Bil Janoob: Multi-National Division-South Security Force Assistance

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Task Force Mountain assumed responsibility for Coalition Forces (CF) in Multi-National Division-Center in June, 2008. Upon the completion of its tour, the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) – now as Multi-National Division-South – oversaw nine provinces encompassing the entire southern portion of Iraq. Within these provinces, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) included nine Provincial Directorates of Police (PDoP) of the Iraqi Police Service (IPS), three Iraqi Army (IA) divisions, three National Police (NP) brigades, and three regional Directorates of Border Enforcement along both the Saudi Arabian and Iranian borders.

Through this collection of observations regarding teaching / coaching / mentoring the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), we intend to provide a holistic view of ISF professionalization endeavors in MND-S. We do not focus on a specific ISF component, but rather generalize to cover the IA, the NP, the IPS, and the Department of Border Enforcement.

Coalition Forces (CF) operations in the sovereign Republic of Iraq changed significantly with the implementation of the Security Agreement. The primacy of CF for both operations and national decision making yielded to elected Iraqi officials and ISF leaders regarding both political and operational decisions. The significant transformation from having CF "in the lead" with a token attempt to "put an Iraqi face" on operations has developed into fully Iraqi-led and inspired endeavors. In effect, CF now serve in a "supporting" instead of "supported" role.

The change to the operational environment required aggressive endeavors by CF leaders to set the conditions for Iraqi partners' success. This does not mean that the CF must acquiesce to every Iraqi concept. It does require that the CF both understands **and** appreciates the nuances of the Iraq operational environment. The key to assisting the goals of the Republic of Iraq – particularly the ISF – lies in developing influence with ISF partners.

We believe that the key operational demand in Iraq is developing cultural intelligence within CF partnership units. Cultural intelligence is a broad term that denotes gaining the ability to work in different cultures with a minimum of friction. The friction – often caused by cultural ignorance – threatens both relationships and force protection. This is primarily because the two are largely intertwined. BCTs may improve their capabilities by developing intellectual capacities, honing social skills, and through regular exposure to the local populace and environment. In addition, it is critical to understand the limitations of western culture. Many "best practices" are counter to the "American Way." It is important to be cognizant of such things as pride and vanity – and the different views of these traits in differing societies.

Importance of Culture

Culture is a lens through which we view the world. It is a reflection of our society and how we were raised. In particular, culture is directly related to societal values, beliefs, mannerisms, mores, and taboos. It not only helps to establish norms (behavioral boundaries for acceptable conduct), it also shapes thought processes. Effective partners – particularly military advisors assigned to transition teams – must be students of culture, including both one's own culture and the culture of the counterpart. One has to know their own culture to ensure that nothing is assumed and that nothing is taken for granted.

For example, westerners tend to think chronologically, whereas Iraqis tend to think in terms of an event's level of importance. If one asks an Iraqi what he did today, he'll typically start with what was most important to him, rather than a chronological event listing. The most effective partners seek to understand the underlying assumptions of both cultures. This approach helps to determine the best method for communication with one another.

A good start to understanding Iraqi culture is to read the book, The Arab Mind, by Rafael Patai. Unfortunately, this book is not the "be all/end all," because it generalizes about Arab culture, and is not specific to Iraq. However there are countless other books available that provide insight into the contemporary Iraqi culture (such as Anthony Shadid's Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War) and hints to the cultural implications of western powers in Iraq (Toby Dodge, Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied). Each branch of the ISF also has its own culture, steeped largely in British military culture. But Iraqi society changed following the Ba'ath 14th of July Revolution in 1958, and their military culture has taken some sharp turns since then based on political and social changes rooted in conflict (the latest being in 2003).

All personnel must be students of culture, and continue to seek understanding throughout their tours of duty. The subject is not effectively tackled only in preparation for deployment, but is more effective when pursued throughout one's career. It is critical that the force view understanding not through the lens of cultural awareness, but cultural understanding. Simply put, cultural awareness is "knowing that something is happening." Cultural understanding is achieved when one understands what that "something" means. This higher level understanding can only be accomplished by persistent development through both personal and collective efforts.

