



Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga take part in a graduation ceremony at the Zakho military academy in January 2018. The peshmerga fought side by side with other units from the Iraqi Armed Forces to defeat Daesh in northern Iraq. A





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- The Heroic Defense of Baiji
  Iraqi defenders withstood nearly a year of
  Daesh attacks on a strategic oil refinery.
  Staff Col. Ali Saham Alkenani,
  Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service
- Securing Baghdad
  Eliminating terrorist cells in the Iraqi capital is a priority after the defeat of Daesh.
- **14** A Courageous Stand
  How an Iraqi grandmother saved Soldiers' lives and inspired a nation.
- Weakening the Enemy With Words
  Iraq's Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance gained skills in countering terrorist propaganda.
- 22 Afghans Assail Daesh
  Special operations forces expel terrorists
  from strongholds in eastern Afghanistan.
  Lt. Amy Forsythe, U.S. Navy
- Psychological Warfare
  An interview with Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq,
  head of the Iraqi Directorate of Military
  Intelligence.
- 28 Repairing the Damage
  A focus on civil rights and economic development will create a sense of community in cities liberated from Daesh.
  Dr. Saad Al-Hadithi, professor of political science, University of Baghdad

Senior Leader Profile
Iraqi Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool
Abdullah Alzubaidi, spokesman
for the Combined Joint
Operations Command

32 Around the Region



ON THE COVER:
A member of the Iraqi
security forces celebrates the
critical victory over Daesh in
Tahrir Square in Baghdad on
December 10, 2017.
RELITERS



#### UNIPATH

## Special Edition

Volume 9



#### CENTCOM COMMANDER

GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL U.S. Army



#### **CONTACT US**

#### Unipath

c/o Commander U.S. Central Command 7115 S. Boundary Blvd. MacDill AFB, FL 33621 USA

#### CENTCOM. UNIPATH@MAIL.MIL

Unipath is a professional military magazine published quarterly by the Commander of the United States Central Command as an international forum for military personnel in the Middle East and Central Asia region. The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent the policies or points of view of this command or any other agency of the U.S. government. Select articles are written by Unipath's staff, with credit for other content noted as needed. The Secretary of Defense has determined that publication of this magazine is necessary for conducting public business as required of the Department of Defense by law.

ISSN 2333-1844 (print) ISSN 2333-1852 (online)

## الله اكبر

### KEY LEADER'S MESSAGE

am very grateful to our U.S. Central Command friends for inviting me to present this special edition of *Unipath*, which addresses Iraq's defeat of Daesh. I was honored to command the joint forces fighting these terrorists from 2014 to the end of 2016, during the ferocious battles in places like Mosul, Anbar and the Baghdad region.

During that critical phase, we worked with coalition forces around the clock to rebuild the Army on a professional basis and develop plans to liberate cities and fight gangs near the capital. In a short period, we cleared the areas near Baghdad and began the liberation of Saladin, Ramadi and Fallujah from the abomination of terrorism.

We have focused not only on destroying military capabilities, but on preserving the lives of citizens and respecting human rights. Sometimes we would endanger ourselves for the safety of civilians. This made the liberation process slow and complicated. Thankfully, we freed Fallujah and Mosul with as little loss of life and infrastructure as possible.

Iraq has emerged from this decisive battle triumphant and strong, and defeated the enemy's plans to fragment the nation by igniting sectarian war between its ethnicities. Their sick dreams were broken on the wall of unity and peaceful coexistence that had existed in this land forever.

The heroes in the Iraqi Security Forces and the Arab tribes fought fiercely to liberate the land from terrorism and sacrificed themselves for the safety of innocent people trapped in the cities. These men — who have rejected all forms of terrorism and believe that Iraq will prevail in all its diversity — have been greeted with love and pride. The world respects your sacrifices and heroism; you honor your profession and perform your duties with fidelity.

After this overwhelming military victory over the bandit gangs, we face a great challenge to ensure they don't reappear under new labels. Millions of citizens have been brainwashed and terrified by the carnage, the destruction of the car bombs and the mass executions. These include many children and adolescents. It is necessary to nurture this segment of society to reduce extremism and prevent the formation of sleeper cells. At the same time, we must hold accountable those who incite violence and extremism, whether at political rallies, mosques or schools. Such negative discourse directly impacts the street.

The solution to terrorism is complex and difficult and not limited to the military. Daesh originated with the remnants of al-Qaida in Iraq who were stalked by the security forces or lodged in detention centers. They found a haven in Syria, where they launched a campaign in social

media and Friday sermons to deceive young people with the notion of a "caliphate." We have repeatedly issued warnings about the dangers of terrorism in conflict-ridden areas. We must therefore work as a team with all brotherly and friendly forces to prevent terrorist groups from exploiting a fertile environment in ungoverned spaces.

We in the counterterrorism apparatus have worked hard to restructure our forces to perform the tasks entrusted to us. Since 2014 we have been fighting, advancing and liberating cities as a regular military force. But the duties of the Counter-Terrorism Service extend to tracking and dismantling terrorist networks and pursuing those who promote, finance and lead them. This task is not limited to Iraq. We work with our brothers in neighboring countries and

our partners abroad to share intelligence about terrorist networks. It is a global network that requires international cooperation to dismantle it.

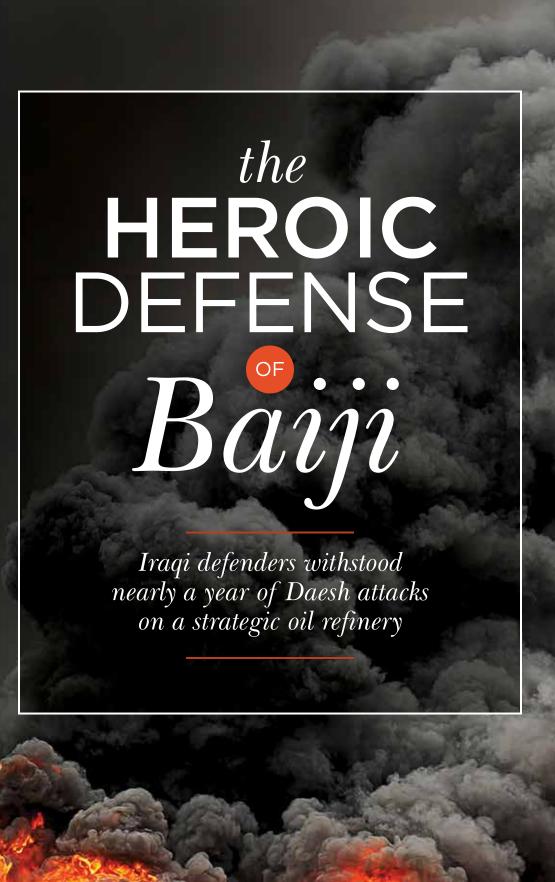
The world has witnessed a technological revolution that has brought many benefits to humanity, such as science and medicine, and at the same time has made us more vulnerable to the dangers of terrorists who spread their sick thoughts on social networking pages or plan simultaneous attacks on innocents.

Terrorists use modern technology to spread extremist ideas and recruit members. So we must keep abreast of technological developments, acquire the latest technology in monitoring suspicious calls, locating mobile phones, conducting aerial surveillance and other modern techniques for hunting terrorists.

The dangers of terrorism have made armies adopt new unconventional tactics to counter these threats. To try to deplete military forces, terrorist gangs depend on speed, the use of light arms and hiding among populations. We must focus on building an unconventional force with light armaments and modern techniques that can fight these gangs under all circumstances and have the flexibility and speed to mobilize within an hour. We continuously develop our technical and tactical capabilities, participate in international exercises and share experiences of mutual benefit.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our international partners who provided support, advice and air support to our forces during the liberation battles. Air support and the exchange of intelligence helped preserve the lives and property of citizens and limited damage in the liberated cities. They worked with us wholeheartedly as a team, at command centers and on the training grounds. We have all shared in the fruits of this partnership.

Gen. Talib Shaghati Alkenani Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service





he Battle for Baiji Refinery cannot be summed up in a single article. The stories of heroism there are the stuff of military legend: the fierceness of the fighting, the plumes of smoke from burning fuel tanks that blocked the sun, the earth quaking from the intensity of the explosions, the tales of martyrdom etched in Soldiers' hearts. For 11 months we lived in the Baiji refinery, demonstrating patriotic resolve

in the face of attacks by the most monstrous terrorist gangs. This is not my story; it is a tale of 325 heroes who fended off 40 full-scale attacks and 175 confrontations with terrorists fielding twice as many fighters as we had, using all types of weapons and hundreds of car bombs. We maintained the cohesion of our forces and repelled the attacks.

The strategic location of the city of Baiji made it a target for Daesh gangs — the main roads connecting Baghdad, Mosul, Saladin, Kirkuk, and Diyala pass through it.

Controlling this location means cutting supply lines coming from Baghdad. The refinery complex in Baiji is one of the biggest in the Middle East, and it dominates the country's revenues and economy. Daesh wanted to control the refinery by any means because of its enormous storage tanks of crude oil and processed fuels. After Daesh managed to take over the city of Baiji, it focused its attacks on gaining control of the refinery. With control of the refinery, it would possess a self-financing military base. Iraqi liberation forces would have had trouble reaching northern Iraq, and any battle to liberate Baiji would have been devastating. That's why terrorists risked their lives to storm the refinery.

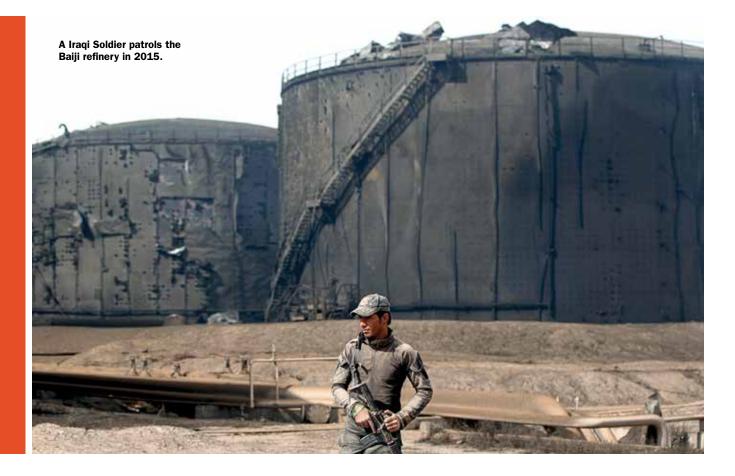
Its capture also would have had a major impact on morale. Daesh recognized the symbolic importance of Baiji; most news agencies were talking about it at the time. More than once, despite official government denials, terrorists claimed that they controlled it.

The battles began on June 10, 2014, and lasted until May 21, 2015. Throughout this period, the refinery was besieged on all sides. In the beginning, we were 35 warriors from the Counter-Terrorism Service, 40 from the 9th Division, a few others from the 14th Infantry Brigade, and a group of tribesmen. In all, we had about 110 fighters. We were able to repel the first attacks on the refinery in 2014, withstanding them even though Daesh controlled most of

the cities around us. In late 2014, our forces managed to create an opening for reinforcements and supplies to be sent, but this passage was severed within weeks. When the battles intensified, our supplies were cut off.

For the sake of history, I want to mention the courage of Staff Gen. Talib Shaghati Alkenani, head of the Counter-Terrorism Service and commander of the joint operations command at the time, and his considerable and active role in the refinery's resistance. In mid-July 2014, Brig. Gen. Ali Al-Quraishi contacted him with a request direct from Staff Maj. Gen. Dhaif Al-Tai, commanding the Iraqi forces at Baiji. He explained to him the challenges we were facing as a Counter-Terrorism Service force and as part of a joint operations command's area of responsibility at the Baiji refinery, as well as the risk of supply lines for the refinery being cut off. Gen. Alkenani reassured us that he would use all his powers to send reinforcements. After intensive meetings between the Army Aviation Command and the Air Force Command, we received a call two days later from Maj. Ammar Abbas Sharhan, who told us that the leadership had decided to send up-to-date weapons, equipment, and rations via Army Aviation with the protection of a specialized team from the Counter-Terrorism Service. The helicopters encountered violent resistance from Daesh defenses, but thank God, they managed to destroy those defenses and opened up a perilous supply route.

Our happiness was indescribable as the helicopters landed in a cloud of dust on August 22, 2014, inside the



refinery compound, with protection provided by MI-28 attack helicopters. This daring operation boosted our Soldiers' morale significantly. As elated as we were to see our fellow fighters from the Counter-Terrorism Service, we were just as eager to look over the weapons and gear we had received, like children opening Eid presents: MK-19 grenade launchers, 8.6 mm long-range sniper rifles equipped with silencers, night-vision and daytime lenses, and all kinds of gear in large quantities. The special operations team from Baghdad trained members of our force on the use of the new weapons, and they reconnoitered the area to provide their impressions to the joint operations commander, who sent his greetings to every member of the force and affirmed his personal interest in the refinery's resistance. For us, it felt like a victory of sorts.

The reinforcements were limited to the Army Aviation helicopters. They reached us at unpredictable times because of poor weather, sandstorms and enemy fire, but they transported equipment and fighters, and so the strength of our force reached 325 warriors from all branches of the Armed Forces. Although the goal was to bring in more reinforcements, our hopes soon crumbled when the terrorists targeted the helicopters and brought down two of them, which stopped Army Aviation from sending reinforcements.

Two weeks passed. No helicopters arrived from Baghdad. They had been a source of comfort to our hearts. The scarcity of rations, gear and medical supplies and the ever-louder moans of the wounded strained our nerves. At dawn one dark day, the loudspeakers from the Baiji mosques near the

refinery began broadcasting messages with threats designed to sap our resistance:

"Hey, Safavids, your time is almost up, and there is no one to save you. Who will bring you food and water? Your ammunition will run out soon, and we will slaughter you like sheep, film your bodies and post it online. You have no choice but to surrender yourselves to the Islamic State mujahedeen before it's too late."

We got used to their horrible speeches, and the helicopter crashes and psychological warfare failed to reduce combat effectiveness or weaken our resolve to resist.

