

Task Force Patriot and the End of Combat Operations in Iraq

Pat Proctor

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In October 2011, President Obama confirmed that the United States would withdraw its troop presence from Iraq at the end of the year. After an eight-year war fraught with controversy and instability, it's unclear if Iraq will thrive as a country ruled by democratic reform or plunge into sectarian bloodshed once US troops depart. As Pat Proctor, a US Army field artillery lieutenant colonel, writes in this excellent chronicle of his battalion's post-combat operations in Iraq, "We will never know the answer until we leave Iraq and let the Iraqis settle [their] disputes for themselves."

Reconciling conflicts among Iraqis became a chief priority for Proctor's Task Force Patriot (2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery) of the Dragon Brigade (4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division) during its one-year deployment to Salah ad Din province—the economic, intellectual, and cultural center of Sunni Arab Iraq—in October 2009. Task Force Patriot's area of operations was the Tikrit qa'da district, which contained many of the province's influential leaders, and the ad Dawr qa'da area, home to a politically disenfranchised populace and the insurgent group, Jaysh Rijal al Tariq al Naqshabandiyah (JRTN). Rather than plan conventional combat missions to engage and defeat the enemy militarily, Task Force Patriot's campaign plan reflected the doctrine of counterinsurgency—the "new paradigm for US Army operations" adopted to quell the insurgency that resulted after US occupation of Iraq by protecting the populace from the insurgents and addressing their grievances.

"It is difficult to overstate what a departure this thinking was from the traditional ... military planning [established] since the age of Napoleon," Proctor declares. It transformed the military from a boots-in-the-sand fighting force to a coalition of civic-minded peacekeepers responsible for repairing infrastructure and providing humanitarian aid. Proctor shows how painstaking these efforts were and how Task Force Patriot's agenda was upended when Cpl. Tony Carrasco, Jr. was gunned down by enemy fire.

Proctor also relates in sharp detail the alliances Task Force Patriot tried to establish and maintain with the powerful sheikhs, tribal leaders, politicians, military commanders, police officers, and civilians in the region. These relationships were hard-won and ever-shifting. Trust wasn't granted easily, and cooperation was an uncertain, keenly crafted interplay of give-and-take.

Task Force Patriot is not a tedious recitation of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. Proctor weaves intrigue into his matter-of-fact reportage and composes descriptive prose, both of which add a dash of artistry, as illustrated here:

The two worlds of Sheikh Sabah Muntasir Diab al Shimiri very much mirrored the man himself. He was a man who comfortably bore the mantle of social leader, yet he held close to his heart the vices and passion that threatened to destroy him.

Accessible to a general readership and technical enough to satisfy a military-minded audience, Proctor's book is instructive, candid, and thought-provoking.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (December 14, 2011)

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