large-scale cordon and search operations of residential houses and instead specifically targeted areas in which AQI was said to be meeting or passing out literature and CDs. We continued to improve the barrier system around the neighborhood, this time using six-foot-tall obstructions and emplacing them away from the houses. The

new structures presented a more cohesive barrier against insurgent movements, denying the flow of arms, ammunition, and explosives. The Iraqi Army implemented a restrictive curfew and a ban on vehicular movement.

For several months, we had searched for a location within Ameriyah to establish a permanent combat outpost. We had established others throughout the battalion area of operations in the Mansour Security District, and they proved effective in helping us better understand the local population and in earning the citizens' trust. We settled on an area in the northwest part of Ameriyah, although it was not the optimal location. On 19 May, as we were emplacing this outpost, a buried IED exploded under a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, killing six Soldiers and one interpreter.

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Our response to this disaster proved critical in gaining the support of an active minority in the community, one that allied with us and the Iraqi Army to defeat AQI. In time, the size of this active minority grew exponentially and led to our gaining the trust of the neutral majority.

After returning to my command post that night, I called one of the local imams to demand his support in helping us drive AQI out of the neighborhood. I was certain the local imams knew who was behind the violence, but also knew that they were intimidated by AQI. Starting in February, our meetings with the imams took on a clandestine nature. They asked me to meet with them only at certain times late in the evening. I argued that my men were suffering, and I knew that these local leaders had the information we needed. Unknown to me at the time, this particular cleric was already part of the minority rallying against AQI. The effort would soon become public.

Also critical was what we did not do. Officers, noncommissioned officers, and Soldiers were all



Barriers at entry control point into Ameriyah, December 2007.

courtesy of author

frustrated with the increase of violence and our inability to positively identify our enemy and target his network. Rumbblings within the ranks included talk of doing “a Fallujah,” meaning a large-scale clearing operation with a heavy emphasis on firepower. I continued to emphasize the need for restraint, focused operations, and treating the locals with dignity and respect. Restraint was not popular, but the battalion’s leaders controlled their Soldiers, and they maintained their discipline. Months later, as we prepared to redeploy, the leading imam and most influential citizen in Ameriyah said that our restraint was key to our gaining the trust of the people.

On the evening of 29 May, I got my answer from the imam I had spoken to after the Bradley’s destruction. He told me that the locals were going to go after AQI the next day. In addition to targeting U.S. Soldiers, AQI had increased pressure on the Iraqi populace, and they had had enough. We argued for about 20 minutes as I tried to persuade him to give us the information and let us handle the targets. However, he insisted that the Iraqis had to do it. He was not asking for permission to act. They were going to attack AQI whether I agreed or not. I told him to ensure that his men did not threaten my Soldiers or unarmed civilians or else we would shoot them. Then, I wished him luck. We adjusted our rules of engagement for the following day and waited to see what would happen.

The next day was pivotal. Locals attacked and killed several AQI leaders in Ameriyah. The imam used the loudspeaker at his mosque to call the people to attack AQI and support coalition forces. Dozens of men carrying AK-47s and machine guns took to the streets to secure their neighborhood. We held our fire because none of these men posed a threat to our formations. The imam called me that night ecstatic over the success the Iraqis achieved,

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claiming they had secured two-thirds of Ameriyah. We were cautiously optimistic.

The next day was a different story. AQI counterattacked, forcing the local fighters to two strongholds around two mosques. I started getting situation reports from my own Soldiers, and the imam called me every five or ten minutes with an update. In desperation, he asked for our help when his men pulled back to his mosque. I ordered two Stryker platoons under Captain Kevin Salge’s command to go to the Iraqis’ aid. Arriving in the nick of time, they stopped the Al-Qaeda advance and established a secure perimeter to allow our new friends to rest. The mosque was a mess, with broken glass from small arms fire and RPGs. Dead and wounded littered the sanctuary.

