



(U//FOUO) How NSA Teams Support Tactical Forces in Iraq

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(U//FOUO) We asked several NSA'ers who served on Cryptologic Support Teams to talk about their experiences. Here's the first article. (For background, see [Supporting the Tactical Units](#).)

(S//REL) This time last year, my wife and I were racing back from our honeymoon in the Mediterranean to attend an executive/evasive-driving course in West Virginia in preparation of our upcoming tandem deployment to Iraq. We were slotted as members of the first Cryptologic Support Teams (CSTs) established to provide national level analysis, training, and access to NSA's tactical customers. Just weeks after the driver training, we were traveling to our respective locations along the Tigris river in the heart of Mesopotamia; separated by 170 miles, terrorists, insurgents and unforgiving terrain.

(U//FOUO) There is nothing more fulfilling than sitting side-by-side with NSA tactical users, enduring the same hardships and successes. The levels of trust, respect, understanding and cooperation cannot be matched by any other means. The CSTs established long-standing relationships and processes that have endured beyond the people that created them, and they have changed the landscape of the tactical environment throughout the country. Furthermore, the CST presence in theater is directly responsible for saving lives of U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi troops as well as the country's citizens, with minimal support from the NSA mother ship.

(S//REL) The **CST in Balad** was stricken for nearly two weeks with no access, followed by severe connectivity issues. However, once the team was fully operational, with the support of the 5th Special Forces Group's Technical Analysis and Control Element (TCAE), the CST was able bring the full spectrum of NSA's capability to the fight.

(TS//SI//REL) Our first indication to 5th Special Forces that the CST wasn't just taking up space came about 10 days later when the CST (with unwavering support from [GRSOC's](#) J302 linguists and [GEOCELL](#)) tracked and pinpointed one of Muqtadah Al-Sadr's lieutenants (a Multi-National Force-Iraq High Value Target). The 112-hour effort that ensued resulted in the capture of Shaykh Ahmed al-Shaybani and 43 other Mahdi Militia insurgents, 4 truckloads of weapons, completed improvised explosive devices (IEDs), medical supplies and communications equipment. The end result was a complete disruption of the Sadr's Mahdi Militia network. (See [DIRgram-340](#).)

(S//REL) Similarly, prior to the arrival of the **CST in Mosul**, there was no mechanism in place to integrate Stryker Brigade's organic SIGINT (collectors, linguists and analysts) with national assets and other special operations units. Within a few short weeks, successful SIGINT-led operations were commonplace and by the end of November, Stryker Brigade, Ranger Battalion and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) elements were engaging AMZ-related and Ansar al-Islam targets nightly.

(S//REL) The CST in Mosul was entirely responsible for the previously absent intelligence and collaboration that made this effort possible. Since that success, a requirement was identified by JSOC to have its elements supported by permanent NSA personnel doing specifically the job that CST Mosul was doing for the entirety of Task Force Olympia. It was an effort born out of necessity and met with resistance, but has become the way we do business.

(S//REL) Since returning, I have maintained contact with elements of both CSTs above (as well as members of the 1st Infantry Division and 1st Cavalry Division CSTs). The relationship we developed in the field was maintained as these units rotate in and out of theater. They remember the support that was provided and are now educated users of the SIGINT system.

They can provide NSA with a clear "ground truth" picture while we can tailor our support specifically to the need of the commanders.

(U//FOUO) There is nothing seemingly unique about our experience, nor is there anything special about what we have accomplished. We did precisely what Major General Quirk and the Office of Military Integration had assigned as our mission. What is noteworthy is the ability to break new ground and direct "the system" to work for our customers. In country, we remembered that we are members of a Combat Support Agency and at the end of the day, providing tactical commanders crucial intelligence is the cornerstone of our existence. If we fail, people may die.

(U//FOUO) So, whether deployed to a hostile environment, or engaged in analysis, collection, and collaboration stateside we will continue to do what is right and push the limits of the SIGINT system to provide the information it promises to those in need: The President, Congress, the intelligence community, or perhaps that 1st Lieutenant with his/her 20-person platoon doing an IED sweep in the middle of the night in a hostile foreign city.

(U) We just celebrated our first anniversary and we look forward to many more together, whether stateside or forward with the honorable men and women who increasingly need our support every day.

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