

# The 91st Military Police Battalion, Operation Iraqi Freedom: *The “Pendulum Effect”*

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*The current environment in Iraq is one of counterinsurgency; that is, it is an environment in which military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions are taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.<sup>1</sup> Military operations—especially counterinsurgency operations—are fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability.*

Iraqi security forces are steadily working toward establishing and maintaining the position of a functioning society within a secure environment. The problem is that there is a disparity between the current state or conditions and the desired state or conditions.<sup>2</sup> The battle between those who desire stability and those who desire to demonstrate instability is complex. The police are making significant progress in maintaining an environment that fosters a sense of safety and security.

The mission of the 91st Military Police Battalion “Guardians” is to conduct counterinsurgency operations by partnering with Iraqi police and coalition forces at the directorate, district, and station levels to develop Iraqi police competencies and operating systems that enable self-reliance and the rule of law, deter insurgent activity, and achieve a long-term, stable, secure environment which promotes a sovereign Iraq. This article relates the experiences and challenges faced by the 91st in executing its mission in the dynamic environment of Iraq—an environment with continuously fluctuating levels of criminal activity and rapidly adaptive and continuously barbaric insurgency. Within this very dynamic environment, there are shifts between conventional and counterinsurgency military police operations and significant changes in operational tempo, police tactics and techniques, police transition team (PTT) mission conduct, and security perceptions.

The first challenge faced by the 91st was the fluctuation of the operational tempo in the insurgent environment. There are two entities at work in this environment. On one side is the Iraqi government, which is trying to establish itself by improving the variables of the operational environment—political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time (PMESII-PT). On the other side are the insurgents, who are intent on forcing a long, drawn-out, bloody struggle. The result is a battle that can be characterized by the “pendulum effect.” As progress in stability is

made, the pendulum swings toward the Iraqi government. However, a rise in insurgency causes the pendulum to slow and change direction, accelerating toward a balance or equilibrium point (the bottom of the pendulum swing) before proceeding in the opposite direction—toward the insurgents. Once the pendulum begins to swing toward the insurgents, tactics and techniques are adjusted to slow the pendulum movement and reverse its direction so that it accelerates toward equilibrium and beyond once again.

Another challenge is the difficulty in maintaining a balanced growth. During periods of growth, progress generally occurs in one or two areas of PMESII-PT. But, the rapid change in operational tempo that results from progress in one area inadvertently stresses or otherwise affects the tempo and progress in other PMESII-PT areas. For example, the Iraqis made progress in the political area when they executed provincial elections in January 2009. However, that political progress required that Iraqi police provide the level of security necessary to ensure a successful election. The operational tempo was accelerated, and the Iraqi police responded positively. Thus, progress in the political area forced progress in the security area. Less than one month after the elections, the Iraqis also enjoyed progress in the social area with the celebration of Arba’een.<sup>3</sup> The large pendulum swings associated with this progress had positive effects, but they also placed stress on the developing Iraqi police. The fact that surges in any one area of PMESII-PT generated efforts in other areas of PMESII-PT resulted in a “pulling effect” on those areas that lagged behind. The 91st Military Police Battalion was concerned that these surges would eventually cripple the police.

The success of the PTT mission was analyzed through constant oversight by military police Soldiers and after-action reviews of surge events. It was determined that the techniques which were being employed to facilitate the self-learning, self-building, and self-sustaining of the Iraqi police were not working. The 91st had slid into an observer/

controller method of conducting PTT; and although this technique is effective with developed units, it was not producing Iraqi police who could function successfully without assistance. Therefore, the battalion changed techniques. In terms of the pendulum comparison, the 91st had reached an apex with its PTT method—a result of the shift from expanding the Iraqi police to developing them. In addition, there was a time constraint applied against the mission that also required a shift in PTT methodology. The battalion, therefore, shifted toward a model which involved the Iraqi police identifying their best officers and noncommissioned officers and sending them to an instructor trainer course and an advanced police continuing education course.

As the 91st Military Police Battalion coached and mentored Iraqi police leaders in the systems and processes designed to facilitate a self-sustaining Iraqi police force, they were also eliminating their own jobs. After helping the Iraqi police develop a police essential training list based on force protection and the seven policing competencies, the battalion focused its training efforts on developing the Iraqi police leadership. The police essential training list, along with the introduction of monthly police training academies, provided Iraqi police leaders with the processes and systems necessary to maintain capacity. The progress made by the Iraqi police during the months of March, April, and May (coupled with the upcoming deployment of coalition forces) served as the impetus for a pending change in future battalion missions.

Operational tempos in the counterinsurgency environment will continue to fluctuate. The 91st Military Police Battalion commander recognizes that the future mission

of the battalion could swing back to conventional military police operations. An analysis of the changing operational environment, along with a defined time constraint, indicated that military police must be flexible and prepared to conduct mobility, maneuver support, and area security operations as the reduction of U.S. forces begins. Uncertainty about what the future will bring requires that military police remain flexible and capable of shifting back and forth between performing PTT missions and conducting mobility and maneuver support or area security operations—depending on which way the pendulum swings.

The 91st Military Police Battalion continues to prepare for and adapt to pending shifts in missions and fluctuations in operational tempo by analyzing potential missions with the intent to identify future Iraqi surge events and mission shifts. The uncertainty and unpredictability presented by counterinsurgency will continue to create a challenge. Understanding the dynamics of the problem will help the 91st Military Police Battalion and future military police battalions understand the importance of incorporating flexibility into all mission planning and execution.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Field Manual [FM] 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 15 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup>FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, 20 January 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Arba'een is a Shi'a Muslim religious observation.

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