



Iraqi security forces (ISF) execute a react-to-contact drill 1 February 2017 during training at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. Building partner capacity is an integral part of Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve’s effort to train ISF personnel. (Photo by Sgt. Lisa Soy, U.S. Army)

A Tactical Approach to Consolidating Gains in a Post-Caliphate Iraq

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With the recent military defeat of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, the government of Iraq has an opportunity to retain and exploit the initiative gained through three years of hard fighting. To assist our Iraqi security

forces (ISF) partners, coalition forces must reorganize to enable the Iraqi government and the ISF to counter current and emerging destabilizing effects and exploit operational success. At this time, coalition forces in Iraq are adjusting at the operational and tactical level

to consolidate the gains made during offensive operations. This article addresses how to consolidate gains at the tactical level in the current and future operating environment. Specifically, it describes how Task Force Warrior, an infantry rifle battalion, transitioned from a strike cell-based organization into a targeting cell and integrated with special operating forces (SOF) to consolidate gains in Iraq.

On 9 December 2017, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced to the world the defeat of IS in Iraq. This announcement is arguably one of the greatest achievements coalition forces experienced in over sixteen years of fighting the Global War on Terrorism, and represents a major blow to the stated end state of IS. Although the three-year campaign to destroy the IS caliphate may be complete, the wholesale defeat of IS is far from over. The recent destruction of the IS caliphate is forcing a complete transition within the terrorist organization.

The assessment at the macro level is IS plans to reposition forces outside of Iraq and Syria, reinforce their digital caliphate, and export expertise to conduct attacks in Europe and North America. Assessed at the micro level, IS will continue to operate in smaller decentralized cells throughout Iraq, use violence and terror to discredit ISF and the Iraqi government, and maintain freedom of movement, but they must first consolidate and reorganize. To prevent IS consolidation and reorganization from occurring, current A2E (advise, assist, and enable) and A3E (advise, assist, accompany, and enable) efforts focus on the persistent disruption of the enemy to deny them the ability to achieve any coherent organization.¹ This will provide the “white space” needed for Iraq’s government and nongovernmental organizations to set conditions for stabilizing Iraq. However, through persistent disruption of the enemy, coalition forces are denying IS the very thing (coherent organization) it needs to target effectively, which is why conventional/SOF integration is so critical.²

