

# Strengthening Iraqi Security Forces

## MITT NEEDED

CAPTAIN JAY BESSEY

**A**s a military transition team (MiTT) chief during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) IV, I was primarily responsible for my 13-man team, my battalion's Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) partnership, and the Iraqi Army (IA) battalion which I was tasked to train. Demands between the three entities competed daily, with the IA receiving the majority of my personal attention. As an advisor to the IA, I spent most of my time improving one aspect of their operations — the targeting and operations planning process.

Though the process I developed was not doctrinally based, a few indicators suggest that it was effective. First, after four months, the Iraqis demonstrated a higher level of tactical proficiency at the company level. Second, their battalion staff displayed improved staff planning and management. Third, synchronization between IA and Coalition force (CF) operations increased. Finally, the IA executed the process with minimal oversight and showed signs of internalizing it.

I did not expect to serve as a MiTT chief when I signed into the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment (TF 1-187 IN) in May 2005. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Randy George, our battalion was a part of Colonel Michael Steele's 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). I was initially assigned to the operations section (S3), and, as the S3 Air, I was responsible for the battalion's maneuver training and air operations. My primary responsibility in the four months between my assignment to the battalion and its deployment was to plan and resource pre-deployment training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and in Kuwait.

In addition to this responsibility, I was

tasked in July to attend the BCT's seven-day MiTT training program as my battalion's MiTT operations officer. The purpose of the MiTT train-up was to identify potential trainers; introduce them to their new responsibilities; and familiarize them with Iraq, the Muslim culture, and working with an indigenous population. I attended this week of training because we were short on captains, and the individual who was supposed to be tasked for this job had not yet arrived at the battalion.

When the division tasked each of the battalions to officially stand up organic MiTT teams in August 2005, we still hadn't received this captain, and LTC George assigned me and seven others (with three more volunteered from the BCT) to man our team. Each team was task organized to have a field grade officer in command, and our battalion executive officer (XO) was designated as our MiTT team chief. When TF 1-187 IN deployed in September to support OIF IV, our MiTT — after spending a week of transition in Kuwait — flew north to attend MiTT training in Taji, Iraq.

While we were sitting through a week of classroom discussion, the rest of the battalion began trickling into our new AO, which straddled Highway 1 in the Sallah Ah Din Province of Iraq. Located north of the provincial capital of Tikrit, our AO encompassed the city of Bayji at its heart. Though our predecessor did well in securing the Bayji area, part of our battalion's mission was to improve that security by bolstering the ISF in the region. For the next year, our AO did not change, though the number and type of security forces — both CF and Iraqi — would regularly.

The city of Bayji sat in the heart of our



*A Soldier with the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division*

sector and east of our forward operating base and was viewed as a major hub in the Sallah Ah Din province because of a major highway intersection that connected Mosul to Baghdad and Kirkuk to Haditha. Further, it was home to a major oil refinery.

Our leadership also viewed the villages of Siniyah and Siliyah as a concern. Located along the FOB's eastern barrier, these villages still housed a considerable number of prominent military and government officials with ties to the Ba'ath Party. Given these populaces, our



Specialist Bill Brothers

*... takes notes while talking with Iraqi Army soldiers after a mission in Baiji, Iraq.*

predecessors estimated 10 prominent insurgent cells operating in the area with several others having operational and financial ties with Al Qaeda in Iraq. Improvised explosive device (IED) makers and local thugs represented most cells, and CF regularly sustained casualties. In early October 2005, TF 1-187 IN assumed responsibility for this area and designated it AO LEADER.

In the opening months of our year in AO LEADER, various mechanized infantry, artillery, and Special Forces units supported our battalion during the tail end of their respective tours. Limited ISF forces, consisting of an IA company, a joint coordination cell (JCC), and five strategic infrastructure battalions (SIBs), also supported our battalion at different levels of proficiency. Both the IA company and JCC were stationed on our FOB, while each of

the SIBs conducted security operations from outposts located throughout our AO.

