MiTT ADVISOR:

A Year with the Best Division in the IRAQI ARMY

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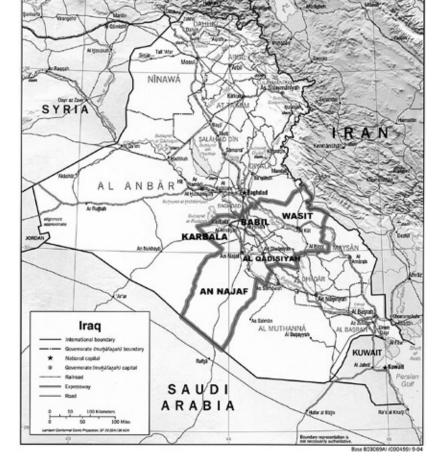U.S. Army Reserve, Retired

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PHOTO: The author speaks with Colonel Hassan, the Iraqi Army's 8th Division Chief of Staff, about humanitarian aid options of benefit to the Iraqi people, 3 June 2008, at Camp Echo, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. (U.S. Air Force, Airman 1st Class Matthew Plew)

AMERICAN SOLDIERS have been advising the Iraqi Army since 2004.[1] During military transition team (MiTT) training at Fort Riley in late 2007, the few published references describing advisors' experience at division level or higher dated from the Vietnam War. Articles covering the recent advisor experience in Iraq dealt predominantly with the tactical level. This article focuses on the 8th Iraqi Army Division (8IA) in 2008. Senior American and Iraqi commanders regarded this unit as top-tier, arguably the best in the Iraqi Army in terms of tactical competence and the ability to provide security in its area of responsibility while conducting operations driven by Iraqi intelligence. Iraqi Ground Forces Command and Ministry of Defense routinely praised the 8th Division as the Iraqi Army's best.[2] The commanding general's leadership and the division's operational successes and proficiency in personnel actions, training, and logistics have all been cited as the top in the Iraqi Army. The division has been selected as the test-bed for initiatives being considered for the rest of the Iraqi Army. As more Iraqi divisions achieve higher levels of operational readiness, they are likely to follow the path marked by 8IA.

The size and quality of Iraq's Security Forces continued to improve and the level of violence in the country dropped significantly during 2008. Changes in the status of U.S. forces in Iraq, coupled with the need for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, will almost guarantee fewer American troops in Iraq. Although the future number and composition of U.S. forces in Iraq are not yet determined, it appears clear there will be fewer U.S. combat units but a continued role for American advisors. This article will share observations likely to remain relevant to future advisors at division and higher levels.[3]

By 2008, it was clear that Iraqi Security Forces needed to take the lead in securing the country to meet U.S. and Iraqi interests. How best to accomplish this became the benchmark by which the 8th Iraq Division transition team prioritized its actions. The team's goal was to build the division to a level of readiness that no longer required advisors.

Iraq

- International boundary
- Governorate (muḥāfaẓah) boundary
- ★ National capital
- ⊛ Governorate (muḥāfaẓah) capital
- Railroad
- Expressway
- Road

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8th Iraqi Army Division

The division's area of responsibility included five predominantly Shi'a provinces stretching from the Iranian border in the East to Saudi Arabia in the Southwest, plus portions of some adjoining provinces.[4] This arc of land between Baghdad and the port of Basra covers almost one third of the country. The division's 17,500 soldiers were organized into four infantry brigades, transportation and engineer regiments, plus divisional signal, intelligence, military police and headquarters companies. Each of the division's four brigades was headquartered in a different province, and the division headquarters was in a fifth province. In January 2008, only two of the provinces in the division's AOR were under Iraqi control.[5] All five were by October 2008. The division went from 10 to 16 infantry battalions in 2008. Unlike most divisions, the 8th Division

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remained directly subordinate to the Iraqi Ground Forces Command.[6]

In 2008, Major General Oothman Ali Salih Farhood began his fifth year in command of the 8th Division. Highly regarded by senior Iraqi and coalition leaders, the general declined promotions to command the Basra and Diyala Operations Commands while awaiting creation of a corps command that included the existing 8th Division area of responsibility.[7]

In August 2007, Diwaniyah, the capital of Qadisiyah province and the location of 8th Division headquarters, was the indirect-fire capital of Iraq; the city receiving the greatest amount of incoming mortar and rocket fire. Operation Wathba Al-Asad (Lion Pounce) successfully regained control of the city in late 2007. As the 8th Division and coalition forces continued to build stability in the area, the transition team's efforts shifted from coaching the division in combat operations to assisting it in force generation, sustainment, and training. In 2008, the division went from being supported by a battalion from the 7th Iraqi Army Division to providing forces to commands in provinces outside its area of operations. At different times during the year, six of the division's battalions operated out of sector, earning the 8th Division a reputation as a unit with expeditionary capabilities.

8th Division MiTT

The standard division MiTT structure was 15 Soldiers—seven officers from captain to lieutenant colonel, and seven NCOs from staff sergeant to master sergeant—led by a colonel. Through most of 2008, just over half of the Iraqi Army's fourteen divisions were resourced with a standard MiTT. The 8th Division MiTT had six captains and majors, five NCOs, and four other Soldiers, which made the team the same size as a standard division MiTT for a time, albeit with Soldiers junior in rank.[8]

The 8th Iraqi Army Division MiTT was under administrative control of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, a part of Multi-National Division-Center. Located at Camp Echo near the division headquarters in Qadisiyah province, the team

was under operational control of Multi-National Division Center-South (MND-CS). The MiTT was the senior U.S. unit subordinate to the Polish divisional commands leading MND-CS. In October 2008, MND-CS relinquished its role and the team came under the operational control of the 2/4 Brigade Combat Team. U.S. transition teams advised all four of the division's brigades and some of its infantry battalions. Some were "external" teams formed at Fort Riley, and trained there, in Kuwait, and in Iraq. After training, teams transferred to the units that owned the battlespace in which they were located. Other brigade and battalion transition teams in the division were "out-of-hide" teams formed internally from their parent brigade combat teams.

