

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

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Critical Enablers to Conducting Effective Advise, Assist, Accompany and Enable (A3E) Missions

Insights from 1-98th CAV training of the Iraqi 9th Armored Division

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News from the Front:

**1-98th Cavalry Trains Iraq's Only Armored Division
18th Airborne Corps**

Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve

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Forward

The enemy of my enemy is my friend is an ancient proverb which suggests that two parties can or should work together against a common enemy. The challenge becomes understanding the most effective method of integrating and affecting change with someone that was once an enemy.

The 1st Squadron, 98th Cavalry Regiment, 155th Armored Brigade Combat Team, Mississippi National Guard embedded with Iraq's vaunted 9th Armored Division from 2018 to 2019. This division has a history from the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and more recently from the Battle of Mosul. One can surmise the generals in Iraq's army today were mid-grade when the U.S. invaded in 2003 and junior officers during Operation Desert Storm.

This News from the Front (NFTF) is an overview of some of the lessons learned from a U.S. Army Advise, Assist, Accompany and Enable (A3E) mission.

The lessons from the 1-98th CAV are:

- Take your time to grow a relationship
- Apply cultural awareness training
- Personality is critical for A3E
- Build trust
- Balance risk to force with risk to mission while building trust
- Get to know your interpreters
- Realize that frustrations the Iraqis have may be more directed at the process and not the A3E team
- A3E missions inherently have interoperability difficulties
- Be prepared to manage expectations, to include your own

Front Cover: 1st Squadron, 98th Cavalry Regiment commander, LTC Glenn Adams, talks with Iraqi generals about an upcoming Iraqi Army and Air Force training exercise at Camp Taji, Iraq, Dec. 20, 2018. (US Army National Guard photo illustration by Spc. Jovi Prevot)

In June 2018, elements of the 1-98 CAV, 155 ABCT deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq to conduct an Advise, Assist, Accompany, and Enable (A3E) mission with the 9th Armored Division. Supporting Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was not a mission the unit initially expected. In fact, the squadron spent months of training, to include a rotation through the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California to fill a theater security cooperation requirement in Kuwait.

U.S. Army units have been filling this security cooperation mission in Kuwait since Operation Desert Storm ended in 1991. Until 2018, the armored brigade has always been an active duty unit, but now a National Guard unit from Amory, Mississippi is building partner capacity (BPC) for Iraq by embedding with the 9th Armored Division to help them build and sustain combat-readiness.

Squadron Commander LTC Glenn Adams directly liaises with the 9th Armored Division Commanding General Major General Walid. The soldiers from “Gunslinger” squadron, the A3E team works side-by-side with their Iraqi counterparts.

Gunslinger’s A3E mission for OIR takes on a new level of criticality. The U.S. Army spent years training the Iraqi Army and when it left in 2011, the United States, Iraq, and the international community had every reason to believe Iraq’s army could defend itself. That was until 2014 when ISIS crossed the border and seized Fallujah and Ramadi. Then a bad situation turned for the worse and the world watched in complete shock when ISIS fighters stormed into Mosul and seized control.



A distinguished visitor party comprised of U.S. and Iraqi soldiers and airmen participates in a tour of aviation assets and capabilities brief at Camp Taji, Iraq, Dec. 20, 2018. (US Army National Guard photo by Spc. Jovi Prevot)

Training is something the U.S. Army does all the time and certainly there are challenges. However, training a foreign army is incredibly challenging. Performing this mission in Iraq adds an element of possible grave danger as the mission requires advisors to “accompany” if the division headquarters has to execute expeditionary mission command. Other challenges include: cultural awareness, interpreters, trust, governance, and interoperability.

Shortly after the war in Afghanistan and Iraq began, the U.S. Army realized the need for its Soldiers to learn the culture about the country in which they would deploy. United States Army Forces Command directed cultural awareness training during pre-

deployment work-ups so soldiers could establish rapport faster and prevent damaging the relationship from words or actions that may be offensive in the Middle Eastern culture. Everyone, regardless of mission, had to complete about an hour or two of instruction on Islam, language, and the ethnic or social norms of their target country.