In December 2005, we lost our artillery support, switched Special Forces units, and gained two additional units on the FOB: our BCT's reconnaissance and surveillance target acquisition (RSTA) squadron and our parent BCT headquarters. Both units proved valuable to us; the RSTA squadron almost halved the size of our AO by assuming responsibility of the desolate, unoccupied northern half of AO LEADER, and our BCT was more apt to provide us assets, such as money and personnel because it saw a firsthand account of the conditions in which we were operating. Despite the addition of our BCT headquarters, TF 1-187 IN saw no immediate increase concerning the number of ISF operating

in AO LEADER. This remained the case until February, when the 4th Battalion of the 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division (4/2/4 IA) moved to our FOB and began conducting operations in AO LEADER.

Known as the “Lion” Battalion, 4/2/4 IA had a typical Iraqi task organization of four rifle infantry companies (with three line platoons each) and a headquarters and service company (HSC), consisting of a command section, battalion staff, communications section, medical platoon, distribution platoon, security platoon, maintenance platoon, and scout platoon. During their time in Kirkuk, the battalion was typically manned at 100 percent of its authorized strength of 765 soldiers and officers.

Since its inception in January 2005, 4/2/4 IA never operated as a typical infantry battalion. Indicative of this fact was the battalion’s use of its companies. An Iraqi HSC is supposed to provide service and support for the battalion’s maneuver companies; instead, 4/2/4 IA HSC conducted most of the battalion’s combat patrols. The four line companies predominantly conducted security operations at tactical checkpoints (TCPs) in and around Kirkuk. If the battalion commander needed a high value target detained or search conducted, he tasked HSC to conduct the mission. This common operating procedure degraded the battalion’s tactical proficiency and hindered its maneuver companies’ effectiveness.

As a result, the companies lacked experience in conducting even the most basic maneuver tasks, to include conducting cordons and searches, cordons and attacks, and raids. Further, 4/2/4 IA did not conduct independent operations, so its staff’s ability to autonomously plan its own missions suffered. As a result, a part of LTC George’s initial guidance to me was to improve the battalion’s tactical proficiency and staff planning.

Contributing to these weaknesses in unit proficiency and staff planning was the fact that in just 13 months of existence, the battalion was already partnered with its third CF battalion and third MiTT. Each team varied operating procedures and provided different guidance and intent, resulting in adjustment periods lasting anywhere from a month to three months. Consequently, the conflicting operating procedures either slowed or disrupted the battalion’s ability to develop a sound battle rhythm supported by clear and unambiguous guidance.

In addition to these factors, another critical event contributed to the battalion’s substandard tactical proficiency. The IA battalion lost almost half of its soldiers due to desertion the month prior to moving to Bayji, reporting over 765 soldiers in January and only

450 in February. This exodus (predominantly caused by soldiers’ desires to stay close to home and protect their families) forced the battalion to reorganize and ultimately cost it a maneuver company and several HSC platoons. This exodus also played a critical part in tearing apart once-cohesive teams. Not only did it degrade the battalion’s proficiency, but it also cut the battalion’s ability to conduct operations by over 25 percent.

Given reports detailing the battalion’s mediocrity in maneuver operations, 4/2/4 IA was task organized under LTC George’s command to support his task force’s operations when the TF moved to Bayji in February 2006. When the battalion finally occupied the FOB, it was inexperienced in fundamental maneuver tasks, ineffective in staff planning, and crippled by a major soldier exodus. To improve these weaknesses, LTC George formed a robust partnership that extended past the typical 11-man MiTT team.

Though most battalions stood up MiTTs that exclusively partnered and assumed full responsibility for their assigned IA battalion, LTC George partnered with 4/2/4 IA differently. The true initiative in LTC George’s partnership was the degree in which his staff and companies partnered with their 4/2/4 IA counterparts. Unlike most battalions, TF 1-187 IN’s staff and companies were partnered one-to-one with an IA staff section or company and were responsible for their training, operations and administrative issues. The partnership ultimately yielded exceptional results in terms of increasing 4/2/4 IA’s tactical proficiency at the platoon and company levels and staff planning, particularly in the communications and operations sections.