A Commander-centric Organization

Decision making in the 8th Division typically resided with more-senior officers than would be common in an American combat unit. The MiTT team leader partnered with the 8th Division commanding general, his deputy, and the division chief of staff. Both coalition force units and subordinate Iraqi commands regularly asked the team to help obtain decisions and actions from the division command group. Because of this, the division MiTT was often involved in high-level decision making with respect to promotions, reliefs for cause, operational decisions, equipment allocation, unit basing, and force protection. The team leader often served as the catalyst for action from the division command group. This was particularly important in an organization so leader-centric in its planning and decision making.

The other advisors partnered with entire staff sections. Deciding which division staff officers to engage to get a decision was crucial because it was normal for one quarter to a third of an element to be on leave at any given time. With experience, it became clear what types of decisions each officer had the authority to make, and which were the prerogative of the section head. Advisors learned to decide whether to seek resolution from the principal staff officer, the head of a subordinate section, or the command group.

The commanding general approved a surprisingly large amount of actions that would be routine staff work in a U.S. formation, including repair parts requests and fuel allocations.

Iraqi brigade commanders sometimes sent requests through their MiTT advisors for assistance in getting decisions from the commanding general. Because this did not support Iraqi security forces self-sufficiency, advisors generally encouraged Iraqi commanders to contact General Oothman directly.[9]

Division Troop Leading Procedures

The Iraqi Army planning process has been jokingly described as both "division troop leading procedures" and "delay, decide, deliver, adjust."[10] Such tongue-in-cheek comments correctly convey that planning in the Iraqi Army is less deliberate and faster than American officers are accustomed to. The division G3 once remarked to his advisor, "Too much planning causes too many problems." In another context, these observations could seem disparaging. However, the comments are instructive in understanding how each army's planning appears to the other.

MAJ Thoms C. Long

8th Division Commanding General, MG Oothman, is joined by the Division G2, COL Khadem, in a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Noori al Maliki following a discussion of security concerns in the country's south, 2009.

Through a U.S. lens, Iraqi planning appears underdeveloped and reactive. Viewed from the other direction, U.S. planning processes seem overly complex and time-consuming. Yet the Iraqi Army system is flexible and responsive, and it works well at lower echelons. An Iraqi battalion can respond quickly to a new threat or situation. A senior U.S. officer observed an Iraqi unit depart five minutes after being notified of a hostage situation. In less time than it would have taken a typical U.S. unit to complete the abbreviated Military Decision Making Process, the Iraqi Army unit had killed the kidnappers and released the hostages. While this planning model works for the Iraqi Army against today's threat, it may prove inadequate against future, larger-scale threats. This is particularly true for a division headquarters once the Iraqi Security Force gains more aircraft, indirect fire assets, and other enablers.

Before beginning the process of assisting an Iraqi Army counterpart in planning an operation or program, advisors had to understand the commanding general's guidance. Initiatives that did not have his approval stood no chance of success. For major undertakings, the most productive sequence was for the team leader to meet with him to determine his level of interest and planning guidance. Once assured of this, it was certain the division staff would work closely with the MiTT. The staff principal and MiTT advisor would meet regularly to discuss the project or initiative.

Conducting interim progress reviews was especially useful when working with less-motivated staff officers. About half of the primary staff performed to a standard that would fit well with a coalition force staff. However, without the deputy commanding general's or chief of staff's participation in interim progress reviews, some Iraqi officers would seek to placate their advisors without achieving much. Keeping senior leaders informed was important to ensuring progress.

In early 2008, Iraqi Ground Forces Command directed 8th Division to return the battalion that had been on loan from the 7th Division for several months.[11] Knowing the battalion was scheduled to return to Anbar (its home station), the MiTT offered to work with the division staff in planning. The division G3 declined the offer, stating that his commanding general had not directed him to do it. MiTT advisors then offered to assist in developing courses of action to maintain security after the battalion's departure. This was also politely declined because it had not been ordered. The 8th Division staff conducted little contingency planning. They typically relied upon the commanding general for a directed course of action before beginning planning.

Noncompliance Not Uncommon

One of the more puzzling aspects of working with the 8th Division was the unit's ability to disregard written orders from higher commands with apparent impunity. The events related to the return of 7th Division's battalion provided insight into how opaque 8th Division decision making could be. Less than a week before the unit was to return, no preparations for the battalion's return to home station had been made. The Iraqi Ground Forces Command MiTT and Iraq Assistance Group contacted the division MiTT to ensure the Division was planning to release the unit. Since the division had not planned for this (because the commanding general had not approved it), the team recommended that Iraqi Ground Forces Command send a written order, reinforcing the originally specified release date. The order was prepared and sent.

The day after receiving the order, it became less confusing why no planning had taken place. The commanding general traveled to Baghdad and personally appealed to the Ministry of Defense. This resulted in the battalion's attachment to 8th Division being extended for a number of weeks. U.S. advisors at all echelons were understandably surprised that this was acceptable in the Iraqi Army. Weeks later, as the new deadline approached, plans were made to transport the battalion back to Anbar and to backfill its security positions in the province. One did not need to ask if the commanding general had approved the plan.

