



Lieutenant Colonel George Markos has been deployed to Afghanistan together with the contingent of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE). In a serious and less serious tone he talks about his job at the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters.

Sir, you are serving at ISAF Headquarters, what is your job there?

I am the Deputy Chief of the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operations Centre.

That sounds very interesting. What does your job entail?

Basically, we share information and intelligence with Pakistani and Afghan delegations. At the 4-star ISAF Headquarters level, this is the highest level of military to military cooperation. We do this to create trust and transparency between all three parties: ISAF, the Afghan and Pakistani Military. We are really facing a common enemy and the more we work together and each understands what the other parties are doing, the better it is for everybody.

We create trust and transparency. Interview with LTC Markos

Written by AG

Monday, 22 March 2010 14:20

How does the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operations Centre work?

We have daily meetings where the delegations come together to focus on one of our four main areas of cooperation: Intelligence sharing, counter IED (Improvised Explosive Device), Information Operations and Operations.

The highest level meeting we have is the Tripartite Commission plenary Meeting. Commander ISAF, General McChrystal, General Kayani, Chief of the Army Staff of the Pakistani Army and General Bismillah Khan, Chief of the Afghan General Staff come together and discuss military issues that are relevant to all three parties. We also have lower level meetings where we discuss each of those focus areas I touched upon. We have the military intelligence sharing working group, the information operations sharing working group, the counter IED working group and the executive steering group, which is responsible for preparing topics to be discussed at the tripartite meeting.

What we also do is we open doors for the Afghans and the Pakistanis including them in HQ ISAF staff processes and routines. In this environment where we want to everything is classified, we encourage our ISAF colleagues to communicate and share with the Afghans or Pakistanis when it is possible.

Are the meetings held solely in the Headquarters?

We meet in the Headquarters where the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operations Centre is; however, we try to rotate the high-level meetings between ISAF and different locations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Everybody gets a chance to host them.

And what is your role in those meetings?

As the Deputy Chief of the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operations Centre, I am involved in all of them. It is a good job because you can do a little bit of everything. When we have the daily meetings, I facilitate them, but of course when General McChrystal, General Kayani and General Bismillah Khan meet, then I am not facilitating any more, but I make sure they the presentations are prepared or the agenda is addressing the right things to set the stage for them.

One of the cool things is that recently we had dinner with the Commander ISAF. After the Commander's update brief about seven of us: Afghans, Pakistani and ISAF guys, sat down with the Commander and he basically gave us his guidance. He told us how important he thought our efforts were. It was great to get guidance straight from the commander. It was also cool to have dinner with somebody who is going to be in history books.

What is challenging about your job?

There is a lot of history between Pakistan and Afghanistan and sometimes certain issues are sensitive so you have to discuss them carefully. Our job is to make sure that everybody is cooperating.

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Referring to the coordination of efforts between ISAF, the Afghans and the Pakistani, your job seems to be very important. How do you perceive it from your perspective?

This is not anything like a multinational environment in Szczecin where we have a long history of cooperation; here we are working in a multinational environment where we have a long history of conflict. Some days there are two steps forward, one step back, some days the success is that we are here together talking. Things are resolved gradually. This is about building relationships, building trust and that is not necessarily done by ticking things off from your "to-do" list. Somedays you think "I did not do anything important today" but that's not necessarily true looking at the bigger picture.

Are you also establishing friendly relations to the Afghani and Pakistani delegations?



Yes. I like both of the delegations, we played soccer together and we mixed the teams up. Next Thursday I am even teaching them CrossFit. And I think the sense of humour is kind of pretty universal, in general, the same things make us laugh.

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Have you learned anything interesting about the Afghan and Pakistani culture?

I have learned a little bit of Urdu (editor's note: second official language in Pakistan) but we do most of our business in English, translated into Dari (editor's note: one of official languages in Afghanistan) and then the Pakistani guys will speak Urdu. But there are many languages to learn here so I am probably not going to learn them all. What is interesting, we celebrated the Chinese New Year, for which our Singaporean officer brought in a bunch of food from his home. I was thinking "here I am in Afghanistan celebrating the Chinese New Year with the guy from Singapore." The Afghans are getting ready to celebrate "Nawroz" on March 21st, which is their New Year.

This is a real multinational pot. What nations contribute to the Tripartite Joint Intelligence Operations Centre?

Of course there are the Pakistanis and the Afghans. My boss is Czech and there's one Pole (Lieutenant Colonel Brysz from MNC NE), a French guy, a French Canadian guy, and there is also a guy from Singapore. He is a non-NATO guy but working very hard and carries a lot of the burden of what we are doing here so it is not just NATO.

Are you in touch with other MNC NE personnel, too?

General Heinrichs, the MNC NE Chief of Staff, comes over here regularly and we try to eat lunch together and have a kind of a MNC NE huddle. Most of our guys are at IJC but about 20 of us are over at the ISAF Headquarters. What is interesting is that we are well spread out so you know people in different positions. This can be helpful. I'll give you an example. I had to make a presentation on a short notice and I needed a map. None of the maps that I had were really good for the purpose. As I know Lieutenant Colonel Mitschke from Szczecin, who could help, I had my map in an hour. It is nice to have an automatic network of friends that are distributed around the headquarters.

There are still five months ahead of you, what do you miss most?

My girlfriend. I also miss the cooking, I like to cook my own meal and here you eat what they make for you.

And what will be the first thing that you do when you get home?

I will have a beer.