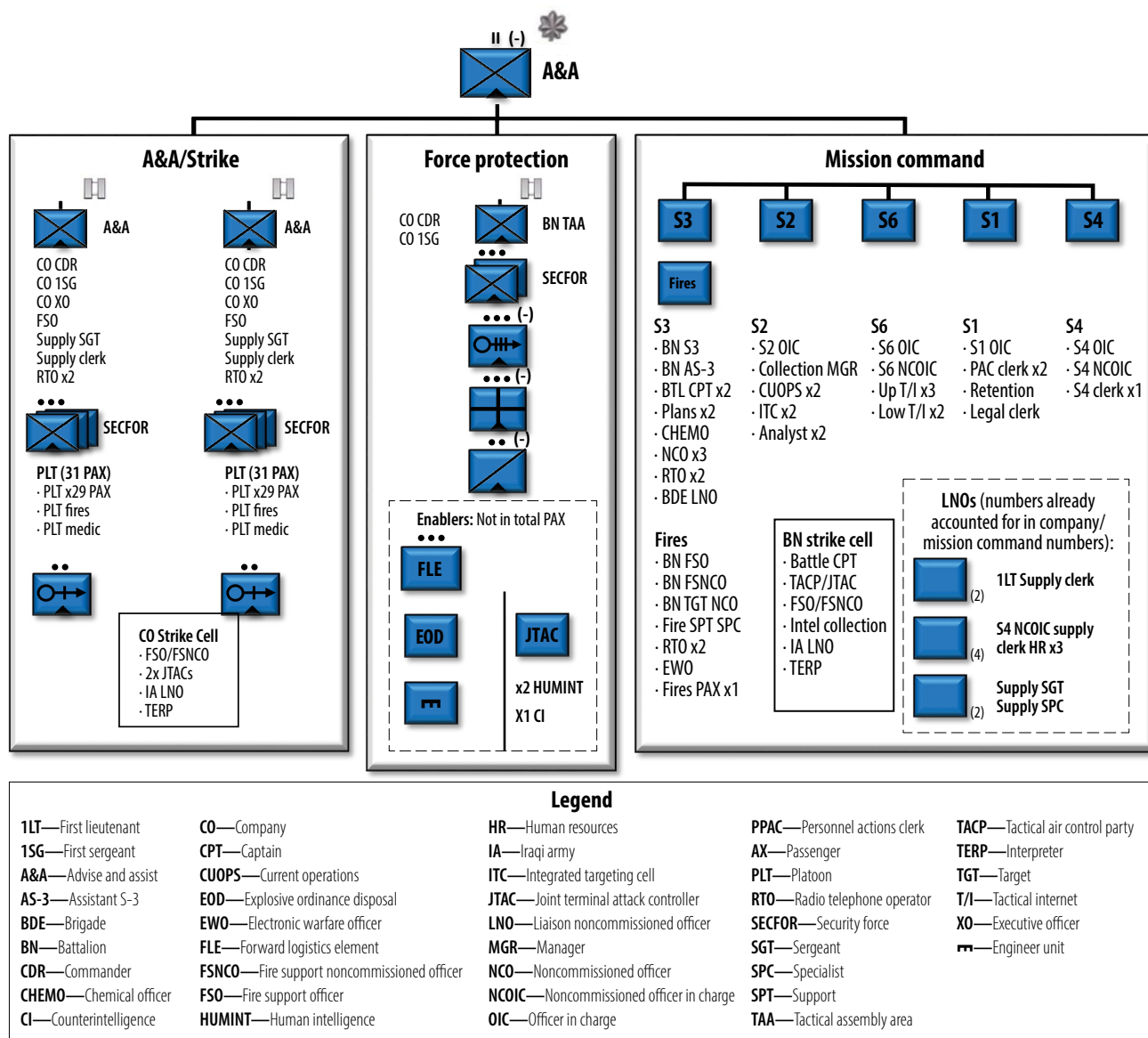
Task Force Warrior deployed to Mosul, Iraq in September 2017 to A3E the Ninewah Operations Command (NOC) commanded by an Iraqi army two-star general.³ The initial task organization, carved out of an infantry rifle battalion, structured itself around a strike cell. A mission command and a fires effects coordination cell served as the foundation for the strike cell to enhance situational understanding and deliver joint

and ground fires in support of ISF maneuver. From the beginning, coalition fires served as currency in the transactional relationship between coalition forces and ISF (see figure 1, page 3). With the defeat of IS, fires are no longer in as high demand, and the ISF instead desires actionable intelligence to facilitate their maneuver and prevent remnants of IS from establishing an insurgency within the country.

To consolidate gains in Iraq requires joint effects, combined conventional clearing operations, and a partner force capable of conducting offensive operations based on actionable intelligence. As the operational environment changed, it became apparent that the strike cell structure required additional enabler support not found at the battalion level to facilitate precision targeting of high value individuals (HVI) and high value targets (HVTs). Most notably, it required augmented signals intelligence, and processing, exploitation, and dissemination capabilities. Further, the task organization required SOF augmentation capability to partner with the ISF to conduct direct action raids.

Closing the gap in capability that was required to consolidate gains in Mosul and Ninewah Province, the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJFLCC-OIR), in coordination with brigade combat team headquarters, directed a transition to an integrated targeting cell (see figure 2, page 4). The integrated targeting cell, built around the S-2 (intelligence) section of the battalion staff, received augmentation from the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational force. This included intelligence analysts and collectors