A similar refusal demonstrated that even the Ministry of Defense was not exempt from division-level noncompliance. At one point it emerged that 8th Division had millions of rounds of AK-47 rifle

ammunition in excess of authorizations. The Ministry sent a written order for the unit to ship large quantities to other installations. The division did not comply.

Coalition advisors to the Ministry of Defense contacted the MiTT for assistance. The 8th Division conducted a physical recount of ammunition and reported that higher headquarters had not properly debited rounds consumed in operations from the unit's account. This revealed that the division actually had less than the original excess amount. When the Ministry of Defense then ordered the unit to ship a percentage of this revised amount elsewhere, the division again declined to do so. The MiTT shared the concerns of the higher echelon advisors with 8th Division. However, after a few such requests, both the Ministry of Defense and coalition force advisors gave up on the effort. Neither of these incidents appeared to hurt the division or the commanding general.

Understanding both groups' interests, the MiTT was able to contribute to a solution. At the time, approximately 40 percent of the division was equipped with M16s. Late in 2007, the Iraq Assistance Group halted M16 fielding to 8IA because 8IA had a number of soldiers in the ranks who had not completed basic training. By working with the division to stop the "street hire" practice, and communicating this in a letter to Iraqi Ground Forces Command, the MiTT gained approval to resume M16 fielding. By the time most of the division's rifles were M16s, the division began the process of exchanging 7.62 mm ammunition for 5.56 mm, freeing up AK-47 stocks for other Iraqi Army units.

It was not unusual for coalition advisors to request division MiTT assistance to get an Iraqi unit to comply with Iraqi orders. The team's standard reply was that the MiTT would ensure our Iraqi counterparts had received and understood the requirement. The MiTT certainly did not have the power to enforce Iraqi decisions or coalition force desires on the division. In fact, attempts to force a decision typically backfired, thereby damaging interpersonal relations. Early in the process of releasing the 7th Division's battalion, one MiTT advisor stated the coalition position too forcefully and too often. The predictable result was that this officer had to rebuild the relationship with his Iraqi counterpart over the next few months.

The author with members of the 8th Division staff and MiTT advisors at the 8th Division headquarters compound in late 2008.

Reassignment, not Dismissal or Retirement

The Iraqi Army lacks a functioning retirement system. Rather than dismissing officers who were no longer performing in their prime, the division routinely reassigned these officers and sometimes created new, lateral roles to shunt them aside. The unit was well over-strength at senior ranks, but this did not appear to be of concern at Iraqi Ground Forces Command or at the Ministry of Defense.[12] Viewed through an American lens, the Iraqi Army was tolerant of weak performance and a degree of corruption.

A technique that sometimes worked to get weak performers removed from key Iraqi Army positions was for coalition advisors to provide written statements by those who witnessed misconduct. A brigade MiTT had been unsuccessfully attempting to have the deputy commander removed for many months. The deputy had been identified as corrupt, inept, and hostile to coalition forces. He routinely stole items (typically loading his car with unit property before going on leave), undercut the MiTT's effectiveness, and was ineffective in coordinating the staff. Despite this, the MiTT team leader's recommendation for removal to the brigade commander was unheeded. The commander also declined to address this with the commanding general. When the division MiTT chief raised

these concerns, the commanding general remained unconvinced of the need to remove the brigade deputy commander.

However, the brigade MiTT team recorded their observations in signed statements. Within a week after reading the translated witness statements, the division commanding general visited the brigade. After personally interviewing the brigade commander, the deputy, and the brigade MiTT team leader, the commanding general decided the allegations were credible. Within days, he removed the officer from his position and reassigned him. This was the typical sanction for senior officer misconduct.

Relationships

Very little good can happen without a solid relationship between an advisor and his counterpart. As Margaret Nydell notes in *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*, "A good personal relationship is the most important single factor in doing business successfully with Arabs."[13] Working together to solve problems, while having the cultural awareness and ability to see things from the Iraqi viewpoint, are straightforward ways to build rapport. Being able to provide something that an Iraqi counterpart would not otherwise have is also a good way to build the relationship. While MiTT teams have a small budget, and the rules on what Iraqis can purchase are somewhat restrictive, teams can provide goods and services that benefit the Iraqi Army and build cohesion.[14] Some of the guidelines the 8th Division's MiTT team developed may serve as a useful jumping-off point for other advisors:

● Set low expectations. The MiTT's primary currencies are advice and communications.

● Do not provide things that undercut the Iraqi systems being developed.

● Gauge a counterpart's interest level by the degree to which he is willing to expend resources and work on the solution.

● Coach counterparts into mastering Iraqi Army systems and processes.

With coalition forces from eight nations serving at MND-CS headquarters in Diwaniyah, the support provided by units partnering with 8th Division units varied widely. Some were willing to provide items available through the Iraqi Army supply system. Because their repair parts system is notoriously slow and unresponsive, Iraqis were understand-

> *…every time a coalition unit provided something also available through the Iraqi Army system, it delayed the Iraqis' mastery…*

ably willing to accept items from partners. Some coalition forces regularly provided spare vehicle parts to one Iraqi unit. Yet, every time a coalition unit provided something also available through the Iraqi Army system, it delayed the Iraqis' mastery of their own cumbersome system.

Construction material, medical supplies, and vehicle parts were among the items some coalition force units regularly provided. This undercut the MiTT's efforts to have the Iraqi soldiers master their own system. The team often successfully deflected such requests with responses such as, "As the MiTT, we can provide whatever you wish—as long as it is advice." Repeated enough times with a smile, the message was clear. The frequency of such requests dropped greatly, but never quite ceased.

