

OPERATIONAL STUDIES

www.operationalstudies.com

The following paper is based on the author's observations and experience in Afghanistan and Iraq as a military advisor and DoD security contractor from 2002 through 2006, while staying abreast of current operations and incidents through 2007.

CONVOY SECURITY In Semi-permissive War Zones (Iraq & Afghanistan)

**By
Mark V. Lonsdale
Director – Operational Studies**

Copyright © 2007

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

With approximately 160,000 US troops committed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and an even larger number of civilian contractors (estimated at 180,000+), the demand for logistical support is massive. While some military supplies are flown in to US controlled air bases, the vast majority comes by ship, and then overland by truck. On any given day, thousands of tons of essential food, fuel, ammunition, reconstruction materials, and support equipment are on the road and on the move in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, one of the main supply routes (MSR) is from Quetta, Pakistan westward into Kandahar and north to Kabul through some of the most dangerous real estate in that region. Convoys are also moving in and out of Kabul to support a myriad of reconstruction projects and military bases in the far flung reaches of the rural and border areas.

In Iraq, one of the main supply routes comes out of Kuwait, north through An Nasiriyah to Baghdad, and from there further north up to Kirkuk and Mosul. Apart from the military's voracious appetite for fuel and ammunition, the numerous forward operating bases (FOB) must be kept supplied with everything from food and drink to rolls of toilet paper and batteries. The base exchanges must also be kept supplied with all the modern conveniences and luxury items that US military personnel have come to expect – candy, cookies, magazines, souvenirs, toiletries, CDs, and the latest in electronic cameras, laptops, I-pods, and DVD players.

In addition to official military and KBR movements, there are hundreds of additional convoy operations requiring thousands of trucks to support the civilian reconstruction efforts. While most reconstruction projects are Department of Defense (DoD) or Department of State (DoS) funded, the actual projects are run by major US corporations.

To further complicate matters, these major prime contractors will utilize a host of sub-contractors who in turn sub-contract smaller construction and support companies to fulfill various components of the prime contract – all of whom are moving on wheels and on very dangerous roads.

These convoys loaded with vital supplies are the very life-blood of the military and the reconstruction effort. They are also large, relatively slow moving targets for the Iraqi insurgents, al-Qaeda terrorists, and local criminals. Where protective security details (PSD) protecting diplomats and businessmen operate primarily in economic centers close to military bases, convoy escort teams (CET) often find themselves hundreds of miles from city centers and very exposed. Fortunately, the insurgents are also very much out in the open in these areas making them easier to spot and kill.

This brings us to the current situation on the ground which is quite unique in the history of post-conflict occupation and counter insurgency warfare. Even though lessons can be learned from other models such as World War II, Vietnam, Bosnia and Kosovo, the military, reconstruction companies, and security providers are now confronted with a number of quite unique problems.

For one, security providers have been obligated to provide security in what could be considered an active war zone. The missions that security providers are being tasked with in Iraq and Afghanistan were traditionally handled by the military with armored vehicles and heavy weapons supported by quick reaction forces (QRF) and close air support (CAS). Further more, as major corporations compete for the lucrative multi-billion dollar contracts to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan, the sheer volume of security providers running around in armored SUVs is unprecedented in the history of post-war reconstruction efforts.

To meet the government, military and private sector's growing demands for security services, security providers have been forced to violate the most basic tenants of security by establishing **predictable patterns on high profile movements**. On any given day moving on the MSR, dozens of PSDs and CETs are channeled into predictable choke-points, at the International Zone (but still referred to as the Green Zone), Camp Victory, the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), Abu Ghuraib warehouse complex, Taji Military Training Camp (co-located with Camp Cooke logistics base), Balad and Anaconda to the north, and on all the major arteries to points further a field such as Al Asad air base out west, in the heart of insurgent dominated Al Anbar province.

This level of **predictability** creates numerous targets of opportunity for the insurgents and a situation that would under normal circumstances be considered unacceptable in the security industry. One of the first rules of security states that if intelligence indicates that a location is dangerous, simply avoid it. Unfortunately this is not possible in Iraq or Afghanistan. Logistical support must be maintained and supplies delivered, so running convoys on the MSR becomes an unavoidable hazard.

