

SNAPSHOT OF A JOINT SECURITY STATION

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The joint security station (JSS) is a program in Iraq that works off the idea that one of the ways to get the Iraqi governmental institution to take ownership over their security forces is to embed coalition forces (CF) with Iraqi police (IP), Iraqi Army (IA) elements, and the “Sons of Iraq” (SoI), formerly known as Concerned Local Citizens (CLC). The purpose of this article is to look at a snapshot view, and highlight a few examples of issues faced at one particular JSS, specifically the district JSS (DJSS) located in the Adhamiyah section of Baghdad (Figure 1).

DJSS Adhamiyah

DJSS Adhamiyah is located in what has historically been one of the most violent and uncontrolled Sunni enclaves of Baghdad. When Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (HHT), 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment took over the DJSS in September of 2007, the various acts of violence against CF and our partners throughout the AO was high. Through interactions with the IA, IP, and with the standing up of the SoI in Adhamiyah, attacks against CF and civilians decreased dramatically over the months, with a rise seen during increased fighting in Sadr City in April/May 2008 (See Figure 2).

The mission for HHT, 3-7 CAV at the DJSS was to provide security for the site, provide tactical and technical oversight, coordinate and track patrols between CF and IP, monitor day-to-day operations, and, along with the Military Police (MP) and civilian law enforcement professionals (LEP), advise and train the IP to increase their efficiency at the sight and their effectiveness throughout their sector of Adhamiyah. This was accomplished by stationing a permanent force made up of the HHT headquarters command element and attachments from the other troops in the squadron, and a separate element of MPs and LEP. This force was approximately 40 personnel from HHT, three to four MPs, and at least one LEP who came periodically for training.

The joint operations cell (JOC) is the nerve center of any JSS. The JOC at JSS Adhamiyah consisted of a JOC supervisor from HHT, the MP element, and liaison officers (LNOs) from the IP, IA, and SoI. Each of these LNOs were equipped with radios and were able to provide the JOC direct communications with the separate elements outside of the JSS on the streets of Adhamiyah. The JOC also ensured that all patrols were monitored, organized, resourced, and tracked. Until a boundary realignment in March 2008, two troops conducted at least two to four patrols per troop in a 24-hour period with IP personnel integrated into the patrols. These patrols were



Figure 1 — 3-7 Cavalry AO

conducted throughout many of the muhallas, or neighborhoods, in Adhamiyah. Personnel from the DJSS also conducted dismounted patrols around the DJSS in the neighborhoods directly surrounding the compound. These patrols were made up of a combination of CF and IP, and were primarily used to show the populace that their IPs were out and about, to meet the owners and workers of the rapidly expanding base of shops opening up all around the DJSS, to get atmospheric reads, and to pass out tip cards with cell phone numbers of the JOC.

The dynamics of a JSS are necessarily very different from operating from a forward operating base (FOB) or a combat outpost (COP). HHT occupied the DJSS on a 24-hour,

seven-day-a-week basis. We did not rotate elements or personnel in and out. This is one of the most important aspects of occupying and conducting a mission at a JSS. It is important to create a working relationship between the CF and the IP. That can only come with the day-to-day familiarity that living at a site on a permanent basis provides. That familiarity does not guarantee an intimate relationship with the IPs at that station, but it does give the parties a common ground upon which to build an effective working relationship.

Along the same lines, one of the lessons that should be quickly learned for incoming units, regardless of the number of deployments their personnel have had, is that at this point in time we — the CF — cannot and should not solve the problems of the IPs.

Just one of many examples: In February, shortly after I had taken command of HHT and the JSS, the IP leadership brought up the issue of having trouble acquiring fuel for vehicles. They could not roll out of the DJSS to crime scenes or go on patrols due to their limited fuel situation. The main reason for this problem was the lack of any kind of steady or reliable logistical support system. Their system, or lack of one, is a bureaucratic morass that still relies heavily on payoffs, nepotism, and favoritism. Culturally, this has been an accepted way of doing business for years and will continue for the foreseeable future.

In our situation at the DJSS, of course, the IPs were testing the waters to see what, if anything, the new command was going to give them. In the past the solution to this might have been to simply supply them with CF *benzin*. However, we (both HHT and the MPs) approached the issue from an angle of encouraging and really pushing for an *Iraqi solution* to the issues they faced. That is not to say that we would not engage the IP’s higher headquarters, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and assist in working out a solution.

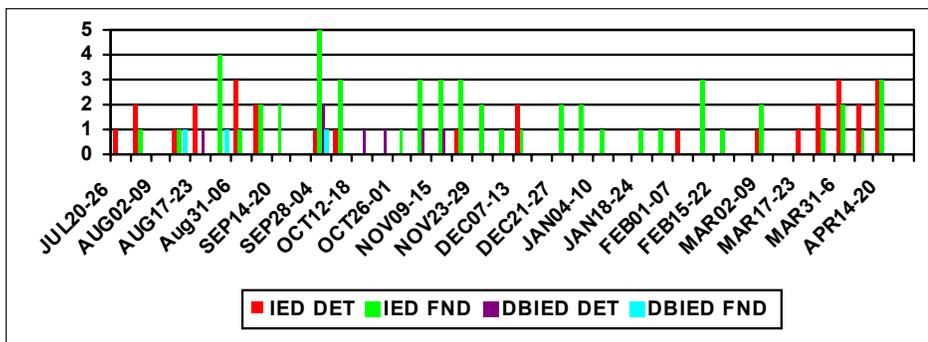


Figure 2

In fact, that is exactly what took place. The 3rd Brigade, 4th ID, to which 3-7 CAV was attached, brought the problem to the attention of the MoI. On the other side, the IP district commander took it through his channels to the MoI. Eventually a solution was brought about, but, most importantly, we did not supply the fuel that they needed or force a solution on them. In extreme cases, I must admit that assistance from higher to solve an issue is a must, but the days of the IP's overreliance on CF is over, and this should only be undertaken when all courses of action are exhausted.

