

O'ER THE HULL AND FAR AWAY

or Who does what, the manning aspect

■ by COL. ITA A Maurizio SULIG

ISAF transferred from a “Core” to a “Composite” HQ with the Change of Command between ISAF IX and ISAF X on 4 Feb 07. Typically, in a “Composite” Model, the majority of posts in the establishment are filled by individual augmentees from the Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs). Whilst this solution grants visibility to the TCNs, it results in a very high personnel rotation rate, challenges to meet specialization and linguistic requirements, initial lack of confidence with NATO procedures: in the words of Gen Schuwirth, COS SHAPE, *“The fractured manning of HQ ISAF makes it a challenge to sustain an operationally capable HQ”*. To correct this situation, GRF (L) are tasked to provide, for 6-months rotations, a so called Standing HQ/Core Staff Element (SHQ/CSE), sort of a “backbone” of collectively trained and experienced personnel, able to enhance and increase the cohesion and output of the HQ.

HQ NRDC-ITA involvement in the process of manning the SHQ/CSE for ISAF 09/1 (how the current deployment is officially called) started in September 2007, as the commitment of the HQ to ISAF was confirmed: the HQ was to fill about 12,5% of the Crisis Establishment (CE) of HQ ISAF (18% of the military posts, since a number of billets in the CE are allocated to civilians), working in close coordination with:

- SHAPE J1, as the owner of the CE for any Contingency Operation;
- JFC BRUNSSUM CJ1, as the Mounting HQ for ISAF and
- ISAF itself, as the supported HQ.

Personnel drawn from NRDC-ITA was to fill key posts in CJ2, CJ3, CJ4, CJ8, CJ9 and in the Office of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (namely his COS/Military Assistant), along with some more positions in other functional areas.

To better understand the scale of the task and its implications a second quotation from Gen. Schuwirth will help: *“It is vital that staff are able to “hit the ground running”, failure to do so will hamper COMISAF’s ability to operate and could in the long term endanger the success of the mission”*. The need to retain at the PHQ sufficient planning capability to meet the training and possible operational requirements during the deployment phase was also to be taken into account.

Moreover, it was immediately apparent that changes to the required contribution would have been the rule until the deployment.

In order to better face this set of challenges, a “ISAF Steering Committee” (ISC) directed by DCOS OPS and Chaired by DD-COS OPS was established. Permanent Members were ACOS G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G7, with remaining ACOSs and SNRs “on-call”. This high-level board met at least monthly and based its work on the following main Terms of Reference:

- 1 *Members are ACOS equivalents.*
- 2 *The ACOS responsible for a given Line of Operation (LOO) will track progress of actions in the LOO.*
- 3 *Minimize documentation as much as possible - after Direction and Guidance and approval from DCOS OPS and COS, FRAGOs will be issued.*
- 4 *Don’t develop detailed instructions for the action plan. If Power Point will work, use it. Simplicity will make the action plan most successful.*
- 5 *After each ISC meeting, the chair and select committee members will brief the DCOS OPS and COS on progress during COS Updates.*
- 6 *All work will be posted on the OPS DIV WISE page, and SNRs will be updated on preparation issues at SNR meetings. Work of the ISC must take into account national/SNR perspectives.*

