

# STEPPING OUT OF THE QUAGMIRE: BUILDING BRIDGES TO VICTORY THROUGH TRAQ'S INDIGENOUS TRIBES

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**A**lthough there were mixed reports detailing the level of U.S. and Coalition success in Iraq prior to February 22, 2006, the shocking attack on the sacred Golden Mosque in Samarra moved the country closer than it has ever been (post-Saddam) to complete civil war, raising serious questions and debate about whether the U.S. cause has been lost and the withdrawal of all coalition forces warranted. The growing sectarian tension and violence, on top of an ongoing lethal insurgency, combine to alarm even the most optimistic about what lies ahead for Iraq.

Despite the setbacks, however, President Bush declared in our Iraq victory strategy that "...we will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more" and that "failure is not an option."<sup>1</sup> It thus follows that avoiding a civil war in Iraq is a vital U.S. interest, not to mention vital to the security of Iraq and the region.<sup>2</sup> Since Iraq is a society that is divided along ethnic, tribal, and religious lines, as well as those of political orientation and ideology, it is not surprising to see the Iraqi people migrate to those groupings to find safety, security, and basic needs in an environment where the government is either incapable of or unwilling to provide these needs. This could lead to an untenable and dangerous situation much like that which occurred in Yugoslavia after the death of its dictator.<sup>3</sup> When there are "empty social spaces" within a disintegrating nation-state, its peoples often migrate or return to the infra-state layers, such as a tribal structure, for protection and basic needs.<sup>4</sup>

Is there any way for the U.S. and its coalition partners to prevent or slow down this slide into potentially virulent factionalism? It is the premise of this paper that if the Coalition creates an institutional mechanism and develops a unified strategy dedicated to engaging leaders of and influencing people in and through Iraq's indigenous

social networks, particularly the tribal network, it can achieve success with the U.S. national military strategy in Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

This paper discusses historical examples of the relationship between tribes and state formation in the Middle East in general; cites historical examples of the relation between Iraqi tribes and the Iraqi state; describes the organization of the tribal structure in Iraq as well as tribal characteristics, customs, and practices, the knowledge of which are essential to U.S. success in Iraq; and finally, provides recommendations for establishing an institutional mechanism and program for implementing the U.S. national military strategy in Iraq through Iraq's tribal structure.

### **Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East**

Reports in the anthropological, sociological, and political science literature vary as to the relationship between Middle Eastern tribes and the formation of Middle Eastern states. In this literature, tribes are generally seen as representing large kin groups that are organized and regulated according to blood and family lineage, whereas states are structures through which the ultimate power of the state is executed.<sup>6</sup> Khoury and Kostiner, however, provide a more detailed definition of "tribe" that may help bring clarity to the discussion of what constitutes a tribe for the purposes of this discussion:

*'Tribe' may be used loosely of a localized group in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organization, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct (in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins); tribes are usually politically unified, though not necessarily under a central leader, both features being commonly attributable to interaction with states. Such tribes also form parts of larger, usually regional, political structures of tribes of similar kinds; they do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through these intermediate structures. The more explicit term confederacy or confederation should be used for a local group of tribes that is heterogeneous in terms of culture, presumed origins and perhaps class composition, yet is politically unified usually under a central authority.<sup>7</sup>*

Because of these structural and sociological differences between the

organization, function, and ethos of tribe and state, it is generally argued that tribes and states are opposed to one another. States have advantages of authority of the ruler, ability to exert military force, control of access to economic resources and markets, and a bureaucratic apparatus for taxation, whereas the tribe has the advantages of geography, mobility, a warrior population, and flexible capacity for organization.<sup>8</sup> Irrespective of whether tribes are opposed to or provide support to states and state building, governments throughout history have been forced to deal with the tribe. In doing so, governments have tended to either eradicate the tribe, incorporate it into the state, or sustain the balance of state power through a policy of dividing the tribe so the state can conquer the territory.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the method employed by the government, the fact remains that each state has had to deal with tribes in some form or fashion and each method chosen had reciprocal consequences to the state. It is generally accepted that tribes in the Middle East will not evolve into a nation-state; however that does not mean that the tribe has no positive impact on state formation.<sup>10</sup>

