



(U//FOUO) NISTing in Kabul and Baghdad - Part Two

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(U//FOUO) Note: This is the conclusion of [REDACTED] two-part article.

(U) Everyone on the compound lived in a tent city. They were magnificently air conditioned, and ours was kept pitch black inside to accommodate the various shifts that team members worked. I never unpacked anything - we all just rummaged through our bags in the dark with small red-lens flashlights. There was not much to worry about finding, since I wore the same thing every day. One of the many benefits of working for a Special Operations command was that they allowed for relaxed grooming standards and had alternative uniform regulations.

(U) While many people on BIAP had to wear full DCUs (desert camouflage uniforms) despite the 125-degree heat, we wore PT gear - black shorts and a brown tee shirt. I only donned my DCU pants when I had to get "dressed up" for a VIP visit. This was a much-appreciated blessing, since the heat was almost unbearable. When I arrived, I suffered heat cramps for a few days which made me walk around on my toes like a dinosaur. At least I was providing some entertainment for the troops, I kept telling myself.

(U) The food was bland but not bad. We had a chow hall which served four hot meals a day. Many were basically mass-reheated MREs, but the hamburgers were nothing to complain about. Living on Zulu time (Greenwich Mean Time) and not local time was an interesting experience. I went to sleep as the sun was coming up and constantly felt jet-lagged. The rest of BIAP, it seemed, was running on local time, so it added a hurdle when coordinating meetings.

(U//FOUO) The work with TF-20 was the best I've had the opportunity to be a part of so far in my career at NSA. I was lucky to be working with such an able and flexible command. Like most NISTs, we worked 7 days a week, at least 13 or 14 hours a day. Whenever an operation was in progress, which was almost every day, we worked until it was done.

(S//SI) A majority of our work consisted of identifying and tracking targets using PCS (Personal Communication Service) handsets. We worked closely with the DIA interrogators, CIA case officers, all-source analysts, and many others to produce timely, actionable intelligence. Sometimes we made PowerPoint presentations of our findings, and other times we just made our case with verbal briefings or diagrams sketched out on the white board. We did a lot of educating non-SIGINTers on our capabilities and limitations, and I learned an incredible amount about the other players in the intelligence community and military structure.

(S//SI) Too often, I noticed, what we think is urgent and earth-shattering may not be what our customer really needs. If you can't

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get the right product to the right person in time, it may not be of any value at all. On several occasions, we were able to hand additional threat-related information to team leaders heading out the door on an operation, just in time. Five minutes later, that same intelligence would have been just wasted time and paper. I had an amazing experience working in Baghdad and have gained a perspective on the value of SIGINT that I hope never to lose.

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