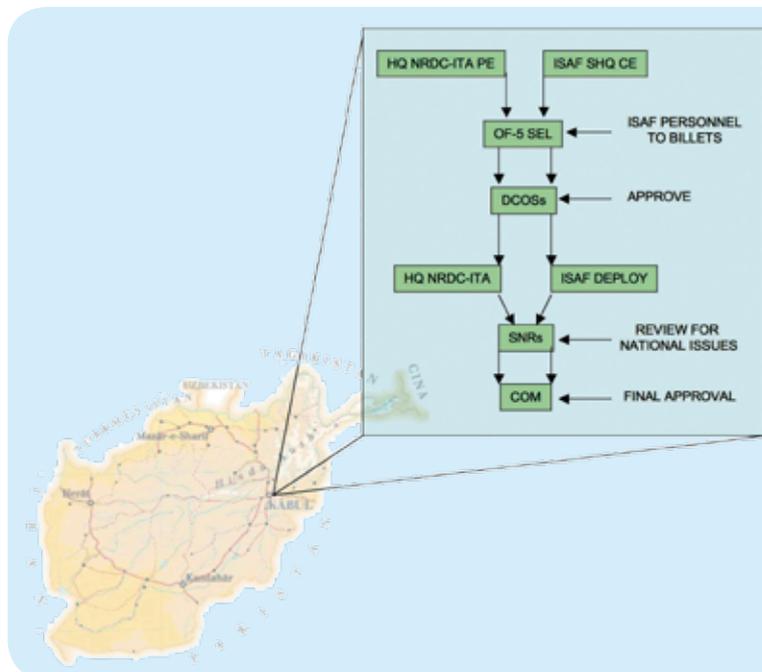
The last point is not to be overlooked, since NATO doesn’t own the manpower it employs, and any personnel should be viewed as a loan to NATO from Nations. It therefore follows that NATO is loaned the personnel on the basis that they will be employed in an agreed post and for an agreed length of time. Any changes to an individual’s employment, including reduction or ex-

tension in tour length must therefore be cleared with the Nation concerned.

That said, the “philosophy” outlined in the TORs was applied during the entire process, and it proved a successful one.

The first and main task was of course to populate the roster of positions assigned to the SHQ. To identify the right soldier to fill a given post, a very simple rule was applied: **MAN ALL POSITIONS FIRST WITH THE PERSON WHO DOES THE SAME JOB AT PHQ, IF NOT POSSIBLE WITH THE MOST QUALIFIED, IF NO QUALIFIED PERSON IS AVAILABLE (e.g., because the position is not foreseen in the PE) WITH THE MOST TALENTED.**

The procedure established to man the roster is summarized in the diagram below:



As anticipated, the request changed several times both in the total number of personnel to deploy and in the positions the HQ was expected to fill. This was due to a number of reasons, ranging from the 20% reduction of ISAF’s CE to the results of ISAF’s Functional Review. According to a well established routine, major issues were discussed at the Manning Conferences chaired by SHAPE J1: the Final Manning Conference for a given rotation is also the Initial Manning Conference for the HQ that will relieve in place the HQ that is soon to deploy. In this way the Final Manning Conference for NRDC-T (Istanbul, 23 Jan. 08) was the Initial Manning Conference for NRDC-ITA as ISAF 09/1 and, similarly, a representative of 1 GNC-Muenster

(designated to relieve NRDC-ITA) attended the Final Manning Conference for ISAF 09/1 in Solbiate Olona. Nonetheless, although a very effective communication channel with SHAPE and JFC-BRUNSSUM was opened



from the outset, many changes occurred out of those main events, thus manning the roster required a lot of adaptability. Just to mention some challenges faced or that could have been faced in the process:

- project changeover of NRDC-ITA personnel in the middle of the training phase or during the deployment, which in some cases resulted in the extension of the tour of duty of individuals;
- failure to pass medical checks: unexpected health problems are to be seen as part of life and the obvious solution would be to identify as many alternates as possible, however it is arithmetically challenging, to identify a trained and qualified alternate for every staff of a Branch that will deploy almost all its personnel;
- exceedingly high linguistic qualifications required for junior ranks and specialists, that required negotiation with ISAF CJ1 in order to readjust them at a more realistic level;
- changes in the organization chart of ISAF proved to be a cause of confusion and misunderstanding (for instance, discrepancies were identified in some Job Descriptions approved by SHAPE and JFC-BRUNSSUM and those published by ISAF). Although not a major issue in itself, proper selection of personnel makes it imperative for the SHQ to work only on a consolidated and agreed set of references. Also in this case, the very effective channel of communication established with SHAPE and JFC-BRUNSSUM helped in quickly fixing any issue.

