

The effect of military operations on feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity

Effect: None (military operations in Ramadi had a counterproductive impact on public trust and tolerance for diversity. This is attributed to heavy-handed tactics and a lack of political efforts to address sectarian divisions. However, in Tal Afar, a mixed impact is assessed of military operations on feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity)

Confidence in study findings: Low (one study, low confidence)

Short Summary

The US counterinsurgency in Iraq prioritised good governance and security but neglected underlying sectarian divisions. While the strategy in one of the regions- Tal Afar showed initial success, it was fragile. In contrast, Ramadi's (another region in Iraq) failure highlighted the insufficiency of governance-focused approaches without addressing sectarian tensions. Heavy-handed military tactics alienated the Sunni population, while the deployment of Shia security forces further exacerbated sectarian divisions. In Tal Afar, a more nuanced approach and efforts to address sectarian tensions fostered a more positive environment for reconciliation and acceptance of diversity. Thus in contexts with significant ethno-religious cleavages, addressing those divisions is crucial for counterinsurgency success, even more so than good governance alone.

Long summary

The intervention

The US counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq (Ramadi and Tal Afar), have a range of military interventions employed, which can be broadly categorised into two phases: offensive operations aimed at disrupting insurgent activity and population-centric operations focused on securing the local population and building relationships.

How is the intervention expected to work

Several interconnected elements contribute to the counterinsurgency efforts, these are:

- 1) Establishing legitimacy: The overarching goal was to establish the legitimacy of the incumbent government in the eyes of the local population. This legitimacy can be achieved primarily in two ways- firstly, traditional counterinsurgency doctrine emphasises the importance of effective governance, including basic service delivery, economic development, and a just legal system, to win popular support. Secondly, by addressing ethno-religious cleavages in Ramadi and Tal Afar, addressing sectarian tensions is crucial for building legitimacy. This involves power-sharing, grievance redressal, and reconciliation efforts.
- 2) Providing security: This was found to be fundamental to counterinsurgency success. Without a secure environment, governance initiatives, infrastructure development, and community trust-building is argued as challenging. A population-centric approach that prioritises civilian protection and community engagement was essential. Maintaining sufficient troop presence to deter insurgents and provide a sense of security.
- 3) Military cooperation with the local population: Building strong relationships with the local population and engaging with the community, understanding their needs, and fostering trust are identified as key factors. This involves identifying and collaborating with influential local leaders and demonstrating cultural sensitivity to avoid alienating the population

The evidence base

There is one qualitative study assessing the effect of **military operations on feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity in Iraq**. This study is by *M Fitzsimmons. (2013). Governance, identity, and counterinsurgency: Evidence from Ramadi and Tal Afar*. All references are from that study.

The evidence

- 1) In Ramadi, the initial reliance on large-scale offensive operations, characterised by cordon and search missions and frequent artillery bombardments, proved largely counterproductive in building trust with the local population. These operations, often perceived as indiscriminate and heavy-handed, alienated many residents and reinforced existing sectarian grievances (p.41-43). Further exacerbating the situation was the deployment of predominantly Shi'a Iraqi security military forces, which fueled sectarian tensions and deepened mistrust between the US forces and the Sunni population. The perceived bias of these forces, coupled with the aggressive tactics employed by US troops, fostered an environment of fear and resentment, blocking efforts to promote acceptance of diversity (p.32-46)
- 2) In contrast to Ramadi, the shift towards a more population-centric approach in Tal Afar had a moderately positive impact on trust and acceptance of diversity. By establishing a persistent presence within the city, increasing foot patrols, and engaging in more direct interactions with residents, US forces were able to build relationships and foster a sense of security. The 3ACR recognised the importance of addressing the sectarian divisions within Tal Afar. They focused on building relationships with both Sunni and Shia tribal leaders, mediating disputes, and promoting a shared sense of community against the threat of extremist groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq (p.81-96). There was a focus on addressing the root causes of sectarian tension, coupled with the more nuanced approach to military operations, created an environment conducive to reconciliation and acceptance of diversity

Confidence assessment

Overall confidence: Low Confidence Qualitative Study (Established small n approach is not used/Unclear, no triangulation done, no discussion of bias)