There are several examples in the Middle East where tribes have had a positive influence over and on state development and function. In Jordan, for example, the tribes have played an important stabilizing role to the monarchy via a significant presence in the armed forces as well as in the use of the tribal structure to encourage participation in the electoral process. The tribes have successfully secured a sizable number of seats in the parliament thus providing a mechanism for the tribe to have a voice in government. Additionally, the use of the tribes' unique dispute resolution mechanism to settle disputes at the local level has contributed to the strengthening of civil society in Jordan.<sup>11</sup>

While Yemen is not considered a stable or progressive society by Western standards, the tribes have demonstrated some traits which appear democratic in nature. From May 1990 to April 1993, one observer of Yemeni tribes noted certain democratic elements such as elections of tribal leaders, consensus in decision making, a sense of equality among tribesmen, and a form of political organization in some parts of the country capable of protecting its members from abuses of state power. Another development during this same time period was the convening of several tribal conferences,

with several thousand in attendance, resulting in the publication of resolutions demanding the rule of law, pluralism, local elections, fiscal responsibility, and other civic demands, while arranging for mediation of tribal disputes.<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that Yemen is a bastion of democracy—it is not; but it does mean that there are traits and characteristics demonstrated by the tribal structure that can help stabilize society and assist the state in modernization and some level of democratization. As one author has noted in his studies of the Yemen political experience, “Allowing the tribes to have some democratic input and domestic autonomy is often easier for the central government than efforts to impose strong, political control over tribal areas.”<sup>13</sup>

While Oman’s social organization remains predominantly tribal in nature, this society has demonstrated some values that are fundamental to the democratic process and essential to civil society. Those traits and values reflected include free economic opportunity and trade, representative leaders, a belief in education in order to advance society, an expectation that leaders are to represent the interests of the tribes, a mechanism to settle disputes, and the ability to interface with the state and negotiate agreements that advance the interests of the tribe and its needs.<sup>14</sup>

The point is clear—states can try to eradicate the tribes, incorporate them into the state, or divide and conquer them, but they cannot ignore the tribes. Tribes will continue to exist long after many states, administrations, or regimes are gone. Successful governments will undertake serious efforts to utilize the tribal structure in stabilizing the state and strengthening civil society.

### **Tribes and the Iraqi State**

Most experts agree that Iraq is a society very much influenced by its tribal identities. Some reports suggest that over three-quarters of the population trace membership to one of the approximately 150 tribes<sup>15</sup> in Iraq, while other estimates of membership are lower.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout Iraq’s long and turbulent history, each governing body or ruling authority had to deal with the tribes in some form or fashion in order to govern. The course of dealing with the tribes by these

respective authorities included using military force against the tribes, securing their cooperation with state activities and programs, leaving them alone as long as they did not threaten the ruling authority, using patronage to divide and conquer, and rewarding tribes favorable to the state while punishing those out of favor. In each case, the ruling powers had to develop a strategy for dealing with the tribes.

During the Ottoman period, tribes formed most of the population. Ottoman central control was relatively weak and it allowed the tribal confederations to loosely govern their respective areas. Toward the end of this period, the Ottoman ruler increased its control over the tribes through settlement programs and land reform measures. This reduced the tribal leader's influence within the tribe and initiated disintegration of the traditional tribal system.<sup>17</sup>

After the demise of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, the British moved in to occupy the provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. They united these provinces into one nation-state and gave it the name Iraq. Under British policies, power was restored to the tribal sheikhs that fueled the reemergence of the tribal structure in many ways, although at the same time, the British assumed control of heretofore tribal functions of land management, essential service distribution, and law enforcement.<sup>18</sup> The British used a method of "divide and conquer" to retain control of the tribes within various regions of Iraq. The aim of the British policy was to keep the monarchy stronger than any one tribe, but weaker than a coalition of tribes, giving the British rulers the upper hand in deciding disputes between the monarch and the tribes. One mechanism instituted by the British that added power to the tribal sheikhs was passage of the 1924 Tribal Criminal Disputes Regulation. This law granted power to the sheikhs to conduct tribal courts in rural areas of Iraq. Another law was passed in 1933 granting large land estates to tribal sheikhs that acted as a legal mechanism to bind the tribes to the land.<sup>19</sup>