Even when coalition force advisors *could* provide something, it was often advisable to have one's Iraqi counterparts put some "skin in the game." On one occasion, the coalition had gravel available to fill in muddy sections of an often-used road. Rather than merely fill the areas, which available coalition force assets could have easily done, a productive discussion on roles ensued. The Iraqi Army provided transport and labor for the project, thus building their own capabilities while the coalition demonstrated its willingness to work with them.

When the team was willing to provide an item in order to avoid failure in a critical Iraqi Army mission, it was also advisable to ask the Iraqi Army to complete and submit a supply request. Even if the submission didn't result in getting the item from the Iraqi Army supply system, it served two functions. It ensured Iraqi counterparts understood and were competent at using their own system, and it provided a document that advisors could trace by working with coalition counterparts in the Iraqi Army supply system. This "shadow tracking" at higher nodes in the supply chain by MiTT members was useful in identifying whether there were

flaws in the manner the requests were prepared, or systemic problems.

Among the most valued services that advisors could facilitate was access to coalition medical care. The Iraqi Army, like the country as a whole, was short physicians. The 8th Division MiTT was able to link division soldiers, and in rare instances family members, with coalition force medical support. Each instance helped build relationships with key Iraqi leaders who were important to the success of the MiTT's work with the 8th Iraqi Army Division.[15]

Cultural Considerations and Differences

When an Iraqi counterpart asked for something, it was normally safer to answer, "This could be a problem" rather than "perhaps" or "I'll check." A MiTT officer asked an Iraqi counterpart, "When you say 'maybe' or 'we'll see,' it usually means 'no.' Yet when I say 'maybe,' you take it as a 'yes.' Why the difference?" His counterpart responded, "You come from the most powerful Army in the world. We know you could paint the sky orange if you wished." One expert advises, "If it is unreasonable, illegal, or too difficult, the correct form is to listen carefully and suggest that while you are doubtful about the outcome, you will at least try to help. Later you express your regrets and offer instead to do something else in the future."[16]

There was no reluctance on the part of Iraqi officers, even the colonels who served as the 8th Division primary staff, to partner with junior U.S. Army captains and senior NCOs. American NCOs were treated with the same courtesy as officers. On the many occasions when the MiTT dined with Iraqis, table positions were generally by rank order. U.S. NCOs sat in and among Iraqi officers. Indeed, since the senior advisor normally sat with the senior Iraqi present at any event, it was prestigious for Iraqis to be paired with an advisor.[17]

The Iraqi Army does not assign its NCOs or warrant officers (senior NCOs) with responsibilities similar to their peers in the U.S. Army. Other than sporadic work with the division sergeant major, all Soldiers on the MiTT spent the vast majority of their time working with Iraqi officers.

One of the places where differences in the two armies' cultures were evident was at meetings. Intelligence information was not widely shared.

Daily staff meetings began with a review of the current situation, as would an American update briefing, but the G2 had information to share only one or two days per month. Even that was usually a report on an event that had occurred, not actionable intelligence. Their rationale was that the staff as a whole didn't possess the "need to know."

The primary text on Arab culture used by transition teams during training at Fort Riley advised, "Arabs place great value on personal interviews."[18] The commanding general's interview of the brigade deputy commander who was eventually relieved was evidence of this. Even candidates for battalion and brigade command were personally interviewed by Iraqi Army selection boards in Baghdad.

Iraqi officers, like other Arabs, "are confident that that the rejection of a request may be reversed if top-level personal contact can be made."[19] Had the transition team better understood that this cultural norm sometimes trumped military standards on adherence to orders, we would have been less surprised by many of the events related here.

New participants at Iraqi Army meetings were often taken aback by the tone with which staff officers would address their superiors. Loud, emotional appeals were not uncommon and could cause an American Soldier to wonder whether someone was putting himself in danger of being fired. However, the MiTT came to appreciate that in Arab culture, "raising the voice, repeating points, even pounding the table for emphasis may sound angry, but in the speaker's mind, they merely indicate sincerity."[20]

Two hours was about the maximum length for a productive meeting. Anything longer risked being terminated early by common (Iraqi Army) consent. Meetings were useful for sharing information and providing leaders a forum for addressing subordinates. They were less productive for developing a plan or obtaining a decision. An Iraqi leader hosting an event would not permit himself to appear weak or permit extensive focus on flaws in his organization. An October 2008 logistics conference represents an example. The agenda, developed jointly by Iraqi officers and their coalition advisors, called for presentations from 0900 until 1500. After an extended, and unplanned, talk by a senior Iraqi officer, the conference was back on schedule by lunchtime. As lunch ended, the Iraqis announced that the meeting

courtesy of author

Soldiers from 8th Iraqi Army Division's 30th Brigade, conduct an After Action Review following company training at Numaniyah in the Fall of 2008.

was over, all goals having been accomplished. While some substantive discussions did continue into the afternoon, these were in smaller groups of peers from different organizations, unlike the morning session which included Iraqis ranked from NCOs to general officers.

The values of the two cultures account for a number of other differences. It is said, "Arabs will rarely admit to errors openly if doing so will cause them to lose face. *To Arabs, honor is more important than facts.*"[21] This may partially explain why they did not make decisions in large gatherings. Opinions shared in small groups among peers or by officers and their direct subordinates are less confrontational and more likely to produce results.

Conducting after-action reviews was a new practice in the division. They occurred during training, but not at higher levels. When the concept was introduced, there was reluctance to raise any criticisms in front of leaders. Iraqi leaders were also initially averse to repeating training to improve performance. Serving as observer/controllers at battalion-level training, advisors convinced division leaders of the benefit of sharing observations and recommendations after training. Units readily used sand tables during AARs, and came to look forward to improving performance during subsequent iterations of a training scenario. The Iraqis eventually came to accept practices that were initially different from their norms.