The leading imam in Ameriyah then called me to set up a formal meeting with the leader of the Iraqi fighters. Up to then we did not know who was directing the local actions. My first meeting with the man, Abu Abed, did not go well. Clearly exhausted, he made demands I was not comfortable with. We met again the following night and hammered out an agreement on how we would cooperate to defeat our common enemy. Our relationship was tentative at first, but over time, we grew to trust each other as we saw the positive results that came from working together. The Iraqis saw that we were committed to safeguarding their neighborhood.

Galula states that the counterinsurgent that refuses to observe and follow his second law (that support is gained through an active minority) and



CPT Kevin Salge (far left) planning a mission with Abu Abed (seated on right), June 2007.

courtesy of author

is bound by peacetime limitations will drag the war out and not get any closer to victory. The challenge we faced was that security forces in the area were seen as occupiers even though they were also Iraqis. Most of them were Shi'a, and they tended to use excessive force. Complicating matters was the fact that the local population was afraid of any force connected to the Ministry of Interior (MOI). The National Police had detained dozens of men indiscriminately, and they gave no further word of their fate. Members of the MOI also had allegedly robbed the local bank.

Galula's argument that gaining the support of an active minority is essential proved to be true for us.⁹ Using a Shi'a-dominated force to provide security only served to reinforce one of the main causes for the Sunni insurgency: the lack of opportunities for Sunnis to become a part of the legitimate security force. Abu Abed and his men were the active minority we needed. They attacked the foundation of the insurgency.¹⁰

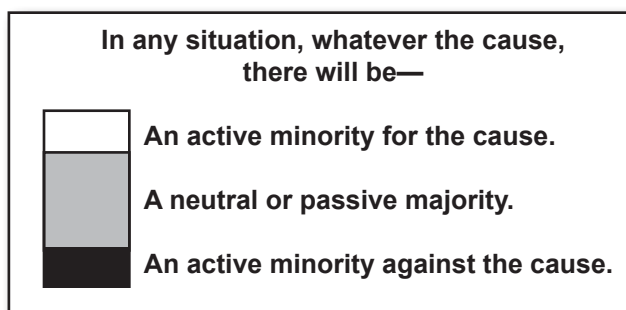


Figure 3. Support for an insurgency.

Conditional Popular Support

Galula argues that a minority hostile to the insurgent will not emerge as long as the threat has not been reasonably reduced. Even if such a minority does emerge, it will not be able to rally the rest of the population unless they are convinced that the counterinsurgent has the will, means, and ability to win. Furthermore, political, economic, and social reforms are impossible as long as the insurgent controls the population.¹¹

We saw all of these challenges in Ameriyah. I am still not sure why Abu Abed and his men came forward when they did. Undoubtedly part of the answer lies in the brutal methods AQI used to control the populace, including kidnapping, torture, and murder. Moreover, AQI actively hindered any

improvements to the local community, disrupting basic services such as trash pickup, sewage repairs, and the distribution of much needed propane and kerosene. I suspect Abu Abed and his followers also came forward because of the commitment we made to the community. In February 2007, at a meeting with local community leaders, I told them that we were committed to defeating AQI and protecting Ameriyah from the Shi'a militia.

The people had seen Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) take control of Hurriya in January. They also watched as JAM expanded to the south in Amil and Jihad, providing AQI with a great recruiting tool. Local insurgents had joined with AQI to protect their neighborhoods from JAM, but came to regret that decision. In committing ourselves to stopping the expansion of JAM, we provided the locals with another alternative. AQI's repressive yoke and its political objective of establishing a greater caliphate did not sit well with the local people or local insurgent groups. The local populace was generally well educated and more secular in its outlook. Even the imams talked about the need for a secular government, rather than one run by religious parties. Favorable minority leaders recognized our commitment, even as the violence in Ameriyah increased, because despite our losses, we continued building.

Increased patrolling, with several companies active in the neighborhood, convinced the residents that we were not leaving. Improved barriers, a curfew, and driving restrictions made it more difficult for AQI operatives to move, isolating them from the population. As our intelligence increased, we discovered the complex patterns of AQI operations and disrupted their meetings. Finally, our Soldiers' disciplined response to the casualties they suffered kept the uncommitted population from turning against us.

