

# CompanyCommand

## Building Combat-Ready Teams

**To:** Company Commanders  
**From:** Company Commanders

## Iraqi Security Forces Galvanized into Action

The critical event of 2009 in Iraq was the enactment of the security agreement. The agreement forced us to shift our role from leading to supporting the Iraqi security forces (ISF). We figured out rather quickly that our success was completely dependent on the ISF. Although we had previously espoused “Iraqis in the lead,” we could always default to unilateral control when we

needed to. The security agreement changed that, and it put company commanders in a challenging position that we were not sure would have a positive ending. Here, some of us who went through the experience with 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Ironhorse), share our stories in the hope that our experience will help others who will follow in our footsteps.

### Johnathan Westbrook

B/1-5 CAV

The security agreement’s initiative to pull U.S. forces out of the cities was instituted during our deployment on June 1, 2009. Our tempo came to a near halt on that date. Before June 1, we were conducting “combined patrols” by taking only a handful of ISF with us. This gave us the freedom to maneuver and to achieve our goals, not necessarily the ISF’s goals. After June 1, the ISF truly had the lead, with our hands tied. My counterparts instantly developed a sense of pride and confidence that I had not observed before. For the first time, we felt as if we were headed in the right direction and had worked ourselves out of a job.

I am sure that microgrants and projects were an invaluable asset during surge operations. With our decreasing footprint (and purse), the local Iraqi government is having to exercise its system now. Even though Iraqis are going through growing pains, they are finding solutions to their own problems.

### Brian Butler

HHT, 1BCT and B/2-5 CAV

Our most significant challenge was adapting our mind-set to achieve the effects we desired solely through partnership with the Iraqi security forces. The new security agreement prevented us from being able to act unilaterally. My boss’ intent did not change, so we had to put our heads together and figure out how to influence our Iraqi counterparts to achieve our desired end state. The only way that I could be successful was if the Iraqi security force leaders *chose* to work with us!

We are often quick to identify Iraqi problems during official Gol [government of Iraq] meetings, and we have the urge to develop and implement solutions to those problems. This is counterproductive to building Gol capacity. This is not to say

we should not provide assistance when and where it is needed, but we need to think it through carefully prior to execution. For example, when my unit assumed control of the Jamila District, there were 12 microgenerators equally dispersed across the four *muhallahs* of Jamila. Everything had been provided to make these generators fully mission-capable, with the exception of the fuel. Only three of the generators were operational at the time we arrived in country, and the local NAC [neighborhood advisory council] immediately began to pressure me to provide fuel for the generators at every weekly meeting. It would have been relatively easy for



*In 2009, Soldiers of 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Ironhorse), witnessed the Iraqi army gaining indirect-fire capability.*



me to find a way to provide the requested fuel, which would have also had the effect of answering the mail for my chain of command by increasing electrical capacity within my operational environment. I came to the conclusion that the additional power was not actually needed by the residents at the time, but would be required when the weather became hotter and demand increased. Fortunately, I was able to convince my commander that this was the case, and, sure enough, as soon as the temperature began to increase, the NAC ensured that all 12 generators were placed into operation. At the end of the day, it was an Iraqi problem with an Iraqi solution, and the NAC took a great deal of pride saying that they did it without my help.

#### **Jason Bullock**

**A/1-82 FA**

The U.S. military is still full of “type-A” personalities who have a hard time not being in charge, but good leaders know that’s a road to nowhere except more time in Iraq. The security agreement was a forcing function not only for U.S. troops to embrace partnership and try to develop the ISF, but also a wake-up call for the ISF that we are not going to be here forever, and they are on the clock to get to the level they need to get to before we leave. Sometimes there were excuses of no fuel, broken trucks, etc., but by and large the FPs [federal police] we worked with were happy to patrol with us.

I was partnered with two battalion commanders, and the

biggest lesson I learned is that you don’t have time to change an Iraqi’s mind about international politics. I had one battalion commander whom I loved, and he loved me, and we got along great. The other despised me, and he wasn’t my favorite person, either. After several unsuccessful attempts to befriend him, I neglected him. My time was much better utilized by working with the battalion commander who was cooperative rather than by wasting time, energy and manpower on one who couldn’t care less. If you are only partnered with one battalion and the battalion commander shuns you, then go after the deputy commanding officer, S-3 or the company commanders. But don’t waste time and energy trying to win a political or popularity contest. Our mission was to help make the ISF better, and so we helped those who wanted to be helped. You have no control over which Iraqi battalion commanders get hired or fired. You do have control over who gets your most limited resource (your time). There are officers in every ISF organization who are motivated and hungry to learn. Identify them, focus on them and build a relationship.