For the Gunslingers, their new mission requires trust to be more effective with the Iraqis. All the things soldiers were taught in cultural awareness classes for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) had to be relearned and become habits fast! The squadron did not expect to perform this mission, but when it became a reality, the team acknowledged the task and put their best foot forward.

Part of the trust factor is having the right rank to liaise with a two-star general officer and his Sergeant Major. Previous A3E or BPC campaigns throughout U.S. Army history have always made a deliberate pairing between a U.S. Army officer of the appropriate rank and the advisee of the host military. In the case of 9th Armored Division, a MAJ could have done the job, but it is optimal to have a LTC.

Additionally, the officer-in-charge of an A3E mission typically leads a team that is comprised of all the warfighting functions. Therefore, it makes sense to have a LTC in charge of a team with a battalion-like structure. The Iraqis are based on a culture that emphasizes social hierarchy and may find it insulting to have a MAJ as the direct counter-part to a division commander. This could subsequently impact the U.S. Army's credibility with the supported unit.

Things that are unfamiliar to American culture have to be overcome. Last summer, LTC Adams and SGM Moyer spent a significant amount of time getting to know the division commander and his staff. This required conversation and drinking chai, but even conversation has its social rules in Iraq. Talking about one's family is a topic that must be avoided initially. Conversely, if the Iraqis start bringing it up, then it is a good sign that the relationship has evolved to a more comfortable level.

One of those conversational topics that would seem inevitable is the U.S. and Iraq fighting each other in the past. Often there are casual conversations on Desert Storm, but the 9th Armored Division's role during the 2003 United States' invasion never come up, said LTC Adams. Despite the outcome and the potential sore spot with the Iraqis, these discussions, as well as the division's role in the 9-month long battle for Mosul, can serve as learning vignettes on combined arms warfare.

The squadron conducts classes and works daily with the Iraqis. Emotions are a natural part of the work environment, but in Iraqi culture, losing one's cool causes one to lose face. While anger is a natural human reaction, losing control and displaying outrage affects credibility. Credibility and trust impact the mission with the Iraqis.

Fortunately, there is help when it comes to cultural awareness, but this help also comes with a cost. Gunslinger had two contract interpreters, of Iraqi-ethnicity, but American citizens. Despite this, there are still challenges when it comes to Category IIⁱ Interpreters. The military culture has its own style of language and interpreters who, regardless of category and fluency, may not always know the nuances of military lexicon despite being American or Iraqi and employed by the Army. The squadron did not hire their interpreters, but had to use them and integrate with them just as much as they integrate with the 9th Armored Division.

“It is key to not let knowledge get lost in translation. Linguists are everything, and they will make you or break you.”

-- SGM John Moyer --

Another tier of challenge exists. There are linguists and there are translators, according to SGM Moyer. “An interpreter translates word for word, and there is a lot of variation between English and Arabic while linguists have to learn us, so they can easily translate our feelings,” he added. Linguists must use the appropriate words in the target language to accurately convey urgent or critical things. When using interpreters for an A3E mission, one must have a solid relationship with them as much as with the supported staff.

The Defense Language Institute continues to provide foreign language study materials such as:

- Rapport – 6-8 hours of culture and language
- Headstart2 – 80-100 hours of culture and language
- Language Survival Kits – Text, Audio, and Up to 3,000 mission-related phrases

<https://dliflc.edu/#homepage-tab|1>

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army is all too familiar with green-on-blue attacks or the insider threat that wreaked havoc on A3E and key leader engagements in Afghanistan. As squadron commander, LTC Adams, must balance the risk to mission and risk to force with trust as the fulcrum. During the violent days of OIF, American soldiers did not always wear their body armor or helmet during meetings with Iraqis, but these were meetings in which American soldiers controlled the environment and the Iraqis were usually unarmed civilians. Now, Adams and his team go to the Iraqi side of Camp Taji where they control the environment.