Because of our small numbers and the large area we had to defend, everyone took turns on guard duty. Even the commander took his turn on duty in one of the towers. I started out as deputy commander of the counterterrorism forces at the refinery, and the commander was Brig. Gen. Ali Al-Quraishi. I became the forces' commander after Brig. Gen. Ali was wounded and evacuated from the battlefield before the helicopters stopped coming. We didn't have a field hospital, so we treated the wounded with the simple bandages that every fighter carried as first aid. When a fighter thought he could carry a weapon, you would see him leaving the casualty collection point and head to a duty post or, at the height of the battle, fighting in field bandages. This was because our forces knew we had no replacements. The wounded Soldiers would volunteer for combat even when their officers ordered them to rest. As for critical cases, we sent them with Army Aviation if there was a plane coming, but we were often

unable to save those who were gravely wounded because of poor flying conditions that limited the mobility of MI-17 helicopters.

We made every attempt to break the siege against us with our Armed Forces. Nearly out of water and ammunition, we assumed we were nearing the end. When every solution for sending us supplies had been exhausted, our leadership sought the help from the commanders of our partners in the coalition forces, asking them to send equipment and rations using large, specialized parachutes dropped by C-130 aircraft from high altitudes. Thank you to our friends in the coalition for sustaining the battle with the logistical support we desperately needed. We were overjoyed by this great achievement. The coalition forces have the latest technology in this field, and they started furnishing the Iraqi Air Force with parachutes for dropping military and medical supplies to us.

We endured difficult and uneasy days, especially when every means of communication and supply was cut off, dampening Soldiers' morale. This was in addition to the psychological warfare that Daesh conducted every day. At sunset, a cacophony of voices would start up in a war to undermine our morale and break our will. Sometimes it came from the mosques' minarets, but often it came from the earthen berm that separated us:

"The Day of Sacrifice has come, you Safavids. Your day will be just like the day at Speicher. There's no escaping death. We gave you the chance to surrender yourselves, but you decided to die cowering under the knives of the men of the Islamic State!"

We remembered the crime at Camp Speicher and how Daesh double-crossed and massacred unarmed Soldiers. Our steadfast determination was a declaration to the mothers and children of the Speicher martyrs that the blood of their sons and fathers had not been shed in vain, as well as a message of hope to the Yazidi and Christian girls abducted by the terrorists because our victory would represent hope of salvation for them and for all the Iraqis who fell under Daesh's oppression. Daesh's crimes made us more determined to fight and not turn over the refinery to murderers, no matter what the cost.

Some nights, we would recall the facts of the Speicher massacre, a true crime against humanity. Because it was so close to the refinery, about 35 kilometers away, most of the Soldiers at the refinery had a brother or cousin or friend among the Speicher martyrs. After Daesh took control of the Saladin governorate, the Soldiers at Camp Speicher were besieged. They ran out of ammunition, and terrorists stormed the camp. The Soldiers had no choice but to surrender. Daesh committed a crime disgraceful to humanity. The Soldiers were unarmed, and nothing in international law or the revealed religions permits the killing of prisoners. Daesh gathered the unarmed Soldiers and opened fire on them in front of the cameras. They threw some into the Tigris River and buried others in a mass grave. In total, 1,700 Soldiers were killed. Not satisfied with murder, Daesh mutilated the martyrs' bodies in monstrous ways. Besides satiating their sadistic desires to revel in killing and brutality, they wanted to sow fear in the hearts of other Soldiers, but it only increased our

determination to fight to the end. So we fought to the death to defeat this terrorist enemy and bring vengeance upon those who committed the crime at Speicher.

back a major attack by Daesh. At dawn we started searching for the bodies of martyrs. At the end of each battle, we collect the bodies of our fellow fighters who had been killed in action, pray over them and bury them in a place set aside for martyrs. The moments of losing a friend or a brother in arms stay with us in these trying days, and we share painful glimmers of joy by getting to know each other and learning the names of each other's children. We become one family. We bury the martyrs' bodies inside the refinery in the hope of transporting the bodies to relatives after defeating Daesh. In Iraq, every sect or nationality has its own traditions and rituals and special cemeteries for burying their dead. But at the Baiji refinery, the martyrs are buried in one cemetery with the Iraqi flag flying above it. Fighters leave behind ethnic affiliation and fight simply as Iraqis.

The morale of the warriors inside the refinery played a big role in restoring the confidence and maintaining the morale of the Iraqi Armed Forces. We were a force besieged, outnumbered by the terrorists encircling the area. The refinery had an area of 24 square kilometers, and there was no way 325 fighters could patrol such a large space. Despite Daesh's repeated, desperate attacks, despite the shortage of food and water, our forces held together. The leaders and commanders in other sectors of operation like Kirkuk, Diyala, Samarra, and Anbar praised the heroics and sacrifices of the warriors inside the Baiji refinery and began exhorting their Soldiers to follow suit

At the start of the battle, Daesh's morale was high, and they had immense military capabilities exceeding the strength of our forces in the operations sectors. The Baiji battle, however, tipped the scales in our favor and became a symbol for our Armed Forces on the battlefield.

The distance separating us from the terrorists ranged from 5 to 500 meters. We would hear them talking in the still of the night. Daesh launched many attacks in 11 months. Ferocious battles raged, and many officers and Soldiers were killed in the savage action. We fed our best men into the refinery battles, but we were determined to not give up the location to terrorist gangs.

Tonight is difficult. Our defenders are living in a state of anxiety and alarm. Daesh gathers all its military vehicles and equipment in huge columns and circles the refinery after midnight in the area of 600 and Albu Jawari and Zuyut to intimidate and unsettle us. We see their columns from guard posts, and calls start arriving at command headquarters. The long columns are visible, thanks to the vehicles' lights. The terrorists try to weaken our forces by any means, and this is one of their favorite tactics. But we are alert and ready.

Daesh also spread rumors on social networking pages and fabricated videos. With the support of some biased networks, they put out false reports about the fall of the refinery. Their goal was to spread chaos and strike fear in the hearts of the fighters' families so that they would ask their sons to abandon the refinery.

One night, a Daesh member called to one of our men, Lt. Wissam Mohammed Khaled Al-Takriti, saying:

"Wissam, you're a son of Tikrit, and we know your people well. Why are you fighting your Sunni brothers and helping the Rafidahs? The Islamic State came to rescue the Sunnis from the oppression of the Rafidah government. Repent, and you'll be safe. Kill as many as you can of those who don't trust you and would kill you, and join your mujahedeen brothers."

Moments passed in silence, then Lt. Wissam's voice came from behind the berm, responding that he was proud to be Iraqi and would fight to the death with his brothers in arms. He said that Daesh killed Sunni, Shia and Kurdish Iraqis indiscriminately and that they were a terrorist gang that would be defeated at the hands of Iraqis.

Lt. Wissam was martyred in a night battle on August 24, 2014. He was a handsome young man and a courageous officer. The Soldiers really loved him, and he earned the confidence of the leadership through his competence. Soldiers witnessed his brave stand that night, as he sacrificed himself and did not allow Daesh to penetrate near his defensive position. We prayed over his cleansed body at dawn and laid him in his resting place. We kept a picture of his father and his watch to give them to his family at the end of the war. We would tell them about Wissam's heroic actions and his love for his family and his city, Tikrit.

The Soldiers' morale strengthened my determination to continue the battle. I had a wired switchboard that the Soldiers used to call their families. Sometimes when waiting for a call from higher headquarters, I would hear a Soldier tell his family that our position was stable and that there were no attacks or losses, even if we had fought off an attack the previous night. We suffered considerably from the shortage of rations because we prioritized bringing in equipment over food and water, but

we would tell our families that we had everything we needed.

During those 11 months, we used only the equipment we had. There were no huge weapons caches we could access to sustain battle momentum. Sometimes when fending off attacks, we used equipment and weapons seized from dead Daesh fighters, collecting them and distributing them to the Soldiers. Each bullet represented survival, and we did not fire randomly. At times we were forced not to respond to incoming fire. In one of the battles, the enemy cut off the roads and started putting pressure on the forces in the areas of Al-Mazraa and Al-Malha to stop the advance of troops and interrupt communications between Speicher and Baiji.

We were on the verge of running out of ammunition entirely, so I asked Staff Maj. Gen. Dhaif to make a new plan to reduce the enemy's pressure on other areas. Our plan was to conserve our ammunition, give the troops some rest, and lure the enemy to an area where troops were gathered. Daesh had already started mobilizing its forces around the refinery. We were watching their movements using infrared cameras, night vision, surveillance devices, and reconnaissance aircraft belonging to the coalition forces. After we identified a Daesh mobilization site at the Seneia base, from which they were about to attack, we asked the command to bombard it. We wiped out the massed Daesh forces with an airstrike conducted by the Iraqi Air Force and the coalition forces. By doing so we conserved our own ammunition. More than 150 terrorists were killed.

We tracked the course of the battles elsewhere and our Armed Forces' conquest of the Al-Alam district north of Tikrit. Our hearts danced with joy at this advance, and we were certain that Tikrit would be liberated. We realized our resistance at the refinery would be a cornerstone in the defeat of Daesh.

Today is March 30, 2015. It is totally quiet around the refinery. We gathered around the radio listening to the announcement of Tikrit's liberation and the rejoicing of the Iraqi people over this major accomplishment. It's the beginning of the end of Daesh in Iraq. Tikrit holds great symbolism for the terrorists, so its liberation is a devastating blow. This evening, we observed unusual movements by the enemy around the refinery. We realize they will try to raise the morale of their fighters and break the spirit of Iraqi forces by resuming the assault on Baiji refinery, no matter the cost.

Fourteen-hundred Daesh fighters launched an attack on the refinery on April 10, 2015. The attacking force was at least three times bigger than our force. The battle lasted 11 days. Fighting was savage and raged day and night. Col. Khaled Al-Jannabi was martyred on April 12 while fighting bravely alongside the Soldiers. The deputy commander, Brig. Gen. Abdul Karim Shibr, fell as a martyr on April 14. The fighting wouldn't stop; it only grew fiercer. One day later, the forces' commander, Maj. Gen. Dhaif Al-Tai, was martyred. When the fighting ceased for a few moments, Daesh used loudspeakers to call for the Soldiers to surrender themselves:

"Most of your leaders have been killed, and all of you will be killed. We have brought the best Islamic State fighters, and this is your last chance to repent and throw down your weapons. Haven't you seen the bodies of Maj. Gen. Dhaif and Brig. Gen. Karim? How will you fight without a commander? The government in Baghdad has abandoned you here to die."

But we were more determined than ever to continue fighting because we had sworn to each other that we would not be defeated and that Iraq's hopes rested with us. After Daesh despaired of taking the refinery, they focused on creating a breach in our defenses and trying to steal the bodies of our martyred leaders. The bodies of Maj. Gen. Dhaif, Brig. Gen. Karim, and Col. Khaled — who were martyred during fighting near the forward towers from which we withdrew to absorb the first attack — were now between us and them.

After the death of Maj. Gen. Dhaif, I was assigned to lead the forces because I was the senior ranking officer. At midnight, I was with some Soldiers in headquarters to make a plan to plug the hole that Daesh had created at one point. I received a call on the military radio from someone who told me that he was the commander of the Daesh assault force that would attack the refinery. Based on his manner of speaking, he sounded Arab. He told me we had no hope of surviving and started making threats. He said that he would attack with a hundred truck bombs and destroy the refinery and everyone in it. We listened quietly, and after he finished with the threats, he said that he was making me an honorable promise to let me leave safely if I surrendered the refinery and the Soldiers.

I answered: There's no way that I would betray my country and my Soldiers. The refinery will resist you, and it will be your grave and the grave of anyone who comes near it. We will avenge the martyrs of Speicher and honor the Iraqi girls that your gangs have profaned. Then the call ended.

Daesh tried more than once to reach the body of Maj. Gen. Dhaif, but we were vigilant and foiled their attempts. Their goal was to mutilate the bodies and display them in their online publications as evidence of their conquest of the refinery. This would certainly boost the morale of Daesh after the Tikrit setback. But thank God that, despite the violence of the attack and the terrorists' desperation, they failed to achieve their goals. I prepared a plan to push Daesh back behind the defensive line, which became a no-man's land, and secure the bodies of the martyrs. I was sure that this operation would break their spirits and achieve victory for us.

The dawn of April 22 was full of sorrow for us as we performed burial rites for Maj. Gen. Dhaif and Brig. Gen. Karim. Their words and the memories that bound us to them were fixed in our minds. A deadly calm permeated the ceremonies like tears shed unconsciously. Losing these leaders had a big impact on the Soldiers' spirits.



A satellite view of Baiji refinery in June 2014 after Daesh set fire to an oil tank during the battle

Daesh poured all of the weapons and skills they had, even tanks and armored personnel carriers, into the refinery battles.

They used car bombs extensively to destroy our defenses and attack main entry points. They employed drones to determine our positions, chlorine gas and heavy mortar fire. During the attack, they bombarded the fuel tanks intensively, striking and igniting them to block the visibility of aircraft and confuse our fighters because the tanks were nearby and part of the refinery was isolated from the rest of the force. The refinery contained flammable materials and poisonous gases. It was no good as a defensive position or a battleground. At times, liberating a single meter required hours of vicious fighting owing to the nature of the terrain, the enemy's fortifications and their use of improvised explosive devices. A single bullet could cause a square kilometer to go up in flames. They used such means to try to gain control of the refinery, but they still failed in the face of the heroic defenders.

The Armed Forces started to tighten the noose on Daesh in nearby cities of the Baiji district. This relieved pressure on us as Daesh fighters departed to head off our forces elsewhere in the district. Days passed, and events unfolded quickly. News of our brave Army's victories spread rapidly. On May 21, 2015, Hummers full of Counter-Terrorism Service men arrived, coming from the direction of Albu Tama and Al-Mazraa. We sang with joy and hugged each other. Only victorious Soldiers know the elation of such hugs.

That was the first night in 11 months that I slept soundly, without placing my hand on the grip of my weapon.