Given this unique support, I set to accomplish LTC George’s primary training objectives for the 4/2/4 IA: increase tactical proficiency, develop staff planning, and synchronize CF/IA operations. To accomplish these tasks, I divided the MiTT into four cells: command and control (C2), training, partnership, and joint TOC cell.

My team sergeant and I were the C2 cell and developed a typical commander/first sergeant relationship that established a command climate, maintained property books and infrastructure, coached and guided our subordinates, and ensured mission completion.

My team sergeant also headed the training cell, which consisted of two other NCOs — our Intelligence NCO and team medic. Between the three of them, they headed two five-day training

*Soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division conduct a class on vehicle searches for a group of Iraqi soldiers outside of Bayji, Iraq, in August 2006.*

Specialist Billy Brothers



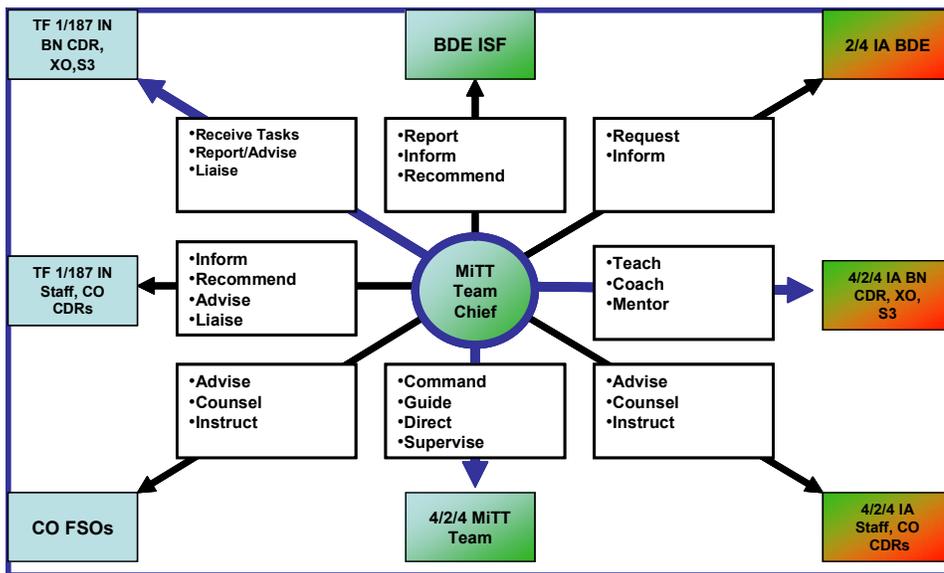


Figure 1 — MiTT Team Chief Tasks

courses aimed at developing junior leadership fundamentals and medical training, respectively. In total, they planned, resourced, and instructed 10 courses that certified more than 100 Iraqi soldiers in six months.

Each of these NCOs was also a member of the partnership cell with the remainder of the team, minus the joint tactical operations center (TOC) cell. Each partnership cell team member paired with an Iraqi counterpart on the 4/2/4 IA staff or in HSC (medical and communication platoons). Partnership cell members conducted their duties daily and focused their efforts on individual training, mentorship, and counseling. The last cell on my team was dedicated to running (in unison with the Iraqis) the joint TOC in the 4/2/4 IA command building. Consisting of two NCOs and four Soldiers, this cell supervised TOC operations, coached their staff duty, and directly liaised between TF 1-187 IN and 4/2/4 IA.

Working with the IA and developing their targeting and operations process was not my only task. I primarily dedicated my time satisfying three entities' demands: my MiTT team, my battalion (working with my commander, XO and S3) and the 4/2/4 IA battalion (through their commander, XO and S3). Further, I also acted as a point of contact for the BCT ISF cell, TF 1-187 IN company commanders, their fire support officers (who were tasked to liaise between CF and IA commanders), and the IA company commanders and staff.