Medical fitness to deploy is another issue of relevance. Of course, the delivery of a Medical Record is a National prerogative, but it must be kept in mind that in a Multinational HQ some Staff will be far away from his or her nearest (national) Military Medical Facility. Once again, the possibility to quickly get information on the subject from the Mounting HQ significantly eased the solving of this task, since it was possible to pass to all SNRs the minimum requirement for deployment to ISAF as per the ISAF Joining Instructions, for their action as required.

From the time of the Roman Legions, military organizations have constantly demonstrated to be voracious consumers and cheerful producers of administrative work, and ISAF does not deviate from this time-honored tradition. Currently, in order to get anything from ID Card to CRONOS account to accommodation, each individual deploying will need to fill out and to be issued forms whose number lies in the region of 2-digits (of course, in multiple copies). Availability in electronic copy of the updated version of the required forms, to be filled at Home Base and delivered electronically to ISAF resulted in:

- time savings;
- possibility to check and amend mistakes;
- possibility for ISAF Billeting Office to prepare in advance the whole package of ID Cards, computer accounts, CORIMEC keys, laundry bags, ration cards etc. for each individual which spared the just-deployed personnel, after a overnight flight from Europe to Kabul on military aircrafts, from the need of standing in queue for long time awaiting their turn to be in-processed.

To the reader who was stoical enough to reach this point, it could seem that, some mi-





nor hindrances apart, everything in the selection and designation of personnel went with the book. However, warfare-old military wisdom tells that no plan survives the first shot fired in anger, that is to say that a reality check of the situation on the ground is vital far more than advisable. To this extent, the deployment presence of a Fact Finding Team to Kabul proved to be very useful, since it brought to light a number of potential issues that could be solved at Home Base before the deployment of the Core Staff Element.

One more point is worth mentioning: since NRDC-ITA personnel, once in processed at HQ ISAF, are from an administrative point of view back to their respective National Chains for the duration of the deployment, it follows that any issue involving or affecting one of them will be dealt with by the local SNR. However, although deployed, they are still “our” soldiers, and it would have been contrary to the covenant that binds soldiers to their unit and to their leaders to send them on an Operation and forget them until they redeployed. Additionally, there was the need to safeguard the identity of our “Contingent” to ISAF, even though it is understood that that issues falling under the authority of the National Lines of Command will be the responsibility of the respective SNRs/NSEs.

To this extent, the senior among the 4 Colonels deployed to Kabul was appointed as NRDC-ITA Senior Representative to HQ

ISAF, to serve as the primary point of contact between NRDC-ITA and HQ ISAF for any serious and urgent issue/problem affecting NRDC-ITA personnel deployed to ISAF. His terms of reference are:

- 1 *Senior Representative of NRDC-ITA to COS ISAF for any issue pertaining to the SHQ/Core Staff Element, aware of COM NRDC-ITA Intent, Concept of Operations, Main Effort and Mission Priorities for the preparation and training of NRDC-ITA personnel deployed to ISAF;*
- 2 *Assists as advisor HQ ISAF in managing NRDC-ITA personnel appointed to HQ ISAF by:*
 - *Promoting close contact, intercommunication and mutual understanding, as required, with Heads of Divisions/Branches to which NRDC-ITA personnel is assigned, supported by the NRDC-ITA OF-5s deployed to ISAF.*
 - *Amplifying NRDC-ITA’s intent and points of detail on personnel issues, as appropriate.*
 - *Assisting HQ ISAF in the proper handling of any proposal to move NRDC-ITA personnel from the post to which he/she has been appointed to another position for which he/she has not been trained.*
 - *Facilitating the passing of oral and written communications between HQ ISAF and NRDC-ITA.*
- 3 *Submits reports/information on any issue that required his attention/action to COS NRDC-ITA.*

Initial feedback from the Theatre show that the system is working well to the satisfaction both of ISAF and of the deployees.



