

Iraqi Intelligence at the Brigade/Division Level: Systemic Deficiencies and Training Solutions

Nick Padlo

Introduction

During 15 months in Iraq, I worked with nearly 100 Iraqi intelligence professionals. Throughout the deployment, I noticed systemic intelligence shortcomings existing consistently at all tactical and operational levels. While some of the shortcomings were due to cultural barriers, others were primarily due to previously embedded misconceptions and a lack of formalized training. In either case, the solutions to the problems are attainable through U.S. training and sustainable after an eventual scale down in U.S. operations.

In order to modernize the role of Iraqi intelligence officers, the Iraqi Army must minimize the intelligence officer's (S2s) role in direct source operations, integrate the intelligence officer with the rest of the battalion/brigade/division staff, understand and employ digital systems to consolidate and organize intelligence, and reinforce the link between the Iraqi Army and the legal system. The intelligence component of U.S. Military Training Teams (MiTT) should focus on these specific shortcomings in order to better equip Iraqi intelligence professionals to fight a modern counterinsurgency.

As an important disclaimer, successful U.S. military training of Iraqi Army forces requires particular attention to cultural norms. Without developing a firm relationship with the Iraqi counterparts, one cannot hope to establish the trust requisite for transformational leadership across cultural and language barriers. Once this core trust and mutual respect is established, American forces can help the Iraqi Army implement long-lasting and effective change. This article does not focus on cultural norms, but rather specific deficiencies. For more information on how to establish cultural relationships, see [*Advising the Iraqis, Building the Iraqi Army*](#) by LTC Carl Grunow.

S2 Role in Source Operations

Iraqi Army intelligence officers have inherited a renegade, James Bond persona, and not without reason. In the previous regime's Iraqi Army and the Kurdish Peshmerga, the primary role of Iraqi intelligence officers was to run sources and provide actionable intelligence to the commander. For example, when asked his job description, the 2nd

Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army BDE (2/4 IA) Intelligence Officer responded, “My job is to gather intelligence from my sources and give that information to the commander.”¹

Rather than thinking of themselves as a source manager *and* a Battalion S2, they saw it as their primary responsibility to be Human Intelligence (HUMINT) collectors. In reality, this commitment to source operations translated into *direct* involvement in all source operations. He ran all brigade sources himself, rarely showed up to any staff events, and often went missing for days at a time to work on source operations.

Because of their previous experience, however, most Iraqi S2s are very proficient in some parts of source operations. Much more so than the US Army S2s, Iraqi S2s have unparalleled access to actionable intelligence from HUMINT sources within their group of family and friends. Their sources can drive directly into villages, assess the situation, draw a sketch map (or collect a GPS grid, depending on funding) and call in the infantry to conduct a raid. On the other hand, these S2s have problems determining the reliability of data and synchronizing large amounts of information.

Iraqi S2s are not typically good at paperwork, as it is considered monotonous and boring. Unfortunately, this significantly impacts determining the reliability of sources. Because there is no record of what a source has reported previously, it is unlikely that a determination on the accuracy of a source’s previous reporting can be assessed. Source reporting is often followed by “he is very reliable” with no quantifiable measure whatsoever. This problem requires the creation of a system to track source information and reliability. While it would be ideal to have such a system exist at the army/corps level, individual systems at division and brigade level must be created as an intermediate step. In effort not to provide excessive information that might breach security concerns, I found that it is best to derive an intuitive system with your Iraqi counterpart, rather than take any information from U.S. collection systems.

The overextension of the S2s into source operations also degrades the quality of work due to an inability to synchronize large amounts of information. An Iraqi S2 retains intelligence operations as his *personal* domain, and therefore, will allow very little assistance from his staff. The S2 alone is responsible for collection, as well as the compilation of data and analysis.

A solution in regards to training source operations is to embed U.S. collection teams within brigade-level MiTTs. It would be the MiTT S2 officer’s job to focus the Iraqi intelligence officer toward conducting staff operations and empowering subordinates to conduct source operations. With the Iraqi S2 focused on the staff-level operations, the collection team can conduct basic level training for source operations and better synchronize them with the staff operations.

¹ LTC (Name removed for security purposes), 2nd BDE, 4th Iraqi Army Division, Kirkuk Iraq. Personal interview, Sept, 2006.