The war media cell rushed the news of the liberation of Baiji to the Iraqi people and the world. I was immensely happy that I would return to my children with my head held high, proud of the near-miraculous victory we had achieved. I don't know why I felt moved to go to the grave of the martyrs and salute them for their sacrifices that led to our victory. I was surprised to find that some of the Soldiers had beat me there. I felt that the martyrs were smiling on us from the silhouette of the Iraqi flag that flapped high above them. •



# Securing Baghdad

## Eliminating Terrorist Cells in the Iraqi Capital is a Priority After the Defeat of Daesh



UNIPATH STAFF

errorist gangs have focused on targeting the civilian population in the capital, Baghdad, with the aim of destabilizing the city and provoking a media whirlwind suggesting the Iraqi government has lost control of security. Terrorist groups intensified their truck bombings in Baghdad in mid-2009, but the cohesion and courage of the security forces thwarted the terrorist schemes. The bloody bombing of Karrada in 2016, which coincided with the announcement of the liberation of Fallujah from Daesh, marked a turning point in the thinking of security leadership. Commanders intensified their focus on protecting the capital and unmasking these killers throughout the Baghdad region, which reflected positively on security of the capital. *Unipath* met with Lt. Gen. Abdul Jalil al-Rubaie, Baghdad operations commander, who briefed the magazine on successes against the terrorists and on the strategy to increase security in the capital.



Iraqi Lt. Gen. Abdul Jalil al-Rubaie, Baghdad operations commander

## *Unipath*: What is the role of Baghdad operations in liberating cities from the abomination of Daesh?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: Baghdad operations played a heroic and historic role in protecting and controlling the belt areas of Baghdad (north, west and southwest) and halting terrorist elements intent on mobilizing toward the capital. The enemy occupied this sector for more than a year, and we prevented them from achieving any progress. And then the leadership began its extensive military operations, and we rushed out from our sector toward the Anbar area of operations and played a key role in liberating the cities of Fallujah, Karma and Saqlawiyah, in addition to other areas related to the mentioned cities such as Albu Shagl, Azarik and other villages.

**Unipath**: Describe your achievements in dismantling networks producing vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED).

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: Our area of responsibility (AOR) is one of the most active sectors because terrorism aims to hit the capital, where there are foreign embassies and international news agencies, with the goal of obtaining wider media coverage. To give readers a clear picture of the achievements of Baghdad operations, I would like to think back to the

period of sectarian violence in 2006, when the capital was living through a bloody period of VBIEDs, suicide bombers and bodies in the streets. This was followed by the period of 2010, when the gangs of the Islamic State of Iraq sent trucks and tankers loaded with explosives to target ministry buildings in the heart of Baghdad. Most of these bombs were manufactured on the outskirts of the capital. But for more than two years we have eliminated bomb-making networks in Baghdad and its surroundings and have not detected any VBIEDs factories in and around Baghdad. All the car bombs — a limited number — that have targeted the capital during the past two years were assembled outside our area of responsibility and came from places like Anbar, Mosul and Divala. This is a positive indication of the efforts of Baghdad operations in clearing the capital of bomb factories and arresting and killing most of the terrorists.

## **Unipath**: What areas do terrorists use to deliver explosives to Baghdad, and how do you deal with these?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: As I mentioned, Daesh recently tried to rush some car bombs from Anbar, prioritizing Baghdad and the areas mentioned above, but intelligence operations successfully targeted some of these cars before they entered

our AOR, especially in Anbar, and the plan was foiled. In the past, Daesh tried to find hiding places to establish factories in the agricultural/rural areas outside the capital and away from the eyes of the authorities. But we were able to raid these areas and destroy several weapons caches. Our units are conducting intensive search campaigns in the suburbs of the capital and Greater Baghdad after closing the entry points for the region and carrying out a large search to find weapons caches, VBIED factories and wanted terrorists. These preemptive operations have helped to extend security and cut off safe havens for terrorist gangs. In addition, we maintain continuous contact with residents in the AOR. By identifying their needs and building bridges of trust, we gain their support and they become our eyes.

## *Unipath*: What is the role of Iraq's coalition partners in tracking terrorist networks in the capital?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: I am grateful for the role of our coalition partners in supporting our units in the fight against these gangs. The coalition's role is essential and influential in assisting us on the intelligence side and the implementation of accurate airstrikes in the district north of Baghdad. We also exchange and coordinate information about important terrorist leaders trying to operate in the Baghdad sector. In addition, coalition forces play a role in training our units and building capacity. We have weekly meetings at the leadership level and meetings at the departmental level. Baghdad operations has a team of advisors working side by side with our Soldiers.

## *Unipath*: How important is border security in limiting terrorist operations in the capital?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: This aspect is very important and effective in ending terrorism and significantly restricting its role in the capital and other cities. This confirms that all the attacks that targeted the capital, whether they succeeded or were aborted by intelligence work, ultimately came from outside our area of responsibility, especially the provinces that have a common border with Syria like Mosul and Anbar. Since 2003, terrorist gangs have infiltrated Iraq through weak gaps in the border. However, after the disturbance of the security situation in Syria, which directly affected the security situation in the border areas of Iraq, Mosul, Anbar and other areas were invaded. So, border security is the backbone of Iraqi stability. We are in contact with our brothers in the border guards and al-Jazeera, al-Badia and Anbar operations to exchange information and track terrorism and organized crime that extend across the Iraqi-Syrian border. We have begun to focus on the use of modern border-control techniques such as reconnaissance aircraft and sensors. We encourage cooperation between the Air Force, Army Air Wing and coalition forces in intensifying round-the-clock surveillance missions and targeting terrorist groups near the border or in remote areas deep in the desert.

Unipath: How do you use social media to communicate with the population and receive notifications of terrorist activities?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: We have an official page on Facebook

followed by about 195,000 citizens. The page is managed by the Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance. We publish some security information on this site, such as arresting terrorists or thwarting terrorist attacks. In addition, we inform citizens when we conduct controlled bombing so as not to confuse them when they hear explosions. By this I mean the controlled detonation of ammunition and car bombs. This communication made us close to the citizens and encouraged them to report suspicious activities in their areas. Sometimes they write on the web pages about cases of corruption or mayhem in their areas and often correspond directly to the page management staff to provide accurate information about the movements of terrorists. We receive the information from citizens through all means available because we believe that they are an essential part of the security system. Therefore, we seek to gain their confidence and encourage them to make available information that we will audit, analyze and act on.

## **Unipath**: How can leaders benefit from your experience with thwarting terrorist plots around Baghdad?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: Our leadership approach is to coordinate and cooperate with our counterparts in nearby operational commands. Our security guidelines and methods allow us to execute successful pre-emptive operations based on accurate intelligence. For example, at the beginning of June 2018, we had a conference to coordinate with all the leaders of neighboring operations regarding the exchange of experiences and security information.

## *Unipath*: What exercises and training are important for building the capabilities of Soldiers in the fight against terrorism?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: Our Armed Forces and all its branches have gained extensive experience in combating and fighting terrorism, both on the battlefield and in direct confrontation with Daesh, during the liberation of our cities and the use of intelligence and fieldwork in tracing cells and arresting and killing terrorists. We believe in the absolute necessity of mixing training curriculum with on-the-ground experience. We are working to coordinate with coalition forces to train at the brigade level.

## *Unipath*: How important is sharing security information with friendly countries to defeat terrorist networks?

LT. GEN. AL-RUBAIE: We are facing a great security challenge, which is the existence of terrorist networks with threads in all countries of the world. They move quickly and secretly, so it is necessary to have intelligence cooperation and information exchange so that we can abort their malicious schemes. Terrorist gangs cannot be defeated by a single state because terrorism depends on the spread of extremist ideology, a complex network of funding and logistical strands throughout the world, so we must work as a team to defeat them. As I mentioned at the outset, most of the VBIED come from areas controlled by terrorists in Syria. Therefore, we must intensify intelligence work and aerial reconnaissance of roads used by terror networks so that we can foil terrorism before it occurs. •



# HOW AN IRAQI GRANDMOTHER SAVED SOLDIERS' LIVES AND INSPIRED A NATION

UNIPATH STAFF

t is a tradition among Arab tribes to have a nakhua, or title, for those who make the tribe proud. The *nakhua* of the al-Jabour tribe is "Akhu Hadla." But maybe, after the courage shown by Aliyah Khalaf Saleh al-Jabouri, known as Umm Qusay, the new nakhua will be "Akhu Aliyah." Umm Qusay is now a familiar name that has entered the hearts of the Iraqi people for helping to save the lives of more than 50 Iraqi Soldiers stranded in areas overrun by Daesh thugs. She is a woman with nerves of steel who refused to give in to sectarianism at a time when Iraq faced a dangerous slide into war and chaos that threatened to engulf the region. Bloodthirsty terrorists were murdering innocent people for the most trivial of reasons, but with her exceptional courage she protected the Soldiers she treated as guests. Her bravery helped restore a sense of national unity.

The al-Alam district is on the west bank of the Tigris River, which separates it from Tikrit and Baiji. Those areas have witnessed fierce battles, including the biggest massacre in Iraq's history by Daesh at Camp Speicher, about 16 kilometers from al-Alam. The camp includes an Iraqi Air Force academy, so most of the victims were students, rather than combatants. This massacre was deeply painful for all Iraqis. Terrorists spread news of the massacre on social media to demonstrate the extent of their brutality. Over the course of several weeks, Umm Qusay saved Soldiers fleeing the massacre. They had ended up on the riverbank, and Daesh terrorists were searching for them like hyenas stalking prey. It wasn't an easy decision for Umm Qusay to help them she knew she would be risking her life and the lives of her children — but she believed she owed it to the young men's mothers awaiting their return.

"Martyrs' bodies were floating down the river, and I saw in them my husband and son, whom Daesh had recently killed," Umm Qusay told *Unipath*. "I listened to the news coming from Speicher, Sharqat and Baiji, and it broke my heart that the blood of our youth was being spilled so brutally and that the scenes of slaughter were being published for bereaved mothers to see. Fear and anxiety filled the hearts of the people in the city. It was then that my children and I decided to save the Soldiers and help them cross the river."

Umm Qusay praised the extraordinary courage of the people of al-Alam district, who resisted Daesh after the fall of cities around them and helped the besieged Soldiers cross the river. About 400 Soldiers were saved, including Air Force Academy students fleeing Camp Speicher.

"The people of al-Alam helped Soldiers and civilians flee across the river from Tikrit. The rest of the young men fired on Daesh to keep them from getting to the crossing point," Umm Qusay said. "My sons fought courageously with the sons of al-Alam, and I sheltered troops in my home. I was alone with my daughters and grandchildren. I shared my loaf of bread with them, though we had so little to eat. My son Khalid brought the Soldiers from the point where they had crossed the river, and they stayed with us. We took them to Kirkuk, from which they went home to their families in Mosul, Dayali, Kirkuk, Baghdad and the South."

Umm Qusay recalled the Soldiers who stayed with her but weren't lucky enough to reach their families safely.

"Three young men came to us, very well-mannered, and stayed with us for a day. They thanked us for our hospitality but refused to stay longer, though we insisted that the roads weren't safe. I learned later that they never made it home to their families. I regret that I didn't force them to stay."

The people of al-Alam saved the Soldiers who crossed the riverbank, but soon the conditions worsened and the roads were cut off by the terrorists. It was then that Umm Qusay received a call that help was needed beyond the district.

"Abu Hamed, one of the sons of our general and a wellknown figure in the al-Hajjaj district — about 40 kilometers south of al-Alam — reached out to us," she said. "He said that Daesh controlled their district and that he had found six Soldiers who needed to get out before they were exposed. I called my nephew, who had a car, and I asked my daughter and son, Khalid, to go get the Soldiers. I sent my daughter with them to confuse Daesh and make them think this was just a family driving together. I remember when Khalid looked at me in fear, saying: 'Mother, how can I go out from here, when our village is surrounded by Daesh? How can I risk the life of my sister, a young girl not yet 20?' But I insisted that he take his sister with him, and I told him that all of these Soldiers had mothers crying and praying for their sons' safety, day and night. When they arrived in the area, Daesh was close by, and my son had to leave his sister and swim across the river to bring the Soldiers across by canoe. During the crossing, Abu Hamed's son was martyred, and water began to sweep the Soldiers back toward Daesh territory. The Soldiers begged Khalid to help them. He was torn between saving them, staying with Abu Hamed, and looking for his sister on the other side of the river as Daesh was closing in. Abu Hamed snapped into action and told Khalid, 'My son has been martyred to save these sons of the South, and we must finish what he started.' We must not forget Abu Hamed's courage. Thank God, Khalid and his sister managed to get the Soldiers home safely."

Umm Qusay recalled the six Soldiers' condition as they entered her house.

"They were full of panic, and their faces looked like the faces of the dead," she said. "Their clothes were covered in mud, and their torn shoes demonstrated the roughness of the roads and marshes they had traveled to reach a safe haven. Despite my grieving for my son and husband, and my fear that Daesh would discover them in my house, I felt an extraordinary power in my body and the determination of a woman who was not afraid to protect them. I don't know where this sense of purpose and determination came from, but I feel that God planted this power inside me to ward off fear. I asked Khalid to set up the bathroom for them and give them his and his brother's clothes while I prepared a meal for them. I sat and ate with them."

Fear filled narrow rural roads, and the sound of gunfire echoed through the night as Daesh terrorists infiltrated the town to send spies to assassinate those who rejected their sick ideology. Umm Qusay guarded the young men, trying to be strong in front of them.

"When I was alone, I had fears about their fate," she said. "I remembered my husband and son, and I cried bitterly, but when I entered the room where our guests were staying, I stiffened my resolve and smiled for them. I was sitting up all night with my rifle by my side to guard them because I was responsible for their safety, and I feared for them greatly. When I went to check on them at night, I found them sleeping without covers. I don't know whether they thought that the covers might impede their escape in the event of any danger. They would go to sleep terrified, and when they saw my smile they would return to sleep."

Umm Qusay recalled the courage of the village's men in those difficult circumstances and how they were fighting on multiple fronts: from the heights of the Hamrin mountain ridge to the al-Fathah village, and to the riverbank to stop Daesh gangs from entering their village.