Looking at the classic "Military Model" for convoy escort the army utilizes lorries and tractor-trailer units designed for military use, driven by trained soldiers and Marines, supported by multiple armored escort vehicles armed with heavy machineguns (7.62mm and .50 caliber) and MK19 40mm grenade launchers. The military also has the option of

shutting down major highways and creating exclusion zones, or saturating a high-risk area with additional fighting patrols or calling in close air support.

However, many of these tactical options are not available to the contractor or private security provider. While KBR's logistic convoys carrying critical military supplies are protected by armored military escort units, this protection is not extended to the thousands of other convoy movements traveling on the same roads and under the same conditions. Many reconstruction convoys of 30 to 100 trucks run with little more than three to five lightly armored SUVs and a handful of armed civilian contractors.

THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

Iraq and Afghanistan are definitely not permissive environments but they can be considered semi-permissive environments in that a significant amount of productive work can be achieved, even though contractors do not have total freedom of movement. Civilian contractors know that it is unwise to leave the security of the military bases or secured compounds such as the Green Zone, Palestine and Sheraton Hotels, and Camp Victory without an armed escort and in armored vehicles.

Even with PSDs, elevated threat levels will periodically make movement between specific locations inadvisable. Sound intelligence and an understanding of the current situation should always drive the operational side of the security effort and ground movements. However the situation on the ground can change rapidly making it all but impossible to stay abreast of emerging threats.

Very few companies have the OP-CON or communications infra-structure to identify changes in the threat or traffic choke points though out Iraq or Afghanistan; and then get that time-sensitive information out to their PSDs and CETs on the fly.

After the fall of Baghdad, when US troops were welcomed by the Iraqi people, a massive reconstruction process was launched by the DoD, DoS, USAID, and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), support by several major US construction entities. This was done under the assumption that the peace would hold and the Iraqis would become willing participants in the reconstruction process.

However, as a direct result of civil unrest, ethnic and religious rivalry, and rampant criminal activity, the peace did not last and US military personnel, coalition troops, and foreign contractors became the targets of insurgent and criminal attacks. These attacks were backed by former Saddam loyalists, Fedayeen guerrillas and foreign jihadis; and soon spread to acts of intimidation and violence targeted at Iraqi civilians supporting the reconstruction effort.

The early attacks ranged from direct small arms fire (SAF), to indirect fire rocket and mortar attacks, to roadside IEDs. This then escalated to vehicle-borne car and truck bombs (VBIEDs) driven by suicidal fanatics. Many of the less effective attacks were perpetrated by young, unemployed men paid by former Ba'ath Party Saddam loyalists. The more sophisticated military-type attacks were executed by guerrilla-trained Fedayeen Saddam and foreign Jihadis financed and trained by Wahabbi and Al Qaeda type movements.

As of late March 2004, spurred by the killing and mutilation of four Blackwater contract security personnel in Falloujah, the violence in Iraq rose to a new level. Military and civilian contractors came under frequent attack from not only Saddam loyalists and insurgents, but also radicalized Shi'a militias and religious fundamentalists.

The FOB where the author was working as a DoD security contractor came under 220+ mortar and rocket attacks between March and June 2004, and several Iraqi workers were killed coming to work or driving home.

As the US Marines prepared to enter Falloujah in early April, insurgents launched pre-emptive strikes against US forces in the neighboring town of Ramadi; and simultaneously, the Shi'a militias loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr (aka Mooky) initiated attacks from Sadr City in eastern Baghdad all the way south to Najaf and Karbala. This situation continued to deteriorate as Sadr offered rewards for the killing or capture of coalition soldiers.

THE CHALLENGES FOR CONVOY ESCORT TEAMS (CET)

Before attempting to develop convoy protection procedures or attack counter-measures, it is important to first appreciate the challenges involved in running convoy operations in semi-permissive war zones.