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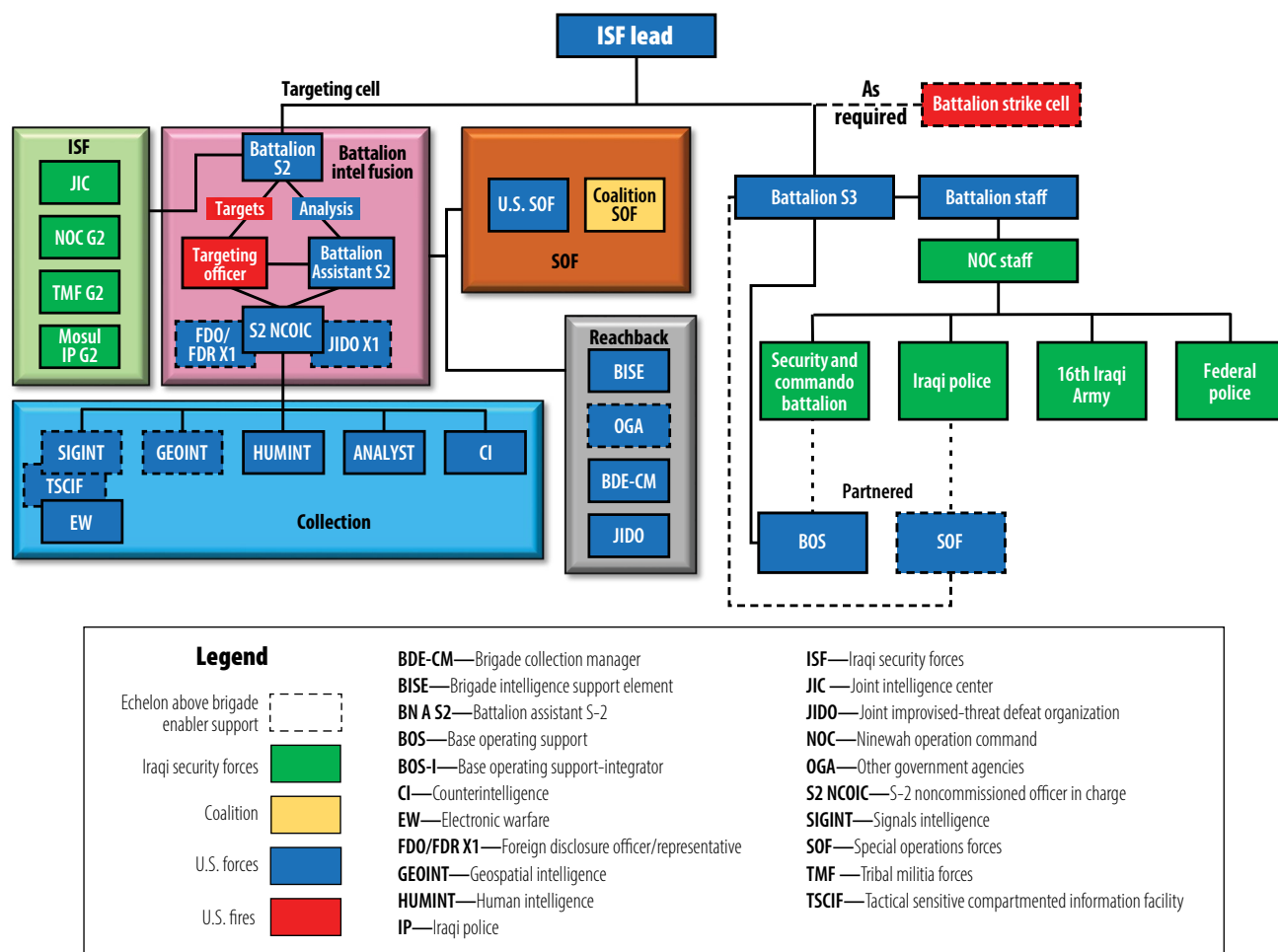


(Figure by Graebener and Maj. Timothy Walton)

Figure 1. Strike Cell

from Special Operations Task Force–North (SOTF-N) and Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Iraq along with reach-back support to CJFLCC-OIR, the brigade intelligence support element, the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization, and other government agencies. In addition to the coalition forces enablers, the partnered relationship with ISF gives access to a vast source network that provides valuable intelligence. Along with the additional intelligence capabilities, SOTF-N forward deployed a Special Operations Team (SOT) to the NOC to partner with ISF to conduct precision raids and action time sensitive targets.