"The fierceness of the battles kept the men busy, but my brother and cousin, Sheikh Khamis al-Jabara, who were checking on the residents, especially at my house, were aware of the Soldiers' presence. Sheikh Khamis told me, 'I came to raise your morale, and I hope you are well.' Although I was crushed inside, I smiled at him and told him my spirits were high. I told him I was happy to save my guests and take care of them. He would visit again and again to reassure me and ask if I needed anything."

Daesh closed in on al-Alam because it was an important supply hub between the Hamrin mountain range and Tikrit. In addition, there was a feud between Daesh and the townspeople for their past refusal to be dragged into sectarian fighting by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's gangs.

"After 15 days of battles and sieges against the

district by Daesh's gangs, they had the area in their grip. The village fighters negotiated with Daesh to end the fight and allow them to enter; in return, the people would be allowed to leave. That sad night, al-Alam entered Daesh's clutches. The situation in the town grew more and more desperate, and there remained no hope of salvation. The next day, Daesh was patrolling among the homes with their informants and fighters, searching for those who resisted them and helped Soldiers escape. They began to demolish homes and detain people for unknown reasons, which spawned confusion and chaos. I didn't know what to do or where to hide the young men."

Daesh began to conduct investigations and searches of the city, and Umm Qusay and her sons decided to fight to the end instead of succumbing to the shame of handing over the young men to Daesh.

"I sent my young grandchildren out to play in front of the home, but they were watching the street to alert me if Daesh would suddenly approach. The Soldiers asked me to leave my home so that we wouldn't be killed because of them, but I said I would rather die with them than live with the shame and regret that would haunt us if we gave up our guests out of fear of Daesh gangs. I told them, in the presence of my children, that [my sons] had rifles and I had two rifles. I gave them one and kept one for myself. We decided that we would fight to the death if Daesh gangs raided our home."

She didn't lose hope of salvation or of saving the Soldiers, instead insisting on continuing to search for a way to save them. She believed that a miracle might save the young men.

"I tried to find someone who could smuggle us as a family outside al-Alam, and through the grapevine, we came up with a person who said he could drive us to Samarra. He asked for the names and number of people he'd be driving, and I told him my sons and I wanted to leave, afraid for our family's safety. His condition was that we would go in two cars — me in one car and my sons in another. He argued that this would raise fewer suspicions, but I didn't trust him. I pretended to agree to his conditions. I told him we would meet him the next day at 7 a.m. But I was sure that it was a trap and he was trying to take the young men from me to Daesh. I called someone else who had a four-wheel drive and, miraculously, he was about to travel in that moment."

She said the Soldiers climbed into the car that afternoon with her family, and they headed down a dangerous road full of terrorists.

"So as not to raise suspicions at Daesh checkpoints along the way, I took my daughter, granddaughters and son's wife with me as our family. I put the women close to the windows to conceal the young men. During the young men's stay with us, my children had created fake IDs for them as university students with my sons' names. We thought they may prove beneficial at some point and, indeed, that day had come. We had taught them the names of the daughters of the family and we agreed on the answers to any questions Daesh might ask along the way. We started our journey at noon. The car slowly made its way through the alleys of al-Alam that I knew so well, but that day, everything looked strange to me. The terrorists' wretched faces, strange clothes and sullen expressions repulsed me. They didn't resemble Iragis in appearance or action, and it was as if they had landed from another planet. Half a kilometer from our house, at the first checkpoint, one of the terrorists shouted at us and pointed his weapon at us to stop. I lowered the window calmly and I said, 'God will bring you victory, my children.' One of them quickly replied 'God be with you.' This was the first miracle, because people in the area know my sons' faces well. I don't want to hide the fact that we were very frightened, and that I put my daughters' lives and honor in grave danger on this journey, in which we had minimal hope of survival. But I believed that we were not alone on this journey, but rather that God and the mothers' prayers were with us. After we made it through the checkpoint, there was a deadly silence in the car. I tried to break the silence by cursing Daesh and laughing loudly. I turned my face toward the young Soldiers, and they returned my laugh, mixed with anxiety and fear. This scene was repeated several times during our trip, and after we had passed each checkpoint, we read the Quran and

The journey did not pass without surprises that endangered the group's lives. After crossing from Daesh-controlled areas into the first peshmergacontrolled area at the entrance to Kirkuk, the Soldiers experienced what they never expected.

"After our crossing of Daesh-controlled areas, we felt safe, and we sat naturally as if we were a displaced family from a Daesh area," Umm Qusay said. "Peshmerga Soldiers were very meticulous and professional in their examination and scrutiny. One of their men asked one of our young men: 'What is your name?' But Ali Hadi — overwhelmed by everything he had gone through — did not know the answer! My daughter whispered to him to say, 'Abdullah Ismail Abdullah,' but the second question was, 'What year are you in university?' and we all forgot the answer. This aroused the Soldier's suspicions, and he cried out that this identification was forged. He wanted to take Ali out of the car and refuse his entry into Kirkuk, forcing him to return to Daesh-controlled areas. Then I purposely hit my head on the door of the car and started bleeding, and my daughters started screaming and wailing. The officer asked what had happened. My daughter replied that my blood sugar was too high and caused me to hit my head on the door. The peshmerga officer gave us back the ID and told Ali, 'If your

identity is forged, they will catch you inside Kirkuk. Hurry up and take your mother to the hospital now!"

The distance between al-Alam and the borders of Kirkuk province is an hour and a half by car. Perhaps that day, with the frequent stops, it took two hours. But for Umm Qusay and those riding with her, it was the longest journey of their lives.

"After we arrived in Kirkuk, the sun was beginning to set, and the last cars had already left for Baghdad, with no more available until the next morning. We weren't sure where to stay in Kirkuk. I couldn't leave the young men alone there, as I was afraid for them. I called my Turkmen friend in Kirkuk, told her the details of our story, and asked her for help. She is a true friend, and she welcomed us. She gave the Soldiers a room in her house and arranged for a driver she knew and trusted to take them to Baghdad in the morning. I left them with her and returned to al-Alam."

For her bravery, Umm Qusay was honored with the National Medal by the Iraqi government. She was also one of 10 women in the world to receive the 2018 International Women of Courage Award, given by U.S. First lady Melania Trump. When asked to recall those harrowing days, Umm Qusay smiles and explains her actions from a national and humanitarian standpoint.

"I am proud that I was able to save these young men and that I could prove to the world that Iraqis love one another no matter their sect or ethnicity. When we are outside Iraq, my passport says that I am Iraqi, without mentioning religion, ethnicity or sect. We are proud to belong to a nation that has long been the cradle of civilization. I harbored in my house a Yazidi and I didn't know he was Yazidi; I sheltered a Christian and a Muslim without asking their religions. All I knew was that they were sons of my people and needed my help. It's true that my house was small, but my heart was big enough for all of them."

Umm Qusay's story spread far and wide among Iraq people, and became a story for women and men to share with pride.

"After the battles had ended and cities were liberated, the young men visited me at my home," she said. "I went out to greet them, tears pouring down my face in relief at seeing them safe. I felt that my son, Ousay, and my husband, whom Daesh killed, had come back to visit me. I felt that I had left my sons for more than a year, and today they had returned to kiss me. I hope that every Iraqi mother can feel as I felt if she has a son or husband. Since my return after the liberation of al-Alam, I go every Friday morning to visit the site of the Speicher massacre, and I lay flowers and read the Fatiha prayer for their pure souls. I know that their mothers far away are not able to visit them, so I will play the role of every affectionate mother. They are our sons, they held our heads high and preserved the honor of Iraq." ♦

# WEAKENING ENEMY WITH WORDS

## IRAQ'S DIRECTORATE OF MEDIA AND MORAL GUIDANCE GAINED SKILLS IN COUNTERING TERRORIST PROPAGANDA

UNIPATH STAFF

Daesh adopted misinformation campaigns through its electronic army, which broadcast rumors and twisted facts to sow horror and chaos in the hearts of residents. Its methods of psychological influence inflated its military capabilities by publishing news of victories and fake battles. The Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance in the Iraq Ministry of Defense played a major role in attacking Daesh's propaganda enterprise and destroying the morale of its fighters. Unipath magazine met with the man who led this unconventional war and helped to achieve major victories against the Daesh media machine: Maj. Gen. Tahseen Ibrahim Sadiq, director of Media and Moral Guidance.

**UNIPATH:** In 2014, Daesh was running a massive media operation. What role did the Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance play in attacking Daesh in Iraq?

MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: After the fall of Mosul and other Iraqi cities and villages, Daesh used rumors and propaganda to confuse the Iraqi public. These rumors spread like wildfire as entire swaths of the country fell into the terrorists' hands without a fight. Despicable satellite channels amplified Daesh's lies, which spread chaos among the media and distorted public opinion. We needed to act fast to combat Daesh's propaganda. With support from coalition forces, we began to develop a strategy to deal with this propaganda machine. I remember at that time we were working with a team from the U.S. Army to study the effects of Daesh propaganda on the target audience and the role of this propaganda in recruitment and deception of young people. Our first step was to create a center to monitor the media and Daesh social networking pages. The directorate created a special Facebook page through which we contradicted the rumors Daesh was spreading. Within weeks, we had 100,000 followers, and citizens were dispelling Daesh's rumors from regions the terrorists claimed to control. This was a major turning point on the media front.

**UNIPATH:** Was your plan to defeat Daesh on social networking sites?

MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: We began the confrontation with Daesh on social media because that was their center of gravity, but our plan also included communication with residents inside Daesh-occupied cities. We conducted an operation to drop leaflets on the city of Mosul. The intent of this operation was to send a message to our people in Mosul that we had not forgotten them and that we would liberate them from the grip of terrorism. We also wanted the leaflets to show Daesh that Mosul is Iraqi, and Iraqi forces would liberate the city from its desecration. This was the primary goal of dropping leaflets. We were sending messages to reassure our people that their Armed Forces were in control and that the contents of some suspicious media channels were nothing but lies to lower public morale.

**UNIPATH:** What caused the chaos among the media and fear among the public?

MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: Unfortunately, there were conflicting and contradictory statements from some Army officers on the front lines, because they didn't have a full picture of the battlefield. These statements caused substantial chaos

and anxiety. For that reason, leadership decided to limit battlefield statements to the leaders of the combined joint operations command and appointed qualified officers in this field to form a war media cell on June 10, 2015. Our joint work with our partners in the coalition forces developed significantly during that difficult time and involved the participation of all security agencies. In addition, we used the capabilities of our national cell for psychological operations. We implemented a strategy to inoculate residents against Daesh's attempts at online recruitment. We formed a team to study and analyze Daesh speech, both in the Directorate of Military Intelligence and the Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance and in the National Security Service and Intelligence Service. We followed and analyzed Daesh's printed and visual releases as we monitored their electronic sites around the clock. From this operation, we learned Daesh's style of communication among its media teams, its methods of recruitment, and its means of bringing foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria.

UNIPATH: You mentioned the impact of Daesh's media. What was an influential hostile media site that hurt Soldiers' morale after the fall of Mosul? How did you rebuild morale? MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: After the fall of Mosul, the international coalition played a big role in supporting the Iraqi Armed Forces in the implementation of and training for numerous psychological operations. We ran a major campaign to rebuild our forces through training, better weapons, and field visits to find out the needs of Soldiers in training centers or on the front lines. We focused on building the professionalism and morale of our fighters. And we cooperated with coalition forces — mainly the United States — which offered a great deal of advanced, specialized training to teach media teams how to communicate news to the public and analyze hostile media. This gave our media teams great confidence in dealing with civilians with professionalism and credibility. Throughout the liberation battles, we focused on professionalism and Soldiers' heroism. Iraqi Soldiers fought with one hand and aided civilians with the other, offering humanitarian and medical services to them to help build bridges of trust between civilians and security forces. This could not have been achieved without the training and education our teams gained from lectures about respect for human rights when interacting with the population. It was necessary to have rules of engagement, and determination, will and courage to beat back these terrorist organizations, which are not connected to Islam or humanity in any way.

**UNIPATH:** What is the role of the coalition in combating terrorism on social media?

MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: International experts held specialized courses for this purpose in which we studied ways to exploit terrorist groups' social media pages, which they used to recruit and spread propaganda. We worked as one team with these experts in deciding how to combat these sites. This training offered experience from the field in penetrating Daesh's social media presence to analyze their speeches and

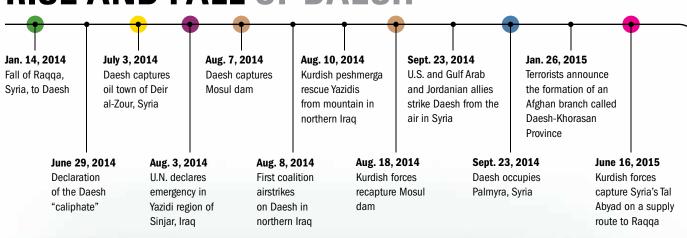
thereby helped devise a campaign to expose their lies. As the Directorate of Media and the Ministry of Defense, we desperately needed a team we could trust to work with us to get through that difficult time. We were happy to have an information operations team as we began to hold weekly meetings with coalition partners to discuss challenges, achievements and plans of action. These meetings were useful for everyone. After we stopped Daesh's propaganda and exposed their lies on media channels and social media pages, we began to plan efforts to communicate with residents in Daesh-occupied areas. Daesh was blocking social media sites and satellite channels from the population and using local radio stations and media outlets to broadcast propaganda about false victories and the supposed achievements of the "caliphate." Meanwhile, they allowed their fighters to use internet in internet cafes guarded by the Hisba police and subjected to heavy monitoring.