During the Ba'ath party rule, initially (in 1976) tribal identity was outlawed, as the party regarded tribalism as detrimental to Ba'athist ideology and programs of reform. At the same time, however, Saddam Hussein used his tribal roots to consolidate his power within the Ba'ath party by giving key state jobs such as the defense ministry, the military bureau, and the National Security Bureau to

members of his Al-bu Nasir tribe and its main core, the Al Beijat clan.<sup>20</sup> However, the rejection of the tribes did not last long. As the Ba'athist state began to fail, especially after its defeat by the U.S. in Operation Desert Storm, Saddam reached out to the tribes as a method of holding the delicate fabric of the state together. He used an elaborate system of patronage to buy the loyalty of the various tribes with gifts ranging from key jobs in government and industry to cash, personal property and land. Additionally, during this period of re-tribalization he invented new tribes and tribal leaders in order to marginalize real tribal leaders that might still remain a threat to his regime.<sup>21</sup> This created a proliferation of tribes and tribal leaders and a dilution of tribal influence that remains a problem to this day for the U.S.-led Coalition.<sup>22</sup>

Since the Coalition arrived in Iraq, there has been no consistent, unified policy or strategy on utilizing the tribal structure to support the mission. The policy, in most part, is left to the whim of the local commander, thereby creating pockets of inconsistent practices with respect to the tribes. Given Iraqi tribes' history of dealing with ruling powers, this practice has created confusion, ambiguity, and at times resentment of coalition practices from key tribal leaders. While it is not the author's purpose to list every effort that has been made to reach out to Iraqi tribes, some will be noted.

For instance, there were news reports prior to the U.S.-led invasion, that elite forces, termed "cash squads," were entering Iraq with huge sums of money to buy the allegiance of tribal leaders. There is, however, no data available as to the scope and extent of such a program or its effectiveness in the overall campaign.<sup>23</sup>

Early in the war, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division aligned its goals and objectives with the interests of the tribes in its area of operations in western Iraq, spending a reported \$41 million to create jobs, establish a veteran's office, and launch a civic-improvement program in Al Anbar province. These initiatives provided opportunities for young male Iraqis to work and to resist the temptation to join the insurgency. Additionally, the Division was receiving an average of three hundred tips per week regarding insurgent activity by March 2004, compared to only twenty per week in August 2003.<sup>24</sup> It is not clear whether this program was continued by any units that followed,

but from news reports of the unrest in western Iraq, it is likely that no such program was continued—at least not in the scope of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division’s program.

In December 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), under Ambassador L. Paul Bremmer III, created the Office of Provincial Outreach (OPO), which was designed to begin a program of outreach to the tribes and leaders. The sparsely staffed organization was headed by a senior U.S. government civilian who managed a small staff of U.S. military and other civilians. One of the key members of the group was Lieutenant Colonel R. Alan King, who had performed as a Civil Affairs battalion commander during the invasion. As the point man for reaching out to the key tribal leaders in Iraq, LTC King spearheaded the establishment of a tribal council that met regularly to discuss issues relating to the military occupation and provide advice as to the future development of the country. Although the program was understaffed and under funded, it did have some success, as the contacts made with these leaders led to the capture and arrest of nearly a score of Iraqi fugitives pictured on the famous deck of cards or listed on the Coalition “blacklist.”<sup>25</sup> The OPO was also instrumental in negotiating conflict termination of the uprisings in Sadr City and Fallujah in April 2004 through the tribal influence.<sup>26</sup>

Following the transfer of sovereignty to Iraq in late June 2004, the CPA was dissolved and replaced by the formal establishment of the U.S. Embassy. The OPO, as it was organized and operated under the CPA, was not duplicated in the new embassy, although there was an Office of Provincial Outreach in name. The precise work of the CPA OPO was continued by this author in his capacity as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G5 to the Commanding General of the First Cavalry Division. While there were successes as a result of this program, and an attempt to coordinate tribal engagement with the new Embassy and the Multinational Force-Iraq headquarters, this author is not aware of any consistent national program that has been adopted or established—nor of any national, unified or consistent policy on tribal engagement developed or implemented by any key headquarters or agency.