Integration of Staff

Iraqi Intelligence officers do not feel as if they should participate in many staff functions, such as operational planning. Why has this become a behavioral norm? The answer is partly due to the reliance on source operations mentioned above, but is also partly due to a deficiency in training. In short, the Iraqi intelligence officers lack the formalized training to understand how to operate as a staff. The Iraqi War College was founded in 1928,² but it was not widely attended by all staff officers. For example, under 50% of 2nd BDE, 4th Iraqi Army Division's senior officers had attended the staff course as of 2007. Furthermore, only one of the BDE S2s had attended the course. Speaking with a brigade operations officer that attended the course, COL Ayad asserted that "They taught the intelligence officers alongside us. They know how to do this [staff integration]."³ When the Iraqi Staff College was reopened in 2005, it resumed operations using primarily American doctrine and methods.⁴ Unfortunately, many of the spots available in the course are not allotted to units stationed outside Baghdad.

In Kirkuk, the solution adopted by MiTT Leader, Lieutenant Colonel Blace Albert, was to employ a locally-trained set of classes focused on the staff process in the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). Once the brigade commander was told of this plan, Lieutenant General Anwar eagerly mandated the class for all staff officers. This 5-part course was taught in a train-the-trainer format with the American MiTT teaching the brigade staff, then the brigade staff designing Iraqi-led training for each of the battalions. Following the training, the staff was expected to conduct a real-world operation, planned through the MDMP process.⁵

Analysis of Information

Shortly after arriving in country, I received intelligence briefings from the Iraqi division G2, BDE S2, and the BN S2s. It was obvious there was a significant lack in the ability to conduct analysis of information. Even at the BN S2 level, the S2s spoke in broad-sweeping, general terms, saying that there was an "issue with improvised explosive devices along the main roads," referring to the largest cities in their Area of Operations as "hot areas," and confidently concluding that the primary enemy threat groups in their area were Al Qaeda, Ansar Al Sunna, Ansar al Islami, Tawid Al Jihad, and another six groups.

After about five of these hugely generalized briefings from S2s at different levels (brigade and division), it became apparent that generalization was the norm, rather than the exception. After doing some investigating, I decided that this failure to speak in

² Jeff Crawley, "CGSC Team Helps Iraqi Staff College," September 28, 2006.

³ Col Ayad, 2nd BDE, 4th IA S3. Kirkuk, Iraq, June 2007.

⁴ Jeff Crawley, "CGSC Team Helps Iraqi Staff College," September 28, 2006.

⁵ One major downside to an integrated staff process in the Iraqi Army is loss of security. By involving the entire staff in discussion of timelines and operation details, there is a greater risk that the operation could be compromised. This is obviously not a concern in the US Army. The solution that we employed in 2nd IA Brigade is to plan multiple operations, and "put them on the shelf." Then, the Brigade Commander can simply pick an OPLAN of his choosing when he wants to conduct an operation.

specific terms was due to cultural barriers against being wrong, unwillingness to give precise information in large groups, and analysis based on previous knowledge.

First, Iraqis place an extreme importance on saving face. In intelligence analysis, this translates into a fear of being wrong in their assessment. As a reaction, they tend to speak in generalities. To work toward more precise assessments, it is vital to discuss the issues with both the commander and intelligence officer in an informal setting. Ask the commander what he thinks about an American intelligence presentation that he received. Invariably, he will have liked the presentation, and have the Iraqi S2 understand why the American analysis was more helpful to the commander.

Second, there are severe security concerns within many Iraqi staffs. Sometimes, the intelligence officer will provide intentionally vague information in order to avoid compromising what he sees as important analysis or information. Unfortunately, this is not always directly stated, because it would question the integrity (and honor) of the other staff members.

Finally, I discovered a significant amount of confirmatory bias involved in intelligence analysis, meaning that their analysis of data was heavily weighted toward their past experiences. I tested this theory specifically with a BDE S2. I brought him over to the pattern wheel that they had completed themselves, and I asked him to tell me “what trends we have seen in VBIEDs this month.” Rather than look at the pattern wheel that he had updated every single morning, he stood with it directly over his shoulder and told me assertively that VBIEDs typically occur in large clusters on one or two specific days a month, and always occur between 0800 and 1200. *This specific month, there had been a noteworthy change in enemy patterns, with VBIEDs occurring on 4 separate days, in smaller intervals, and often at night.* Though this is an isolated incident, it illustrates the inability of the Iraqi Army to overlook specific details/trends and defer to past activity.

