

Tactical Decision Game #05–2

Children Bearing Gifts

by Andrew H. Hershey

Situation

You are the 1st Squad leader, 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Your battalion has recently taken over the area of responsibility (AOR) from a U.S. Army battalion operating in east central Iraq, a country in which the dictatorial regime was terminated by U.S. and coalition forces. However, insurgent and mercenary fighters remain as active combatants.

Your AOR is in an urban environment characterized by densely but haphazardly arranged mud brick houses of one and two stories with flat roofs, with the occasional taller building—usually a mosque or other religiously associated structure. The main roads are paved and two lanes wide. Side roads are also paved but only one and a half lanes wide. In addition, there are numerous narrow dirt alleyways only suitable for foot traffic.

The enemy you face wears no standardized military uniform and often appears in civilian dress, uses Soviet-era style infantry weapons (AK-47s, light machineguns, and rocket propelled grenades), and has the occasional command of 82mm mortars and 12.7mm machineguns. Their main tactic is the ambush, initiated by tripwire or command detonated improvised explosive device. The enemy rarely stands to fight, even after such ambushes. When they do it is often the signal of a major engagement. S-2 (intelligence) believes such battles center around religious sites.

The U.S. Army unit operating prior to your arrival had been relatively successful in matters of civilian affairs and civil-military relations. They had initiated a “weapons buy back program,” paying on a sliding scale in U.S. dollars for each weapon turned in depending upon its lethality. Despite such gains, the AOR still had a share of insurgent attacks. Currently, your platoon is on its second patrol. You are moving from south to north, your squad on the left flank, 2d Squad in the center with the command element, and 3d Squad on the right. You have only your organic weapons and are in radio contact with the other squads and command element, though such contact is not always 100 percent due to the urban environment.

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The 2-hour patrol is broken by the sound of yelling and screaming kids coming at you from your left through an alley. You turn to see four young boys, 8 to 10 years old, each with different types of ammunition. One boy has a belt of 12.7mm around his neck; two boys hold 82mm mortar rounds like dead fish, from their fin-tails (you note one is fused); and to your horror, the fourth clasps a grenade, spoon in place, like a dead frog, but from your angle you cannot see signs of the pin.

At this instant there is the sound of an explosion, and a large dust cloud forms to your front. “Sergeant,” yells your 1st Fire Team leader, “Watson is down hard. Perez is hit too, but maybe not as bad.” One kid drops his mortar round and flees, followed by the kid with the 12.7mm. Then, AK-47 fire erupts from a nearby building behind you.

Requirement

What now, Sergeant? In a time limit of 45 seconds, determine what actions you would take, what orders you would issue, and what reports, if any, you would make.