Like the rest of the Army, officers in 8th Division lived on base away from their families and typically took two four-day periods of leave per month. While the top three leaders would adjust their planned absences based on operations and the situation, most of the primary division staff typically did not. This resulted in unexpected situations, such as primary staff officers being absent at critical times. Absences of key leaders were common during planning or execution of important events. When asked about this, 8th Division leaders normally responded that competent deputies were present. The realization that, in the fifth year of the insurgency, one cannot put family life on hold forever, and their cultural view of fate likely played into this attitude toward absensces.[22]

Relationships with Higher Headquarters

Logistics and personnel systems in the Iraqi Army are complex, not well understood, and still relatively new. A standard request for training ammunition requires 12 signatures, a non-standard request 16. Compared with U.S. Army supply procedures, personal contact and good relationships with counterparts throughout the supply chain are vastly more important to meeting units' needs than accurately following procedures.

Thus, Iraqi Army officers can profit from maintaining regular contact with their colleagues at senior headquarters. The G1 was particularly successful because he traveled to Baghdad weekly to follow through on pay problems, promotion backlogs, and other personnel actions. His achievement in having the Iraqi Army's best record in personnel matters was closely linked to these regular visits.

In 2008, any U.S. Soldier with a Common Access Card had easier access into and around Baghdad's International Zone (formerly the Green Zone) than Iraqi officers with all but the highest-level access badge. This paradox meant there was a distinct advantage for Iraqi Army officers to travel with

> ***…there was a distinct advantage for Iraqi Army officers to travel with their advisors.***

their advisors. It also served the MiTT's interests to meet advisor counterparts at higher headquarters.

When working with 8th Division staff officers with less initiative, the MiTT found it useful to arrange travel to make it easier for the staff to meet their counterparts.[23] The MiTT also learned that it was useful to invite senior Iraqi Army leaders to the division's conferences. Reflecting cultural values, good relationships generally proved more successful to solving problems than did solely adhering to procedures.

MiTT Organization

The year began with MiTT team members performing advisory functions that closely matched the standard roles on the team's organization chart. Most members performed similar functions both internally and in working with the Iraqi Army. For example, the advisor for the Iraqi Army G3 (operations) was also the team S3; the G1 (personnel) advisor was responsible for team administration; the team medic advised Iraqi medical professionals.

After an uprising by the Mahdi Army, the 8th Division demonstrated the ability to suppress any resistance in its area in less than 24 hours.[24] By mid-2008, months had passed without MiTT participation in combat operations.

While early in 2008, the MiTT's four additional positions were filled, by October all but the colonel had departed without replacement.[25] Because the team leader was not part of the battalion team that formed the core of the division MiTT, the start and end dates of his tour of duty were offset from the rest of the team. By summer, it was clear that logistics and sustainment were the division's greatest needs. With the improvement in the operating environment, the change in teams and a decrease in overall strength, the incoming MiTT took on different roles than their predecessors.

An offset in "relief in place/transfer of authority" dates proved to be a benefit for the incoming team. Rather than relying solely on a standard ten-day

transition process with their departing counterparts for situational awareness, the incoming team spent several months with the experienced team leader. Instead of directly following the previous organizations, the leader decided to structure the team to focus on the division's greatest need. As a result, the incoming transition team had three logistics advisor instead of one.

With fewer assigned members, the team had some advisors partner with multiple staff sections and units.

One advisor worked with the G3 (operations) and G7 (training), previously two different positions. The team was reduced from two intelligence officers to one, who partnered with both the G2 (intelligence) and the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance company commander. Another technique that worked for the team was adjusting the internal-external balance. In the outgoing team, most members had roles of near-equal importance on both sides of the walls that separated 8th Division from Camp Echo. By focusing one of the new team members on coalition reports and internal administration, most of the incoming team was able to spend more time with their Iraqi counterparts.[26]

Another successful tool in organizing the newly-arrived team was a one-month azimuth check. As with any new team, there were unknowns regarding relationships, workload, and battle rhythm. One cannot align advisors, counterparts, and responsibilities precisely based on the situational awareness on the first day. The team therefore planned and executed a 30-day re-look of roles and responsibilities. This provided all team members a chance to shape their work environment after a month of building situational awareness. The adjustments made in roles, responsibilities, and the rating chain after the first 30 days prepared the team for success later in the year.

Small Unit on a Coalition Base

The 8th Division MiTT was one of a number of small U.S. units on a base where non-Iraqi allies predominated. A continuing challenge involved how and where to provide the greatest lasting benefit to the division staff, the separate companies, and two Iraqi battalions without transition teams located in Diwaniyah. The division MiTT found that good relationships with other U.S. and coalition forces increased the team's effectiveness in assisting the division.

Commander of 8th Iraqi Army Division, 30th Brigade, gives feedback to his 1st Battalion after an assault conducted at Numaniyah in 2008.

During 2008, Ukrainian and U.S. military police who usually focused on professionalizing Qadisiyah's civilian police, also helped assess the division's military police company's readiness. A Bosnian explosive ordnance disposal platoon conducted training with 8th Division's ordnance disposal company, later incorporated into the 8th Field Engineering Regiment. A Polish MiTT team worked with one of the Iraqi infantry battalions in Diwaniyah.

When not otherwise engaged, Soldiers and vehicle crews from other U.S. units participated in convoys and mounted combat patrols with the team. The participation of these crews was particularly helpful. Every vehicle and crew provided by another unit meant that three MiTT advisors (driver, vehicle commander, and gunner) could work with their Iraqi counterparts, rather than simply contributing to the three-vehicle minimum required for a patrol.