It is the purpose of this paper to suggest a method for the establishment of an organization responsible for dealing with the tribes, as well as

the development of a national outreach program and strategy for influencing the tribes. An effort made in this direction would not only assist with the current mission, but would be critical to the attainment of victory in Iraq.

### **The Necessity for a Tribal Engagement Strategy and Program**

Of all the controversies surrounding the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. and other coalition partners as well as the resulting occupation and administration of the country, one theme emerges more clearly than any other—we didn't understand the culture or the society. As a result, the mission is in serious jeopardy. Forces were unleashed that had long been kept silent or impotent by Saddam Hussein's brutal policies of violence and suppression—forces that have taken the country to the brink and slightly over the edge to civil war.<sup>27</sup> Understanding foreign cultures must become a core competency of our new expeditionary military if we are to succeed in future conflicts, especially in such volatile regions as the Middle East.

McFate argues that understanding and utilizing certain aspects of an adversary's culture can bring positive results strategically, operationally, and tactically. One such recommendation is to understand and utilize preexisting indigenous social systems and organizations, such as the tribal system and structure, to create legitimacy for an occupying power and to facilitate stability and security operations.<sup>28</sup>

There are good reasons to understand and utilize the tribal network within Iraq. First, the key tribal leaders are often highly respected members of Iraqi communities and it is important to build strong relationships with them, especially in areas where security is most at risk. Second, by building relationships with the tribal leader, it is easier to execute a campaign to win the hearts and minds of the tribal members. Third, once a relationship of trust has been established with the tribal leaders, the Coalition can fund programs through the tribal leaders on local employment projects, public works improvements, agrarian programs, and security and intelligence initiatives, as some members of the coalition have done.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, there has been a resurgence of tribal power since the fall of Saddam and competition has arisen between tribal leaders and religious clerics. These groups are attempting to fill

the vacuum left with the demise of the regime and, since they are all heavily armed, it makes sense to engage them and try to bring them into the legitimate political process instead of leaving them to the temptation to engage in lawlessness and political violence.<sup>30</sup>

Andrew Krepinevich offers a solid fifth reason and some sage advice which bears reproducing here. He suggests that the U.S. should work to build a coalition that cuts across key Iraqi religious, ethnic, and tribal groups that are willing to support a democratic and unified Iraq. This would be a long-term effort (at least a decade) and it would not seek to win over every group in its entirety, only a substantial portion of each. This coalition then would serve as the “critical mass” in support of the U.S. objectives in Iraq.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, he gives advice on how to make this plan work:

*Stitching this coalition together would require a good understanding of Iraqi tribal politics. In many areas of Iraq, the tribe and the extended family are the foundation of society, and they represent a sort of alternative to the government. (Saddam deftly manipulated these tribal and familial relationships to sustain his rule)...Creating a coalition out of these groups would require systematically mapping tribal structures, loyalties, and blood feuds within and among tribal groups; identifying unresolved feuds; detecting the political inclinations of dominant tribes and their sources of power and legitimacy; and determining their ties to tribes in other countries, particularly in Iran, Syria, and Turkey...*

*Accurate tribal mapping could guide the formation of alliances between the new Iraqi government and certain tribes and families, improve vetting of military recruits and civil servants, and enhance intelligence sources on the insurgency's organization and infrastructure. Most important, it would facilitate achieving the grand bargain by identifying the Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite tribes that would be most likely to support a unified, independent, and democratic Iraqi state. In return, tribal allies should receive more immediate benefits, such as priority in security and reconstruction operations.<sup>32</sup>*

Another very important reason to understand the tribes, tribal ways, and culture has to do with the protection of coalition forces. There are some unique characteristics, codes of conduct, and customs among the tribes which can be used in a positive way, or that can lead to tragic results if not recognized or respected by coalition forces.

