



Iraqi Police Transition Bridging the Gap



By Captain Nate Brookshire

In 2007, the 716th Military Police Battalion “Peacekeepers” from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, deployed on a police transition team (PTT) mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 07-09. The 716th relieved the 92d Military Police Battalion, who concluded their grueling fifteen-month deployment during the peak of the “awakening” and “surge” operations. The wealth of combat experience that the 716th gained through a previous OIF deployment and as a headquarters for Task Force 716 in Afghanistan set the stage for a successful OIF 07-09 rotation.

The 92d Military Police Battalion had successfully sustained police forces from Baghdad, Iraq, to the Syrian border; and the Iraqi police had supported their overarching goal of transitioning primacy to the Iraqi government. Trained and eager, the Peacekeeper Battalion did not wish to falter. The 716th set out to sustain the progress made by the 92d and to further it by transitioning the Iraqi police from a force that supported a kinetic fight to one that performed stability operations. Such a transition created many challenges, but the 716th remained creative, proactive, and flexible in addressing the myriad of issues. As a result of the battalion’s diligence, more than 12,000 shurta (police) were recruited and trained and Iraqi police have taken over as the primary security force in eight Baghdad “muhallas” (neighborhoods) and expanded security functions and responsibilities by integrating the Sons of Iraq¹ into their organizations.

This article presents lessons learned, highlights best practices, and describes one military police battalion’s preparation, methodology, and execution for transitioning Iraqi police to a legitimate organization.

Predeployment

There were many problems associated with the predeployment of the Peacekeepers, but those problems helped the battalion develop the analytical and critical thinking skills that were needed. In addition to preparing the headquarters and headquarters detachment (HHD) for deployment, the staff was consumed with reconstituting units that had just redeployed from OIF and Operation Enduring Freedom. And they were busy planning and preparing for the deployment of sister companies—the 194th and 561st—to OIF 07-09 as well. The 716th assisted these units until the day they boarded the plane. The staff delicately managed predeployment requirements and individual preparations with other required, work-related tasks—a job that was quite difficult at times.

As a tenant unit of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the 716th was directly impacted by structural changes that resulted from the adaptation of the Army force generation model within the division. Consequently, battalion access to ranges and training facilities was somewhat limited, so the 716th was required to readjust training plans and objectives to work within the constraints of available areas.

Fortunately, the 101st Sustainment Brigade assumed training readiness oversight (TRO) of the Peacekeeper Battalion months in advance of the deployment. Once that oversight was established, access to resources and training facilities improved. The limited resources of the battalion were supplemented by the brigade through the approval for off-post training at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center, Greenville, Kentucky, and the Fort Knox, Kentucky, military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT) site. After several months of planning and resourcing, HHD conducted a field training exercise that consisted of a 350-mile ground movement from Fort Campbell to Fort Knox. Once the Soldiers arrived at Fort Knox, they used the state-of-the-art MOUT site, renowned for recreating the contemporary operating environment of Iraq. This facility provided role players; training scenarios based on recent intelligence; and instruction on current tactics, techniques, and procedures used to address issues and problems that Soldiers would be facing during the upcoming deployment. Many of the lessons learned during this event proved valuable during the deployment.

For the staff, the culminating event that prepared them for deployment was a mission readiness exercise held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. A week of nonstop scenarios and interaction with the 18th Military Police Brigade (the battalion’s higher headquarters for most of its deployment) allowed key staff members to work through situations together, finalizing—and sometimes

establishing—battalion standards that were implemented and used throughout the deployment.

Although riddled with constraints and competing demands, the 716th Military Police Battalion successfully validated training in preparation for the deployment while maintaining command and control of the companies that would remain at Fort Campbell. The time spent and lessons learned during predeployment assisted with a smooth deployment.

Deployment

During their fifteen-month deployment, the Peacekeeper Battalion successfully transitioned and provided oversight to nine companies, conducted two changes of command, and assisted in all matters related to the movement of three companies from one area of operation to another. Impressively, throughout all of this, more than 3,000 awards were processed; numerous promotions occurred; and over \$115 million worth of equipment was procured. Although this list of accomplishments is not all-inclusive, it illustrates the degree of logistical and administrative support that the battalion provided throughout the deployment.