Sub-MiTT

Forming small, task-organized MiTT elements, augmented with soldiers and vehicles from other units, was a useful technique. Sub-MiTTs traveled to other bases to work with different elements of the division. At one time, the team was able to simultaneously deploy two sub-MiTTs while continuing work with key leaders at the division headquarters. The team executive officer led three soldiers from the MiTT, one of the team's Iraqi National Military Advisors, and augmentees from the parent brigade combat team to the training base at Numaniyah, where they coached an Iraqi battalion through Warrior Training.[27]

The communications and logistics NCOs, one of the team's contractors, and personnel and vehicles borrowed from the provincial reconstruction team's security detachment comprised another sub-MiTT. This group worked at the Besmaya training center, overseeing the fielding of M16 rifles to other units within the division. During this period, the G7 advisor continued to work with his counterpart at division headquarters to resolve problems and coordinate with the units undergoing training and their advisors.

Cooperation with others was quite beneficial on a base without a major U.S. unit present.[28] Every U.S. unit in Camp Echo reported to a different higher command located elsewhere. Despite the "stove-piped" reporting chains, the units shared

situational awareness to improve their unity of effort and effectiveness. Sharing scarce resources, whether power tools, a plotter printer, or other information technology assets built a spirit of cooperation that contributed to mission success. With time, the MiTT was able to borrow vehicles and crews to form multiple convoys large enough to employ sub-MiTTs.

Advisors, Communication, and Situational Awareness

A contracted military advisor support team consisting of two special operations/foreign internal defense specialists (retired senior Special Forces NCOs) and two retired Iraqi brigadier generals who were former instructors at the Iraqi Army's Staff College augmented the MiTT. These four contractors made important contributions to the team's success. The U.S. contractors possessed the same skills and experience as their active duty counterparts. Both had spent multiple years in the Central Command area of operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom. With only one NCO on the team from a maneuver branch, the advisors expanded the team's capability to provide training.

The Iraqi National Military Advisors helped overcome the Iraqi Army's cultural aversion to raising problems or having substantive discussions during large meetings. They provided instant feedback to the MiTT by confirming (or questioning) statements made and recommending follow-up questions. They were seen as a safe, non-attribution channel in which to raise problems or to share observations on what was really going on. The Iraqi National Military Advisors also clarified discrepancies between U.S. and Iraqi Army military terminology that confused the team's interpreters, none of whom had military experience beyond basic soldiering. They also provided insight to how the Iraqi Army was supposed to function and attended informal office chats between the MiTT and staff principals.

U.S. contractors possessed the same skills and experience as their active duty counterparts.

Communication is crucial to success in an organization as large as an Iraqi division. In 2008, the Iraqi Army's internet system extended only to division level. To supplement communication the division MiTT established biweekly logistics and operations/training conference calls with MiTTs from 8th Division's subordinate brigades and battalions.[29] These calls were useful forums for understanding priorities and problems. Higher Iraqi headquarters also conducted audio and video conferences with division counterparts using the MiTT's more robust electronic communication media.

The Iraqi commanding general regularly hosted commanders and senior officers from the coalition divisions, the Multi-National Corps, the Multi-National Security Transition Command, and the Coalition Army Advisory Training Team. Special operations units and coalition brigades and battalions partnered with 8th Division subordinate units. Because multiple coalition force units had regular contact with elements of the division, each unit that partnered with or visited might garner information about the division that the transition team didn't have.

For situational awareness, the MiTT was the best single source to know what was happening across the division. It was therefore important to attend senior-level Iraqi Army and coalition force meetings and share information with coalition units. There were times when information in the advisor and coalition force channels was more current than that in Iraqi channels. The ability to share information with both 8th Division and coalition forces improved unity of effort and the situational awareness of all. For technological and cultural reasons, the division did not maintain 24-hour operations. The MiTT was able to maximize its effectiveness by matching the schedules of their senior Iraqi Army counterparts, rather than attempting to maintain 24-hour operations.

Success Building on Itself

During the course of the year, 8th Division's successes led to other opportunities. The division and the MiTT were proactive in working with the Iraqi Ground Force Command and Ministry Of Defense in improving the unit's logistics. When the Ministry Of Defense and its advisors decided to jump-start the Iraqi Army's poor repair parts

system by "pushing" repair parts to units, it selected the 8th as the first division to receive a shipment of 27 pallets of HMMWV spare parts.

When fielding of M16 rifles resumed, joint Iraqi and coalition cadre conducting weapons training at Besmaya were impressed with the manner in which the soldiers of 8th Division conducted themselves. Saying that "they showed up on time, with the proper equipment, and ready to train" may be faint praise in some circumstances, but by doing so the division differentiated the 8th from other Iraqi Army divisions. The division's performance led to additional opportunities to replace its AK-47s. It moved to the top tier of units equipped with the new rifles and was also selected to receive a new intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance system.

"Iraqi Good Enough"

While the term "Iraqi good enough" might initially sound pejorative, it simply acknowledges that one cannot realistically use U.S. Army metrics such as Unit Status Report ratings, Mission Essential Task List proficiency, or Army Training and Evaluation Program standards in measuring success in building the Iraqi Army. The phrase represents the coalition's attempt to quantify how proficient the Iraqi Army needs to become. Speaking of Afghanistan, the commander of the Combined Security Transition Command, Major General Robert Cone, stated, "We don't need to make these cops as good as the 82nd Airborne. We just need to make them two-and-a-half times better than the enemy."[30]

While one can quantify and compare elements of combat power between symmetric forces, it is awkward to quantify the effectiveness of the Iraqi Army over its insurgent and militia enemies. But with all the metrics of violence (the numbers of improvised explosive device attacks, indirect fire, suicide bombers, etc.) down sharply and indicators of economic activity increasing in its area of responsibility, the 8th Division exceeds both the "Iraqi good enough" and "two-and-a-half times better" measures of success.