Despite the fact that most Arabs dwell in cities and villages and not the desert in this modern world, many hold the Bedouin ethic and ethos as the yardstick by which to be measured. The Bedouin is seen as the living ancestor, witnesses to the ancient glory of the heroic age for the Middle East. Certain characteristics, customs, and practices developed from the structure of the Bedouin society. During their wanderings in the desert, several units would form sub-tribes, then combine to form tribes, and tribes would come together to form confederations. The units were based primarily on kinship and practiced intermarriages to preserve the lineage. As a result of these alliances, group solidarity developed. Loyalty to the group (*asibiyya*) became the supreme value and moral code by which to live and die.<sup>33</sup> Tribesmen and women (through their chastity and modesty) were taught from an early age to protect the group solidarity. Anyone threatening or causing harm to that solidarity was subject to vengeance.

The concept of honor (*sharaf*) is another core value of the tribe used to preserve and protect group cohesion and individual integrity. There are several aspects to this concept. For instance, there is honor in having numerous sons; in demonstrating the ability to defend one's family, tribe, home, village, country, and property against an adversary; in conducting a raid according to tribal rules of warfare; in showing bravery and courage; in showing Bedouin hospitality and generosity, no matter how poor one is (even to a fugitive or potential adversary who seeks asylum, and even at the risk of one's own safety); in having pure Arab blood; by women preserving their sexual honor for the family; in showing a strong sense of group solidarity; and in behaving with dignity and always preserving "face" (*wajh*). As one writer has noted, "All these different kinds of honor, clearly distinguished in Arab life and operative at various times and on various occasions, interlock to surround the Arab ego like a coat of armor."<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, if someone causes serious harm or death to a member of the tribe, or if one's honor is damaged by the action of another, then an act of revenge is required to avenge (*al-tha'r*) or restore the honor back to the person, family, or tribe. As the saying goes, "*Dam butlub Dam*—blood demands blood."<sup>35</sup> If an individual in the

tribe is shamed, then the whole tribe is shamed. As a result, an act of revenge is needed to restore honor to the family or tribe and protect its collective honor. Thus, the Arab saying, "It is better to die with honor than live with humiliation."<sup>36</sup> An alternative (used as a means of stopping revenge attacks) may be to settle the dispute in the tribal way by engaging in mediation (*fas'l*). If the disputing parties can reach a satisfactory agreement to compensate for the harm or injustice, a blood feud or revenge attack may be averted.

It is imperative for all members of the Coalition to know and understand these tribal characteristics, customs, practices, and codes of honor in order to avoid triggering revenge attacks on Coalition forces as a result of inappropriate Coalition conduct in the course of its operations. Likewise, the characteristics of solidarity (*asabiyya*), honor (*sharaf*), hospitality, generosity, courage, integrity, and dignity are values that are essential to an effective civil society. The Coalition should tap into those values and use the tribal ways to achieve its objectives of creating a secure, prosperous, and stable, democratic Iraqi state. This objective can only be achieved by creating an institution that is solely dedicated to identifying, understanding, and developing strategy for utilizing the Iraqi tribal structure and network to achieve the U.S. national military strategy for victory in Iraq.

## The Mechanism for Success

This author recommends that an office or directorate be established at the national level (either MNC-I or MNF-I or Embassy) that is solely dedicated to, and authorized to establish and execute policy relating to, Coalition interaction with the various indigenous social networks in Iraq, especially the tribal system. A suggested name for this entity might be Office of National Outreach Programs and Initiatives<sup>37</sup> or Directorate of National Outreach Programs and Initiatives.

This office should be vested with the following characteristics and authorities:

- It should be designated a primary or special staff section reporting directly to the MNF-I or MNC-I Commander or U.S. Ambassador, and be the lead advisor on all matters of tribal affairs.

- It should be clothed with exclusive and sufficient authority and responsibility to develop and direct the execution of all Coalition policies, programs, strategies, and activities dealing with the tribes after appropriate and complete staff and interagency coordination.
- It should have appropriate fiscal authority and resources to fund the execution and implementation of all tribal policies, programs, and activities that are approved by the Commander.
- Its staffing should reflect the joint, multinational, interagency, and host nation characteristic of the Coalition.
- It should be granted authority to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize Coalition tribal policies, programs, and objectives with those of the appropriate Iraqi government officials, agencies, and ministries.

