



(U) Hollywood Special Effects? No, It's Modern-Day SIGINT

FROM: NSA Deployer (name withheld for operational reasons)

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globe

(C//REL) Editor's introduction: An NSA deployer describes a day in Baghdad, with details of how SIGINT is now doing things previously unimaginable... (Click on photos for larger view.)

(U) "That's funny," I said to myself. "Why am I over the desert?"

(U) It was almost three o'clock in the morning, and the force of air coming through the open helo [helicopter] bay felt good moving across my armor, offsetting the heat from the helicopter engines. But not knowing why I was over the desert made me really stop and look around, as there was no desert between the Green Zone I had just left and my home base where I was headed...

(S//REL) I had started my day out at the Perfume Palace (pictured right) in the Victory Base Complex in western Baghdad, where I worked at [CSG](#) Baghdad. The NSA/CSS Representative [NCR] Iraq office at the U.S. Embassy in the Green Zone -- in central Baghdad -- had asked if I would give a brief demonstration and overview of the capabilities of [RT10](#) and describe generally what support CSG Baghdad and other NSA elements in theater could provide to the various intel offices located at the Embassy. I agreed.

Perfume Palace

(C//REL) However, in a last-minute change of plans, rather than taking the normal helo night flight to the Embassy, I was told I would be diverted to the Baghdad International Airport, where I would join the NCR Iraq and the CSG Baghdad Officer-in-Charge to greet NCR CENTCOM. Then the NCRs and I would all ride back together to the Green Zone in a protective-services detail [PSD] convoy on the fabled Route Irish. While I had been to the Green Zone several times before, this would be my first chance to experience the "dance of the SUVs." If it were a dance, it would be Swan Lake, as performed by Metallica.

(C//REL) Our rendezvous at the airport came off without incident, and we kitted up on the edge of the airstrip and climbed into the SUVs. While most describe the procession as a "dance," I looked at the process more like football with armor at 60 miles an hour. The "dance" is actually a series of high-speed tactical blocking maneuvers, with three vehicles moving at 40-60 miles an hour. The front vehicle and back vehicle "block" other vehicles by getting between the "package" vehicle and anyone else on the road, or any access ramps to the road. While a football game can move fast on the blitz, doing 60-mph in a heavily armored vehicle will definitely wake you up if you're used to sitting behind a desk all day long. The ride was quick and professional, but "I'm glad I'll be flying home," I thought to myself as we made our way through the checkpoints.

(U) Working my way through the Embassy, I laughed, as I always did, to see Saddam's ornate furniture (*left*), perhaps remnants from Liberace's yard sale ... Once used to seat some of the most powerful men in the Middle East, the furniture was now used in mirrored waiting rooms along the vast corridors of the palace, a place for visitors and the press to wait for their meetings with attaches. Funny, as these few pieces of furniture are some of the only objects of Saddam's that remain visible to the public since the invasion.

(TS//SI//REL) Entering the NCR's office, I was greeted by a packed audience of State INR, hostage/personnel-recovery analysts, FBI, OGA [other government agencies], and reps from several other INTs. I walked the analysts through the CSG's RT10 tool suite (now known as "RT/RG"), first explaining how the new tools would let CSG analysts call-chain their targets to identify their contacts, then enrich the data from all the databases in [SHARKFINN](#), and finally display the data as a crisp, clean network in [Analyst's Notebook](#). What once took weeks now took a single analyst minutes to produce.

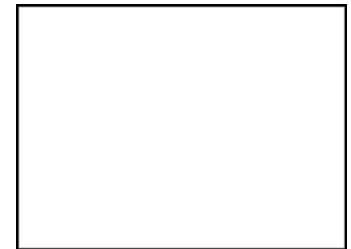
(TS//SI//REL) Showing them [IED](#) -network insurgents moving across the big-screen [GeoT](#) map in near real-time, Arabic text messages scrolling across the bottom of the screen as the insurgents sent messages from one target to another, I could see it was starting to sink in with many of the "ops" guys. "Yes," I said, "it's *Enemy of the State*, but now it's the insurgents who target the Coalition who now have nowhere to run." An analyst from the FBI raised his hand and, pointing at the screen, asked, "Is this why the rockets stopped falling on the Green Zone?" -- shaking his head in awe, he watched one of his own targets moved across the screen, tracked in near real-time -- to which I nodded and smiled. (The [CST](#)s supporting the boots on the ground had quickly rounded up the rocket-and-mortar networks that had rained relentless havoc on the Green Zone for the past 3 months.) We ended the meeting there with a light applause and smiles from people who were obviously worn out and tired of sitting in hallways and racing to bunkers every 8-10 hrs.



(C//REL) It was then that the NCR's staff informed me that my flight back to the Victory Base Complex wouldn't be leaving till late, and so my reward for a briefing well done was to sit pool-side at the U.S. Embassy (*left*) and soak up the sights for a few hours. While this might not sound like heaven, after 5 months in Baghdad, it was a pretty good

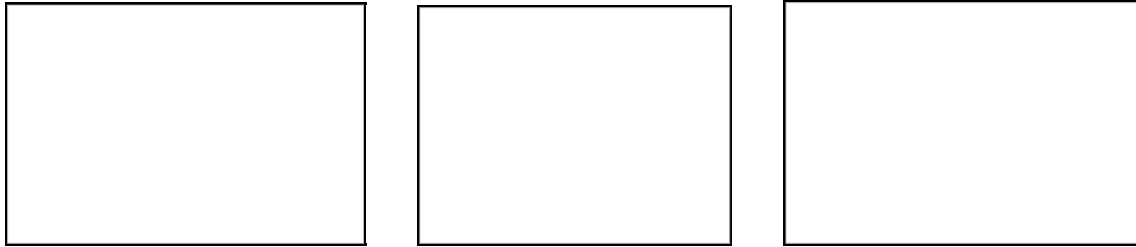
start.

(U) I managed to get three hours' sleep in before kitting up and heading to the landing pad to catch my flight back. I helped a tired soul get his gear and weapons on board. My six-month deployment felt pretty good when I realized the sergeant across from me was heading home after 15 months in Tikrit. I shifted my [M-4](#), closed my eyes and lowered my head to savor the cool night air as we took off, a sultry guitar ballad running through my head, I opened my eyes to look for the "mother of all Mosques" that should have been looming in the darkness in front of me, and was greeted instead by rolling dunes of sand.



(U) "Why am I over the desert?" I thought. The flight from the Green Zone to Victory should go straight across the metropolis that is Baghdad, the blackness spotted with burn-barrels and pools of light cast by yard lights installed by the Coalition to restrict insurgents' freedom of movement at night. Nowhere in between was there a stretch of open sand dunes like what lay before me. Blue lights ahead in the darkness, the sergeant turning to look my way, just realizing we weren't at our destination.

(U) We had barely landed when, from the cover of a shed, a field aide ran to the helo an Iraqi general, Iraqi colonel, two British officers, and what looked like an Iraqi intelligence officer trying to pass himself off as the general's aide. I shifted to help buckle in the officers, while discreetly covering my identifying badges in the same movement. A nod and a thumbs-up from the starboard gunner confirmed we were now headed to our proper destination, now that our "special cargo" had been secured. Lifting off and turning back over the dunes, Baghdad now approaching at high speed as we raced the sunrise back to the base, a few hours sleep and another day ahead.



(U//FOUO) If you'd like to learn more about deployments, here's the [MOC Deployment Page](#).

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