Relationships First

Cultural understanding serves to identify the best means to approach mission accomplishment within the Iraqi cultural landscape. There is an old saying in the Army that Soldiers "don't care what you know until they know that you care." This effect is significantly magnified in dealings with Iraqi counterparts and citizens. Westerners in general – and Americans in particular – typically want to "get down to business" right away. Unfortunately, the playing field is not level, and the concept of time is in the Iraqi's favor. It is critical to understand that the CF are guests in Iraq, and must empathize with local customs in order to be

polite (and welcome) guests. Unless there is an established relationship with a counterpart, there is a clear expectation that the social aspect of interaction initially dominates any business concerns.

The most effective partners try to become knowledgeable about their counterparts before they address business. In particular, the social aspect of dealing with Iraqi colleagues often demands exchanging extended pleasantries, followed by further development of past conversations and personal matters. It is critical to remember that each meeting essentially sets the conditions for the next meeting.

If, for example, one learns during the initial meeting that Major General Ahmed has a son who is going to medical school in Jordan, then the next meeting could start out with: "how is your son in Jordan doing? How are his studies in medical school?" While this clearly may sacrifice a couple of minutes, the importance of such an approach to the relationship – hence the desired outcome of any business – is immense.

There are countless "do's" and "don't's" in cross-cultural communications. One of the worst things that an advisor or partner can do is to check his watch during an engagement (especially when the counterpart is speaking). This (probably unintentionally) sends the message that "I don't have time for this," and even more importantly, "I don't have time for you." There is minimal potential for getting anything accomplished if that is the approach. Common sense, along with a conscious awareness of one's own behavior and a courteous approach to all dealings can often be significant mitigating factors.

Advisors / Partners should take their inherent lack of patience and reserve it for "US only" events. Learn to hold hands (that's what they do with their friends), expect physical contact, and even pronounced emotions. Learn to speak at least a couple of phrases in Arabic, and endeavor to develop an increased vocabulary daily. A useful technique for breaking tension is utilization of regional slang; it is often unexpected and shows that the attempt to empathize goes beyond the "Iraqi Basic Language Disk" and cultural awareness briefings. Understand that relationships are critical to getting anything done, and it is far more effective to go out of the way to develop a mutually comfortable relationship than to press issues too aggressively and early rather than the other way around.

Focus on the Leadership

The difference between good organizations and bad ones is usually a function of leadership. The importance of leadership for ISF organizations is significantly more dynamic than in their U.S. partner units. That effect is notably – once again – a function of culture. Unlike in American units, which often prosper through the strengths of subordinate leaders, the effectiveness of commanders is by far the single most powerful determinant of an ISF unit's fighting abilities. For ISF units, the most direct way to affect organizational culture is through the leadership – specifically the ISF commander. To shape behavior, the most effective route is through the commander. More importantly, to affect (potentially even change) values, all endeavors must be through the commander.

The CF realized in 2003 that the goal of developing a professional NIA (New Iraqi Army at that time) by training all of the soldiers at one time was neither efficient nor effective. This realization caused a change to methodology which focused almost exclusively on the leadership. More than five years later, the investment in leader development is becoming very apparent.

The same cannot be said of the IPS. From 2003 on, the CF focus regarding the IPS emphasized the number of *shurtee* trained. Even after the shift to the use of PTTs in 2005, training efforts outside the Baghdad Police College have been heavily weighted towards the patrolman rather than the leadership. The rapid expansion of the IPS detrimentally compounded the CF manpower demand which further impeded attainment of a professionalized force. In MND-S, the mindset regarding police development changed and now focuses almost exclusively on officer leadership, the benefits of which are only now being realized.

We recommend that units concentrate first and foremost on the leadership at all levels for developmental and training efforts. CF units should place significant emphasis on developing, building, and sustaining both personal and professional relationships in order to build influence. This influence becomes the tool with which to develop a common vision for further ISF unit development.

Appeal to What Motivates Partners

One of the most effective ways to shape behavior is to understand what motivates one's counterpart, and then determine how to appeal to that desire in order to change behavior in another area. This is essentially a negotiation strategy in which some effort must be devoted to analysis of the counterparts likely "best alternative to a negotiated agreement" (BATNA).

Common knowledge among those who served with the ISF is that Iraqis have a seeming fascination with and (from the U.S. perspective) an unhealthy reliance on checkpoints to maintain security. Even though the enemy can easily bypass most checkpoints, they do occasionally get caught in them. The local citizens tend to reinforce the plethora of checkpoints because on the surface at least, more checkpoints seemingly equal more security. It seems that many units are entirely fixed by their checkpoints.