Given the number of entities and

partnerships, lines of communication were at times mixed and complicated affairs when it came time to issue guidance, orders, and intent. For example, LTC George often met with the 4/2/4 IA commander, provided him purpose and intent and then proceeded about his business elsewhere. In some cases, I was not present for his meeting and (at a later time) gave the 4/2/4 IA commander conflicting guidance. Considering the number of partnerships and training and operations between companies, it was simple for guidance to conflict and made daily and weekly synchronization between TF 1-187 IN, the MiTT and 4/2/4 IA imperative.

Each of my lines of communication carried with it a particular set of duties. Though some of the relationships required additional tasks, Figure 1 outlines basic tasks that typically followed each line. My first responsibility was to my MiTT team. As its chief, I assumed the role of leader and commander. Unlike a company command, however, I assumed the additional tasks of directing my subordinates' training and partnership priorities and guiding their day-to-day activities.

To simplify the demands of synchronizing the plans of nine subordinates across three lines of activity — training, partnership, and Joint TOC — I developed two synchronization meetings. The first meeting was conducted daily with every team member and served as a team update and coordination forum where I readjusted priorities, as necessary. I held

the second meeting weekly with each training and partnership cell team member to refine his training plan for the following week. Though only consuming an hour and a half of the day, these two forums served as the cornerstone of my efforts to develop 4/2/4 IA staff planning and further synchronized both battalion staffs' efforts.

My next major priority was to my parent battalion and the TF 1-187 IN primaries. The primaries included LTC George and my battalion XO and S3. Though I worked directly for LTC George, I received daily guidance and counsel from the other TF 1-187 IN field grade officers. Given their personal natures and duty responsibilities, all three men took interest in every facet of 4/2/4 IA. Consequently, I met with each of them at the beginning of the day. Further, I fed their information needs by developing and publishing a daily situation report that highlighted the previous day's IA operations, significant intelligence collected, meetings, rumors, and administrative and logistical status changes.

Through these meetings and situation reports, I was able to receive guidance, report significant activities, and advise my superiors on the status of 4/2/4 IA. Given that each of them was also partnered with an IA counterpart but did not meet with them as much as I did, I liaised between the CF-IA partners to ensure that guidance was passed in a timely fashion. In total, I dedicated three or four hours at the beginning of each day satisfying this requirement, but it was imperative in synchronizing CF-IA operations.

My final primary responsibility was to the 4/2/4 IA commander, XO, and S3. As mentioned, I often acted as an extension of my battalion leadership's partnerships with these three officers. As such, I met with each of them on a daily basis (leave cycles aside) and focused my efforts on teaching them U.S. Army tactics and techniques, coaching them through their duties, and mentoring them as much as a junior captain could be expected to mentor an IA colonel and two lieutenant colonels.

Meetings with the IA commander focused on passing guidance from LTC George, collecting information on the IA battalion's issues, and advising his actions. An educated man from Kurdistan, the battalion commander was agreeable and knew maneuver tactics. On occasion, I

planned and taught him classes on staff techniques and planning considerations, but his proficiency as a commander limited the need for too many blocks of instruction. Most time spent with him focused on handling internal soldier issues, enemy actions, and the local government's demands.

When I was with the IA XO and S3, I focused most of my efforts in practical applications aimed at developing staff techniques. The IA XO was the strongest officer in the battalion and had been in the battalion since its inception. He was experienced, and the soldiers and officers respected him and carried out his orders without question. The most I offered him was counsel and peace of mind from time to time. My relationship with the IA S3 was quite different, however.

The IA S3 was in Iraq's army for over two decades and relied on extensive combat experience from the Iraq-Iran War to guide his staff planning and mission preparation. With this experience under his belt, he confidently performed his duties but was less open to improving them through western ideology. Given his mentality and his part in the battalion's primary deficiency — tactical proficiency — I dedicated most of my partnership time developing his targeting and operations systems with the hope that it could increase the battalion's ability to conduct tactical operations at the platoon and company levels.