Challenges include:

1. Large slow moving convoys
2. Unarmored trucks, lorries, tractor-trailer units and fuel tankers
3. Poorly trained drivers often from third world countries (US KBR drivers excluded)
4. Movement on highways and major supply routes (MSR)
5. Predictable points of origin in Kuwait, Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, Iran, etc
6. Convoys channeled into known military bases, logistic distribution points, warehouse complexes, and reconstruction projects
7. Wide ranging movement in isolated areas
8. Limited access to military support or Quick Reaction Forces (QRF)
9. Thriving criminal activity in which the drivers may be complicit
10. Drivers communicating with or sympathetic to the insurgents
11. Well established insurgent attack methodologies
12. Poor road conditions and traffic jams
13. Military activity in the AO restricting convoy movements
14. Being fired upon by US and coalition forces
15. Security providers and CET teams of marginal capability
16. An over dependence on local nationals (LN) and third country nationals (TCN) for convoy escort duty.
17. Poor communications networks

These are in addition to the more mundane administrative challenges:

1. Drivers who do not speak English
2. Drivers lacking sufficient documentation
3. Delays crossing border checkpoints
4. Corrupt customs officials
5. Logistics companies making errors in paper work
6. Vehicles running out of fuel, breaking down or becoming lost

7. Drivers refusing to drive along specific routes
8. Departure or turn around delayed by loading logistics
9. Delays at military vehicle checkpoints (VCP)
10. The inability of LNs and TCNs to enter US military bases
11. Security providers lacking the correct badges (CAC, MNF-I, ISAF)
12. Uncooperative bureaucrats at all levels of the supply chain

The only light in all this gloom was the establishment of Logistics Movement Coordination Center (LMCC) in Baghdad, and ISAF cooperation in Afghanistan.

INSURGENT ATTACK METHODOLOGY

The more dangerous regions of Iraq and Afghanistan have turned to classic counter-insurgency guerilla warfare with relatively small numbers of insurgents and fundamentalists utilizing five primary methods of attack.

1. Small arms fire (SAF) with rifles (AK47s, AKMs, AK74s) and light machineguns (RPK, RPD, PKM). These are usually hit and run type attacks or linear ambushes allowing the shooters to melt back into their neighborhoods.
2. Attacks on buildings and vehicles with RPGs (rocket propelled grenades). Fortunately a significant percentage miss the target or fail to detonate.
3. Mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and roadside booby-traps. Definitely one of the biggest problems in Iraq with the shrapnel from improvised artillery shells proving to be devastating.
4. Indirect fire mortar and rocket attacks, often from 3 – 5km with 60- 82mm mortars, but in some instances from distances of up to 18km with old 122 mm and 127mm rockets.
5. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) driven by suicide bombers, frequently directed at military and police checkpoints or recruit depots but also at PSD and CET teams. A VBIED can also be the precursor for a SAF ambush.

Of these, the IEDs pose the greatest threat when moving about in vehicles, while mortar and rocket attacks pose the greatest risk to FOBs. Roadside IED attacks have become a depressingly routine part of life in Iraq with multiple attacks on various MSRs every day.

RPGs are also quite prolific in post-war Iraq so are often used in attacks on vehicles and convoys. One only has to look to CNN or FOX to see the effect of an RPG hit on a fuel tanker or truck. The RPG-7 is a reloadable, simple to operate, shoulder-fire weapon that can be loaded and fired by one man. The RPG launches an armored-piercing projectile with an effective range of 300 meters on moving targets, 500 meters on static targets, and has a burn-out range of just over 900 meters. Fortunately, the insurgents have not demonstrated any high degree of proficiency or accuracy with these weapons but they do occasionally score a hit with tragic consequences.

In addition to direct attacks, insurgents and fundamentalists have engaged in numerous kidnappings of Iraqi citizens, foreign coalition workers, soldiers and truck drivers. In some instances the victims have been killed; in some they have been released; and in one the victim was able to escape to safety.

INSURGENT TARGET SELECTION

Many of the attacks launched by both the insurgents and the fundamentalists are **planned attacks** but their victims are often **random targets** of opportunity. Although the terrorists' greatest animosity is directed towards US and coalition occupation troops, the military presents a more difficult target to hit than the police and civilian population. This includes civilian convoys and private security contractors.