The best way to combat the reliance on past experience is to implement systems that ensure the focus on timely analysis. Instruments such as a pattern wheel, Falconlite mapping software, and regular command and staff meetings can help to aid in intelligence analysis.

Collection Plan

In 15 months with numerous Iraqi Army professionals, I saw one Iraqi collection plan. Excited to finally see one, I spoke to the MiTT Representative working with the intelligence officer to track down the history of this unique event. Unfortunately, the American officer was the author of this particular collection plan.

The Iraqi Staff College teaches a rough version of MDMP. They also provide instruction on presentation skills. They do not (or did not in the past) teach the use of a viable collection plan. Primarily, this is for two reasons. First, Iraq historically has relied on just one method of intelligence collection - source operations. The units on the ground never thought of themselves as intelligence collectors and such, there was no integration

with other Iraqi Armed Forces collection assets - the Iraqi Air Force for imagery is but one example. Moreover, there existed, and exists, a lack of other sophisticated means of intelligence collection beyond HUMINT.

Unlike the US Army, the Iraqis don't consider each soldier a sensor, so infantry units rarely gather information directly related to intelligence requirements. Secondly, putting a collection plan on paper would mean giving the location for their collectors and sources, thereby writing their death sentence by the corruption inherent within the ranks.

This is a valid concern. If a collection plan is to show the location of the intelligence collectors, it must be vague and have limited distribution (commander only, or commander and operations officer, are examples). Nonetheless, as integration with the Air Force increases, and units on the ground become more competent, some version of a collection plan will become necessary, allowing the commander a say in how his assets are collecting and enabling collection according to his intent.

Digital Systems

Obviously, the U.S. Army relies heavily upon digital systems to conduct daily operations, while the Iraqi Army is just beginning to utilize these systems. It is vital to the future of the Iraqi Army to continue the use of digitization. The largest hurdles for Iraqi intelligence officers to overcome are competence and security concerns.

First, Iraqi intelligence professionals must gain the basic knowledge of computer systems. With most of the senior officers being computer illiterate, it is very difficult to persuade Iraqi leadership to stress the importance of digitization. Our MiTT was able to emphasize computer literacy – but it occurred as an accident. The senior leaders were invited to attend or send a representative to a computer class at the division level. Not internalizing the importance of computer training, they all sent a low-ranking representative. Once the representative returned, the senior officers realized that this gave their subordinates a sense of competence and even superiority. In weeks, the next computer class was scheduled and all of the senior officers attended, so that they too could impress others (specifically the Americans) with their advanced computer skills.

Intelligence professionals have an additional concern with computer use – security. Once again, this concern is well justified. With vulnerable computers, often connected to a public internet source, the information could be easily accessed by a moderately trained hacker. The long term solution to this problem must be worked at the Iraqi national level, but at the local level, there are elementary steps that can be taken. First, and foremost, is the concept of not e-mailing sensitive documents. Next, that can be extended to not storing sensitive documents on internet connected computers. On a side note, good luck explaining to the senior officers that they don't get the internet; it is seen as a status symbol and a right of passage for many senior officers. If the internet must be connected, and they must store sensitive documents on the computer, then basic security measures must be enforced. First, there can be no pornography surfing. While one would not assume that this is an issue in a religiously devout society, it is. It is a systemic problem,

and it is the leading source of Iraqi computer viruses. In addition, they must agree to leave their computers at work at night in a locked/supervised area. Once again, this is not always easily achievable due to concerns over leaving sensitive materials behind. This ground rule is most easily established while distributing the laptops/electronics equipment. Thumb drives must have tight control, and must be scanned for viruses prior to being inserted into computers. Finally, the latest anti-virus, anti-spyware software must be continually updated.

Once the computer competence is increased and the security concerns are minimized, then the intelligence professionals are prepared to make full use of their digitization. The primary uses for digitization is in pattern analysis of past activity, coordination of information with the rest of the staff, presentation of intelligence in a useful format, etc. It makes intelligence information both useful and presentable.

