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HIIDE™ and Seek: Protecting the People by Building the Database

Jeff Emanuel

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In a move to advance the Iraq war to a high tech war, America now uses a biometric recognition system that identifies the enemy unequivocally. FSM Contributing Editor Jeff Emanuel, currently embedded with the U.S. military on the front lines in Iraq, details this exciting battleground asset.

HIIDE™ and Seek: Protecting the People by Building the Database

By Jeff Emanuel

SALMAN PAK, IRAQ – Despite its many negatives, one benefit to the military of a lengthy, fluid war is the advance and improvement in battlefield equipment and technology which are fielded to meet its rapidly changing combat and security needs. Though the words of a certain former Secretary of Defense – "You go to war with the Army you have" – still do (and always will) hold true, the technological arsenal deployed by the US military in its quest not only to keep its soldiers safe, but also to combat terror and to establish the peace in the current long war, is ever-growing, with more useful assets being deployed with the soldiers all the time.

One such technological asset now being used in Iraq is the HIIDE™ (Hand-held

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Interagency Identity Detection Equipment) system, a biometric identification database through which soldiers can quickly input and access the name, age, address, religious sect, birthplace, fingerprints, retinal information, and facial photograph of any individual who has been previously entered into the system and uploaded to the database's mainframe.

The system is important enough to the overall mission in Iraq that General William Casey, the Army's Chief of Staff, has been checking in with battlefield commanders on his current tour through Iraq, inquiring about the availability and the functionality of the new handheld biometric devices.

"The world's first hand-held, multi-modal (Iris, Finger, Face) enrollment and recognition device," according to the company's (SecuriMetrics, Inc.) website, "the HIIDE™ was developed for the US Department of Defense and other government agencies." Last August, the DoD signed a \$10 million contract with SecuriMetrics, and the HIIDE system is now being used with increasing frequency – and success – in Iraq.

The system is not without its flaws. For example, until the data is transferred by hardwire uplink to a mainframe computer, the identities input into any one HIIDE device are useless to anybody other than that specific device's operator. However, with each identity that is entered into the system and uploaded, the main database becomes ever more formidable as a tool to assist not only in identification, but, in the case of its primary use, either in the conviction or in the exoneration of individuals suspected of wrongdoing.

"You can see it in some folks' faces," said Captain Rich Thompson, commander of Baker Company 1-15 (3rd Infantry Division). "They see that now we've got them in our system, and that knowledge may make them think twice before engaging in any criminal or terrorist activity in the future."

The people who are primarily targeted for input into the biometric system fall into two general categories: suspected insurgents, and Iraqi law enforcement personnel. When 'persons of interest' are questioned in incidents of crime or terrorism, for example, they are entered into the database – therefore, even if there is not enough evidence for the coalition (or for the Iraqi police) to hold and to prosecute them, their information will be on file should they be connected to a criminal incident in the future (whether it be by a witness recognizing them, or a fingerprint being found at the scene).

Law enforcement officials, who are included in the system for multiple reasons, sometimes require some convincing before submitting to the idea of American soldiers – who are supposed, in their minds, to be their equal partners – fingerprinting and photographing them for a coalition database.

"We tell them that we're doing it to protect them," Staff Sergeant Cory West, platoon sergeant for Baker Company 1-15's 3rd Platoon, told me. "And it's true.

If we take fire from an area, and we move in and apprehend people there, and test them for gunpowder or explosives residue, and a guy comes up positive, if he's in the system then we can check and see that he's a National Policeman carrying an AK[-47] around all day.

Also, we have his fingerprints, so if we find the weapon used against us, and his aren't on it, then it shows that he didn't do it, so it protects him against being wrongly arrested.

In order to soften the feeling of suspicion naturally aroused in the NPs by the coalition demand that they submit to being entered in such a database, soldiers often refer to the HIIDE as simply a 'camera,' and the National Police are simply asked to pose for a 'picture,' before they are subsequently asked to provide their fingerprints and other information for input. This tends to help matters, as the NPs – like most Iraqis with whom I have come into contact on my trips here – absolutely love being photographed.

Regardless of the tack taken by American soldiers seeking to enter the

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policemen around them into the database, the Iraqis tend to go along willingly in the end – a result helped along, no doubt, by the easy, almost jovial relationship that some of the more clever soldiers have built up with their National Police counterparts.

However, under that good-natured exterior is a distrust by many soldiers of the Iraqi NPs, whose members have long had a reputation for being influenced by radical cleric Muqtada al Sadr and his Jaisch al Mahdi, and for persecuting Sunni populations under their charge.

So, as the soldiers enter each policeman and each suspected insurgent into the coalition's biometric database, they do so with the knowledge that they might be collecting evidence that will exonerate an innocent individual – or that might help link that person to a future crime or attack, potentially helping the Iraqi courts find that person guilty, and thus taking another hardened terrorist off the streets of Iraq.

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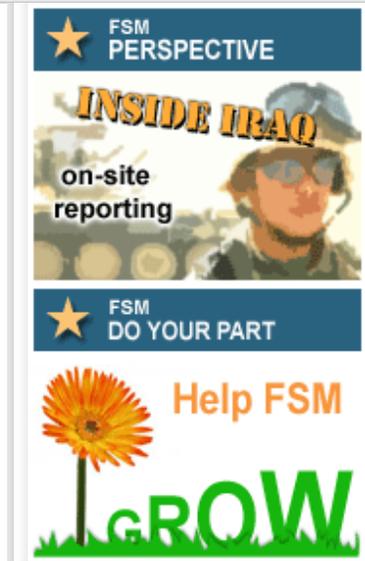
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