In its current form, the NOC integrated targeting cell has no formal command relationship amongst the various stakeholders. Integration is achieved through unity of effort. Although each separate organization may operate along slightly differing lines of effort, there exists mutual interests and common objectives that create a unity of effort. Generally, the end state is the same; defeat the remnants of IS. This unity of effort facilitates the integrated targeting process. Using the Find/Fix/Finish/Exploit/Analyze/Disseminate (F3EAD) model, all members of the targeting cell collect, fuse, and analyze intelligence to develop targets, and share assets to find and fix



(Figure by Graebener Graebener, Capt. Andrew Germer, and Capt. David Henson)

Figure 2. Integrated Targeting Cell

the enemy. The NOC integrated targeting cell, reinforced by SOF, possesses multiple lethal and nonlethal options to finish the enemy. These options range from large-scale conventional clearance operations, targeted raids, and precision fires, to information and deception operations. However, the greatest effect on the enemy is achieved through the combination and synchronization of all these options. Once the target is finished, the integrated targeting cell exploits, analyzes, and disseminates intelligence gained during and after the operation that is reinvested into the targeting cycle for future missions.

Task Force Warrior in coordination with SOF partners at the NOC, developed an operational framework to help plan and synchronize integrated conventional and SOF A2E/A3E operations in support of ISF (see figure 3, page 5). This operational framework synchronizes the actions of the integrated targeting cell and advisory forces

over six phases.⁴ Phase I, the integrated target development phase, fuses all intelligence for the target area across the intelligence enterprise to produce actionable precision targets.⁵ Phase II, the plan and prepare phase, includes the combined coalition forces/ISF planning, precombat checks/precombat inspections (PCC/PCI), rehearsals, and final conditions check for the operation. Phase III, the direct operation raid phase, may occur any time throughout the operation but generally prior to Phase IV, and is executed by SOF-enabled ISF CTS/SWAT forces to capture or kill HVI/HVTs. Phase IV, conventional clear phase, occurs after the precision raid (mission dependent) and is executed by Task Force Warrior-enabled ISF.⁶ Phase V, the information operations/sensitive site exploitation phase, leverages the operation to message information operations themes by the ISF, and includes exploitation of materials and detainees for reinvestment

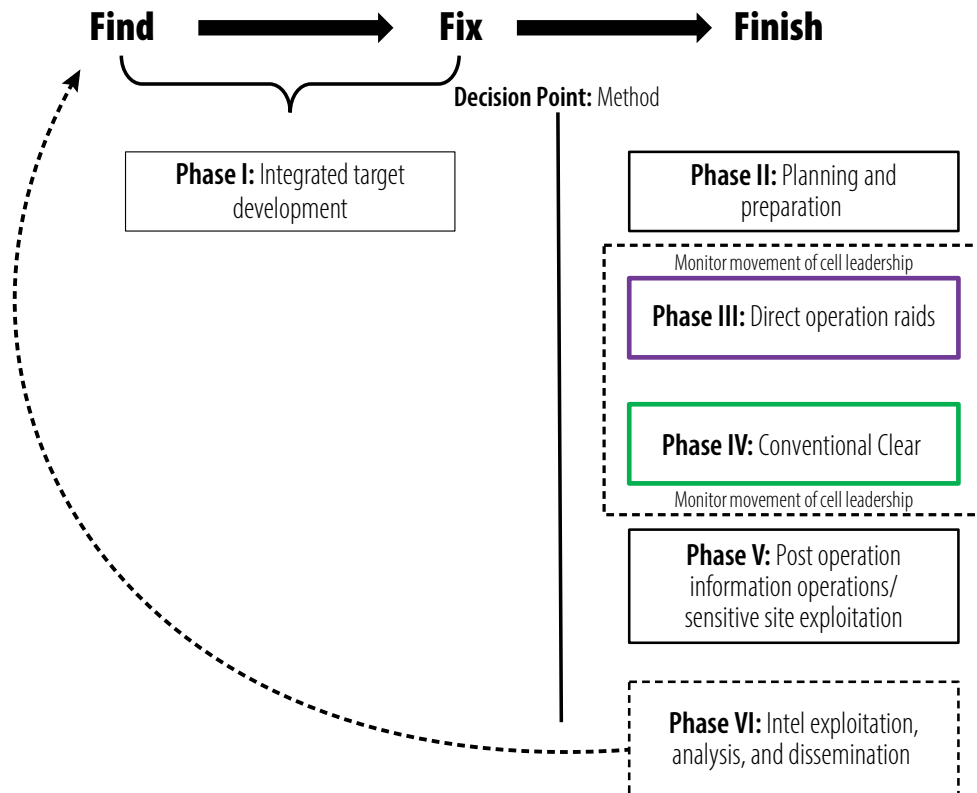
to the targeting cycle. Phase VI, the exploit, assess, disseminate phase, monitors how ISF is stimulating the environment to create the next opportunity to exploit. In this model, the ISF remains in a constant plan, prepare, execute, and assess cycle.