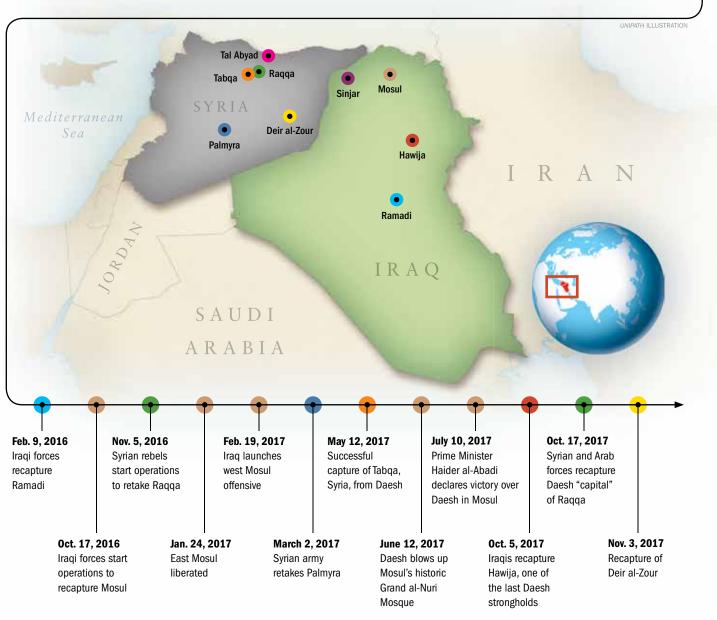


Maj. Gen. Tahseen Ibrahim Sadiq, director of Media and Moral Guidance IRAQI MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

**UNIPATH:** How were your media teams prepared and trained? MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: We coordinated with our partners in the coalition forces to train and include media teams in the units that prepared to liberate the cities. We provided them with the most advanced media technology, from cameras to loudspeakers, mobile radio broadcasts, and devices to send photos and videos via satellite. Our media and psychological operations specialists used loudspeakers to send messages to our people in occupied areas. We broadcast those messages to destroy Daesh's morale and spread chaos and fear among their ranks. Coalition forces supplied us with mobile radio stations and trained our teams to use them, which directly influenced the course of our battles by allowing us to communicate with inhabitants about safe routes out of the city or ways to confuse the enemy. Through cooperation with coalition forces, we located sites from which Daesh published

## **RISE AND FALL OF DAESH**





propaganda, conducted recruitment operations and ran internal communications. We monitored these sites and investigated their contents. These operations stopped recruitment and silenced Daesh calls to action that had dominated Twitter, Facebook and other chatting mediums. We paralyzed Daesh's channels of communication with sympathizers and supporters, which in turn lowered their fighters' morale. The partnership with our friends in the coalition forces didn't stop here, but continued to develop. They invited us to international conferences to speak about our success in defeating the Daesh media machine. We went to London and Washington and attended a U.S. Central Command subject matter exchange in Tampa, Florida, where we exchanged our experiences and began to build close and strategic relationships to develop our capabilities and share our expertise with friendly countries. We also hosted international conferences in Baghdad to counter the ideology and media of Daesh; these were attended by most brotherly and friendly countries. The conference

produced positive results for impeding terrorist organizations' attempts to use cyberspace to spread their ideology, rumors, and exploitation of youth.

**UNIPATH:** How did you send psychological messages to destroy Daesh's morale? **MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN:** We used these techniques in the Battle of Al-Anbar, when we used moving vehicles to broadcast the sounds of the battles, bombing, airstrikes, and tank attacks to confuse the terrorist gangs. We entered those villages without firing one bullet. We successfully sowed fear and confusion

among the terrorists, thinned their ranks and exposed their lies that enabled them to recruit hundreds of foreign and local fighters. When we later caught some of the terrorists in the area, they said that during those battles, they and their comrades fled upon hearing these sounds.

**UNIPATH:** You mentioned dropping leaflets on Mosul. What was the impact of those leaflets on the population? MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: This topic is very important. When we dropped the leaflets, the people were overwhelmingly happy to read them; at the same time, the leaflets caused chaos and confusion among the terrorists. We saw this confusion from reconnaissance planes — they ran like crazy to gather all the leaflets and prohibit residents from reading them. But they were outnumbered by our leaflets, so we managed to drain their energy by fomenting hysteria. We included on the leaflets our radio frequencies and tip lines, which received an increased number of calls in the moments after we dropped the leaflets. Here, I'd like to thank the coalition forces, who provided us with ink and paper to create these leaflets. I specifically remember a team from U.S. Central Command that worked with us every day during this time.

Before the beginning of the battle of Mosul, we launched the biggest psychological and media operation in history. We dropped more than 40 million leaflets on Ninevah province and West Anbar. This was an intense campaign to tell residents that the time of liberation was near, provide them with safety information, and urge them to stay away from Daesh groups. We produced separate leaflets to target foreign and local fighters. These campaigns sowed suspicion among the terrorists and led them to fight among themselves, thereby creating psychological battlespace for liberating forces. Civilians fleeing the city carried copies of the leaflets with them and told us that they had been a source of happiness and hope.

**UNIPATH:** How did military media tactics change after Mosul? **MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN:** Before Mosul, media was limited to focusing on news from leadership and field visits by commanders, and there was no special training for media officers. This was the role of our friends in the coalition: They helped us open a training program for media officers in the

security forces after Mosul. In cooperation with our partners, we built the capabilities of the Directorate of Media and Moral Guidance, which offers the truth, whether in combating terrorist hostile propaganda or in raising the morale of our troops, who now have confidence and experience in managing crises by combating rumors, observation, analysis, and winning over a target audience. This development gave us great resilience in interacting with the public and helped us protect our secret information. Military intelligence played a big role in foiling many attacks by monitoring and analyzing

Daesh's communications on social media sites. This added to the intelligence support offered by coalition forces in information exchanges after targeting Daesh leadership and command and control sites as we implemented psychological campaigns to break their will. Indeed, we caused local fighters to flee or surrender to our forces.

**UNIPATH:** What is the role of the Directorate of Moral Guidance in winning residents' hearts and minds and preventing Daesh's return to liberated areas? MAJ. GEN. TAHSEEN: Our role is in communicating with residents and conveying their suffering and concerns to the media. We gave the leadership situational awareness of the population's concerns so it could provide what they needed. We also educated Soldiers who manned checkpoints in their area on how to deal respectfully with the population. We documented the Army's mission to open roads, deliver services, protect government institutions and facilities, and treat the ill and wounded. We also covered the engineering efforts to open schools, which helped build trust between the Army and the citizens and motivated citizens to give intelligence about terrorist hideouts and activities. We have made great strides in the role of military media and have become among the world's most advanced armies in this field. •

"We successfully sowed fear and confusion among the terrorists, thinned their ranks and exposed their lies that enabled them to recruit hundreds of foreign and local fighters."

# AFGHANS ASSAIL DAESH

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES EXPEL TERRORISTS FROM STRONGHOLDS IN EASTERN AFGHANISTAN

LT. AMY FORSYTHE, U.S. NAVY

n one of the largest joint operations ever conducted between U.S. and Afghan special operations forces, Afghan commandos captured a major Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) stronghold in eastern Afghanistan in June 2018, effectively depriving the terror group of its local capital.

The Afghan commandos were advised by U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers assigned to NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan.

The joint force of Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) and U.S. Green Berets killed 170 fighters affiliated with ISIS-K, the terror network's Afghan offshoot, during a multipronged assault on the village of Gurgoray

U.S. forces in Afghanistan conduct an air attack in the foothills above Gurgoray village to prevent ISIS-K fighters from returning. LT. AMY FORSYTHE/U.S. NAVY

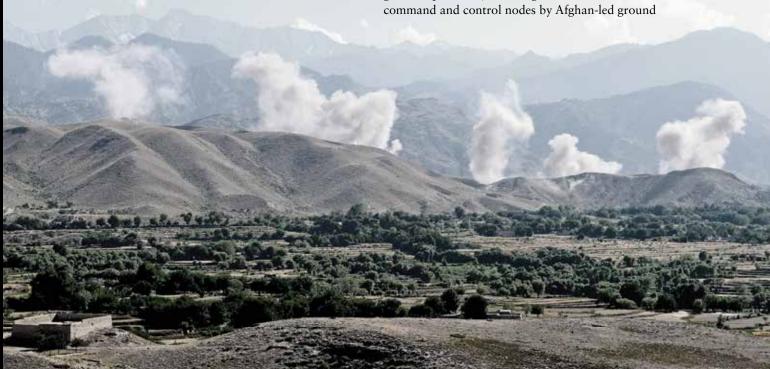
that served as the group's primary base of operations in eastern Nangarhar province. They set up a small base camp in just a matter of a few days, approximately 25 kilometers from the Afghan-Pakistan border.

There were no Afghan or U.S. military force fatalities during the mission, which involved three ASSF companies and six U.S. Special Forces teams along with support enablers.

Before the operation, ISIS-K took over homes and forced hundreds of families to flee the area, prompting village elders to request assistance from Afghan commandos. Human intelligence indicated ISIS-K financed itself through illegal logging and talc mining, as well as exploiting local villagers.

ISIS-K — also known as Daesh — gained a reputation for extreme brutality with executions by beheading and high-profile attacks in Jalalabad and Kabul.

"The achievements by Afghan-led integrated air and ground operations, including the destruction of ISIS-K command and control nodes by Afghan-led ground



patrols in Nangarhar, highlight the tremendous growth and increased capability of Afghan Special Security Forces since the Afghan government announced its plans to grow ASSF last year," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Joshua Thiel, Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan commander.

Since it first arrived in Afghanistan in 2014, a faction of ISIS-K attempted to establish a caliphate in Nangarhar province. With an initial design to conquer, then subjugate, the citizens of Jalalabad, ISIS-K continues to attempt to find sanctuary that provides a springboard for its global jihad ideology.

In early 2015, ISIS official spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani released an audio statement announcing the expansion of the "caliphate" with the creation of Wilayah Khorasan (Khorasan province), a historical region incorporating parts of the modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Tensions between existing Taliban fighters and the ISIS-K faction increased, and fighting between the two groups broke out in Nangarhar province. By June 2015, ISIS-K fighters, comprising Afghans and foreign fighters, seized territory in Afghanistan for the first time.

Upon receipt of U.S. presidential authorities to target Islamic State affiliate militias in January 2016, U.S. Forces in Afghanistan aggressively pursued ISIS-K in remote and nonpopulated areas of Nangarhar that it claimed as its caliphate. Under pressure, ISIS-K relocated and then declared Mohmand Valley in Achin district as its center of operations.

The announcement of the U.S. South Asia Strategy in July 2017 ushered in a conditions-based approach to an enduring U.S. commitment in Afghanistan. This policy enabled the execution of a joint special operations offensive in January 2018 that pushed ISIS-K 7 kilometers from its previous holdings in Mohmand Valley. Suffering its second consecutive and pivotal loss, ISIS-K retreated into nearby Gurgoray in Deh Bala district to conduct terror operations.

The Afghan government offered an unprecedented ceasefire to Taliban forces in mid-June 2018, which provided an opening to intensify efforts against ISIS-K. The Nangarhar operation assembled one of the largest contingents of Afghan Commandos and Green Berets ever to push ISIS-K back into the rugged terrain and return land and homes to their rightful Afghan owners.

"This area, two months ago, was controlled by Daesh," U.S. Army Brig. Gen. John W. Brennan Jr., the Train, Advise and Assist Command-East commander, said in June 2018. "We pushed them into the mountains, so they cannot harm the people here."

The Afghan commandos achieved yet another combat milestone by conducting a successful prolonged counterterrorism operation with the use of three Afghan Commando companies from two Special Operations Kandaks, or SOKs.

Placement of the battalion-size contingent of commandos in Deh Bala was made possible by the Afghan government's investment to double the size of the commando forces, as directed by President Ashraf Ghani's 2020 Roadmap. Within a year of the announcement, 4,000 additional commandos joined Special Operations Kandaks throughout the country.

The fight against the Islamic State and other militant groups, including al-Qaida, is at the heart of the counterterrorism mission being conducted by Afghan and U.S. forces throughout the country.

"This operation proved that putting troops on the ground, in addition to continuous airstrikes, was the right combination to prevent ISIS-K from infiltrating the country from the east," Lt. Col. Thiel said. "The Afghan National Army and Afghan Border Force troops will maintain a presence in the area to ensure ISIS-K won't re-establish their caliphate along the porous border of eastern Afghanistan. And we will continue to stand firmly with our Afghan partners and support ASSF growth, operations and our enduring partnership for global security."

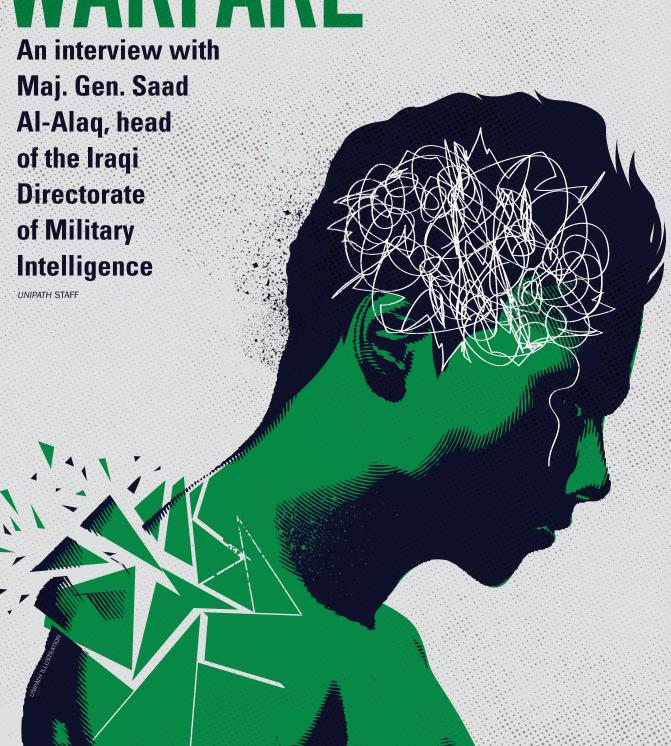


Afghanistan air to ground strikes destroy ISIS-K structures in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, in July 2018. NATO

An Afghan commando participates in a mine-clearing operation in Nangarhar in June 2018.

STAFF SGT. MARCUS BUTLER/U.S. ARMY





**Unipath:** What was the role of the Directorate of Military Intelligence in the defeat of Daesh?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alag: After the events of June 10, 2014, and the control of terrorist gangs of large areas of Iraq, our directorate began to collect intelligence and recruit a large number of sources and collaborators who provided us with important information. The directorate managed to infiltrate the terrorist organization and locate the enemy's command and control and weapons caches, and accurate airstrikes led to the loss of a large part of its combat capabilities. We uncovered the organizational structure with which terrorists ran their so-called state, which expanded the collection of information about the enemy. In addition, officers of the Directorate of Military Intelligence conducted aerial intelligence gathering and cross-checked the information available in the collection section of our directorate. We discovered the command and control headquarters of the enemy. With aerial imagery, we mapped and studied the terrain. We created intelligence cells at the operational headquarters to supply leadership with immediate intelligence.

