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Team Ninewa Models Successful Civilian-Military Unity of Effort

by Mark Schapiro and Stephen Petzold

Over the past year within the restless province of Ninewa Iraq, the “Team Ninewa” concept was born. This concept is a highly successful model of U.S. civilian-military cooperation that resulted in an unprecedented unity of effort among the State Department and U.S. military goals/objectives in the region. This unity of effort led to tens of millions of dollars in savings on redundant projects and a highly effective use of Defense and State Department funding streams targeted at very specific local communities. Key to this strategy was “thinking small” – de-prioritizing large infrastructure projects in favor of income-generating activities for neglected economic actors among Ninewa’s myriad ethnic groups and business associations. Team Ninewa, which consisted of TF Spartan (2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division), the State Department-led Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), and the Ninewa Reconstruction Cell (NRC), all gathered around a table once per week to discuss, assess and de-conflict all U.S. government assistance and program spending in the province. For these meetings, the PRT was the lead in articulating specific U.S. policy and development goals for the province. TF Spartan would communicate any specific security related goals of the brigade and express any concerns with the potential impact of PRT initiatives on security in the region. These “de-conflicted” objectives would then be communicated to the TF Spartan units for execution throughout the province.

Our unified goals were always based on a clear vision for the province: the vision of Team Ninewa was to work in partnership with the Ninewa Provincial Government and local associations to build economic and governance capacity at the provincial and local levels with an end state of a legitimate, transparent, and representative government capable of delivering essential services, fostering sustainable economic growth, respecting and bolstering rule of law, and providing security for its people. The key Team Ninewa objectives to support this vision were: 1) to coordinate and synchronize capacity-building efforts in association with the Ninewa PRT Provincial Development Strategy and Maturity Model which were consistent with established Iraqi provincial and local government goals and priorities; and 2) combine civilian expertise and military reach into communities to thoroughly assess progress and review programs to ensure that every effort remained consistent with U.S. policy and development goals as expressed by the PRT.

The challenges in Ninewa to achieve this vision and objectives were, and continue to be, tremendous. Ninewa Province is the most diverse and unstable province in Iraq. The Arab-Kurd fault line that runs through it traps numerous vulnerable communities in an unresolved political situation driven by decision-makers outside the province. For the purposes of economic development and reconstruction planning, the Arab-Kurd line also represents a resource divide. South of this line, mostly poor Sunni Arabs have endured four years of a crushing drought with

some modest relief from 2009-2010 rains, and have little agricultural, mineral or other resources to draw from. North of the Arab-Kurd fault line, there is significantly more water, numerous oil fields with ongoing exploration, sufficient winter supplies of kerosene due to imports from the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and higher crop yield in winter 2009-2010. It is within this context that Team Ninewa continued to prepare for a responsible drawdown of United States military forces in 2010 and 2011 and lay the groundwork for long-term U.S. civilian diplomatic engagement, slowly changing the face of the bilateral U.S.-Iraq relationship and educating Iraqis about the peaceful civil affairs value that the military and PRT can bring to the area of operation.

True sustainable economic development, however, cannot occur without political stability at the local, provincial and national levels. Team Ninewa's strategy was to develop programs to build local Iraqi capacity and bridge resource gaps to create the conditions for a political accommodation to occur. Economic and development programs alone though, cannot create peace and reconciliation; they can, however, take some issues of contention off the table and allow the Iraqi government to focus on the larger political solution. Without political accommodation, many of our security and developmental efforts are simply an exercise in building sandcastles at low tide. The alternating waves of security and insecurity in Ninewa over the past six years are the best evidence of this. In this environment, what seems like a good "quick win" idea may actually prove wasteful or harmful to longer-term U.S. interests if that idea is not maintained, developed or expanded upon by local Iraqis. For example, paving a road will help a community today but two or three years later when the road is in disrepair, locals will point to it as an example of a negative U.S. legacy.

Given the political situation in Ninewa, it was critical that we focus creatively on local and provincial Iraqi capacity to plan, manage and maintain projects as well as developing this capacity at the local level. Programs consisted of Iraqi ideas and goals combined with U.S. solutions and expertise, driven by the Department of State-led PRT with full support from TF Spartan and TF Marne. Due to ineffective communication and a weak relationship between rural Ninewa and Mosul and between Mosul and Baghdad, local Iraqis needed U.S. support to get their own system to approve projects and assistance. This lent a governance component to every economic, agriculture and security program in the province, reinforcing the need for the close partnership, communication and unity of effort brought by the Team Ninewa civilian-military model. This support came from USF or PRT Key Leader Engagements (KLE's) at the local level, in Mosul, and in Baghdad. Above all, if a program did not have significant interest and a motivated Iraqi buy-in in the form of vision, financing, labor or supplies, the U.S. interagency funding mechanism decided against supporting it through Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP), Quick Response Funds (QRF) or other USG funding sources.