As stated earlier, the advantages of the integrated targeting cell and integration of conventional/SOF A2E and A3E of the ISF provide a powerful tool to tactical level commanders in

consolidating gains in the postcaliphate Iraq. Basically, the sum is greater than its parts. These advantages include

- increased intelligence self-sufficiency at the tactical level leveraging SOF signals intelligence and exploitation capabilities;
- resident all-source intelligence analysts provided by the battalion staff;
- persistent tactical UAS provided by BCT and access to tactical/theater/national level UAS through SOF and CJFLCC.
- SOF/ISF partnership;
- conventional/ISF partnership; and
- fusion of human intelligence networks across the intelligence enterprise.

Although this operational approach is still developing, the disruptive effects against the remnants of IS in Mosul are promising. In a sixty-day period, the NOC integrated targeting cell enabled seven ISF conventional



(Figure by author, based on Army Techniques Publication 3-60, *Targeting*, 2015)

Figure 3. Integrated Operational Framework

clearing operations and ten precision raids, resulting in 131 low-level IS detainees, 23 HVI detainees, 31 IS killed in action, various materials seized, and the destruction of two IS terrorist cells.⁷ Bottom line, the model is working.

In addition to the tangible effects on the IS network, this model is also producing additional actionable intelligence, opportunities to exploit ISF and Iraq government messaging as well as develop security conditions that facilitate stability operations. In the future, these operations may also serve in military deception operations to force movement of IS sleeper cells, which will enable the integrated targeting cell to fix cell leadership and technical experts. Finally, through continued partnership, the integrated targeting cell and conventional/SOF forces are building partner capacity so that one day the ISF will integrate their own intelligence enterprise to secure their population with limited coalition force assistance. ■

Notes

1. Task Force (TF) Patriot uses persistent disruption because the Iraqi security forces (ISF) is not large enough or capable enough to hold terrain.

2. Further compounding the security issues, popular mobilization forces are occupying liberated areas, but who has command authority of these units and their true intentions are unknown. Additionally, Iraqi government-led reconstruction efforts are slow to materialize. These changing variables within the environment also represent a shift from a contiguous to a noncontiguous area of operation.

3. TF Warrior (2-4 Infantry Regiment, 3/10 Mountain Division) deployed to Mosul to conduct advise, assist, accompany, and enable at the Ninewah Operations Center (NOC) in the summer of 2017 following the liberation of Mosul City from the Islamic State.

4. The ISF commanding general of the NOC is the final approval authority on operational objectives. However, coalition

force advisors shape his decision based on the enemy situational template, and high value individuals and high value targeting.

5. Understanding each stakeholder's targeting framework is a key component to integrating SOF/conventional targeting. For example, the combined joint special operations task force elements' targeting framework focuses mainly on national and theater strategic objectives where TF Warrior's focus is at the tactical and operational level objectives. Once understood, stakeholders look for complementary targeting effects achieved along each other's shared interests creating a unified action.

6. These forces include Iraqi army, Provincial Police, Federal Police, and in some cases popular militia forces and tribal militia forces. The target area is usually large (e.g., city neighborhood, or village[s]), and follows basic cordon and search doctrine.

7. These two cells were responsible for sustainment operations and mission command.