Meetings and their security take on the same level of planning as missions did when the U.S. was routinely patrolling the streets of Baghdad. Basic troop leading procedures remain the same and are in effect. The team always has situational awareness and 360-degree security when they are with the Iraqis. While the risk to force cannot be eliminated, the optics of the A3E team in body armor risks insulting the Iraqis. Subsequently, this impacts trust.



A U.S. Army soldier teaches an Iraqi marksmanship course at Camp Taji, Iraq, Dec. 19, 2018. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Jovi Prevot)

The Iraqis have to know that they can trust the U.S. Army and that LTC Adams, and his team are genuinely trying to help build partner capacity among the 9th Armored Division and its brigades.

The Gunslinger team identified a need for Combat Life-Saver training in the division. Furthermore, leveraging the unique talents that a National Guard unit brings with civilian and military expertise enabled the 1-98th to use one of their organic soldiers who just happens to be an X-Ray technician in his civilian job. Normally, one does not see an X-Ray technician in a combat-arms unit. Fortunately, LTC Adams was able to apply a creative and field-expedient solution to train the Iraqis on a piece of equipment they had, but did not know how to use.



A U.S. Army soldier teaches preventative maintenance to the 9th Armored Division at Camp Taji, Iraq, Oct. 10, 2018. (US Army photo by Spc. Madelyn Sanchez)

Similarly, SGM Moyer recounted a time when by pure coincidence they found a Forward Repair System (FRS) in a connex that was still in the box. Since the Iraqis like the M1 Abrams Tank and the U.S. divested the FRS to them to actually be used, the team broke it out and trained 9th Armored on the system. It was too easy to let things like the FRS and X-Ray machine go untouched, but by staying true to the mission and underscoring trust, the relationship can continue to grow. “This opened the door to endless possibilities. It’s a matter of trust

and freedom of maneuver with the 9th Armored Division,” said SGM Moyer. And this relationship will also benefit the next A3E team that comes here to continue the progress and 1-98 Cavalry Squadron’s hard work.

Just like the American Army has its way of doing things, so too does the Iraqi military. Unfortunately, the Iraqi Security Forces and Ministry of Defense tend to have a different dynamic on management or governance than U.S. Army soldiers might expect from their senior leadership. This tends to put another challenge on LTC Adams and the A3E mission.

The 9th Armored Division moved to Camp Taji after the battle for Mosul ended in 2017, said LTC Adams. “They were told to figure out their own billeting and work spaces. [Now] we are trying to modernize [and] are waiting on twenty laptops,” he said. The Iraqi army has a supply system, but the leadership, implementation, and efficacy of it varies among the brigades. In some cases, parts are in the warehouse, but they are not getting to the units. While helping the Iraqis facilitates building trust and acquiring spare parts is one aspect to reinforce relationships however, SGM Moyer stresses “Do not promise anything!”

“It became a situation of ‘insert Americans here’ [and] a means to provide consumable supplies, garrison life support, parts that they should get through their own supply system and their own budget.”

-- LTC Glenn Adams --

No one, especially those on an A3E mission, will tell a host nation that the American way is the best way. However, there are some common characteristics among the most capable of those in the profession of arms. The difficulties LTC Adams and SGM Moyer have when the Iraqis ask for more than can be provided could be attributed to a nation’s defense institution that is lacking in ability, capacity, or willingness. A host nation does not necessarily have to mimic what the U.S. does, but to underscore the institutional weakness, a coalition adviser with another Iraqi division said the Iraqis want parts more than the training itself.

This dynamic impacts training and planning for the 9th Armored Division, which hinders the A3E effort. The division does not always have enough tank ammunition to shoot for training. There are training and service rounds, so if the Ministry of Defense cannot provide a sustained supply of training rounds, then less training occurs because the 9th Armored Division wants to save the service rounds for combat. They also do not have money to operate all the base life-support functions. The other impact is that the concept of a long-range plan does not exist. “We asked them if they had an established deployment cycle, so we could help them on short, near, and far planning” LTC Adams said. “Their long term horizon is maybe two months.”