We coordinated with the Air Force and through the joint operations command to determine air targets and made technical efforts through unmanned aerial vehicles and cameras to provide the leaders in the field with in information. And finally, we created teams to conduct security checks for internally displaced people.

**Unipath:** What intelligence operations did you conduct in the cities controlled by Daesh?

**Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq:** The Directorate of Military Intelligence plays a prominent role in the intelligence operations inside the cities that were controlled by terrorist gangs:

- Recruiting sources and taking advantage of collaborators within cities under the control of gangs that support the terrorist.
- Identifying the main locations and command positions of gangs

- supporting the terrorists and directing focused strikes on them.
- Implementing precision airstrikes in coordination with the Air Force and Army Air Wing on key Daesh sites, which led to breaking the morale of the enemy and the killing of many prominent leaders in the organization.
- Gathering information about those who work with Daesh and those who harbor the terrorist elements, which led to the arrest of many wanted persons during liberation operations.
- Breaching the enemy through the departmental reconnaissance detachments, entering cities and scouting information about the distribution

the lies of the hostile and suspicious media through monitoring and following up on their programs, especially the channels that disseminate hatred and spread false and inaccurate news, which lead to instability and diminishing trust between citizens and security forces.



of the enemy and its headquarters. Some of the photography was published in the media and on social networking sites as part of psychological operations.

**Unipath:** What are the statistics of terrorist networks dismantled by the Directorate of Military Intelligence?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: The directorate dismantled several terrorist networks operating within the ranks of Daesh, which had a significant impact stability and security. Most of these networks have been dismantled and are a fraction of what they were:

- In 2015, nine terrorist networks were dismantled, four of which were within the southern state, four within Baghdad's jurisdiction and one operating within the state of Falluja.
- In 2016, four terrorist networks were dismantled, three of which operated within the Baghdad region and a network operating within the northern Baghdad governorate.
- In 2017, five terrorist networks were dismantled, two networks operating within the northern state of Baghdad, a terrorist network operating within the state of Diyala, another in Nineveh province, and another within Anbar.
- There is continuous follow-up by the Intelligence Cell and the Anti-Terror Directorate of Military Intelligence of several terrorist networks to be dismantled.

**Unipath:** How can Iraq prevent the emergence of terrorist organizations in the future?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: By maintaining international borders, especially with Syria, and strengthening them with modern monitoring systems as well as unmanned aerial vehicles. And to control the means of social communication through electronic access gates and to limit social media to a couple of approved sites as some other developed countries do. We need to prohibit the sale of SIM cards for mobile phones by the unlicensed and adopt the use of authorized agents that go through

security clearances through intensification of efforts in the Directorate of Security of Communications. The spread of extreme takfiri thought must be fought and implemented through awareness campaigns for different age groups, especially youth. We must rehabilitate terrorists in prisons to abandon extremist ideology and attempt to reform their ideas by developing a prison work program. We should update our doctrine to adopt an asymmetric approach instead of conventional war planning as well as redistribute our forces and control vital points based on the intelligence collection. Iraq should intensify intelligence efforts to find storage places of explosive materials, missiles and weapons and destroy them to prevent their use by terrorist organizations. We need to expose the lies of the hostile and suspicious media through monitoring and following up on their programs, especially the channels that disseminate hatred and spread false and inaccurate news, which lead to instability and diminishing trust between citizens and security forces.

We must activate the principle of regional security between regional and neighboring countries and strengthen trust between the citizens and security professionals because building trust between the citizen and the security men is half the battle. We have to conduct periodic evaluations of security plans and professional security elements. We must collect more human intelligence in the social sphere. We need to adopt electronic surveillance in residential and commercial areas and traffic control systems to capture the movements of suspicious vehicles. We must require strict supervision of money transfer offices and privately-owned banks.

**Unipath:** What is the importance of sharing intelligence with friendly countries?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: Daesh gangs used the open borders between Syria and Iraq, which highlights the importance of cooperation and coordination with friendly countries in the field of intelligence exchange. This exchange will have a great impact on the defeat of terrorist groups, especially the exchange of intelligence between the Iraqi intelligence agencies and agencies of friendly countries that restricted illegal movement and entry to and from Iraq and exchanged information with the coalition forces that led to the success of many proactive intelligence operations. This helped us identify and strike command and control and headquarters of terrorist-supporting gangs, accurately conduct aerial reconnaissance and cut off enemy supply routes. The role of friendly countries will be important in the coming years, especially in the collection and exchange of intelligence information about the

principle of regional security between regional and neighboring countries and strengthen trust between the citizens and security professionals because building trust between the citizen and the security men is half the battle. 33

enemy and knowledge of its movements, especially in Syria where the enemy still lurks in unliberated areas, making them a threat to Iraq's security. The role of partner states that possess modern equipment and efficiently monitor the enemy and its movements is greatly beneficial to us. Terrorists are trying to take advantage of the so-called global jihad to set up camps and build cells in Sinai, Nigeria, Somalia, Libya and elsewhere.

**Unipath:** What are the security challenges after the defeat of Daesh?

**Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq:** After a significant blow to its forces, Daesh is trying to reorganize and changed its strategy

to a long-term adherence to clandestine warfare through the selection of specific targets scouted in advance for attack by explosive devices. They will use suicide attacks and sleeper cell tactics. They want to buy and accumulate various weapons and explosive materials and store them away from the eyes of the security forces, taking advantage of the areas and villages located on the border between operational divisions. They also focus on Iraqi prisons and summon lawyers to consider their cases and pay large bribes to reduce the sentences for terrorists. This indicates a significant lack of fighters and leaders in Daesh because of the killing and arrest of many of them. They exploit women to transfer mail and letters and funds, which is a major challenge to the security forces and intelligence agencies. One of the most important security challenges on Iraqi territory, which may be exploited by the enemy, is the existence of areas with weak security presence, which gives the terrorists and organized crime gangs ease of infiltration. The presence of medium and heavy weapons among the tribes causes a permanent security imbalance that may be exploited by organized crime and terrorist gangs in their operations. Another problem is delays in the reconstruction of liberated areas, provision of services to citizens and the guarantee of return of displaced persons to prevent their exploitation by terrorist gangs. We've noted the emergence of new armed factions with hard-line ideologies into the arena vacated by terrorist organizations such as so-called white banner groups. Terrorist organizations will try to take advantage of the so-called global jihad arena to set up camps and build cells that could later be transferred to other countries.

**Unipath:** What has the security service learned about the reasons people join terrorist groups?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: I will talk about the confessions of terrorists arrested by our men. First, in terms of ideology, there are many terrorists who said that they belonged to the former terrorist organization al-Qaida. They continued with terrorist acts and then joined the ranks of Daesh because of their criminal takfiri ideology. They listen to lectures in some mosques run by preachers of sedition and cite extremist imams who encourage violence, atonement, sectarianism, killing and pillage. Often these religious guides occupy important positions in Daesh. A second motivation is the temptation of money. Investigations show that a large proportion belongs to terrorist gangs for the financial benefits. They work to lure young people through the disbursement of monthly stipends as soon as they pledge allegiance to Daesh. The spread of unemployment in Iraq and neighboring countries is a factor in the recruitment of a large number of young people. We have seen from the confessions of some defendants that they belong to Daesh because of pressure and threats. Terrorists resort to coercion and threats, especially in areas where they have a foothold. They force young people to work with them to achieve their goals through information gathering, reconnaissance, processing of supplies and other activities. Finally, terrorists exploit social networking platforms, the most common means of recruitment, because they are easy to use and reach around the world. In addition, they exploit prisoners and feed them extremist ideology and religious intolerance and penetrate places of entertainment to attract experts in the fields of drugs, currency counterfeiting and arms trafficking for use in their logistics support networks.

**Unipath:** What are the cultural and academic levels of the fighters?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: It was noticed through the study and analysis of some prominent figures and leaders in Daesh that quite a large number have master's and bachelor's degrees in various civil and military disciplines. For example, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the terrorist organization, has a Ph.D. in Islamic law. His deputy, Abu Abdurrahman al-Baylawi, who was the "minister of war," had a bachelor's degree in military science, and the terrorist Haji Samir, responsible for

manufacturing and development, holds a degree in military science. But Daesh's focus is on the exploitation of people of limited education to use as tools to implement their malicious schemes inside Iraq. This category of people makes up the bulk of the organization since they're easy to deceive and train. They rely on young people who often don't exceed the age of 15. The best proof of that is that most suicide operations were conducted by minors. From the beginning, the leaders of the organization advocated the ideological indoctrination of children and young people. Investigations of many terrorists and suicide bombers who were arrested

of this unit, it has contributed by destroying the morale of the enemy and spreading rumors among its ranks.

It has exposed the extremist narrative of terrorist gangs and aired them to the public.

by the Military Intelligence Directorate found that they have no educational achievements and no knowledge of jihad and the fundamentals of religion. A terrorist's only duty was to pledge obedience to the commands of his "emir." The terrorists also often focused on terrorist families in which individuals have been killed and exploited them to carry out suicide attacks for revenge.

**Unipath:** What role did the psychological operations unit play in the defeat of Daesh?

**Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq:** Despite the newness of this unit, it has contributed by destroying the morale of the enemy and spreading rumors among its ranks.

It has exposed the extremist narrative of terrorist gangs and aired them to the public. It has highlighted the achievements of our military units in general and the sections of our directorate in the media, especially with regard to the arrest of terrorist elements, the dismantling of cells and the seizure of stockpiles of weapons, ammunition and car bombs. We have monitored social and media communication sites of individuals and enemy institutions, analyzing and responding to them and gathering intelligence about the enemy's psychological state. Our unit has disseminated publications during operations to apply psychological pressure on terrorists, and raise the morale of our fighters by broadcasting patriotic songs. We helped provide psychological and military immunization of combatants from hostile military operations. We broadcast calls to the enemy and gained the friendship of the target audience and urged them to raise banners over their homes. We helped them move away from Daesh positions being targeted and guided them to safe roads. We called out with loudspeakers whose range extended 5 kilometers beyond the enemy's lines.

**Unipath:** What is the role of military intelligence in securing and protecting elections in liberated areas?

Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Alaq: The Directorate of Military Intelligence played a major role in securing and protecting the elections in the liberated areas by providing the Supreme Security Committee supervising the elections with periodic intelligence reports on the intentions of the enemy to target electoral centers and political candidates. We assessed security in liberated provinces and tracked sleeper cells to prevent the enemy from moving freely. We participated in the First Task Force of the Directorate of Military Intelligence to protect election offices and voters in the areas of northern Babylon because of fragile security there. We followed up electoral violations, especially those who carry multiple voter cards, and arrested some of them and referred their cases to the judiciary. •



## A FOCUS ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WILL CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN CITIES LIBERATED FROM DAESH

DR. SAAD AL-HADITHI, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF BAGHDAD

he Iraqi government, previously headed by Prime Minister Dr. Haider al-Abadi, has assumed responsibility for reshaping security policy in dealing with citizens in areas once under the control of terrorist organizations. He succeeded in rebuilding bridges of trust that had been broken before the terrorist takeover of their cities.

As the commander in chief of the Armed Forces, then Prime Minister al-Abadi initiated restructuring of the military and security system and carried out major reforms in combat doctrine, rehabilitation and selection of efficient and fair officials to assume responsibility and command according to purely national considerations. He also attacked instances of corruption.

#### RESTORING COMMUNITY TRUST

As a result of this policy, the government regained the support of citizens in these cities who played a major role in the fighting alongside their Armed Forces to liberate cities using local police forces and tribal fighters. Residents

also cooperated in these areas by providing intelligence about the locations and movements of terrorist elements. The revival of cities had a direct impact on the victory over terrorism, which was achieved in record time with the fewest possible sacrifices.

Iraqis in Mosul line up to vote in the parliamentary elections of May 2018. Iraq's government aims to build democratic legitimacy in cities formerly occupied by terrorists.

Similarly, in liberating these areas, Iraqi forces served as role models in urban warfare, preserving the lives of civilians and steering them away from dangerous military operations. Military planners recognized the presence of tens of thousands of civilians in residential neighborhoods. This affected the movement of liberation forces and the types of weapons used.

Forces were ordered more than once to halt their progress to save the lives of people, secure their safety and to allow them to exit the battlefield. Military plans were modified on more than one occasion in accordance with the highest goal of the Iraqi forces — to protect and liberate civilians from the grip of terrorism and sources of fire. A number of members

of the Iraqi forces sacrificed their lives to protect civilians and to save them from improvised explosive devices, ambushes and sniping from Daesh terrorists.

#### **EXTENDING SECURITY IN LIBERATED AREAS**

On the other hand, the Iraqi government began to return displaced people to residential areas after the end of the military operations in each city. These residents were permitted to return only after their safety could be ensured and their neighborhoods secured and cleared of explosives and other remnants of military operations.

The government also needed to provide basic services like water, electricity, health centers and schools, reopen government buildings, and deliver food and fuel to the population and returnees. These efforts have resulted in the return of more than 3 million displaced people to their areas of residence. And government efforts are continuing in this regard to repatriate the remaining displaced people.

#### **POPULAR APPRECIATION**

The following strategic successes were achieved by the government of Dr. al-Abadi under exceptional circumstances over four years:

- The liberation of cities from terrorism.
- The success in eliminating sectarianism.
- The striving for national unity among all sectors of society.
- The resumption of state authority over liberated areas.

These were all the result of the rational policies and the national approach adopted by the Iraqi government. This achievement signals the birth of a renewed national project that crosses sectarian boundaries. The prime minister received the support of citizens in provinces such as Ninevah, Anbar and Salahuddin, collecting about a third of the seats in parliament in these three provinces.