#### **Derek Drouin**

**HHT/1-7 CAV and C/1-7 CAV**

There are three lines of operation along which the troop operates here in Iraq. The first is civil capacity in making improvements to local infrastructure, focused on electricity, irrigation water, drinking water, agriculture training and schools. The second is partnership with Iraqi security forces. The troop is partnered with one federal police battalion, one emergency response battalion and two Iraqi police stations, totaling more than 1,600 personnel. The third is security as the troop conducts patrols, intelligence development and time-sensitive targeting.

Our relationship with the federal police has gone very well. I am extremely fortunate to be partnered with 1-2-1 FP



*Troops from the 1st Brigade taught Iraqi army leaders how to train their own soldiers in marksmanship.*



Battalion, colocated here at Joint Security Station Istiqla'al. At the outset of my relationship with the battalion, I told the battalion commander that I wanted to be a "company under his command." The respect that I fostered for the battalion commander and his senior officers and NCOs by the Soldiers in the troop helped create a relationship of equals, not an "us versus them" relationship.

### **Brennan Speakes**

**HHC/1-5 CAV and C/1-5 CAV**

The Iraqi army officers who spoke to us at the COIN [counterinsurgency] academy said that their biggest problem with the U.S. Soldier was the lack of respect we show to Iraqi senior officers. I made it a hard-and-fast rule that an officer was an officer no matter what. Don't let your Soldiers even start down that road. Use the golden rule—it works.

### **Alex Aquino**

**B/1-82 FA**

The partnership that the battery has built with the Iraqi police and Iraqi army is excellent. For the first two weeks, I focused solely on building the personal relationships that I share with the ISF leadership. I believe that personal relationships are the foundation of partnership with ISF counterparts. They are more willing to assist you and not let you down. Partnership will fall into place once the personal relationships are established.

### **John W. Kimball**

**HHC/2-8 CAV and C/2-8 CAV**

One early significant event was the initial meeting with COL Kashem and building a true partnership. Though COL Kashem was hesitant due to his past experiences with Coalition forces, we were able to agree on what we both thought success would look like and how we were going to achieve it. I was able to gain COL Kashem's trust and confidence by following through with small accomplishments at first, which we were able to build on later. Eventually, we



*CPT Alex Aquino, advising Iraqi police at a checkpoint, focused on building personal relationships with Iraqi leadership.*

were conducting 90 percent joint patrols, teaching classes that included medical training and patrolling techniques, and enjoying each other's company during meals.

An extremely influential event for us was Operation Stallion Last Castle. This consisted of our sapper company emplacing T-walls, a tower and an entry control point to standard, and some fighting positions within their battalion compound. Though there was nothing extravagant about what we did, it was the fact that we followed through on something that another unit had promised and something COL Kashem really wanted done. He did not think that we would or could follow through on it, which was evident when talking with him about it. He was short in conversation, and his demeanor screamed no confidence in our ability. Well, once we started the project, all that changed, and I believe we made friends for a lifetime. Unfortunately, we did not stay in the AO [area of operation] long enough to reap the benefits of all of the hard work of my

men, but I know that the local populace saw both armies working together side by side, which built confidence and respect for 4th Battalion and COL Kashem.

### **Ray Canzonier**

**B/2-8 CAV**

The Iraqi army is both "adjacent units" and part of the human terrain at the same time. You cannot change them, so you have to figure out how to guide the natural force of things into a desirable outcome. They have attributes that I have come to admire, although at first I



*Soldiers of 1st Brigade partnered with Iraqi security forces on patrol and shared their experiences on a daily basis.*

*Ironhorse troopers and Iraqi security forces around the city of Taji shared a two-year bond based on back-to-back rotations in the same area.*

thought those same attributes were stumbling blocks. I had two Afghanistan tours before I came to Iraq. During the first, I worked with disorganized militia (AMF) whom I would link up with on the fly. During the second, the ANA [Afghan National Army] had formed up and moved out to start working, but they were entirely dependent on their ETTs [embedded training teams]. Early on in Iraq, I saw how the IA [Iraqi army] are much different from the ANA. The IA have a history and traditions that some still in uniform are old enough to remember. Their pride is the source of the professionalism that the IA show. They are developing their own ways, and realizing that they are going to do things their way is an important part of working together successfully, along with having a relationship that allows you to influence each other. Ultimately, the mature form of partnership that will yield the best results is when we link in at the C2 [command-and-control] level, coordinating effects instead of trying to make them walk with us and be like us.

**Matthew Hopper**  
HHB and B/1-82 FA

I learned that if I wanted to truly gain the respect and working relationship with my ISF partner, in this case an FP battalion commander, I had to spend a tremendous amount of time with him. Before this tour, I would have considered watching three hours of subtitled American movies or listen-



ing to my partnered commander talk on the phone with his family for hours a complete waste of time. However, it was the time I spent with him that built a relationship that allowed me to depend on him when I needed him most.