Attacks continue against the Green Zone, military convoys and military bases, which are usually considered hardened targets, but the most devastating attacks are launched against softer targets such as police stations, recruitment centers, marketplaces, government officials, government offices, NGO buildings, and convoys.

The chance of being attacked when moving between points in Baghdad or Kabul is as much a matter of chance as design. The same is true for any of the major MSR that run through "Indian country." IEDs are often placed and ambushes staged for the first or most suitable target of opportunity to come down the road. However, the two roads in Iraq that get hit with regularity are Route Irish between the Green Zone and BIAP, and Route Tampa, the MSR that runs from the Kuwait border north through Baghdad, then up through Balad, Samarra, Tikrit, Baiji and Mosul, then finally to the Turkish border at Zakuh. Large convoys also run south down the same route every day. In Afghanistan, things get interesting when convoys push down through Ghazni and Zabul into Kandahar and Helmand province.

The obvious problem for the convoys and CETs is that once they leave their point of origin, it does not take a rocket scientist to calculate where and when they will be passing any given point on the MSR. In addition, as a convoy passes through one area, an insurgent – what the Brits call a "dicker" – can call ahead to his cohorts waiting in ambush or preparing the IED. To further compound the problem of predictability, a convoy running out to make a delivery in the morning, will often return down the same route in the late afternoon or evening.

ATTACK ANALYSIS

The attack on the Blackwater CET in March 2004 was a rude awakening for many security contractors, not just Blackwater management. In this instance the CET was reportedly sent out under manned, under gunned, in soft-skinned vehicles, and without a route reconnaissance team. (*This incident is still under investigation and litigation*) The Marine commander responsible for this military area of operation (AO) was also unaware of the contractors' movement and route so was not well positioned to mount a QRF. The results were a tragic loss of life (*one a close friend of the author*) and an immediate re-evaluation of all PSD / CET SOPs and movements.

In this case there is no indication that the team or their convoy was selectively targeted by the insurgents. It was in all likelihood a case of the attackers setting an ambush in an ideal location, such as a chokepoint, congested area, checkpoint or overpass, and this team unfortunately driving into the kill zone. In this and several other cases, it can be noted that the modified civilian SUVs used for escort are simply not up to the level of concentrated fire or method of attack they are exposed to. It could be argued that the Blackwater team was slaughtered because the other vehicles in the convoy were unable

to come to their assistance, but in all likelihood they were killed by the initial burst of fire or overpressure from an RPG. (*Blackwater has since developed a purpose-built armored vehicle called the Grizzly*)

Other companies have been hit even harder than Blackwater losing over a dozen security contractors and drivers in each ambush. However, after all such cases, the PSCs have continued to run operations in the face of an on-going insurgent campaign. Even if the location and timing of a specific attack is unknown, the threat has been identified and accepted, as is the case with all CET operations in Iraq. So where standard security doctrine is based on **risk avoidance**, Iraq and Afghanistan have driven security providers into a policy of **risk acceptance**. For some private security companies (PSC) the level of acceptable risk is higher than for others and has become known euphemistically as “pain tolerance”.

This then raises the question or whether the current security tactics, procedures and equipment are sufficient to meet the identified and accepted threat. Obviously even armored SUVs are not designed to survive a direct coordinated attack with military-grade weaponry.

So with **risk acceptance** comes the obligation by the security providers to supply their PSDs, CETs and clients with the best of service and equipment at all levels to meet the identified threat. Since the threat is military-grade attacks, the defensive measures must be equally robust. The ever changing nature of the threat may also require an equally flexible approach to tactics and methodology.

