



Task Force Patriot and the End of Combat Operations in Iraq

Pat Proctor

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Task Force Patriot tells the story of an artillery-turned-infantry battalion that arrived in Iraq in late summer 2009 to take over as the last US combat force to occupy Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit.

Iraq in 2009 was a strange netherworld, not quite war but not yet peace. The country teetered on the threshold of great change--the impending national elections and the promised withdrawal of all US combat forces. These changes would usher in either an era of irreversible stability or a return to the sectarian carnage that nearly destroyed Iraq in 2006.

Task Force Patriot faced determined resistance on the battlefield, including a shadowy order of Sufi militants that fought to restore Saddam's Ba'ath Party and the still very dangerous remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq. They also faced resistance from squabbling Sunni politicians and Ba'ath Party subversives operating from within the Iraqi government. Task Force Patriot also had to navigate the competing military and state department visions for the endgame in Iraq. At the same time, as adjacent units redeployed ahead of President Obama's 31 August 2010 deadline to end combat operations, Task Force Patriot expanded to cover an area the size of New Jersey containing over a million Iraqis.

Despite resistance from insurgents, intransigent Iraqi politicians, and, occasionally, the US interagency team, Task Force Patriot found itself in a position to not only improve conditions in its area, but solve the last unsettled problem of the Iraq war, the sectarian divide. Task Force Patriot, through the confluence of lucky circumstances and innovative thinking, had stumbled upon a unique approach--a combination of hardball politics, economic investment, and a nuanced application of force--that could potentially end Sunni separatism in Iraq.

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