In addition to these characteristics and authorities, the office should be structured with certain elements:

- First, the command element should consist of a Director (0-6) and Deputy Director (0-5), with sufficient clerical staff to support the work of that element.
- Second, there should be an operations element staffed with experienced operations officers (0-4) and mid to senior grade non-commissioned officers that can track Coalition activities and operations that impact the tribes throughout the country.
- Third, a functional element consisting of civilian or military personnel with education, experience, and expertise in cultural anthropology, sociology, Islamic religion, Iraqi culture, history, politics, and tribes, that can also be cleared at least to the U.S. Secret level of security classification. The section should also possess adequate native linguist support.
- Fourth, a plans and policy element staffed with civilian and military personnel skilled in developing strategic and operational level plans and policies.

- Fifth, a fiscal element with expertise and experience in budgetary matters capable of managing funds for the types of programs that might be associated with the activities of this proposed office or directorate.
- Sixth, a security element, adequately trained, equipped, and staffed to escort principles or functionaries on missions related to the activities of this office.
- Finally, a tribal liaison element consisting of military officers with the task of interfacing with the tribes and military forces in various sections of Iraq to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of programs and de-conflict issues. It should include tribal coordinators made up of vetted Iraqi nationals that interface with the various tribal councils and report the activities of the councils to the office or directorate.

It is not the intent of this paper to spell out every detail of how this new office should be organized, staffed, equipped, or clothed with authority. It is only to suggest a conceptual model from which others can create the details. It is an ambitious plan; however, as was previously noted by Andrew Krepinevich, if the U.S. chooses to embark on this engagement strategy, it must be prepared for a long duration of at least a decade to see success.<sup>38</sup>

The benefits of such an office are many, but primarily it will be an important conduit through which the President's National Strategy for Victory in Iraq will be executed. That plan sets forth three tracks on the road to victory—political, security, and economic.<sup>39</sup>

Under the Political Track, the Coalition intends to help forge a broadly supported national compact for democratic governance. This is to be achieved by helping the new Iraqi government *isolate* the enemy, *engaging* those outside the political process to join that process, renounce violence, and help to build stable, pluralistic, and effective national institutions.<sup>40</sup>

The Security Track involves a campaign to defeat the terrorists and neutralize the insurgency. This is to be done by developing Iraqi Security Forces, helping the Iraqi government to clear areas of enemy control, holding areas freed from enemy influence while

ensuring they remain under the influence of the Iraqi government, and building the capacity of local institutions to deliver services, advance the rule of law, and nurture civil society.

Under both the Political and Security Tracks, the tribes can help achieve Coalition and Iraqi government objectives. There is little question that many insurgents and foreign jihadists are living among and within the Iraqi population at large and in many of the rural tribal areas. Knowing also that it is a tribal value to provide hospitality to those who seek it, it can safely be assumed that insurgents are finding sanctuary and asylum based on these principles and also on the assumption that some tribes are loyal to the insurgent cause. However, if the coalition builds bridges of trust to the tribal leaders and tribes, forms a collective solidarity with them (*asabiyya*), and demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality of life for the tribe and its leaders, then, over time, the enemy will be denied sanctuary and asylum as the loyalty of the tribe will have shifted to the new bond of solidarity.

Additionally, if security or combat operations are required in a region, then it is necessary to have a strong relationship of trust with the key tribal leaders in those areas to reduce the friction between the combat forces and the people and to mitigate any unnecessary, collateral or unintended harm or damage done to innocent civilians. This can avoid the situation of creating new enemies to avenge (*al-tha'r*) the honor of the individual or tribe that was harmed. The tribes may also be enlisted to help with security operations by providing information and intelligence about the insurgents or actually used to eliminate the threat from insurgents or foreign jihadists as seen illustrated recently by a leading tribe in western Iraq.<sup>41</sup>

The tribes can also be influenced to support the other branches of these tracks. They can participate in the political process and influence others in the tribe to do the same. They can be used as a conduit for information to counter the propaganda of the insurgents and jihadists and to disseminate information favorable to state-building in Iraq. They can assist the Iraqi Security Forces with securing and holding areas of the country, keeping them free from enemy influence once they are cleared. And, they can help build the Iraqi Security Forces and support civil society and the rule of law by

sending their best and brightest from the tribe into government and private sector service for the country.