With an already uphill logistical atmosphere in the Ministry of Defense, there exists an immature supply chain that is supposed to provide Russian model T-90 Tanks, BMP-3 Infantry Fighting Vehicles, operator training, maintenance training, and spare parts for both platforms. According to a Polish liaison officer to the 9th Armored for Russian or Eastern-Bloc equipment, the 9th Armored has been waiting on parts since July 2017. However, the 9th Armored also sent some of their soldiers to Poland to learn how to conduct maintenance on the Russian equipment. So now, the 9th Armored is in a position of needing two separate supply chains and technicians that are trained and proficient on two different platforms.

A3E missions have always been a double-edged sword. LTG Joseph Stilwell and the War Department believed U.S. support to the Nationalist Chinese during World War II should only be insofar as they can help themselves. Prior to 1950, the U.S. policy for the Republic of South Korean (ROK) army was to train and equip them within the country's economic capacity.

The Nationalists succumbed to the Communists in 1949, and the ROK army could not stop the North Korean invasion in June 1950.

As the commander with only a small percentage of his squadron with him in Iraq, LTC Adams must manage his time extraordinarily well to lead the A3E team and his soldiers in Kuwait and Syria. The squadron executive officer and CSM remained in Kuwait, but LTC Adams retains all the authorities of the commander. LTC Adams, SGM Moyer, and the operations SGM, dedicate about half their day to squadron requirements and the other half to the 9th Armored Division. They work seven days a week to lead a squadron of 600 that is spread out among three different countries.

The Gunslinger team mobilized from Mississippi in early 2018 and trained for a mission they did not expect. They conducted full-spectrum operations training at the National Training Center, exercised the Army Prepositioned Stock issuance process in Kuwait, and then began a difficult mission in Iraq. Even though the 9th Armored Division had a great relationship with their previous A3E team, LTC Adams and SGM Moyer continue to develop that relationship and build trust with the Iraqis. Success means staying engaged daily, putting 100 percent effort into the job, managing expectation of the Iraqis, and planting the seeds for the day the Iraqis take over their own training.



U.S. Army Soldiers from 1-98th Cavalry pose for a photo with soldiers from the 34th Brigade, 9th Armored Division after an equipment maintenance course graduation ceremony at Camp Taji, Iraq, Nov. 03, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Madelyn Sanchez)

¹ CAT II vs. CAT III

CAT II linguists must have native proficiency in the target language International Listening Ready Test (ILRT level 4 to 5) and an advanced working proficiency in English (ILRT level 2+). Target languages consist of Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, Russian and Uzbek.

CAT II linguists shall be U.S. citizens who have been screened by U.S. Army Counterintelligence personnel assigned by the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command. CAT II linguists will be granted access to SECRET by the U.S. Army Central Personnel Security Clearance Facility or other designated U.S. Government Personnel Security authority for the specific purpose of providing support to the operations. The MI Battalion will screen linguists once they arrive in theater.

CAT III

Native proficiency in the target language is preferred, but not required. CAT III linguists should meet at a minimum the criteria of ILRT level 3. CAT III linguists must be able to understand the essentials of all speech in a standard dialect and have broad enough vocabulary that he/she rarely has to ask for paraphrasing or explanation. CAT III linguists must be able to follow accurately the essentials of conversations between educated native speakers, reasonably make and answer telephone calls, understand radio broadcasts, news stories similar to wire service reports, oral reports, some oral technical reports and public addresses on non-technical subjects. CAT III linguists shall be fluent in English.

CAT III linguists shall be U.S. citizens who either possess a TOP SECRET Security Clearance with access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI), or who, after prescribed counterintelligence screening, have been granted, at a minimum, an interim TS/SCI clearance by the U.S. Government.