#### THE ROAD TO THE FUTURE

Advancing this encouraging national trend will require adoption of the same strategic vision initiated by the government of Prime Minister al-Abadi. Important decisions and bold steps are nedded to complete the return of all the displaced to their homes and to immunize Iraqi society and protect it from the dangers of internal conflict and sectarian tendencies that splinter Iraqi national unity and upset the harmony between segments of society.

It is the responsibility of the next Iraqi government to continue the path taken by the current government in liberated areas to ensure the full social integration of young people and other fundamental gains. When the government embraces people and guarantees their political and civil rights, they become instruments of community and national solidarity instead of instruments of division.

This immunizes them against attempts by extremist ideologues and violent groups to penetrate communities. This immunity is achieved by providing stability in local communities, ensuring security and reconstruction, rehabilitating infrastructure, providing services, achieving sustainable development, and stimulating investment and the private sector to create jobs and build communities.

It is necessary to implement a comprehensive program of lending to industrialists, the private sector and businessmen. The program also includes small- and medium-size enterprises that contribute to reducing unemployment, setting up income-generating workshops, absorbing the energies of youth positively and investing their abilities in construction, development and productive work, and linking their interests to achieve security and stability in their communities.

In addition to rehabilitating youth in these areas, it's necessary to develop and highlight the principle of citizenship and national belonging as a cultural concept for all Iraqis. Civil society should operate according to democratic mechanisms based on respect for pluralism, acceptance of diversity, recognition of the other and peaceful coexistence. Differences of opinion should be expressed through peaceful, political means.

The people must be given a central role in managing their areas at the administrative and security levels. This is necessary for them to maintain security in their cities and to establish the foundations of stability by activating the economy and stimulating the labor market, which will serve as a permanent source of stability.

To encourage growth and investment, Iraq must reassure citizens in these cities that they are an essential part of state institutions and partners in building and achieving security and development in their communities.

Dr. Saad al-Hadithi, a professor of political science at the University of Baghdad, served as spokesman for the government of former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

Iraqi children attend school in Mosul after the defeat of Daesh. The government provides programs to help them cope with the trauma of the recent occupation. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## SENIOR LEADER PROFILE

# Voice of Victory



Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool Abdullah Alzubaidi led media operations to defeat Daesh propaganda

UNIPATH STAFF

uring the battles waged by the Iraqi Armed Forces to liberate Iraq from the abomination of terrorism emerged many stories of Iraqi heroism. The world learned the names of many men who distinguished themselves through their heroic deeds.

Publicizing these morale-boosting tales of military triumphs
— while rebutting Daesh's lies — was largely the role of one
commander: Special Forces Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool Abdullah
Alzubaidi, spokesman for the Combined Joint Operations Command.

In the direst straits, amid the tensions of the Iraqi street and social media misinformation spread by Daesh, it was Brig. Gen. Yahya who sought to restore tranquility by highlighting Iraqi victories and explaining battle developments.

Brig. Gen. Yahya discredited Daesh propaganda by publishing evidence and photos that confirmed that the Iraqi Armed Forces were defeating the terrorists. His words landed on terrorist lairs like airstrikes or artillery bombardments, undermining Daesh's ability to rally its fighters.

Brig. Gen. Yahya graduated from the First Military College in 1989 and joined the Special Forces School. For his outstanding performance in the Special Forces Course, he was nominated to become a Rangers instructor.

After 2003, he was appointed an intelligence officer in the National Guard and served as a battalion commander in the 42nd Brigade, 11th Infantry Division, from 2006 to 2007, where he was responsible for one of the most dangerous areas during the days of sectarian violence in Baghdad.

He earned the confidence and trust of the people, who cooperated with his troops to expel criminal gangs and militias from his areas of responsibility.

"There can be no security in the town without citizens' respect and trust. For that reason, I conducted home visits, addressed citizens' concerns, and promised that we would serve them as best we could," the brigadier general said. "I also ordered my Soldiers to treat people with respect and professionalism and not to allow sectarianism to There can be no security in the town without citizens' respect and trust. For that reason, I conducted home visits, addressed citizens' concerns, and promised that we would serve them as best we could.

- Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool Abdullah Alzubaidi

intrude into their daily tasks, especially because our areas of responsibility included many factions of Iraqi society."

He worked as the director of the Office of the Secretary General at the Ministry of Defense from 2010 to 2012, where he dealt with senior leaders during their daily visits to the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Office of the Minister of Defense. He also received guests of honor, increasing his experience in dealing with the media and senior leaders and forming personal relationships with Iraqi officers.

"It is my honor to have been chosen by the commander in chief of the Armed Forces to be the spokesman for the Combined Joint Operations Command. Despite his busy schedule, he summoned me to his office, and we sat for 15 minutes as I answered his delicate questions, which emphasized patriotism, the rejection of sectarianism, and [the importance of] credibility when conveying information to the public," he said.

"At the end of the meeting, he wrote his personal phone number on a small piece of paper and asked me to call him directly if I needed to discuss anything. He told me he had put his trust, and the trust of the Iraqi people, in my abilities to handle this responsibility."

Brig. Gen. Yahya began the arduous task of discrediting Daesh's propaganda, which dominated social media sites and used suspicious media channels during fierce battles in Jaraf al-Sakher, Tikrit, Ramadi, Fallujah and Khaldiya. Iraqis awaited his appearance to describe the Army's victories and the liberation of cities.

"Despite Daesh's control over social media pages and the battles around Baghdad, I was able to counter its mass propaganda and get millions of followers on social media by publishing information about the course of the battles. I made sure to be in the city during liberation battles and witnessed firsthand the raising of the Iraqi flag above the buildings before it was shown on the news so that I could announce our Armed Forces' control of the city," Brig. Gen. Yahya said.

"This allowed me to win the trust of Iraqis and expose the lies of the terrorist thugs, who claimed that the fight continued in those areas. My press conference in front of government buildings in Fallujah and Tikrit negated their propaganda operation on Twitter and Facebook; here, we started to defeat them on social media pages."

Brig. Gen. Yahya believes in the unity of Iraq and peaceful coexistence among all sects. He knows that Iraqis by nature are a peaceful people who reject sectarian divisions and that they will emerge from this period victorious and united:

"We must teach the next generation to reject the extremist ideology that brought Daesh, woe and destruction to Iraq. We must encourage peaceful coexistence so that we do not permit terrorism in our mosques. We must not allow proponents of terrorist ideologies to exploit social media or other channels to recruit our young people. The Iraqi people have believed in tolerance since the dawn of time; Iraq fostered the world's oldest civilizations and preserved its social fabric. Extremist thugs cannot defeat a civilization that has lasted for thousands of years."

He also recognizes the importance of international partnerships in combating terrorism, and expressed gratitude to the global community for standing by Iraq by providing training, weapons, air support and intelligence.

"We are fighting terrorism in Iraq on behalf of the civilized world because [terrorists] hate freedom and peace. I am in constant contact — and have strong relationships — with my colleagues in the international coalition," Brig. Gen. Yahya said. "Because the scourge of terrorism does not stop at state borders, it cannot be defeated by one country alone, even one with modern technology and weapons. We need international partners to combat terrorism."

## AROUND THE REGION 🖺 🚞 📵







## **QATARIS SHARPEN** AIRDROP SKILLS

UNIPATH STAFF

efore a crowd of dignitaries that included Qatari Minister of Defense Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attivah, Oatari troops showed off a newfound proficiency in airdropping battlefield supplies from C-17 and C-130 military aircraft.

The May 2018 demonstration was the culmination of four weeks of training between Qatari Army and Air Force personnel and U.S. and Italian partners. The training focused on proper ways to assemble bundles and affix parachutes so that troops on the ground can receive vital supplies such as weapons, fuel and food.

To show off their skills, Qatari airdrop systems technicians, known as "riggers," worked at Al Udeid Air Base to prepare more than 100 55-gallon metal drums filled with water to mimic airdropping fuel.

"The Qatari riggers came over, watched us rig and helped us rig the bundles to get them training and proficiency," said Chief Warrant Officer Shane Hicks, commander of the U.S. Army 824th Qu artermaster Company.

"My guys jointly inspected the load and helped them push it on the aircraft to get it ready to go."

Under a tent in the desert, Qatari Ministry of Defense officials, together with U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, air component commander for U.S. Central Command, watched 40 bundles drop from a C-17 and 20 bundles from two C-130s.

The observers showed their appreciation for the successful display. One of the Qatari military's priorities is to become self-sufficient in airdropping supplies from C-17s to enable troops to conduct extended missions.

"I think it was a successful airdrop." Hicks said. "There were no malfunctions in any parachutes, and all the commodities would have arrived on the ground safely to support the warfighter."

Source: U.S. Army

Oatari and U.S. forces airdrop 40 bundles during a demonstration.

STAFF SGT, CHARLOTTE REAVIS/U.S.ARMY



## TURKMENISTAN **OPENS STRATEGIC PORT**

UNIPATH STAFF

With hopes of becoming a strategic trade and transportation hub between Asia with Europe, Turkmenistan opened a major port in the city of Turkmenbashi on the Caspian Sea in May 2018.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that the port will improve maritime access to the Black Sea region, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and the Asia-Pacific.

He added that the port would help achieve "integration into the international system of economic relations, enhancing Turkmenistan's role as an important center for transit communications." Berdimuhamedov expressed his readiness to discuss use of the port with landlocked neighbors Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

The \$1.5 billion port is almost 2 kilometers long and can accommodate 17 vessels simultaneously. Its estimated annual capacity is 300,000 passengers, 75,000 trucks and 400,000 shipping containers.

Economically dependent on exports of natural gas, Turkmenistan views the Caspian port as a means to boost tourism, industrial development and international investment.

Sources: Trend News Agency, Azer Tas, Turkmen Portal, Turkmenistan,ru























## **CLEANSING KYRGYZSTAN OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE**

LINIPATH STAFF

A fter the collapse of the Soviet Union, all five Central Asian countries — Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — committed themselves to nonproliferation of nuclear materials, denuclearization and cooperation with international arms agreements.

That process of eliminating the remains of the nuclear arms industry continues to this day. In May 2018, Kyrgyzstan held an international conference dedicated to safeguarding former uranium mines in Central Asia and reducing the public health threat from radioactive waste.

European Union representative Michele Rivasi, speaking on behalf of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, called on the international community to help clean up uranium debris in these countries. According to Rivasi, uranium sites in Kyrgyzstan and other regions pose a lethal danger if radioactive and other toxic chemicals leak into nearby rivers.

Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Emergency Situations lists 92 sites in the country containing toxic and radioactive substances. Of these, 36 are in the city of Mailuu-Suu, and 23 contain uranium. Millions of people in the densely populated Ferghana Valley could suffer if radioactive materials escaped into waterways through landslides or other natural disasters.

In 2017, Kyrgyzstan ratified an agreement with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to begin cleaning up several uranium sites. The EU pledged an



Kyrgyz villagers scavenge minerals at a uranium dump, one of dozens of radioactive waste sites in the country. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

initial contribution of \$19.4 million. More money is needed: The country planned to submit a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2018 seeking further international donations.

As signatories of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, the five Central Asian states agreed "not to research, develop, manufacture, stockpile, acquire, possess, or have any control over any nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device, or carry out nuclear weapon tests."

Sources: Azattyk, 24.kg, Atameken Business Channel, IAEA.org, Armscontrol.org

## Jordan Hosts Annual Warrior Event

UNIPATH STAFF

In a nine-day demonstration of tactics by 40 special operations teams from around the world, Jordan's Annual Warrior Competition 2018 concluded with a triumph by the Black Panthers SWAT team from the Lebanese internal security forces.

The annual event — which tests individual and team skills such as marksmanship, hostage rescue, rappelling, and armed incursions — was held April 29 to May 7 at the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center (KASOTC) in Jordan.

It was the second time the Black Panthers took top prize after finishing first in 2016. Over several days, the competition whittled down the competing teams to 15, enlisting them in the "King's Challenge" on the final day.

The challenge was a 45-minute exercise over harsh terrain that forced participants to overcome obstacles, lift heavy objects and hit targets.

Competitors came from places such as Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.

KASOTC, a sleek, multimillion-dollar complex carved into a former stone

quarry near Amman, is a favorite training spot for special forces, particularly those originating or serving in the Middle East. Training focuses on counterterrorism operations and is inclusive enough to involve units from militaries, paramilitaries and law enforcement.

The competition's closing ceremony was attended by Jordan Armed Forces Army Inspector General Maj. Gen. Mohammad Sabaileh and KASOTC General Director Col. Osama Al Zoubi.

Sources: Jordan News Agency-Petra, Army Recognition, Jane's Information Group











## Pakistani Sailors RESCUE Indian Fishermen

UNIPATH STAFF

Pakistan Navy ship Alamgir rescued a stranded Indian fishing dhow in the Gulf of Aden in April 2018, one of the ship's many contributions to regional security as part of the Combined Maritime Forces. The fishing boat had sailed with a crew of 12 from the Indian port of Colochel and lost engine power on open waters near Salalah, Oman, for eight days.

The Alamgir appeared on the scene to help repair the engine and send the dhow on its way. After so many days adrift, the fishermen were also dehydrated and required medical care from the Pakistani crew.

The master and crew of the Indian boat showed their appreciation by shouting "Pakistan Zindabad" (Long live Pakistan) as they steered for home.

Pakistan naval vessels have played leading roles in Combined Task Forces 150 and 151, part of the Bahrain-based Combined Maritime Forces.

These multinational naval operations patrol for pirates, terrorists and other criminals in seas stretching from the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

With 15 officers, 190 Sailors and room for two helicopters, Alamgir has served successfully with the task forces since the ship was commissioned in 2011.

Sources: Pakistan Today, Combined Maritime Forces



UNIPATH STAFF

eapplying lessons learned in the campaign against Daesh in Iraq, coalition aircraft in Afghanistan are striking drug labs and other illegal sources of revenue that sustain Taliban terrorists.

An Afghan collects raw opium in April 2018. The drug, refined into heroin, helps sustain terrorism in the country.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. and Afghan pilots have struck dozens of heroin-processing labs that provide most of the hundreds of millions of dollars terrorists use to buy weapons and hire fighters.

"The Taliban will have no safe havens. We will continue to exploit their networks and decimate their ability to develop narcotics," said U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. James Hecker, commander, 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force-Afghanistan.