TACTICAL METHODOLOGY

In addition to the military model, there are basically three tactical philosophies or methodologies at play with security companies currently running convoy escort operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

1. In the early days of reconstruction in Iraq – late 2003 thru early 2004 – many PSCs were running ultra-low key “Low Profile model” CETs utilizing locally purchased SUVs, soft-skinned vehicles, and even taxis driven by local drivers. It must be understood that this approach was not just a tactical decision but also a fiscal one. Many of these new start-up companies simply did not have the financial resource to invest in a fleet of new armored vehicles and gun trucks at \$150,000 a piece so were running “guerrilla security operations”. However, while benefiting from very low profile movements in unobtrusive vehicles on PSD operations around Baghdad and Kabul, they were less successful at high profile convoy operations.
2. At the other end of the spectrum are the high-profile movements with multiple armored SUVs and gun trucks, usually large American Chevy Suburbans, Ford Expeditions and Excursions, or heavy duty pick-up trucks. The drivers and shooters are all fully kitted with visible plate body armor, load-bearing equipment, additional ammunition, FBG stun grenades, and automatic weapons – mostly M4s, AK47s or SAWs (squad automatic weapons). This is the “US Model” that is common with US governmental and military PSDs and CETs but quickly became

the norm for their British counterparts. The tactical advantage that these teams derive from this approach is not only overwhelming firepower but also a certain deterrent factor. This would be the case where one or two insurgents may opt not to attack a large “fighting formation” when they can wait for an easier and softer target.

3. The third methodology is the “Corporate Model” which falls between these first two. Security companies whose core competence was in western executive protection and risk management were employing a somewhat low-profile approach while still driving identifiable up-armored fleet SUVs. The PSDs and CETs were armed but not obviously so and the companies’ weapons policies were more restrictive. Pistols and rifles were kept concealed and security personnel wore lighter armor and no visible load-bearing vests. This equated to less ammunition, less fighting capability, but a more “politically correct” image. This approach could be considered “semi-tactical”. Unfortunately it has neither the deterrence of full para-military firepower nor the safety of totally “low profile” movements.
4. The fourth approach that was not being utilized by private security in 2004 through 2006 was the “Military Model” which would require up-armored Humvees, light armored vehicles (LAVs), or APCs equipped with crew-served weapons systems such as the GPMG, M240G, MK19 and the M2 BMG .50 caliber. This model has been used by private security in Afghanistan and has been considered by several security contractors in Iraq – particularly for convoy escort duty in remote areas. This is the only model that offers immediate and aggressive counter-force and suppressive fire for an ambush break-contact drill.

CORPORATE PHILOSOPHY

The antithesis of good tactics and sound military war fighting doctrine would be corporate image and social responsibility. Western security companies tend to cultivate a corporate image of impeccable professionalism and expertise in the fields of high-end risk management and international security. They have also gone to great lengths to distance themselves from any association with private military corporations (PMCs) and para-military operations such as Executive Outcome (EO) and Sandline, even though both demonstrated considerable capability in support of stabilization efforts in Africa.

British companies in particular established themselves as the foremost respected organizations in the international security field, earning this reputation through detailed and professional intelligence collection, threat analysis and identification, and **risk avoidance**. Unfortunately elevated risk is a part of daily life in Iraq and Afghanistan that realistically cannot be avoided, only minimized.

If security companies were to be true to the concept of risk avoidance, they would simply advise their clients not to come to Iraq. But in the current context, reconstruction operations have moved past that point or option. A few PSCs brought to Iraq very professional operations with first-class personnel and equipment, along with communications, intelligence and logistical support. But was there room for improvement? The answer must always be most definitely! As the situation and threats change on the ground, security equipment and procedures must also change.

The CET model that was being run in early 2004, for example, of two or three vehicles with a driver and a shooter in each was grossly inadequate falling far short of the requirements to secure even a small convoy of even 10 trucks. Yet in 2005 PSCs were still running CETs that were little more than a vehicle in front to lead the way and a follow vehicle to keep the convoy closed up or spot any break-downs.

A number of PSCs also applied the tried and proven methodologies for **corporate security in a permissive environment** to security operations in a more high threat **semi-permissive war zone**. They followed the time-proven security doctrine of intelligence collection and risk analysis, and when the threat indicated, shutting down all movements for the safety of the client or convoy.

