

A Soldier's Guide to Iraq

It's Friday in Baghdad and a U.S. Army major wants to know what local reaction would be if he ordered his troops to blockade a mosque. In this fictional scenario, the officer doesn't even have to know that Friday is the Muslim day of prayer. The computer he types his question into knows this for him.

Aptima, a software company in Woburn, Massachusetts, is developing a program for the U.S. Department of Defense that aims to put the wisdom of an old Iraq hand at the fingertips of American soldiers who may not know Shiite from Sunni. Dubbed ACUMEN, for anticipatory culture-based urban modeling environment, the software program could be in the field in 18 months, says Michael Paley, Aptima's vice president for government programs.

The company recently won a \$400,000 contract from the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to deliver a prototype of ACUMEN. DARPA's stated mission is to pursue military technology where big rewards offset high risks. In the Pentagon's budget of \$419 billion, \$400,000 hardly represents a risk, but for Aptima a successful product could be worth millions. Aptima has 85 employees, and had revenues of \$13 million in 2004. A major test of ACUMEN's strengths will begin this spring when computer programmers load

the software with data from past conflicts. ACUMEN's forecasts will be compared to the outcomes of actual events.

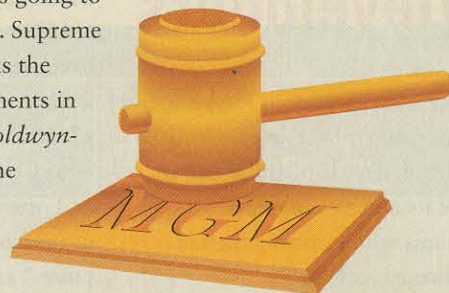
ACUMEN's brains will be a broad range of data culled by foot soldiers acting as cultural anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and geographers. Many of ACUMEN's underpinnings come from the computer science lab of Kathleen Carley, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Ms. Carley says ACUMEN will never be able to make specific predictions based on single events, but it will bring a measure of cultural savvy to overtired and stressed soldiers.

Given the Pentagon's admitted miscalculations concerning the Iraq war, from the absence of weapons of mass destruction to the ferocity of the insurgency, one wonders if U.S. Army majors would even be in Baghdad today if ACUMEN had been up and running when the war was still on the drawing board. **RH**

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JURISPRUDENCE: Oral Arguments

The file-sharing war is going to the big dogs. The U.S. Supreme Court set March 29 as the day it will hear arguments in *Grokster v. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*. Lawyers for the movie studio will maintain that



peer-to-peer (P2P) companies are responsible for the copyright violations of users. The case comes to the Supreme Court after an August ruling in a San Francisco federal appeals court came down against MGM. A spot in the courtroom when the justices hear arguments is a hotter item than tickets to an advance screening of *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*. Some P2P supporters are planning on camping out in front of the courthouse the night before to snag a seat.

EVENTS: Nerd Alert

Behind the thin veneer of celebrity, the broadcasting industry has always been a refuge of truly hard-core techies. Just drop by the audio-visual club of the nearest university if you need proof. So it makes sense that tech is always a big deal at the

National Association of Broadcasters' annual conclave. Visit Las Vegas between April 16-21 and AMD's Hector Ruiz will lead a "showcase" of artists from film, broadcasting, and music who are using technology to do their work.

LEGISLATION: Spammers Beware

Wireless spammers, you are running out of time. Living up to its end of the CAN-SPAM act of 2003, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission published a list of verboten domain names. Beginning in early March any spammers sending unbidden messages to an address with a domain on the list risk incurring an \$11,000 fine per infraction. To view the list, go to fcc.gov/cgb/policy/DomainNameDownload.html. **RH**