It took a month or two of assessment and trial and error, but in April 2006, I determined that the best way to most directly influence the IA S3 and his battalion's poor tactical proficiency was to develop their targeting and operations systems. My ultimate goal was to develop a system that would accomplish the three tenets of LTC George's intent. To accomplish these goals, I focused on improving four areas: IA S2 and S3 intelligence sharing, target selection, patrol schedule development, and debriefings. Each of these areas included the IA S3 at its epicenter and, subsequently, ensured our daily interaction.

The first area that I set to develop was IA S2–S3 intelligence sharing. In our doctrine, the intelligence officer is the battalion's primary information collector and analyzer and, as such, identifies and predicts threat courses of action. After the S2 develops these courses of action, he briefs them to the S3 who, after comparing them, develops friendly courses of action for the commander's approval. From what I observed of the IA S2 in the opening months of our partnership, he operated along different lines. Contrary to our procedures, he hoarded information, sharing it only with the battalion commander to gain his approval. He then executed the mission himself with only a small band of trusted soldiers from around the battalion. Though his technique occasionally provided results and decreased the likeliness of intelligence breaches, his actions made it impossible for subordinate units to plan and conduct operations and develop their tactics.

To improve upon this procedure, I sought to increase intelligence sharing between the IA S2 and S3 by conducting a weekly targeting meeting between the three of us on Wednesdays. This allowed me to use information from TF 1-187 IN's Tuesday targeting meeting to guide the Iraqis; further, 4/2/4 IA conducted leave operations on Mondays, so Wednesday meetings allowed the officers a reintegration day as well as almost two full weeks to refine the targeting process. This meeting forced the S2 to share information with the S3 (to some degree) and provided the S3 a set of targets to begin planning against. Prior to the meeting, the

S2 brought his list of potential targets, while the S3 brought the battalion's next patrol schedule. Initially, the IA S2 relied on TF 1-187 IN's target lists and was reluctant to share the names with the S3. Though it took over two months, the meeting forced the S2 to "open up," and he consistently reported to the meeting with a target list that correlated with insurgent trends and matched TF 1-187 IN intelligence collection efforts.

The IA S2 opened the meeting by briefing the latest threat estimate and its relevance on our AO and continued to recommend potential targets and the effect he wanted to have on them. Given his input, the S3 then decided what unit could best detect and deliver that effect. Despite differences in leave schedules (both primaries typically attended the meeting twice per month) and an Iraqi tendency to withhold information, the meeting met my intent of information sharing after the first couple of months. By the end of this meeting, the S3 usually held a legitimate list of targets in his hand and briefed his commander immediately afterward.

After the commander approved the target list, the IA S3 and I met daily for the next week to plan each mission. We met in the evenings, and our planning sessions covered the following agenda: assess previous operations (last 24 to 48 hours), confirm previously planned operations (within next 12 hours), and plan future operations (next 24 to 48 hours). Through this process, I sought to maintain visibility on the IA battalion's independent operations, de-conflict those operations with the joint patrols they were conducting with TF 1-187 IN and coach my IA S3 counterpart in his staff duties. To assist the process, I developed an operations debrief board. During the initial operations meeting (24 hours prior), I used it as a visual aid to facilitate my ability to convey my intent. If a second planning meeting occurred prior to the mission, I used it as a pre-combat planning checklist.

During either meeting, the planning board allowed me to verify that the IA S3 planned and understood all pertinent information — targets, unit task organization, concept of operations, scheme of maneuver, etc. It also facilitated the IA S3's learning when it came to developing information operations (IO) themes and commander's critical information requirements (CCIR). Further, it emphasized the need to identify the unit's reserve, route and quick reaction force (QRF), as well as communications, medical evacuation, and detainee plans.