Sons of Iraq (SoI)

During our deployment in Adhamiyah, the Sons of Iraq program was initiated. This has been one of the most important steps taken in the Iraqi theater of operations to reduce the amount of violence directed against CF, our partners, and civilians. Without getting into too much detail, the SoI serves as a "neighborhood watch" for their communities, albeit an armed one. In Adhamiyah they have become a force for peace and stability. The complexities of working with SoI, who are effectively conducting static checkpoint operations throughout Adhamiyah, are many. And there are naturally times when they and the IP have had their differences. There are, in fact, times when power struggles arise between SoI leaders as they seek to consolidate local power in a secure environment. But CF have recognized the benefit of the SoI and have begun the process of bringing them into the fold of the MoI as IPs and IA. Granted, the process has not been an easy one. The historic religious, sectarian differences and prejudices are still strong and will remain so for the foreseeable future. However, there seems to be some real action on reconciliation at the ministry level. But it will

be a slow, cautious process.

The benefits of the process of recognizing and legitimizing the SoI by accepting them into the IP are twofold. First, it legitimizes and recognizes the service that has been provided by the SoI. That the amount of violence has dropped significantly due to the SoI cannot be refuted. There is, of course, a train of thought that says we are simply paying terrorists who were trying to kill us before to not kill us, and that we're creating "consurgents" (concerned insurgents). One answer to that argument is the enemy you know is better than one you do not. Another answer might be that is why it is so important to reconcile the factions and bring the SoI into the fold as part of the solution rather than have them on the outside as an armed militia.

The second benefit of recognition and legitimization is that by accepting and

sending SoI to the IP academy it increases the numbers of the IP and could, if they are assigned to their home neighborhoods, provide familiar faces that have a proven track record of providing security for their muhallas, have been engaging with the citizenry, and providing protection to the property and livelihoods of not just the private citizen, but also the important economic livelihood of the burgeoning "shopkeeper" class that provide services and employment in the various neighborhoods.

This plan, at the time of the writing of this article, is in its nascent stage and has yet to reach complete fruition. Handled correctly this program will provide a real and lasting impact on the security issues facing Iraq.

The Shia/Sunni Dichotomy

One very real problem faced at the DJSS was the fact that a majority of the IPs working at the station were Shia, many with homes and families in Sadr City. Adhamiyah, however, is an overwhelmingly Sunni area. The Shia IPs would not conduct independent patrols without either CF or IA support. Their fear, a valid one, was that they would be attacked, kidnapped, and/or killed by the Sunni in Adhamiyah, and there are numerous examples of both the SoI and IP (usually off duty) engaging in periodic harassment of each other. This was never a



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A Sons of Iraq member provides security as residents line up to exchange empty propane tanks for filled ones at the marketplace in the Adhamiyah district of Baghdad March 19.

major problem, but there was always the possibility for escalation.

An example of the problems faced can be found in the patrols. The MPs consistently reported that when they accompanied an IP patrol of Shia makeup that the members of the patrol were distrustful of the citizenry, refused to engage with the people, and when prodded to “take the lead” did so unenthusiastically. The same was seen in the HHT foot patrols. Conversely, when the patrol was made up of Sunni personnel, their actions were the polar opposite. They talked to the population, passed out IO messages and tip cards, and generally took more of the lead than their Shia counterparts.

One solution to this problem is a joint operations program between the IP and SoI. This would involve the IP and SoI patrolling together, manning checkpoints, and serving warrants together.

Another solution for the IP in Adhamiyah to be effective at the street level is for the local police element to be made up of majority Sunni personnel; the Shia officers can then be reassigned to stations in predominantly Shia neighborhoods where they, in turn, can be more effective. As it stands now, hundreds of SoI members have been admitted to the police training academy. After graduating, it is hoped they will return to work in their own neighborhoods, relieving the SoI and offering a governmental, as opposed to extra-governmental, solution to the security problems.

As this article is written, we are preparing for redeployment after more than a year in theater as part of the surge. The outcome of the

JSS and SoI experiment remains to be seen, but that there has been a significant drop in violence over the period of the surge deployment of 3-7 CAV is inarguable. Many things need to happen to ensure this trend remains steady. There must be continued oversight at a small unit level to ensure a more intimate and personal relationship between CF and IP is cultivated. The SoI must accept a gradual drawdown of their numbers and release local power that has been consolidated during the SoI program. The MoI must accept and legitimize the SoI and bring them into the government through programs such as recruiting them for positions within the IP. And, there are still a hundred more things that must go right for final success. We are on the right road. The new catch phrase of the day is “defeat the FOB mentality.” This is a truism, and the JSS is one of the ways to defeat an isolating mentality. The JSS is succeeding and will continue to succeed as long as we maintain the focus of encouraging Iraqi solutions to their myriad of problems.

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HHT Soldiers, along with members of the Iraqi Police, conduct a patrol in Adhamiyah.

Courtesy photo