The quotation most frequently referenced during MiTT training is also the most useful to remember in working with the Iraqi Army. As T.E. Lawrence counseled, "Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it for them." Advisors tempted to insert themselves into an Iraqi operation should always

DIVISION MiTT LESSONS LEARNED

- The decisive operation is to coach, teach, and mentor the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to lead their nation's security. Any activity that does not support this is secondary, at best.

- A good relationship with your Iraqi counterparts is paramount. Without this, you are combat ineffective.

- The goal is to get your ISF unit good enough that you are not needed. Work yourself out of a job.

- The Iraqi Army is centered on the leader. Be careful not to encourage Iraqi counterparts to take actions not supported by their superiors.

- MiTT teams need to coordinate with counterparts up and down the coalition force advisor chain. Think of yourselves as observer/controllers embedded with an Iraqi unit for a year.

- Don't expect an Iraqi Army counterpart to admit an error or otherwise show weakness in public. Expect Iraqi Army officers to be more demanding with you in public than in private. Perception of "honor" trumps fact.

- A "yes" from your counterpart means he will try. "We will see," "perhaps," or anything less than a definite "yes" is a polite "no."

- Expect planning much closer to execution, with less detail. Most operations look like the previous one; even brigade operations appear like SOPs. FRAGOs can happen surprisingly quickly.

- Following Iraqi Army processes is often not adequate for results. Routine actions (e.g. supply, personnel) are more likely to succeed if accompanied by personal contacts with counterparts in higher commands.

- Personal appeals to higher authority are common in Arab culture. Expect your counterparts to skip levels in the chain of command with appeals. Advisors should expect to be treated as appellate authorities, particularly when visiting subordinate Iraqi units. "This could be very difficult; who normally handles such matters?" is a safe response to an unexpected request.

> ***…one cannot realistically use common U.S. Army metrics… in measuring success in building the Iraqi Army.***

reconsider Lawrence's advice before acting. If an event meets "Iraqi good enough" standards, it is normally better to let it continue without interruption and later address concerns and recommendations in an after-action review. Inserting coalition force solutions, particularly as an operation is unfolding, risks undermining the confidence that comes with proficiency.

Coalition advisors can help with two of the three main challenges hindering more rapid improvement in the Iraqi Army. Military transition teams and coalition partner units will continue to help their counterparts improve logistics and medical care, but cannot aid in establishing a retirement system. The lion's share of change needs to come from echelons above division. Authorizing repair parts stocks at unit level and substituting a direct-exchange system in lieu of paper requests,

particularly for high-use items, would go far in improving Iraqi Army logistics. While Iraq lacks doctors, the Army is particularly short, having lost many physicians to the Ministry of Health. The third major shortcoming, lack of a functioning military retirement system, coupled with concerns for colleagues, keeps too many weak and marginal performers in senior positions. Clearly, decisions on whether and how to address these problems lie with Iraq's civil and military leadership at the most-senior levels.

By nature, advisors are problem solvers. This discussion of the challenges the 8th Iraqi Army Division faced and overcame highlights its progress. During Warrior Training, one of the division's battalions was praised as the best the cadre had ever trained. Trainers were forced to revise situational training scenarios in order to ensure the unit remained challenged. The division clearly sets the standard for a new army building itself.

During 2009 the 8th Iraqi Army Division attained a readiness level that permitted the withdrawal of its U.S. advisors. I hope the experiences recorded here can aid other transition teams in coaching, mentoring, and teaching their partnered units to similar results. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Originally named Advisor Support Teams, the units advising the Iraqi Army were re-named military transition teams in 2005. See *On Point II,* Dr. Donald Wright and COL Timothy Reese, Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2008, 462.

2. Iraq's Ministry of Defense (MOD) is the equivalent of America's Department of Defense. The Iraqi Joint Headquarters parallels the Joint Staff. The Iraqi Ground Forces Command is a three-star headquarters that is equivalent to the U.S. Army's Forces Command.

3. Border Transition Teams, Police Transition Teams, Logistics Training and Advisory Teams, and teams advising the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Joint Headquarters may also find the viewpoint from Iraqi Army Division advisors instructive.

4. From east to southwest, the provinces are Wasit, Babil, Qadisiyah, Karbala, and Najaf. Provinces are often identified by their capital cities. Using this convention the provinces are Kut, Hillah, Diwaniyah, Karbala, and Najaf. The cities of Karbala and Najaf contain the two holiest sites of the Shi'a branch of Islam in Iraq — the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf and the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala. Both cities see millions of pilgrims walk there during annual religious festivals including Ashura, Arbaeen, Shabaniya, and the important dates in the lives of the Imams entombed there.

5. A province's Province Iraqi Control (PIC) status determined, among other things, who exercised authority for approving military operations. While the Memorandum of Understanding for each province was slightly different, in general when a province came under PIC, this authority transferred from the senior coalition commander to the Governor.

6. Most Iraqi Army divisions are subordinate to Operational Commands (OCs). These are joint headquarters, typically exercising command and control over Army and police units in a particularly important province (e.g. Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Ninewah). The OC may be commanded by an Army or police Lieutenant General or Major General who reports directly to the Ministry of Defense.

7. Iraqi officers are generally called by their rank and first (given) name; that convention is followed here. For ease of comprehension, Iraqi officers in the article are referred to U.S. Army rank equivalents rather than Iraqi titles. MG Oothman was promoted to Lieutenant General in 2009. For more on him see Michael Gordon's cover story in the *New York Times Magazine*, 3 August 2008.