Included in Task Force Spartan's mission statement was the directive "provide support to the PRT." Due to the effective working and personal relationships between the PRT and TF Spartan, whatever Ninewa PRT needed, TF Spartan provided. In fact, an entire field artillery battalion was tasked by the brigade to provide direct support to the PRT. This support from the 1-9 Field Artillery (FA) Battalion included dedicated movement teams, logistical support, communications support, and staff augmentation for the PRT. As needed, 1-9 FA provided support to enable PRT special requests, such as augmenting the PRT Elections Operations Center during the critical March 2010 Iraq parliamentary elections with a fully operational tactical communications suite which included multiple radios, Blue Force Tracker, and personnel to help

keep track of election observers and ballots. As required, TF Spartan also provides helicopter lift support, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) surveillance, intelligence updates, CERP funds, and CERP project packet development. To insure that the Iraqi government and citizens saw all U.S. government actors speaking as one, the brigade leadership participated in joint engagements with provincial leaders through and with the Ninewa PRT. The days of the military meeting with the Mosul Mayor, provincial councilmen, or governor without the PRT present were over. Most important to the successful relationship between TF Spartan and the Ninewa PRT was the participation in each other's re-occurring meetings – each other's battle rhythms. This insured a level of transparency which allowed for de-confliction of projects and programs between all the U.S. government players in Ninewa, greatly enhancing unity of effort.

One of the first events held between the PRT and TF Spartan was a series of meetings to refine the PRT's "Ninewa Provincial Development Strategy." The Provincial Development Strategy (PDS) proposed a new function for military field units. If capacity building and economic empowerment were the new centerpieces of U.S. policy and development goals for Ninewa, then military units should begin to deemphasize traditional infrastructure assessments – such as the SWEAT assessments every soldier is familiar with – and instead engage in "human mapping" to find and evaluate all local partners who could develop and ultimately manage economic and governance programs. This broadened the Team Ninewa contact base beyond the same small group of leaders we had been relying on for years. This reliance over the years empowered some at the expense of others, creating economic imbalance and growing resentment of the U.S. within certain areas of the population. Thus, the first task of any field commander or civilian in Team Ninewa was to conduct a full human inventory with names and contact information of local NGO's, women's organizations, economic and agricultural associations, media outlets and local business leaders. The brigade supported the PRT in this effort by surging its attached Human Terrain Team (HTT) personnel to the various focus areas throughout Ninewa province.

A cornerstone of the PDS was to think small and rural; building capacity, bridging resource gaps, avoiding perceptions of favoritism, and creating long-term employment projects/programs at the local level with significant Iraqi buy-in in the form of vision, financing, and labor. Several of these small and rural projects were focused in areas vulnerable to violent extremists influence, smuggling, or other activities that supported terrorist financing. For example, in the village of Tawajena, inexpensive drip irrigation systems offered a highly lucrative economic alternative to local farmers, leading to greater reliance on cash crops such as eggplant, melon, tomatoes, and squash. Unlike the government-subsidized and politically sensitive grain sector, cash crops offered the farmer direct control over the price and market demand for their harvest. Six months after the introduction of this drip irrigation program, the insurgent line had shifted away from the village due to the economic alternatives now present.

Programs that create lasting jobs for unemployed males were also a priority. These programs aimed heavily at Ninewa's moribund agricultural sector. Paving a road creates jobs for a few weeks, meets U.S. forces' immediate logistical and counter-insurgency needs, but does not meet Team Ninewa criteria for sustainability and Iraqi management capacity. Instead, using Team Ninewa used its funding to purchase and install greenhouses for Farmer's Associations and Cooperatives which created long-term local jobs and built local confidence and administrative capacity. We no longer agreed to provide 100 percent of the work or investment on a project. We met local Iraqis half way – we provided materials but not labor, and/or we

provide training expertise, but not organization or financing. We would provide the greenhouses, but the Ninewa Directorate General (DG) of Agriculture provided the training. Establishing this “buy-in” was our only way to be certain that our efforts were absorbed and sustained by local cultures and communities. Team Ninewa insisted on seeing the Iraqi’s contribution first. If the input was not there or the government was not willing to provide financing, labor or maintenance, this suggested that it was not a true priority but rather just another money-maker for a local contractor or leader.

Team Ninewa recognized that the engine of true and sustainable economic growth is small and medium enterprise. Agricultural associations continue to be an excellent partner; in most cases, we provided 1-2 greenhouses to an association while the Ninewa DG of Agriculture provided them with training. The association would then lease a greenhouse to a member and purchase a new one once enough income was received from the first. This model combined traditional Iraqi collective culture with an element of profit and market-driven incentive. In the Ninewa Women’s Initiative program, we used State Department Quick Response Funds (QRF) to provide business plan training to the leaders of women’s groups, who then developed small business plans for catering, laundry, sewing, and internet businesses, all ranging in value from \$7,000 to \$10,000. Once the women developed market studies and budgets, we used Department of Defense CERP funds to establish these businesses. These programs were nested with the Brigade’s security plan and often targeted specific vulnerable communities across ethnic and religious lines.

As a result of multiple, reinforcing efforts coordinated and de-conflicted across the province, Team Ninewa was highly successful in strengthening Iraqi civil capacity at the provincial and local levels, supporting Iraqi governance goals, fostering sustainable economic growth, respecting and bolstering rule of law, and assisting the government in providing security for its people. Team Ninewa has been blessed with many skilled members from both the State Department and the U.S. military, but we do not possess all the competencies necessary to provide solutions to every problem. However, by applying the tenets of a targeted effort, consultation with partners, and a shared vision of a responsive Ninewa Government and vibrant economy, we were able to significantly raise the level of civil capacity and economic development in Ninewa Province.

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