While this philosophy and methodology cannot be faulted from a risk management standpoint, especially where the client absolutely does not want their employees or drivers injured, kidnapped or killed. However, it became evident that several contractors and clients working in Iraq were willing to raise their threshold for risk (pain tolerance) to have more freedom of movement and in an effort to become more productive.

In some cases, it has been noted by reconstruction contractors that a **risk avoidance** policy and refusal to run PSDs and CETs when the threat level warrants, has been considered a hindrance to the client's work output and movements. However, it must also be noted that these same clients may be somewhat uninformed as to the actual threat and dynamics at play. They focus only on their immediate needs without considering the very real risks that intelligence may have identified.

It has been observed that the construction clients and logistics companies appeared not to care how risky it was to make a convoy run. Their focus was on their contractual obligations to deliver goods with less regard for the trucks or drivers. Their thinking was more fiscal which clouded the decision process and flew contrary to sound security thinking. Never-the-less, they were willing to go with any security provider who was willing to make the run, even if that provider did not have the intelligence and communications resources of a professional PSC – and even if that security provider's CETs were enjoying a run of success derived **more from luck than planning**.

WORKING IN IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN

Where most security providers **accept the risk** of movements in this current **high threat** environment, other PSCs continue to employ their time-honored philosophy of **risk avoidance**. But again, it must be noted that risk avoidance in an insurgent war zone is all but impossible if movements are designed to support an acceptable level of productive work for the clients.

PSCs may lose ground with clients when they shut down CET movements while other provider's make successful runs at the same time and on the same MSRs. Granted, a big part of a successful run is **luck**, especially when the movement is made oblivious to elevated threat indicators and lacking sound intelligence. Since statistically the probability of an attack on a specific convoy, on any specific road, at any specific time, is low, these more aggressive teams end up earning a reputation as being gutsy not foolhardy (in the eyes of the client).

However, the laws of probability can also work against a security provider. The bigger the footprint, the more numerous the convoys, and the greater the number of CET runs, the higher the probability that one of these teams will be **unlucky**. This is not a product of poor planning or bad tactics, but simply **bad luck** when a convoy drives into an opportunistic ambush or IED attack.

RISK ACCEPTANCE

Instead of risk avoidance, the working model for other companies in Iraq and Afghanistan seems to be **risk acceptance & risk identification**, and then an attempt to adapt their tactics to suit the mission. This is done by either venturing out in full battle mode with the most powerful vehicles and weapons available, or by going low profile and trying to slip through unnoticed. Both these tactics have obvious strengths and weaknesses.

Even the best armored SUV is still vulnerable to RPG and IED attacks, but the weight and power may carry them thru the kill zone to get the vehicle off the X. But this does not help the large, unarmored trucks and unprotected drivers in the convoy. Heavily armored SUVs also deny the opportunity for return fire or aggressive counter-force except for ramming – thus the birth of the armored gun truck for CET operations. With an exposed heavy machinegun in an armored box in the back of the pick-up, the gunner can now engage 360 degrees and has an elevated position of advantage (even though still exposed to hostile fire)

Those traveling in low profile mode are extremely vulnerable if their cover is blown or they are caught in heavy traffic. The heavy low-slung sedans, while they may handle better on the open road, are just not suited to curb jumping, ramming or going off-road in exigent circumstance. The armor in local vehicles is also of unknown origin and quality.

On the personnel side, going in with a CET that is kitted-up for a fight with full body armor, state-of-the-art weapons, multiple accessible magazines, and stun grenades, is not only preferable to the shooters, it also gives the convoy drivers a greater sense of security. This “look and feeling” of security cannot be underestimated when dealing with a clients’ perception and sense of well being. Some clients have been sold on the heavy “US model” that they have seen around town with companies such as Blackwater, and there are times when this model is the more preferred option.

Again, and at the other end of the spectrum, utilizing local Iraqi drivers and shooters has both benefits and risks. The benefits being that they can drive around without drawing attention, they know the streets, can run route reconnaissance, and may be less likely to be attacked. The risks lie in their basic lack of training and experience and the potential for betrayal. If this model is to be used, then thorough vetting and training is essential.

