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AOB Operations Sergeant in Operation Iraqi Freedom

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Abstract

This paper examines a Special Forces Company's daily operations in central Baghdad. The paper is written from the point of view of the Company Operations Sergeant. The Company's goal was to conduct Targeting Operations with an end state of integrating a target list into Force Development missions. This assisted Iraqi units with all aspects of controlling their assigned battle space. The initial transition of authority focused on a detailed analysis of the Company's battle space concentrating on the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) process. The IPB produced a detailed Target Intelligence Packets (TIP) in support of the conventional forces and Combined Joint Task Force Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTFAP) commander's intents. Further, we conducted a detailed analysis of the Iraqi units in our area of operations to identify all strengths and weaknesses to be addressed during Force Development operations.

AOB Operations Sergeant in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)

US Special Forces provide a service often referred to as a combat force multiplier in OIF. This is accomplished by embedding a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (SFODA) with an Iraqi battalion to assist them with the entire spectrum of combat operations. Five to seven SFODAs fall under control of a Special Forces Company that is called an Area Operations Base (AOB). The SFODA begins the mission with an assessment of the Iraqi battalion to determine the Mission Essential Task List (METL) tasks to be accomplished. This assessment is the basis for future short and long range training resourced for the unit. All of these battalions have a conventional Military Training Team (MiTT) with which the SFODA works closely and depends on for much of their support. As the SFODA begins operations with the Iraqi unit the MiTTs usually have the local national soldiers trained in great detail on basic METL tasks. After a detailed analysis the SFODA assists in refining and updating these METL tasks. The SFODA assessment of the Iraqi unit goes well beyond the needs for training and resources. It includes a more operational oriented focus with a detailed analysis of their battle space to determine the best way to find, fix, and destroy the enemy. This analysis begins a targeting process that creates a target list of combat missions to be accomplished once the local national battalion is combat ready and prepared to control their assigned area of operation. Building and prosecuting this target list can sometimes be considered the most important part of the SFODA mission while working with the Iraqi units. The SFODA participates in all phases of the intelligence and operations process to include the conduct of combat operations with the local national soldiers. The Iraqi leadership at all levels is included in this process with the ultimate goal of having them control all operations unassisted. You can better understand the focus of the Company operations if you keep in mind the above overview of their mission.

As the Company Operations Sergeant my primary mission was to track, resource, and ensure quality of training, targeting, and combat operations for four Iraqi battalions with embedded SFODAs. This required the company operations to closely scrutinize all training and resources needed by the local national units. We aggressively sought out and coordinated with all agencies responsible for providing support to ensure the Iraqi units were fielded appropriately. I also coordinated to resolve operational conflicts between the SFODAs and their Iraqi counterparts with conventional force commanders. Further, the company operations tracked all targeting throughout the AOB area of operation to ensure targets were prosecuted by the best unit available to accomplish the mission. We coordinated with numerous Special Operations Forces (SOF), conventional forces, and federal agencies to ensure the target packets were passed accordingly. I prepared a detailed assessment of each Iraqi unit every 40 days. This assessment was analyzed in great detail to ensure all shortfalls in the unit's training, targeting, and conduct of combat operations were addressed. Additionally, I staffed a weekly target meeting to ensure each SFODA integrated their targets with all other units and identified triggers in the detailed TIP for future prosecution. We constantly updated and addressed the issues in the training, targeting, and combat operations process to include a detailed IPB for each Iraqi unit. Integrating all of this into the commander's intent remained my primary focus as the company operations sergeant throughout the entire deployment.

One of the major problems I encountered is found in the mission planning process was civilians on the battlefield. They are considered in the mission planning guideline known as Mission, Enemy situation, Time, Terrain, Troops available, and Civilians (METT-TC). We considered the civilians in METT-TC in three areas: civilians that will help you, civilians that will hurt you, and civilians that that are neutral. We approached all of them as if they could help,

in a passive or active role, if we gained the needed rapport. We constantly updated and analyzed the demographics in our battle space with civilians in mind. We worked tirelessly to maintain rapport with civilians actively assisting coalition forces and ensure their protection. All operations addressed every contingency to prevent civilian collateral damage.

The above duties while serving as the AOB Operations Sergeant were primary, but not all encompassing. Along with these operational responsibilities of great importance came the normal duties of running the day to day AOB business. This included, but was not limited too, administrative functions and supply operations that filled over 900 support requests spanning a six month deployment from seven SFODAs. These teams were spread over a 90 kilometer area and often filling these support requests required movements through areas of high Anti Iraqi Force (AIF) activity while using unconventional Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs). Also, maintaining this support base required constant attention to the enemy situation. A detailed microanalysis of the SFODAs area of operation was conducted prior to executing these missions. Special TTPs had to be tailored to each support mission requiring detailed rehearsals prior to execution.

The company's mission required me to coordinate with, and find resolution to operational and logistical issues associated with several agencies outside of the US military. Some of them included the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Treasury Department, and State Department. We coordinated with numerous Iraqi organizations such as the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Oil (MOO), Ministry of Industry, and the Ministry of Defense (MOD). Further, we coordinated with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to include many local national and American civilian contractors that provided a myriad of services to assist us in accomplishing our mission. This

responsibility was time consuming as all of these organizations conducted business differently. Breaking the code on finding the right people to make decisions on different issues presented an ongoing challenge.

Recognizing the individual strengths and weaknesses of each Iraqi battalion allows US Special Forces to tailor a program that recruits and trains local national soldiers. They implement a targeting process that allows the Iraqi units to find, fix and destroy the enemy in their area of operations and ultimately deny the enemy of operations in their assigned battle space. As a Special Forces company operations sergeant, tracking all aspects of the Force Development and targeting process for seven SFODAs and hundreds of local national Soldiers presented a daily challenge that required incredible team work and the highest levels of competence among my junior NCOs. I successfully ensured the highest quality of training and detailed execution of combat operations throughout the company's area of operations due to the hard work and dedication of these NCOs on my left and right. The end state of the rotation showed over 100 AIF killed or detained as a direct result of their hard work. All of these AIF were successful at targeting US conventional forces prior to our intervention. The NCOs from my AOB certainly saved US lives by successfully completing their mission. Further, they successfully played key roles in bringing four Iraqi battalions on line to finally conduct combat operations with minimum US assistance. They never wavered under the stress of fighting an asymmetric war. This extremely demanding mission was accomplished only through their dedication. Every leader in the unit owes the success of our mission during OIFIII to each and every one of them. I am honored to have served with them during my time in Iraq as a Company Operation's Sergeant.