The tribes can likewise assist with the success of the Economic Track. They can provide skilled workers to help rebuild and restore Iraq's damaged infrastructure by partnering with the Iraqi government and Coalition on reconstruction projects. They can help protect development projects in their respective areas. And again, they can encourage their best, brightest, and most business savvy members to participate in economic activities and initiatives designed to help Iraq rejoin the international economic community.

Finally, the Coalition, through the newly established office or directorate, can coordinate the dissemination of information and the promotion of educational and training initiatives that will help the tribes participate in viable economic activities that will improve their quality of life, provide an adequate source of income, and dry up the pool of individuals that are available for or tempted to join the insurgency. While there will be some risk to this suggested initiative, this author believes the benefits of moving forward with such a program far outweigh the risks. Conversely, the negative consequences associated with the risk of ignoring and alienating the tribes are far greater than any benefit derived from ignoring or alienating them.

## Conclusion

In the Iraq Victory Plan, President Bush has defined the boundaries and set the stage for how and why the U.S. must remain engaged in Iraq until final victory is achieved. Iraq is now the central front in the war on terror. Therefore, success in Iraq is an essential element to the success of the "long" war against international terrorism. He declared that the ultimate victory in Iraq will be achieved in three stages, short, medium, and long. He defined the short term as,

*An Iraq that is making steady progress in fighting terrorists and neutralizing the insurgency, meeting political milestones; building democratic institutions; standing up robust security forces to gather intelligence, destroy terrorist networks, and maintain security; and tackling key economic reforms to lay the foundation for a sound economy.<sup>42</sup>*

This author submits that it is critical to build the bridges with the tribal networks in the short term stage (as outlined in this paper), in order to build the larger bridge to victory in the final stage. The short term stage is really the foundational stage for building a stable, democratic Iraq. It is in this phase that the tribes can contribute their best people to help build strong, effective ministries, democratic institutions, and civil society and participate in reconstruction and economic initiatives. It is in this phase that the tribes can form a bond of solidarity with Coalition forces and the fledgling Iraq Security Forces to deny sanctuary to, identify, and fight the insurgent and terrorist forces that threaten to take the nation into civil war. It is the tribes that can help the Coalition and Iraqi forces hold key areas once they are cleared of the enemy forces. It is the tribal leaders and influential members of the tribes that can persuade their members to reject insurgent propaganda, violent extremism, and political violence. And it is the tribal leaders and other influential members of the tribes that can encourage and persuade its members to support the development of a democratic, secure, and prosperous Iraq and a sense of pride and national unity (*asabiyya*).

While there may have been initiatives with the tribes in the past, and there may be some initiatives in existence today, it does not appear that these efforts have been sufficient, timely or consistent.<sup>43</sup> Now is the time to act—to engage in a paradigm shift in our dealings with the tribes. Time is of the essence. History shows that, although Iraqi tribes can be weakened and marginalized at times, they cannot be destroyed.<sup>44</sup> Build the suggested organization now with adequate staffing, budgetary and other appropriate authorities. If the Coalition sows seeds to the wind in trying to ignore the tribes, it will reap a whirlwind and the consequences that follow. It will most likely be bogged down in a quagmire until the American people force the U.S. government to bring their sons and daughters home without a clear victory, as occurred in Vietnam.

With nearly three-quarters of the Iraqi people ascribing membership to a tribe, and in the face of an unformed and ineffective Iraqi government, the tribe becomes one of the most effective ways and means to influence and win the hearts and minds of the people. Building bonds of trust and reliability with Iraqi tribes and tribal

leaders is one essential key to building a bridge to victory and bequeathing a safe, prosperous and democratic society to the Iraqi people.