There has also been observed considerable disparity in the kit issued by various PSCs to their CET security personnel. Where LNs or TCNs may be issued an old AK47 and a few magazines, more professional western teams will have state-of-the-art level IV body armor, modern M4 weapons, SAWs, and load-bearing vests chocked with magazines, radios, GPS, and grenades.

Training is another issue. It would be unheard of in the military special operations community to send operators into a hostile environment without the opportunity to zero and become familiar with their personal weapons; or to be told to procure weapons locally. When some PSC personnel rotate back in country, they may often be issued different weapons to the ones they carried on their previous deployment. This highlights the need for a professional approach to weapons and equipment, and the need for permanent range facilities for formal and informal weekly test-firing, zeroing and training.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS & SOLUTIONS

One of the fundamental principals of tactical operations is **flexibility** – and applies equally to CET security operations. This includes flexibility in equipment load, flexibility in manning, flexibility in mobility, flexibility in tactics, and most important of all, flexibility in thinking. However, some PSCs in Iraq appear to be following one institutionalized **doctrinal approach** to security operations in general. If this approach or model is based on corporate security operations in a permissive environment, it is definitely not the best model for Iraq and Afghanistan.

After the first attacks in late 2003, PSC personnel were quick to realize that 9mm primary weapons such as the MP5 were inadequate in an open ambush scenario; a lesson that had to be re-learned from the SAS Regiment's experience in Northern Ireland. This necessitated the adoption of AK47s which was a significant departure from the western corporate image. Similarly, other aspects of the low-key corporate security model were found to be not applicable to operations in Iraq.

A good example of this was where most of the security providers were running a minimum of 5-vehicle CETs, others were still running 2-vehicle movements. A 2-vehicle CET would be the minimum in any **routine** operation in the US or Europe, but Iraq is considerably **more risky** than routine. Having two or three additional heavily armed vehicles is essential for fighting, blocking and ramming, to shield the trucks and drivers, to supply cover-fire for a break-contact drill, or a cross-deck hot extraction.

The best argument against 2 or 3-vehicle CET operations is where one CET vehicle is disabled in an ambush. Do the remaining CET vehicles come to the assistance of the disabled vehicle or is their primary mission to shepherd the convoy out of the kill zone. There needs to be a sufficient number of CET vehicles to do both. At least one can assist the disabled vehicle by laying down cover-fire while pushing, towing or cross-decking; while the other three can keep the convoy moving off the X.

PSCs need to adopt a tactical and flexible approach to CET operations to best match the changing threat and to meet the needs of the client. Where in some circumstance a low profile 5-vehicle CET may be appropriate, in others, a 6 or 10-vehicle CET with full war-fighting load and gun trucks may be the wiser choice.

This comes back to one of the most basic principles of tactical planning – **matching the force to the mission**. If the force is too big it becomes slow and vulnerable; but if it is too small it is not able to defend itself or even break contact with a determined enemy.

There are a number of factors that should be considered in the manning for convoy escort operations, to include:

1. Number of trucks, lorries & overall length of convoy (With a minimal 100-meter spacing a 30-truck convoy with CETs will extend over two miles)
2. Relative value of the load (Do the bad guys want the contraband, particularly loads such as fuel or cigarettes?)
3. Vulnerability of the loads (example: fuel tankers)
4. Length of the planned movement (Two hours or two days)
5. Experience of the truck drivers (can they drive fast and stay on route?)
6. Prior corruption issues with drivers
7. Armament of the CET vehicles (Heavier machineguns can cover larger arcs of fire and longer ranges)
8. Experience of the CET security personnel (Less experienced teams should be augmented by more vehicles and operators)
9. Time of day and predictability of the convoy run
10. Frequency and timing of attacks on specific MSRs (Routes Irish and Tampa)
11. Prior threats or attacks directed against a specific company's trucks
12. Inter-tribal rivalry derived from running trucks and drivers from one region through a rival group's area
13. Road conditions and choke points
14. Proximity to FOBs and availability of a military QRF in a timely manner
15. CASEVAC options
16. Current Intelligence & Threat Assessments

In implementing this type of approach, the **protection package** may be flexible, but the basic equipment, weapons and contact drills remain standardized. However, when stepping up to this next level of CET operations, it may require additional in-country training to bring all the individual operators up to speed. Major US contractors are running their PSD personnel through theater-specific training before deploying to Iraq. The British companies are also making their in-country training more robust to match the elevated threats. However, few run training for CET teams since it was not a contract requirement.