To summarize, and to try to draw some Lessons from what has been done so far:

- **Communication:** It is fundamental to liaise regularly with SHAPE and JFC-BRUNSSUM for official references as SHQ bid, ISAF HQ CE, Job Descriptions and any new proposal; Moreover, it is useful to establish liaison also with ISAF J1 for the “on ground situation”, e.g. to identify priorities in the manning of gaps;
- **Fact Finding Team:** the presence of a Fact Finding Team in Kabul two months before the deployment of the Core Staff Elements proved to be very useful. On future occasions, it would be highly advisable to insert in the Team a G1 representative, due to the large number of activities specific of the Personnel function (in processing, manning, Personnel Administration Forms, ...);
- **Manning changes:** during all the preparation phase G1 is to be prepared and ready to face manning changes, until the end of the deployment. Adaptability, flexibility and back-up solutions are required to great lengths;
- **SHQ Senior Representative to ISAF HQ:** a very sensible and effective solution, with the value added of conveying the message that the GRF (L) tasked to provide the SHQ/CSE for HQ ISAF are deploying a cohesive capability package, and that they are not a mere “augmentees farm”.

The successful execution of and support to NATO operations is our top priority. Our ISAF commitment will continue to be the highest priority. We will do everything possible to ensure long-lasting operational success and guarantee the historical chance of the Afghan people to peacefully shape a promising future.

A few months ago, I was told I would be sent to Joint Force Command (JFC) - Brunssum as Liaison Officer (LNO) during the deployment phase of our personnel to Afghanistan (ISAF mission). JFC - Brunssum is our higher Command, whose top priority is the execution of, and the support to, NATO operations. Of course, ISAF commitment is, and will continue to be, the highest priority.

Well, when I was told to join JFC-B for the deployment phase, I thought to myself that a period of relax would not have been any bad. I don't know why, but there is always a misleading perception that a higher Command does not work as hard as a lower one. And I think this feeling applies not only to military reality, but rather to any public institution.

Once I was there, I had to definitely change my mind. I did appreciate the quantity and the quality of work, at any level. In practical terms, my task was to support J4 Movement & Transportation Section, during the deployment operations to Kabul. In other words, to monitor all activities, starting with the preparation of personnel to the arrival to the final destination (ISAF Headquarters), passing through all intermediate steps: transfers to/from airports, check-ins, take-offs, landings, transfer to ISAF compound.

In the backstage of all these activities, an organization composed of:

- a Transition Team located in Kabul (TTK);
- a Transition Team located in Solbiate Olona and Malpensa airport (TTS);
- an Operational Centre (OPSCEN) activated for the scope at NRDC-ITA;
- a LNO to JFC-B.

All these assets were effectively coordinated by Rear Support Command (RSC) of NRDC-ITA, particularly by Lt.Col. Imbimbo and his staff.

The awareness of having such a perfect organization behind, did consolidate my initial feeling: it wouldn't have been a big burden. Everything was planned in details and only unexpected events could have mined such a capillary organization. Exactly: unexpected events: that's what it was about.

As I arrived to Brunssum, after the necessary briefings, the first bad news: the first flight (chalk) was cancelled, and tentatively postponed by 24 hours. At a first thought, nothing really serious: we just inform the personnel that they can enjoy their family one more day and then re-schedule everything for the following day: not a big issue. In fact, the re-schedule of the first chalk took place without significant trouble.

What, instead, did create a little havoc was the second chalk. A series of concomitant causes (fuel problem, overbooking, and so on) did result in a never-ending story of postponements, bringing a lot of troubles to personnel, stressed by an infinite go/no go.

It was in this very moment that the synergy and the cooperation between JFC-B, Kabul, NRDC-ITA and Ramstein (the airbase from where the US C-17 came) was appreciated. Even in night-time, as the situation evolved.

You may easily understand how was the feeling of the deploying personnel: stress, frustration. In those moments it's even hard to accept any evident justification. They might have thought of a rough organization, instead. It's more or less about the same story I was saying in the beginning: the distrust towards whoever has to decide on us. Now I have realized that it's not like this, and I would like to assure those with that feeling. And if some of the 81 persons leaving for Kabul on that 27 January 2009 should read this story, I hope they will change their mind too.

By LTC ITA A Matteo Mancini