The ISF frequently have little – if any – flexibility since nearly all of their forces are committed to checkpoints. There was a recent case in MND-S in which the CF battalion commander was unable to get his ISF partner to alter the IA force's disposition, and only a platoon was not committed to checkpoints. The problem, however, was that the battalion was not well-connected with the population. The area was very dominantly Sunni and the unit was overwhelmingly Shia. The area was rural and all of the checkpoints were on just a few major roads. Many small villages in the area never saw an IA Soldier unless the citizens drove through the checkpoints (and most, of course did not have cars).

Rather than telling the ISF commander that he needed to move some forces off of the checkpoints to gain mobility, CF leadership attempted to assess what motivated him. During a briefing between the CF and ISF leaders concerning this area and current operations, it became apparent that the ISF commander took great pride in using his QRF platoon to capture High

Value Targets (HVTs). However, the discussion revealed that his intelligence source network was poorly developed, especially in the smaller villages. When pressed, he admitted that the only contact his soldiers had with these more rural areas was when they entered the areas for a raid.

The technique employed by the CF leader was to help him understand that he could generate more effective raids if he had a better-developed intelligence network. The key was helping the ISF commander realize that he could not develop a better network unless he had the trust of the people. The compromise was a plan to conduct a series of regular dismounted patrols through these small villages, with an immediate goal of building trust and a longer term objective of developing new sources. In the end, that approach was far more successful than by starting off with: "you have too many forces committed to checkpoints."

Partners and advisors must seek to understand what motivates counterparts and then use that as a point of leverage to shape behavior. The approach to reaching such compromises is key and a direct result of the established relationship. In short, understanding the personality of the host-nation counterpart can facilitate a strategy for addressing areas of concern.

After Action Reviews

The U.S. Army has developed its own culture, and an important aspect of that culture that has grown over the last 30 years is the importance of the after action review (AAR). Building on a technique that gained popularity in the training centers, AARs are routinely conducted after every training event and combat operation. In the course of using AARs, the Army has become very self-critical and continues to be a vibrant learning organization. The use of AARs has become so ingrained that their validity is not even questioned — AARs are a routine part of every event. It is natural, therefore, that there is an expectation to conduct an AAR following any event. But combined operations demand cultural considerations that may provide friction to the conduct of AARs.

Cultural differences demand a different approach to the AAR. In fact, the use of the same techniques one would choose for an American platoon may ensure abject failure. In recent history, the ISF have not been learning organizations. Iraqi soldiers are not routinely self-critical and will NEVER criticize their leaders in public. If a TT or partner unit decides to lead an AAR after a combat operation and starts off with "What are three strengths and three weaknesses in today's operation?," he may only get the strengths. Such a response will limit learning and inhibit organizational growth.

A successful technique is to acknowledge and capitalize on cultural differences, rather than trying to fight them. For example, after every operation, we recommend that CF leaders join the ISF commander in a separate room with three or four CF personnel for a frank discussion concerning those tasks performed well and those that may need improvement. All personnel informally discuss these areas, including the commander; the private session minimizes discomfort and prevents any perceived loss of face in front of the subordinate ISF personnel. This permits the ISF commander to provide frank comments concerning the event.

In reality this prepares him to lead an AAR with his unit. Upon implementation with the subordinate ISF leaders, the commander can be expected to be the primary speaker during initial attempts. Over time, the commander's confidence will probably increase resulting in more effective AARs in which he induces participation by subordinate leaders. More importantly, he will become increasingly self-critical. It is not exactly an American-style AAR, but the unit learns after every event.

As with all of the best practices, partners and advisors must understand culture and work to operate within its limitations. By using an indirect approach to institute the conduct of an AAR, it can become the ISF commander's initiative. Because at that point it is essentially his idea, the potential for effectiveness is greatly increased.

Provision of Equipment

ISF commanders look to their CF counterparts for help with acquiring equipment and resources. Over the last several years, CF have evolved from full provision of supplies and materiel to the ISF, to assisting with the implementation and execution of a strictly ISF-driven acquisition and sustainment system. CF continues to assist as ISF counterparts' advocates through either the Ministry of Defense (MOD) or Ministry of the Interior (MOI) to ensure that Iraqi systems address everything from HMMWVs, to repair parts, to training ammunition, to fuel. The CF learned hard lessons over the past several years about simply providing the ISF equipment, and continue to develop and share best practices.