There is a collateral advantage to more robust CET operations and that is confidence for the actual team members. Virtually everyone working PSD and CET is former military or SWAT so has had the experience of kitting up in full war-fighting load for an operation. There is a routine and ritual that brings the team together and creates the right mindset for the impending risky operation. This same ritual and behavior pattern has been observed with several PSD/CET teams in Iraq as they kit up for a hazardous run. It has also been observed that the clients and truck drivers are not only fascinated by this pre-deployment ritual, they appear to gain assurance from knowing they are traveling under the protection of professional war-fighters and not just bodyguards.

PRACTICAL & FISCAL LIMITATIONS

There is however a number of practical and fiscal hurdles that needs to be negotiated when moving to **more flexible force packaging**. The first practical consideration is the need for a tactical operations center (TOC) that is above and beyond a routine business communication and coordination center. A CET TOC would require that the operations manager have a number of resources on-hand or on stand-by for deployment. Only by having these people and vehicles on immediate stand-by can the operations manager

match the security to the threat in an often rapidly changing environment. This would require some form of ready room or holding area from which CET teams and QRFs could be launched.

On the fiscal level, this more flexible force packaging creates problems in pricing and billing the client. The cost of a specific convoy movement would be unpredictable since the CET security package would be selected just before the operation based on best intelligence and the operations manager's judgment. In some cases the client would receive a 5-vehicle CET with 10 operators, but on others, an 8-vehicle CET with 24 operators (usually a mix of internationals, TCNs and LNs).

So even though this may be the optimum method it may be impractical for fiscally conservative clients unless a contract or memorandum of understanding (MOU) is in place that allows the PSC operations manager to ratchet up the security package when specific conditions were in place. The most basic of these is a ratio of convoy trucks to CET vehicles, for example one in five – for every 5 lorries there is a CET vehicle imbedded in the convoy. So as the client adds trucks, the PSC is authorized to add CET teams.

AIR OPERATIONS

Another option that is being under utilized in Iraq and Afghanistan is helicopter supported operations. In both the construction and the security industries in the United States and other countries, helicopters have become a regular and daily part of operations. Clients landing at major airports are routinely moved to corporate centers or job sites by helicopter, by-passing both traffic congestion and ground threats. Aircraft are also used for site surveys and pipeline inspections.

Helicopters or fixed wing aircraft could be used in Iraq and Afghanistan for route reconnaissance, traffic reports, aerial surveillance of high-risk areas, as gun ships in the event of an attack, and CASEVAC in the aftermath. But again, this creates issues with cost, maintenance and the risks associated with flying in military airspace – all beyond the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSION

The threat levels in Iraq, and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan, have increased considerably since 2004, and can be expected to continue to increase in the immediate future. Even though the latest surge appears to be having some traction in Baghdad, Iraq and Afghanistan will not become safe permissive environments for foreign contractors any time soon. While some contractors enjoy the security of the Green Zone and US military FOBs, the convoy operators are doomed to be out on the highways presenting very attractive targets to the insurgents.

While STTU and Operational Studies have developed a number of effective tactics, techniques, and procedures for convoy escort and PSD operations in high risk environments, they cannot be presented in this paper which will be circulated in open forum. It is sufficient to say that professional convoy security is a combination of good intelligence, effective long range communications, well equipped personnel and vehicles,

rigorous training, and an aggressive, rehearsed counter-force capability when all else fails. Reconstruction contractors, security providers and logistics companies should also ensure that their truck drivers have the necessary training and personal protective equipment (PPE) to maximize their survivability in the inevitable attacks.

– Mark V. Lonsdale

Copyright © OS 2007