



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

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IA Intern
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(U//FOUO) Being in the field will change the way you do SIGINT forever. This is what I told the other analyst deploying to NIST Joint Task Force 20 (now 121) with me as we waited around Rhein Main airbase for three days for a flight into Baghdad. He was a very experienced analyst, one of the best we have at doing the geospatial analysis that is the mainstay of NISTs. I don't know if he believed me at the time, but after we had been there for a few weeks, he told me that I was right.

(U//FOUO) I had realized in Kabul that to be a really good analyst you have to know your customer - not just know where he is located, or talk to him on the phone once a month. To sit down with the people who will take action on your intelligence, whose lives you are helping to protect, changes your perspective on our business like nothing else I can imagine. My name is [REDACTED], and I am an IA intern who deployed to Kabul and Baghdad on NIST teams.

(S//SI) A year ago, I volunteered to go to Kabul, Afghanistan, where I worked for four months with the High-Value Targets cell comprising NSA, CIA, and DIA analysts, as well as military and CIA operational elements. After a fabulous tour in Kabul, and with the war in Iraq creating a large demand for NSA analysts in that region, I eagerly accepted an offer to head to Baghdad for two months in the summer.

(U) Everything on our little corner of the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) was tan. The sand, the tents, the HUMVEEs, the tee shirts, the food. As far as I could see, there was just dust and tents and concertina wire. At first glance, the only things that weren't brown were the white boxes that were our porta-potties. Even these were covered in so much dust and sand that they couldn't be called white anymore. It truly looked like a wasteland. There were no trees, no grass, no red cars, no yellow birds, nothing. All we had was a blue sky and the flag flying above the compound.

(U//FOUO) When I first walked into the crumbling building which served as the Joint Operations Command (JOC), I overheard someone asking whether I was someone's daughter come to visit. After four months at NIST Kabul, I was used to rough conditions, long hours, and people looking at me funny when I told them that I had volunteered to be there. I knew that there wouldn't be many other women working with me at TF-20, the elite command of all-male Special Operations soldiers tasked with prosecuting High-Value Targets in Iraq.

(U) For the first few days, as in Kabul, everyone hid their stacks of "men's magazines" and painfully avoided telling off-color jokes for fear of an EEO lawsuit. But when people asked me why I was there, I answered, "for the same reason you are." After a short while, they realized that this was true.

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(U) Watch for the second and final part of this article tomorrow!

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