The following example illustrates the importance of using the correct approach in the Iraqi culture. An ISF battalion commander requested PKC machineguns for his battalion. He had a significant shortage of vehicle-mounted MGs and asked for four additional weapons per company, plus two for his Quick Reaction Force (QRF) - a total of 22 PKCs. The assigned CF advisor team was able to exercise MOI logistics channels to get the additional machineguns.

When the team delivered the PKCs to the battalion, the weapons were fielded based on the allocation provided by the BN CDR — four per company plus two for the QRF. The reaction from the BN CDR was extremely negative. In effect, the team stole his *wasta* by providing equipment to his troops, rather than allowing him to do so.

This apparent "Godfather" method of taking care of one's subordinates is common in Iraq, and the advisor team undercut their Iraqi partner by giving the weapons directly to the subordinates. In reality he probably only intended to issue two or three guns per company, and keep the rest in reserve.

Instead of building on the team's relationship by getting the Iraqi commander what he asked for, the relationship was actually damaged (in Iraqi eyes) by the team taking care of subordinate troops instead of allowing the commander to do so. If he was truly suspicious, he could have assumed that the advisors sought to usurp his authority and increase the loyalty of his subordinates to the team rather than their own chain-of command.

Since the Commander's role is so dominant in the ISF, advisors and partners must seek to reinforce it rather than work against it. We recommend that units always issue supplies and equipment to the Commander, and allow him to control distribution. It is critical to remember that relationships are defined by the counterpart's performance – both personal and unit.

Iraqi Solutions

A common mantra developed in 2003 and 2004 was to "put an Iraqi face on operations." It was said with the purest of intentions, with the desire to show the Iraqi people that their own citizens were taking responsibility for the future of Iraq. Equally important was that both the ISF and CF were working together for the benefit of the Iraqi people. In hindsight, perhaps the following statement may be more accurate: "Let's come up with a US solution and put an Iraqi façade on it."

That sort of approach is ineffective and even counterproductive. American culture seems to demand answers or solutions to problems. Even with the best of intentions, such solutions are often developed in isolation, and then presented to ISF counterparts to try to get their "buy-in." Iraqi culture mandates that they act as gracious hosts, so they typically nod and agree in public with such proposals and in the end do whatever they intended in the first place. CF solutions developed in isolation rarely, if ever, work, and they certainly do not last. Iraqi solutions (even if sub-optimal from the U.S. perspective) tend to be lasting ones.

Commanders must resist the temptation to develop solutions in isolation, but rather seek to help the Iraqis develop their own solutions and then support them in execution. The transition to Iraqi primacy in all endeavors requires CF leaders to be humble. They must understand that their main purpose in Iraq is not to develop a mirror-image of the U.S. Armed Forces. Rather, the goal is to develop an organization with enduring strength and capabilities that embrace the Iraqi concept of "acceptable." This may include CF units actually having to learn new techniques for supply management, decision making processes, or personnel management in order to enable the ISF systems.

Conclusion

The Iraqi operational environment has matured to the point that CF are truly guests. This demands increased cultural intelligence and attention not towards kinetic means to solve problems, but more soft skills to facilitate enduring institutional capabilities. Adroit cultural maneuvering requires adaptive leaders and units who can work within the Iraqi culture. Influencing Iraqi commanders to improve their capabilities and at the same time build competence within their units is paramount to success. The goal for many years was developing the ISF to the point where the CF "worked itself out of a job." We are clearly much closer to reaching that objective than we were two or three years ago, and the tremendous efforts of thousands of CF advisors, TT members, and leaders at all levels in MNC-I have had an incredible impact. We are not yet "out of a job," but the fundamental nature of our operations (and who is in the lead) has changed. Leaders who recognize that change and resolve to apply what works (rather than what is comfortable) will ensure success in this dynamic environment.

This article was developed as part of the 10th Mountain Division / MND-S "Best Practices" series from after actions reviews and observations over several Iraq tours to highlight the transformation of the operational environment along with potential TTPs to assist future rotations.

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