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into the streets. However, AQI's violent response caused many to melt away. When we came in to help, Abu Abed had only about a half-dozen dedicated men. This number rose again to about 30 in a few days, but it was still a small group. The bulk of the population was still not convinced. Over the next two and a half months, we worked closely with this small group of fighters and the Iraqi Army to control the population. Through lethal and precise targeting, we wrested control from AQI.

We went through various name changes for the group, settling on the Forsan al-Rafaidan, or "Knights of the Land of Two Rivers." During our time in Baghdad, they were more generically known as "concerned local citizens," which has since changed to the "Sons of Iraq." As the people saw success, the numbers of volunteers grew. For the first month, the number hovered around 30, but when we signed a security contract with them 3 months later, we had almost 300. These men fought, and in some cases died, without being paid for over three months. Many have argued that the only reason the Sunnis came over to our side was because we were paying them. In our area, that claim was inaccurate.



U.S. Army, SGT Jack Androski

Forsan al-Rafaidan fighters on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, June 2007.

Early on, we established a cell under the command of Captain Dustin Mitchell, commander of E/4 BRT, to work with the Forsan on a daily basis. These men served as our MiTT advisors to Abu Abed, coaching him on how to transition from being a small-unit operator to being the leader of a large organization. When Mitchell and his outfit redeployed, we established a provisional company under Captain Eric Cospers, my fire support officer, to continue the close relationship with the Forsan.

As we continued to operate with the Forsan, we found that both my battalion and the Iraqi Army battalion gained legitimacy with the local population. We worked plenty of issues with them, including complaints of intimidation and criminal activity. Some of the reports we got were part of an active disinformation operation campaign by AQI and others seeking to discredit Abu Abed and the Forsan. In truth, we did have some incidents that we had to deal with, but we received fewer complaints about the Forsan than we did about the Iraqi Army. As we investigated claims by locals against the Forsan, we did find justification for some of the complaints, and thus disciplined several members and detained a few of them.

We also received similar complaints about IA Soldiers in the area. We went through an assortment of IA commanders. The number of complaints corresponded directly with the quality of IA leadership. We found that complaints dropped significantly when we conducted operations with all three forces together, further increasing the trust of the population and isolating the insurgents from them.

Abu Abed's emergence as the leader of the counterinsurgency minority was an act of courage and faith. He had the courage to come forward, even though we had done little to reduce the threat that Galula argues is essential for this minority to come forward. However, he and the imams who supported him had faith in our efforts to support them, and they felt that the time was ripe. Their growth was slow. The majority of the populace was still not convinced that we had the will, means, and ability to win. However, as our success in targeting AQI grew, the numbers of those hostile to the insurgency also grew. Volunteers swelled the ranks of the Forsan and became local heroes for stepping forward. The populace in general became more

confident and began to openly denounce AQI and demonstrate support for our efforts. The partnership we formed with the Forsan and the Iraqi Army increased the Iraqi government's legitimacy. The security created set the stage for political, economic, and social development.¹²

Intensity of Efforts and Vastness of Means

Galula argues that operations necessary to relieve the population from the insurgent threat must be intensive in nature and of long duration. We cannot dilute the counterinsurgent effort all over the country; we must apply it area-by-area.¹³ The surge in troops this past year and their focus in Baghdad finally gave us the combat power necessary to have a lasting effect. Without the addition of two more battalions in our area of operations and others in our area of interest, we would not have had the success we did. The addition of 2-32 Field Artillery and 1-64 Armor into the Mansour Security District allowed us to concentrate our efforts in Ameriyah. The number of spheres of influence and partnered Iraqi units we worked with decreased to a manageable level. The efforts of these battalions also served to disrupt AQI's ability to move freely and denied it the ability to reestablish in other areas. To our north, the operations of 2-12 Cavalry and 1-325th Airborne Infantry Regiment effectively stopped the expansion of Jaysh al-Mahdi, and 2-12 CAV wrested control of southern Ghazaliya from Al-Qaeda.