Link to Iraqi Legal System

Once an Iraqi S2 gathers information that leads to an arrest or detention, another problem arises. How does the covert and secretive collection method justify detention under the legal parameters set forth in the new Iraqi legal system? In the Iran-Iraq War, there was no need for evidence. In Sulymania and most of Kurdistan, where the Peshmerga still operate independently of Baghdad, there is no need for evidence. "He is an insurgent" is often enough for the records; the individual is locked up, and they then move on to the next target. When the Iraqi Army did need proof in the past, and there was no hard evidence of wrong doing, a confession was the primary means of evidence. It could be obtained under any conditions or methods and was completely binding. Needless to say, the propensity for detainee abuse and torcher developed, and continues to be an issue to date. Old habits die hard. It is essential for American MiTT Advisors to take a no-excuses line toward standards of behavior during interrogations. This includes numerous spot checks and inspections of detainee facilities.

The current Iraqi legal system was co-authored by US and Iraqi pens, and under the current legal system, there is a significant evidentiary standard. While the Iraqi Terrorism Law broadly states that the Iraqi Army or Iraqi Police can arrest individuals and prosecute them in public courts for "terrorism related acts," that law is rarely enforced in northern Iraq. Instead, the laws used to prosecute detainees are civil laws, such as those against murder, extortion, theft, etc. Because the Army is being used in an internal law enforcement role, there is obviously a significant burden of proof. Within the Iraqi Court System, Army-obtained confessions are highly scrutinized because of the aforementioned interrogation issues with forced confessions. Now, sworn statements from witnesses and a strong investigative packet are necessary. More highly prized are graphical representations of wrongdoing in the form of sketches and pictures.

Unfortunately, detainees that are considered High Value Targets or have a significant amount of hard evidence are often sent to the Coalition Forces and not prosecuted in the local Iraqi courts. This presents a significant problem. Because the Iraqi courts cannot see the open and shut cases, the judicial system develops a mindset that the Iraqi Army is

incapable of producing solid evidence, etc. This decreases the confidence of the Army, and Iraqi intelligence officers often develop a sense of apathy leading to a lackadaisical approach in their work to provide complete packets.

In addition, it becomes difficult for the Iraqis to gain confidence in their ability to put insurgents in jail. Rather than see them placed in a local jail, they are simply “turned over to CF,” – with limited feedback as to final disposition, that is - until they see them back on the local streets.

So how do we solve the legal problems? It starts with the Iraqi S2s. If they are able to consolidate intelligence (and give an unclassified version to the courts), prevent abuse in their interrogations, and liaise with the judges to discuss what evidence is expected⁶, then they are able to close the gap and work toward successful prosecution of those involved in terrorist attacks.

Conclusion

Most intelligence officers in the Iraqi Army have the potential to be impact players on their staff, but past experience has prevented them from making the necessary progress. Rather than integrating into the staff process, many Iraqi Intelligence Officers serve as mediocre Human Intelligence Collectors who operate without a plan and often without a budget. American MiTT S2s must aggressively work to power down some of the source operation tasks, integrate the S2 into the staff, digitize them for modern warfare, and sync operations with the Iraqi legal system. Only then can they effectively lead intelligence collection and actually allow intelligence to drive operations.

Nick Padlo graduated from the United States Military Academy with Honors in 2003. Since then, he has served as the Assistant Intelligence Officer for 2-27 Infantry Battalion in Afghanistan and as the Intelligence Advisor for 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Division, located in Kirkuk, Iraq. Nick Padlo's experience with Iraqi Intelligence Officers (S2s) was mostly with the 4th Iraqi Army Division in Northern Iraq. There, he often worked with the Division Intelligence Officer, Brigade S2s (2nd Brigade S2 on a daily basis), the subordinate BN S2s, and various Civilian and Governmental Intelligence Agencies in Kirkuk Province. Since returning from Iraq, Nicholas Padlo has resigned his commission to continue his studies at Stanford's Graduate School of Business.

⁶ It is important to liaise with the judges, but it must be clear that this is not corruption or tampering. Intelligence officers and judges often have a respect for each other that borders on fear, and encouraging meeting/talking sounds like you are expecting them to cheat the system. This could not be further from the truth, but if a judge has thrown out 6 cases due to failure to have a certain form before that is communicated, it is a form of frustration on both sides.

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