

Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned

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Articles & Testimony

Engagement activities -- overt interactions between coalition military and foreign civilian personnel for the purpose of obtaining information, influencing behavior, or building an indigenous base of support for coalition objectives -- have played a central role in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). They have involved efforts to reach out to village headmen (mukhtars), tribal sheikhs, Muslim clerics, elected officials and representatives, urban professionals, businessmen, retired military officers, and women.

Tribal engagement has played a particularly prominent role in OIF. This reflects the enduring strength of the tribes in many of Iraq's rural areas and some of its urban neighborhoods. And tribal engagement has been key to recent efforts to drive a wedge between tribally based Sunni Arab insurgents and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in Anbar province and elsewhere, as well as efforts to undermine popular support for the Mahdi Army in largely Shi'ite neighborhoods and regions of the country.

Because of the growing importance of tribal engagement for coalition strategy in Iraq, its potential role in future contingency operations, and its potential contribution to future phases of the War on Terrorism, it is vitally important for Army leaders at all levels to understand what history and the social sciences suggest, and what coalition forces in Iraq have learned, about how to engage and leverage tribes and tribal networks. . . .

Read (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/opedsPDFs/46e959386ed5a.pdf>) the full text of this article (PDF).

Lt. Col. Michael Eisenstadt is a Middle East foreign area officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. He served in Turkey and Northern Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort (1991), and at U.S. Central Command Headquarters and on the Joint Staff during planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom (2001-2002). Colonel Eisenstadt is currently an individual mobilization augmentee in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. In civilian life, he is a senior fellow and director of the Military and Security Studies Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. In this capacity, he served as an advisor to the State Department's Future of Iraq Defense Policy working group and to the congressionally mandated Iraq Study Group (The Baker-Hamilton Commission).

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