While not necessarily designed to support our effort, the efforts of the 1st Infantry Division's 2d Brigade Combat Team helped reinforce our commitment to the people of Ameriyah. The campaign plan of Colonel Burton and his staff was simple yet effective: focus on stopping Shi'a extremist expansion and defeating AQI. He gave his subordinate commanders the flexibility to handle the unique challenges in the manner they saw fit. His staff ensured we received necessary resources to follow up security gains with improved services and projects to improve the infrastructure. Enabled by the surge and implemented

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through a comprehensive brigade campaign plan, these efforts provided hope to local nationals who came to believe that ultimately we had the capability to win. The hope led to an increase in the number of people willing to support us openly in our efforts to defeat Al-Qaeda, and consequently, the ranks of the Forsan increased exponentially.

Conclusion

The basis of our success in Ameriyah was disciplined Soldiers who acted with restraint in the face of adversity and leaders down to the squad level who understood that we needed the support of the local population to defeat Al-Qaeda. We built upon the relationships and success of the Soldiers who went before us and passed on as much as we could to the Soldiers who followed us. Developing the trust of the local people was essential. To build that trust we had to show we were committed to



Playground in Ameriyah, December 2007. This field was called Body Drop Field due to the number of dead bodies left behind by Al-Qaeda.

their safety. To be effective we had to learn to trust the locals who came forward to fight alongside us and the Iraqi Army to defeat Al-Qaeda. The results were dramatic. We suffered no major attacks on the battalion in Ameriyah from 7 August until we departed on 2 January. The last mortar attack in the community occurred in July. Murders and kidnappings decreased from about 30 per month to only 4 for the last half of the year. Over 200 stores had opened by the time we redeployed. The success of our operations also put pressure on the Iraqi government to provide services within the community and move toward reconciliation by including Sunnis in the Iraqi Police force. Our success required intense dedication on the part of Soldiers and leaders, as well as time and patience. Once the security gains were obvious, we were able to significantly improve the quality of life of the citizens in Ameriyah.

From our experience, it appears Galula was correct in asserting that gaining the support of the population is essential for the counterinsurgent. I saw gaining the trust of the local population as a center of gravity for our operations as well as those of the insurgents. While I had the means at my disposal to take a more lethal approach, I believed that this would be counterproductive and only play into the hands of our enemies at the expense of the populace. We were not able to gain the trust of the local population until we were able to get those hostile to the insurgency to come forward. The security

thus established led the general population to support us when they saw we had the will, the means, and the ability to win. Finally, we had to focus our efforts on Ameriyah to clear the area. The surge in troops allowed us to focus the efforts of the entire battalion in the area for an extended period. We were then able to provide other resources to build the local infrastructure and economy, providing greater legitimacy to the Iraqi government. Our efforts working with the Iraqi Army, the Forsan, and the people of Ameriyah demonstrate the validity of Galula's arguments for U.S. Army operations in Iraq.¹⁴ **MR**

NOTES

1. Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 2006), 3-13.

2. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 52-55.

3. National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, *Baghdad* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2006); available from University of Texas at Austin, Perry Castaneda Library Map Collection, <www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/baghdad_nima_2006.jpg> (1 September 2008).

4. *Ibid.*, 2-32 FA was one of the first surge units to arrive in Baghdad, and it took over the neighborhoods of Hateen and Yarmouk March 2007. 1-64 AR arrived in June and took responsibility for the remainder of Mansour except for Ameriyah and the Bakriyah, which 1-5 CAV controlled.

5. Galula, 52.

6. National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005), 18-19, <www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_strategy_nov2005.html> (1 September 2008).

7. FM 3-24.

8. Galula, 53.

9. *Ibid.*, 53

10. FM 3-24, Figure 1-2: Support for An Insurgency, 1-20.

11. Galula, 54.

12. *Ibid.*, 54.

13. *Ibid.*, 55.

14. *Ibid.*, 52-55.

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