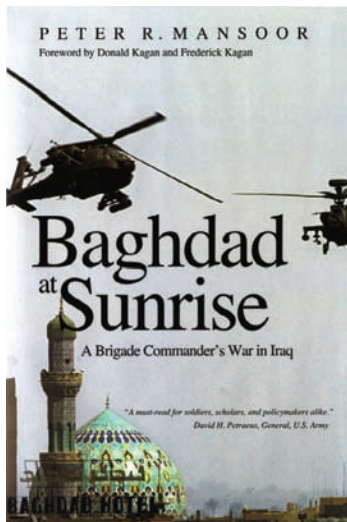


BAGHDAD AT SUNRISE, A BRIGADE COMMANDERS WAR IN IRAQ
MANSOOR, Peter. Yale University Press, 2008, hardcover, 416 pages, \$36.50,
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General Petraeus, the commander for the surge into Iraq and also the prime mover behind the American Army COIN publication, said of this book, "A must-read for soldiers, scholars, and policy makers alike." I thought it was a good read. It was interesting and contained many useful lessons and bits of information about the U.S. Army, counter-insurgency, and the situation in Iraq. It's not a must-read for everyone, but should be read by commanders and staff officers preparing to conduct counter-insurgency operations at the battle group and higher headquarters.

Colonel Mansoor is both a soldier and a scholar, a graduate of West Point and now a Professor, currently in the General Raymond Mason chair of military history, at Ohio State University. He served as the executive officer to General Petraeus in Multinational Force-Iraq, 2007-2008; as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategy Group that proposed the surge strategy in Iraq, 2007; as the founding director of the US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center, 2006; and as Commander of the First Brigade Combat Team, First Armored Division, in Baghdad, 2003-2004. He thus has a wealth of knowledge, both on Iraq and counter-insurgency and used this book to bring out many of the lessons he felt important.

He wrote the book using his diary and much of the information is what you'd expect to find in a diary, lots of detail, lots of names and his personal observations. Unfortunately, there's a little too much superfluous detail, which detracts from the overall value of the book by making it a longer read than necessary. I didn't need to know every time he smoked a Cuban cigar. Colonel Mansoor describes his tour of duty, as the brigade commander of the "Ready First Brigade Combat Team" in Baghdad, Iraq. His tour started at a relatively slow pace with the insurrection just beginning to take hold. His emphasis was on creating the democratic institutions necessary to move the various communities in Baghdad forward. They started the tour with a briefing from the British Army's Operational Training and Advisory Group, all with experience in Northern Ireland, which helped the brigade combat team set the intellectual stage for conducting counter-insurgency operations. They were tutored on how to break down the counter-insurgency tasks into two components—framework operations and surge operations. Framework operations are those activities a force has little choice but to execute, such as guarding pieces and critical sites patrolling and quick reaction forces for emergencies. Search operations are activities that enable a force to seize the initiative—cordon and search, checkpoints and ambushes, as well as humanitarian and civic action projects. This instruction became the conceptual underpinning for Colonel Mansoor's operations over the next year.¹ He applied the theory and learned his lessons by trial and error. His observations are good learning points for commanders operating in any counter-insurgency environment.

The first lesson he felt it necessary to pass on was a comment on interpreters. Local interpreters were an issue throughout the tour because of their various backgrounds, loyalties and language capability. It was hard to ensure precise translations. His recommendation is that in building an army for the 21st century a high priority must be assigned to improving language capabilities and noted that in the contemporary operating environment such language skills are as much a part of the soldier's equipment as the rifle and helmet.²

The second lesson, which he described as one of the most difficult issues in a counter-insurgency, is determining whom to trust. He met people every day on the street in council meetings and at the gates to his base. They offered lots of information and sorting truth from fiction and determining the motivation of the informant was extremely difficult. "I often joke that in Baghdad, we finally discovered something that travels faster than the speed of light—rumors, dubbed RUMINT [rumor intelligence] by our intelligence officers. Your context might have been in the plants, although proving so was difficult at best. Finally, a small percentage of Iraqis came forward with genuine useful information. Sifting the wheat from the chaff was graduate-level work."

A third lesson was about boots on the ground. As Colonel Mansoor learned, despite being an armoured brigade commander, much of this activity centered on the use of light and mechanized infantry. He believed that he was observing the passing of an era in military history, "precision weaponry had made massed armored operations increasingly problematic, and therefore it was unlikely the decisive phase of operation Iraqi Freedom was not the drive to Baghdad. But the struggle for stability is now occurring. We would win or lose the war on the Arab street—not with high-tech web weaponry, but with boots on the ground."

As his brigade was in the final stages of departing Baghdad and returning to Germany, an uprising was launched by the radical cleric Muqtada al Sadr's Mohammed's army as they tried to wrest control of Karbala from the government. The low-level insurgency went to high-intensity combat very quickly with Colonel Mansoor's tanks and APCs conducting combat in the streets of Baghdad and Karbala. Colonel Mansoor found himself having to make difficult decisions about how much force he could use. The insurgents were using religious shrines as their bases, destruction of these shrines would be counterproductive, but using less force than available to him also endangered his soldiers. As he said, "it was the tough kind of trade-off one often faced in counterinsurgency operations—safety of the troops versus excessive collateral damage that could jeopardize the support of the population".³

The book concludes with some reflections about the changing face of war and recommendations for improving the U.S. Army's ability to fight them. There are several good ideas here and you can see how they have been built into to new counter-insurgency publication. I thought the most relevant and telling comment was, "While retaining the capability to conduct major combat operations, the Army must change its culture to embrace missions other than conventional land force combat. The current personnel system, its emphasis on rewarding technical and tactical competence at the expense of intellectual understanding and the broader, deeper grasp of the world in which we live, must adapt to promote those leaders with the skill sets and education needed for the wars we will fight in the years ahead. Effective leaders will be those who can think creatively, lead change, and understand information warfare and asymmetric battlefield—those who are flexible and adaptive."

Endnotes

1. Pge 35
 2. Pge 44 and
 3. Pge320
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