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Iraqi females at checkpoints

By Pfc. Amanda Tucker, 3rd Sustainment Command (Expeditionary)

JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – Checkpoints have become commonplace here in Iraq in efforts to provide security and to detect crime or terrorist activity.



Pfc. Amanda Tucker

Iraqi volunteer Fatma Mohammed Abdurassol, an Iraqi volunteer trained by Soldiers from the 164th Military Police Company, 728th MP Battalion, 18th MP Brigade, and Iraqi Police, pats down a woman at a checkpoint in Balad July 24.

At a recent checkpoint in the Balad region of Iraq, a Soldier stopped a car to conduct a vehicle inspection. As the vehicle inspection continued, the Soldier asked the male driver to step out so he would be able to conduct a thorough inspection. As the Soldier walked around the vehicle and he identified a woman sitting in the back seat wearing traditional Iraqi clothing, her eyes and hands were the only parts visible.

She looked nine months pregnant, so the Soldier did not ask her get out of the vehicle into the over 115 degree heat to be searched. The Soldier allowed the vehicle to pass through the checkpoint.

Moments later, a thunderous boom with shrapnel flying and screams reverberated throughout the

checkpoint.

That Soldier's act of "compassion" was his last.

Female suicide bombers are becoming more common, and some insurgents are taking advantage of Soldiers who are reluctant to search females due to their cultural upbringing. Some terrorists have been known to dress as women to get through checkpoints.

Now, Iraqi females are stepping forward to help solve the problem.

“Having the females searching Iraqis is a good thing,” said Balad District Director of Police Col. Hussein Al-Aalan. “She can search females; that is something males can’t do.”

After seeing a story on the television about a female suicide bomber blowing herself up in a market, Manar Abdul Mutaleib, the only female member of the Balad City Council, suggested using Iraqi women at checkpoints.

“My mission (is) to find the females a job and work because right now, in my association, I have more than 950 without any job(s),” said Mutaleib.

Mutaleib fulfilled part her mission when more than 50 Iraqi women volunteered to take the job of helping at the Balad checkpoints. The city council chose widows of slain Iraqi Police officers in order to help them care for their families.

“We have 10 females in Balad that are actually able to search females coming into Balad,” said Staff Sgt. Iris Munoz, a Phoenix native and a squad leader for the 164th Military Police Company, based out of Fort Richardson, Alaska.

“We went over all of the search methods and we provided hands-on training with them on how to search to make sure they are checking everything,” said Cpl. Jamie Brown, a 164th MP Company team leader.

The MPs organized and conducted an eight-hour class at a local police station to teach the Iraqis how to properly search another woman.

“They were really eager to learn and they always had a lot of questions to ask about what to do in certain situations at checkpoints,” said Pfc. Leilani Carroll. “Having the females out there searching keeps Balad safe. They actually go out there and do everyday work.”

“Sgt. Munoz and her squad really have bent over backwards to get these women trained, to get them out on the checkpoint and feel like they’re part of the team,” said Capt. Matthew Norris, 164th MP Company commander. “They freely talk to her, they call her by her first name. That shows the trust and how they feel about what we’re doing here.”

The training is going to be a continuous process, said Munoz. With the ongoing threat of female insurgents, Iraqi females' continuous training is important to the Iraqi Army.

The Iraqi women are helping male Soldiers perform their mission without compromising security or insulting Iraqi culture.

The 164th MP Company is currently assigned to the 728th MP Battalion, deployed in Iraq. While in Iraq, both MP units are supporting security efforts to train Iraqi Police under the command and control of the 18th MP Brigade and Multi-National Division-North.



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