After the mission was conducted, I made minor alterations to the planning board and used it as a collection tool to consolidate all operational debriefs. To inform TF 1-187 IN of the IA battalion's operations, I included a copy of the debrief board in the following day's situation report. The operational debrief, though unfamiliar to the Iraqis, was a critical step in developing their targeting process because it provided them their first opportunity to assess operations in a continual forum. It also facilitated information sharing, reinforced reporting channels and fashioned an after action review (AAR) system. On a weekly basis, I continued to develop and refine the targeting and operation planning cycle.

The weekly targeting and daily operations meetings continued for the next four months and, as the IA S2 and S3 became more comfortable with the process, my input level and supervision tapered off. Though they still needed intermittent prodding, both officers gradually increased information sharing and staff

production. This trend was demonstrated in the staff's ability to plan more operations and manage more information. Not surprisingly, the IA companies benefited. Because they conducted the majority of combat operations (as opposed to the S2 officer himself), all three companies gained experience and improved their platoon-level tactics. On average, the number of combat operations steadily increased from two-per-day in February to over six-per-day in July. Further, the improved staff planning resulted in a more synchronized Iraqi staff whose increased functionality correlated with a higher number of potential insurgents detained as well as fewer false detentions. Finally, planning and debriefing boards — in conjunction with daily synchronization meetings — facilitated a higher level of continuous cross-talk between the battalions that synchronized both units' tactical operations.

By focusing on the targeting and operations planning systems, I was able to accomplish a few things. First, I observed the S2 and S3 interaction and was able to more accurately determine whether they were doing their jobs and talking to one another. Second, I could judge whether their information was legitimate and courses of action feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, suitable, and complete.

Third, I could AAR their previous actions and ultimately use their information to update TF 1-187 IN. Overall, I felt that I was in the right position to affect IA operations and synchronize them with TF 1-187 IN. As a result, two battalions independently planned and executed operations in the same small area with minimal conflicts of interest and mitigated operational risks.

Though hindered by leave plans, language barriers, and cultural differences, this targeting method improved Iraqi operations. But, it was time and personality intensive. Most of my day was spent preparing, briefing, or reviewing the information required to make this process successful. From discussing options with the IA S3 through an interpreter, to drafting the operational brief on PowerPoint to briefing LTC George on IA operations, I spent the majority of my day making this process functional. Not surprisingly, other aspects of my job suffered. The amount of time required to make this process successful stressed me to the point that my effectiveness as a MiTT chief decreased because I lacked the time and energy to dedicate to other duties — supervising IA combat patrols, facilitating logistics and sustainment procurement, etc.

If all things were equal and I was given the same mission today, I would dedicate the same energy to the same priority with one fundamental exception — I would involve at least one more team member to this process to ensure that it was taught and executed accordingly. Of all things, it would give me more time to focus on other areas of command while providing the same beneficial structure to the Iraqis. Additionally, it would strengthen that subordinate's professional development and fight against the monotony brought by working with the same person daily.

In retrospect, my time in Iraq and experience with 4/2/4 IA opened my eyes to the amount of work required to stand up a legitimate fighting force at the battalion level, much less any higher. The 4/2/4 IA Battalion was at such a low stage of tactical readiness that it was impractical to expect TF 1-187 IN and a MiTT to leave them fully trained and capable of conducting independent operations after a seven month partnership. As a result, LTC George did what he could and dedicated a few well-placed men and resources to a few key causes — among them, targeting and operations development. Whatever the practicality, however, primarily focusing on a few operational aspects will never be enough. Anyone tasked with a transition team mission will ultimately need to develop their partnered unit's combat support and combat service support fundamentals in order to stand up any indigenous force capable of taking over a host nation's security mission. When I left Iraq in September 2006, the IA was not capable of consistently providing these fundamentals down to the battalion level. And, until these fundamentals are provided, CF and MiTT time and energy — at every level — will be needed.



Staff Sergeant Vincent Wells

*A Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment issues last minute instructions to soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division, before a mission.*

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At the time this article was written, **Captain Jay Bessey** was attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. He is currently serving as the assistant operations officer for the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas, and is preparing for their upcoming deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

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