"They have become a criminal organization that profits from selling drugs and using those funds to conduct operations that maim and kill Afghans. By cutting off the Taliban's economic lifelines, we also reduce their ability to continue these terrorist activities."

The coalition is borrowing an idea that proved effective against Daesh. In Iraq and Syria, aircraft destroyed Daesh-controlled petroleum refineries and tanker trucks that had helped support the group's terror campaigns.

In Afghanistan, the counterrevenue airstrikes target not just drug labs, but also road checkpoints at which terrorists extort tolls from passersby. Afghan and U.S. commanders suggested they might expand the bombing campaign to include illegal mining operations, another source of money for terrorists.

Despite attempts to suppress it, opium poppy cultivation reached record levels in 2017, threatening to spill more heroin onto world markets. But the coalition is determined that the illegal trade won't benefit terrorists.

"We will continue to help the Afghan security forces to send a clear message to the Taliban: They will not win on the battlefield," Gen. Hecker said. "The only way they can have a peaceful solution is to sit down and reconcile with the National Unity Government."

Sources: Military Times, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal







## **Southern Lebanon Opens Civil-Military Center**

UNIPATH STAFF

The Lebanese Armed Forces opened a Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) center in May 2018 near Marjayoun, where Soldiers can provide educational, health, environmental and humanitarian assistance to civilians in the southern third of the country.

The center — one of three in the country dedicated to encouraging peace and stability — was built with the support of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the government of Spain.

Lebanese CIMIC Chief Brig. Gen. Elie Abi Rached expressed enthusiasm about working more broadly with UNIFIL peacekeepers.

"We are going to conduct many projects here in southern Lebanon, which will strengthen the relations between the Lebanese Armed Forces and our community here," the general said during the center's opening ceremony.

Acting U.N. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Pernille Dahler Kardel said the new center provides proof that Lebanon's central government was extending its authority over southern Lebanon.

"Initiatives like this have the potential to make a crucial contribution to the preservation of Lebanon's security, stability and sovereignty," she said. "The



Members of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL attend the opening of Lebanon's new regional civil-military cooperation center. UNIFIL

United Nations remains committed to supporting these crucial goals."

UNIFIL initiated community outreach projects in Lebanon in 2006 and enlisted the Lebanese military in these CIMIC efforts in 2008.

In a little over a decade, UNIFIL has spent \$45 million on 3,400 projects. They include providing health clinics, planting trees and distributing book bags to schoolchildren.

## Central Asia Supports Afghan Reconciliation

UNIPATH STAFF

Representatives from more than 20 countries expressed support for a peace process in Afghanistan between the Kabul government and the Taliban.

The call for negotiations came at a conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in March 2018. It attracted support not just from Central Asian countries but also Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

There was only one problem: The Taliban refused the peace offers and insisted instead on continuing its terror campaign against Afghan society.

Attendees at the Tashkent conference agreed that a process of Afghan reconciliation, combined with anti-terrorist and anti-narcotics operations, were necessary to restore peace and prosperity to the country.

The signatories of the joint declaration called on the Taliban to "accept this offer for a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned."

Before the conference, President Ghani expressed his support to allow the Taliban to set itself up as a political party and pledged to remove sanctions if it joined the government in peace talks.

Although the meeting in Tashkent failed to achieve significant breakthroughs, it raised the profile of Uzbekistan as a diplomatic actor in Central Asia. Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev offered to host peace negotiations between Afghan factions should the need arise.

Uzbekistan, together with other Central Asian countries, also expressed its commitment to further integrate Afghanistan into regional trade and strengthen joint economic links.

Sources: UzReport, Afghanistan.ru, UzA, Podrobno.uz, Mir24, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty





## CENTCOM HOSTS IFTAR DINNER

UNIPATH STAFF

Gen. Joseph Votel, commander of United States Central Command, hosted an iftar for Muslim Senior National Representatives (SNRs) during Ramadan 2018. More than 20 officers joined Gen. Votel for the formal dinner on May 30 at U.S. Central Command headquarters in Tampa, Florida.

They included 11 senior representatives from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, Jordan, Yemen, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Djibouti and Morocco.

Also attending the fast-breaking dinner were several coalition generals and flag officers. The iftar was organized by the Coalition Coordination Center in U.S. Central Command's Directorate of Strategy, Plans, and Policy.

## **Egypt Partners with Gulf Countries**

UNIPATH STAFF

Egypt conducted two separate military exercises with Arabian Gulf partners in April 2018. Khalifa 3 was a bilateral exercise held in early April with the naval and air forces of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The forces gathered at a base on Egypt's Red Sea coast.

Egyptian military spokesman Col.

Tamer El-Rifai said the goal of Khalifa

3 was to improve military relations
between Egypt and the UAE by "developing the skills of commanders and officers to maintain combat efficiency and standardize operational concepts."

Later in April, a contingent of Egyptian special forces traveled to Bahrain for the Khaled Ibn Al Waleed 2018 exercise. Through lectures and drills, Egyptian and Bahraini troops practiced counterterrorism tactics, hostage rescue and storming buildings.

As is the case with the UAE, Bahrain is increasingly coordinating military operations with Egypt to improve troop preparedness with its regional partner. Bahrain also praised Egypt for educating many of its officers at its military colleges and academies.

"The aim of these drills is to reach the highest levels of efficiency and preparedness to face any danger that may pose a threat to the region's security and stability," *Egypt Today* noted in an article.

During the Khaled Ibn Al Waleed exercise, Bahraini Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dhiyab bin Saqr al-Nuaimi discussed joint military cooperation with Chief of Egyptian Commandos Maj. Gen. Mustafa Shawkat.

Sources: Egypt Today, Ahram Online, Bahrain News Agency





## Uzbekistan Renews Focus on Human Rights

UNIPATH STAFF

Tzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has pledged to improve human rights, reduce restrictions on travel, and make government more responsive to citizens.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based advocacy group, sent representatives to the country for the first time in seven years to interview government officials, civil society activists, former prisoners and ordinary citizens. The group noted a greater tolerance in Uzbekistan for journalists, religious figures and opposition groups.

Another democracy-promoting organization, Freedom House, praised Uzbekistan for loosening control of the media and allowing more public criticism of government officials. Along the same lines, President Mirziyoyev established a network of presidential reception centers across Uzbekistan to address citizen grievances.

As part of the greater openness in the country, the Uzbek government eliminated visa requirements for 16 countries, easing travel to Uzbekistan, and is planning to simplify acquisition of tourist visas for citizens of 39 other countries. Starting in 2019, Uzbek authorities will cease requiring exit visas that have often prevented Uzbeks from leaving the country without official permission.

Uzbekistan is also making efforts to improve its business environment by stressing anti-corruption efforts that have drawn praise from the World Bank.

Sources: Azattyq, Reuters, Gazeta.uz, Human Rights Watch, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty





# TAJIKS, UZBEKS CLEAR LAND MINES FROM BORDER

UNIPATH STAFF

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have begun the process of eradicating mines on their mutual border with the goal of reducing fatal accidents and opening more land for productive use. Anti-mining engineers demonstrate the detection of land mines in Tajikistan during a United Nations event. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have agreed to clear mines from their border. REUTERS

Separate sections of the

1,300-kilometer-long Tajik-Uzbek border were mined at the end of the 1990s at the instigation of the Uzbek government to prevent incursions of militants from the terrorist group Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Unofficial sources suggest the total mined area is about 9.5 square kilometers. Over the past 18 years, 474 people have died from stepping on mines; many more were wounded. Fifty-four sections of the border area remain particularly dangerous with the presence of close to 11,000 mines.

Through the efforts of agencies such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, about 16 square kilometers of the border were demined as of May 2018, a process that removed the threat of 56,000 mines and 41 kilograms of explosives.

The mine clearance agreement resulted from a 2017 summit between Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Both countries will benefit from thousands of newly cleared hectares of land available for crops and livestock.

Sources: Fergana News, Regnum, Ozodlik, EurAsia Daily, Centrasia.ru











## **Kuwaitis Practice** Nuclear Decontamination

UNIPATH STAFF

A truck contaminated with potentially hazardous radiation attracted the scrutiny of Kuwaiti and U.S. troops in a scenario that played out in the Kuwaiti desert in April 2018.

The weapons of mass destruction drill was serious business requiring reliance on protective suits and strict decontamination procedures. It was part of a larger multinational focus on dealing with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks.

The exercise brought together 45 members of the Kuwait Land Forces Weapons of Mass Destruction Battalion and the U.S. Army's 300th Chemical Company.

1st Lt. Nawaf Al-Awadi, assistant commander of training in the Kuwaiti battalion, praised the opportunity to exchange techniques and experience with American partners.

"I think there are some differences in the details of how we do our decontamination, and we need to know what those details are, so we can work together in

real situations," Lt. Al-Awadi said.

"Working together makes our relationship stronger and makes us more powerful, so we can fight stronger. Working as a team makes everything easier."

In preparation for the demonstration with the radiologically contaminated truck, the troops spent long hours honing their abilities to get in and out of protective gear and to handle decontamination pumps.

"They were able to clean the vehicle to a level that we could still maintain our fighting capability, and the Soldiers were able to demonstrate their ability to change out their protective equipment and return to the fight," said U.S. 1st Lt. Jared Schwab.

"Today's joint training provided a good foundation for future training events. We worked with their leadership to develop this scenario, and we worked with them during the scenario to see how much we could provide to our interoperability future goals, in case we had a real-life scenario." Source: U.S. Army



## **AFGHANISTAN** CARGO CROSSES **KAZAKHSTAN**

UNIPATH STAFF

azakhstan approved an agreement with NATO to use the Central Asian country's Caspian Sea ports of Kuryk and Aktau as transit points for nonmilitary cargo to Afghanistan. The deal amends an agreement signed by NATO and Kazakhstan in 2010.

NATO sought alternate routes to avoid parts of Pakistan that the alliance deemed insufficiently stable, according to a statement from Kazakhstan's Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Defense and Security.

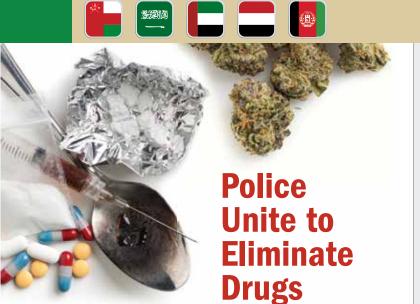
NATO would ship cargo across the Caspian from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan and then carry it by rail to Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov stressed that the agreement represents the interests of his country as a strategic partner of the United States in its efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

"Kazakhstan is ready to render all possible assistance to the forces of the anti-terrorist coalition and those countries supporting peace, security and sustainable development in Afghanistan," he said.

About 13,000 tons of cargo has transited through Kazakhstan to Afghanistan, according to the Kazakh Ministry on Investments and Development. Kazakh officials acknowledged that the agreement with NATO will help develop the country's transportation and logistics infrastructure.

Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Eurasianet, Atameken Business Channel, Caspian News, Trend News Agency



UNIPATH STAFF

Police in Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continue to seize hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of illegal drugs, highlighting the importance of multinational cooperation in policing Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Anti-narcotics forces from the three countries upset at least four large drug smuggling operations in the first half of 2018 and many others in 2017. The seizures involved hashish, marijuana, heroin and amphetamine pills called Captagon.

"Border security will not slack at their job to thwart attempts to undermine security," a spokesman for the Saudi government said. "Suspects will be dealt with appropriately and according to the law."

Oman's seafaring traditions, combined with a 1,700-kilometer coastline, make patrolling for smugglers a constant challenge. Popular spots to deliver drugs bundles are international waters near coastal towns such as Duqm, Salalah and Sur. Fishing boats belonging to criminal gangs ferry the drugs to shore.

Overland routes from Yemen are also exploited to move narcotics. In June 2018, for example, Saudi guards in the Jizan, Najran and Asir border regions with Yemen seized a half ton of hashish. Other routes pass from Yemen, through Oman, to the Emirates.

To interdict more narcotics, Omani authorities have increased security at ports, airports and border crossings. Such efforts require increased communications with colleagues in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"The best is being done to patrol the sea, but these drug smugglers don't give up because it is a profitable business." said a spokesman for Oman's National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances

In 2017, alarmed by a rise in addiction among youth, Oman started a nationwide campaign in schools and universities to warn about the hazards of drug use. The slogan was "Life is wonderful — don't spoil it with drugs."

## UAE SENDS MORE TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN

UNIPATH STAFF

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has reinforced its troop presence in Afghanistan as part of the 39-nation coalition battling terrorists intent on destabilizing the country.

For much of the past decade, the UAE has stationed about 200 Soldiers in Afghanistan, but recently agreed to send more troops to help train elite Afghan recruits and support counterterrorism missions. Some of the Emirati forces will be based at NATO headquarters.

The coalition, part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission, has been pressuring the Taliban to lay down its arms, renounce terrorism and negotiate a peace settlement with the Afghan government in Kabul.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has sought to improve relations with Middle Eastern and Islamic countries, and the deployment of Emirati troops — combined with a prospective increase in Qatari troop levels — is part of that diplomatic engagement. Source: Reuters



# SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Unipath is a magazine provided free to those associated with security matters in the Middle East and South and Central Asia.

# CONTRIBUTE TO UNIPATH

Send all story ideas, letters to the editor, opinion articles, photos and other content to *Unipath*'s editorial staff at CENTCOM.UNIPATH@MAIL.MIL

#### SUBMISSION TIPS

- Content submitted in your native language is preferred. *Unipath* will provide translation.
- Articles should not exceed 1,500 words.
- Please include a short biography and contact information with each submission.
- · Photo file size should be at least 1 megabyte.

#### **RIGHTS**

Authors retain all rights to their original material. However, we reserve the right to edit articles to meet space and style requirements. Article submission does not guarantee publication. By contributing to *Unipath*, you agree to these terms.

# FOR A FREE SUBSCRIPTION

EMAIL US AT: CENTCOM.UNIPATH@MAIL.MIL

Or write to: Unipath U.S. Central Command 7115 S. Boundary Blvd. MacDill AFB, FL 33621 USA

Please include your name, occupation, title or rank, mailing address and email address.