In addition to the vast number of logistical and administrative tasks, the main effort of the battalion was to carry out the Multinational Division–Baghdad (MND-B) PTT mission. This required a great deal of time and effort by many. The 716th Military Police Battalion partnered with two directorates, nine districts, and thirty-seven police stations. Five PTTs were organically formed from the battalion headquarters to partner with directorate and, in some instances, district level stations. These five teams were developed and headed by the battalion commander, three staff officers, and the HHD commander. Their engagements were critical in shaping the actions and directions taken by the Iraqi police as a whole. In addition, the other eight company commanders assumed duties as district chiefs and maneuvered six to nine PTTs within their companies on a daily basis.

The PTTs provided oversight and assistance to more than 15,000 Iraqi police. The time and effort of the PTTs resulted in the development, expansion, and legitimacy of the Iraqi police force.

Postsurge

As the surge drew down and the implementation of the security agreement and preparation for the provincial election approached, the battalion found itself at the center of focus for operations. The transition from the Iraqi army to the Iraqi police was at the forefront of the agenda. The term “max partnership” was coined to describe the ideal transitional process. The battalion was charged with assisting Iraqi police in taking the lead in securing



Soldiers of HHD, 716th Military Police Battalion, conduct reflexive fire drills during predeployment training.



Soldiers of HHD, 716th Military Police Battalion, conduct medical evacuation training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

neighborhoods, checkpoints, and several named areas of interest. Through a complex and tedious recruiting, selection, and hiring process, more than 10,000 Iraqis were brought aboard as Sons of Iraq to support the growing demand for Iraqi police. In addition, two new emergency response unit battalions were established and fourteen new Iraqi police stations were opened. These actions provided evidence that the Iraqi police were a critical element for the community and government and that “max partnership” was truly occurring.

Although the “max partnership” process appeared to be successful, it was necessary to measure the actual success or failure of the process and the readiness of the Iraqi police to operate independently. The method of measurement was the Police Monthly Station Report. This report was used to brief senior leaders on the operational readiness assessment (ORA) of each station on a monthly basis. The ORA was a tangible way to evaluate and convey to key leaders information about the progress (or lack thereof) made within the Iraqi police organization.

In addition to the Police Monthly Station Report and ORA ratings, the Peacekeeper Battalion developed another subjective tool to provide a real-time snapshot of station capabilities. This tool, known as the “check ride” template, visually depicts how the current significant activities, the five Iraqi police competencies (apprehend, process, investigate, adjudicate, and incarcerate), and the five core systems (administration, logistics, maintenance, force protection, and training) affect the progress of a station and the transition of primacy from coalition forces to Iraqi police. As significant activities decrease and the competency and proficiency of the Iraqi police core systems grow, the time required for on-station partnering with coalition forces decreases. The check ride template makes use of a sliding scale that takes situational factors into account and provides commanders with a running estimate of Iraqi police capabilities.

Security Agreement

On 1 January 2009, the security agreement took effect, placing Iraqi forces in the lead for security operations. No longer authorized to perform combat patrols independently of their Iraqi police counterparts, the PTTs quickly incorporated Iraqi police into their daily tasks to an even greater degree. Max partnership reached its peak and began to decline as the Iraqi police took on more and more daily responsibilities. The Iraqi police are now securing checkpoints and critical sites (such as election polling sites) and conducting daily patrols, ensuring that the security of the populace is the top priority. As a result, the local populace has gained trust in the ability of the Iraqi police to perform their duties as a legitimate organization.

Conclusion

The improved security environment, increased Iraqi security force proficiency, enactment of the security agreement, and successful provincial elections have established the conditions necessary for the Iraqi government to protect the population and execute the Iraqi rule of law. Our Iraqi partners are in the process of transforming into a legitimate force, and they are making daily gains in the trust and cooperation of the populace. The actions of the Peacekeeper Battalion over the past fifteen months were an integral part of that success. The 93d Military Police Battalion, Fort Bliss, Texas—under the watch of the 8th Military Police Brigade—now continues the fight.

Endnote

¹Formerly known as Concerned Local Citizens, the Sons of Iraq is a grassroots security force made up primarily of armed Sunnis who augment coalition and Iraqi security forces by helping to maintain order and collect intelligence in their local neighborhoods.

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