This also held true for the more important local leaders in my area, such as the mayor of my city. My battery had a bad escalation-of-force incident where a man was accidentally wounded. As soon as possible, I went to see the mayor—who at this point was my ally—and explained the incident. He later held a press conference in which he stated the facts and made no negative comments about my battery or U.S. forces. He also called the governor of Baghdad to explain the incident and that I had come to see him. I believe it was the relationship I had built with him that kept that particular incident from having a negative information operations effect.

**Amanda Doyle**  
HHC, 1BSTB

As a commander, I didn't have a landowning role that forced me to interact with the local populace on a regular basis, but in May I started a partnership with the 11th Field Engineer Regiment [FER] for route-clearance operations. Working with that unit, I grew, personally, in my own understanding of the Iraqi culture and the capabilities of the ISF. Initially, I had some difficulty getting my Soldiers and leaders to understand the importance of the partnership; like many Soldiers, they reverted back to previous deployment experiences in which our interaction with locals and ISF was very different.

Over time, the relationship grew between my Soldiers and FER *jundi* [troops], but the leadership piece was always difficult. They had platoons of *jundi* and a few untrained lieutenants, but really no standout enlisted leaders, which didn't help in the training of the troops. The FER commander, a lieutenant colonel, was very interested in getting the training but wanted no part in viewing training unless we encouraged it. Since my interaction was usually with the FER commander, and my platoon leader and his Soldiers primarily interacted with the *jundi*, there remained a significant disconnect in the training. Over time, this improved as a few



*The U.S. partnership—as evidenced in a Stetson—extended from the troops, or jundi, to the general officer level.*



*jundi* stood out as de facto leaders in the group, and we groomed them as NCOs during the training, but there was nothing seamless about the effort. What we learned, in the end, was that we had to work with what we had and that our version of “right/good” didn’t necessarily match theirs.

**Adam Pooley**  
D Co, 1-5 CAV

A local *sheikh* came forward to our Iraqi counterparts and told them that since he had seen how well-trained and professional they had become, he wanted to tell them the location of several al Qaeda in Iraq [AQI] members who were hiding out in his area. We began planning the mission to capture these AQI terrorists and thought that if the locals were impressed by the abilities of the Iraqi ground troops, they might be even more impressed to see the Iraqi air force in action. Up until then, the Iraqi air force helicopters had only been flying training flights with U.S. Air Force instructor pilots. We thought it was a long shot, but we requested support from the Iraqi air force on what would be their first real-world mission. Our request was approved. After a lengthy planning process and some additional training, we conducted the air assault with the Iraqi combat troops flying into the mission on two of their own Mi-17 HIP helicopters and Company D Soldiers flying in on two UH-60 Black Hawks. In the end, we captured four AQI terrorists and three Syrians who were in Iraq on false travel documents. The mission was significant because Iraqis are now coming forward to the Iraqi army with information about terrorists in their area, which indicates that they are no longer willing to tolerate violence. It also says that they believe the Iraqi security forces are now well-trained and professional enough to actually protect them from terrorists and criminals. The successful integration of Iraqi army and air forces and the addition of air-mobile operations into the Iraqi army’s set of abilities has shown the Iraqi people, and the ISF themselves, that the ISF are not dependent on the Americans. Our Iraqi counterparts left at the end of the mission with their heads held a little higher, knowing that they could execute a fairly complex mission like an air assault with purely Iraqi resources.

**Robert Reece**  
A/1-82 FA

The building of a solid relationship is paramount to accomplishing anything with the Iraqi security forces. They will pretend to listen to you, but until they respect you, they do not really hear what you have to say. There is no better way to build that relationship than to live with your counterpart and share your experiences on a daily basis. We have attempted to influence this relationship by sharing everything we have, including our intelligence.

We worry too much about insulting Arabs. Just act the way that you were raised—be polite and professional. They have been around us for so long that they understand our culture as much as we understand theirs, and they are willing to write off honest mistakes. Push the ISF, GoI and everyone else to lean on each other rather than on the



*Mutual respect fostered the Ironhorse Brigade’s success; it took pride in leaving Iraq with a bright future.*

United States. Spend time talking to them about going to the GoI vice the United States. We are mostly in observation mode in meetings anyway. The typical post-June 30 quote is, “You’re invited to attend the meeting, but we really don’t need you anymore.” That’s a good feeling.

*The Iraq Commander AAR Book, 1st Bde, 1st CAV—a book of insights from 50 company commanders, including the leaders featured in this article—is published in the Mil-Space Library, a web page accessible to members of the <http://CC.army.mil> and <http://PL.army.mil> professional forums. Special thanks to Scott Shaw for his vision on that project and his hard work in capturing and sharing the hard-earned insights of those company commanders.*