8. Only male US Soldiers serve on MiTT teams at battalion through division level. Female Soldiers serve on the transition teams advising motor transport regiments and logistics battalions.

9. One person acting "as an intermediary between two other persons is very common in Arab society. Personal influence is helpful in getting decisions made and things done, so people often ask someone with influence to represent them (in Arabic this process is called *wasta*)." Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times* (Intercultural Press, 2006), 25.

10. In the U.S. Army, Troop Leading Procedures is the problem-solving methodology typically used at company level and below. Since a battalion is the lowest echelon with a staff, planning at company level is primary the responsibility of the commander. The Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) is exercised by staffs at battalion level and above and can take days or weeks. (See chapters 3 and 4 of FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Productions*). The targeting cycle employed by field artillery and information operations professionals is, "detect, decide, deliver, assess." The caricature above correctly points out that Iraqi Army (IA) planning begins much closer to execution and typically involves more improvisation once an operation begins. The 8th Division commanding general's guidance was typically so specific as to be a Directed Course of Action.

11. The Iraqi Army does not have well-defined command relationships such as operational control (OPCON) and administrative control (ADCON). Whenever battalions worked with other divisions, there were routinely problems, followed by negotiations about which unit would provide rations and fuel support, during the initial days of the new relationship.

12. The 8th Division Headquarters was authorized five colonels and nine lieutenant colonels. At one time, there were 14 colonels and 33 lieutenant colonels assigned. The Iraqi Army's practice of internally furloughing weaker officers calls to mind the Japanese corporate practice of moving those shunted aside from the center of action to window seats. In one instance, a G4 was moved to a newly created position overseeing transportation in order to make room for his more-energetic deputy. However, advisors should not overly praise a strong deputy directly to a weak superior. Competent subordinates who visibly outperform less-capable supervisors risk being transferred out.

Unemployment remains a problem and may be a contributing factor. In late 2008, the 8th Division conducted a registration of veterans from the Saddam-era army living in its area of operation. This screening process would determine whether these men were eligible for service in the new army, or a future retirement stipend. During a two-month period 886 former officers and 18,171 former enlisted soldiers registered, more volunteers than the division's authorized or existing strength.

13. Nydell, 22. Advisors commonly expressed a similar sentiment regarding their

Iraqi counterparts: "They don't care what you know until they know that you care."

14. Transition Team Integration Funds were eliminated at the start of Fiscal Year 2009. The Quick Response Funds that replaced them were limited to short-term, one-time expenses to prevent mission failure.

15. Coalition Forces offered medical care to save the life, limb, or eyesight of Iraqi Army soldiers. The rules for coalition force care for others were more restrictive and subject to change. Advisors should know the criteria and procedures for medical care before offering assistance.

16. Nydell, 18.

17. The selection and training of MiTT team members is extremely important, but beyond the scope of this article. While 8th Division would certainly have benefitted from more experienced advisors, the captains and NCOs on the 8th Division MiTT team were quite effective at coaching senior Iraqi field-grade officers.

18. Nydell, 31.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid, 29. Emphasis in the original.

22. Ibid, 28. Nydell notes that while the sense of fatalism captured in the phrase "Inshallah" (if God wills) is often "overemphasized by Westerners . . . it still needs to be considered, since it is often encountered."

23. Air movement requests were how the team requested rotary-wing transportation. The fledgling Iraqi Air Force provided the first flights to 8th Division in late 2008.

24. The Mahdi Army's name in Arabic is Jaysh al Mahdi. Coalition force members typically refer to it as JAM.

25. When a MiTT, BTT or PTT team experienced a casualty, or otherwise lost a team member, the vacancy would be filled by a soldier with the proper grade and specialty from a "bench" of trained soldiers at Fort Riley. When their team completed its year, the Soldier from the bench would be reassigned to another team or a staff position. The 8th Division MiTT team leader's position was filled by an officer re-missioned from a Border Transition Team. Three positions on 8th Division MiTT were filled by officers/NCOs who had not yet completed a one-year tour. As MiTT casualties decreased, fewer of these were available, and 8th Division MiTT strength declined from 15 to 12 Soldiers.

26. Faced with the choice of performing a familiar role or an unfamiliar one, most Soldiers choose what is comfortable. When each team member had a balanced set of responsibilities, some MiTT team members put more weight on the foot planted on the U.S. side of the wall separating the U.S. and Iraqi camps. Restructuring roles so that most team members had fewer responsibilities on Camp Echo made it easier for most of the team to spend more time with their Iraqi Army counterparts.

27. This three-week event combined issuing M16s and HMMWVs, rifle marksmanship and collective training through battalion level.

28. Until 2/4 BCT arrived late in 2008, the 8th Division MiTT was the senior U.S. unit at Camp Echo and in Qadisiyah province. The largest U.S. unit by manpower was a platoon from the 511th MP CO.

29. MiTT teams were ADCON or OPCON to the coalition brigades/divisions responsible for the provinces in which they were located. In 2008, the MiTT teams aligned with 8th Division were subordinate to three different brigade combat teams (BCTs). Since brigade MiTTs did not report to the division MiTT (and battalion MiTTs were not subordinate to brigade teams) the use of conference calls and sharing daily/weekly reports was important for situational awareness throughout the advisor chain.

30. The Unit Status Report evaluates an organization's ability to perform its mission based on personnel, training, and equipment status. Army Training, Evaluation Plans, and Mission-Essential Task Lists identify the missions and tasks each type of unit must be able to perform.