



Talking Afghanistan, Iran and ISIS

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REPORT AUTHOR

“Talking Afghanistan, Iraq and ISIS” was researched, compiled and written by **Faisal Aijaz**, Deputy Director General – Operations.

ABOUT **COMMANDELEVEN**

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan’s national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, **CommandEleven** provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact info@commandeleven.com.

PREFACE

Faisal Aijaz, CommandEleven's Deputy Director General - Operations, had an exclusive talk with Mike, a Norwegian Army veteran who served in Norwegian Army's elite Telemark Battalion during his deployment in Afghanistan and then went to Iraqi Kurdistan to join Peshmerga, fighting the Islamic State/ISIS.

Faisal Aijaz: Give us a little info about your background including a brief description of your stay in Norwegian Armed Forces?

Mike: As a Kurdish refugee from Iraq, my family was lucky to escape to Norway at a time when Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime was quite infamous. When I joined the Norwegian Army in 2004, I served in an elite mechanized infantry unit called 'Telemark Battalion' Company 5-Mortal Platoon for several years. My rank was vice corporal and also a completed a tour in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN

Faisal Aijaz: When did you move to Afghanistan? Kindly walk us through your deployment there with the Norwegian Military.

Mike: I served 6 months in Afghanistan mostly in cities like Kabul, Meymaneh and Mazar-i-Sharif, doing Force Protection for supply convoys traveling in dangerous areas. I went there so I could help the people of Afghanistan against the Taliban Insurgency.

Faisal Aijaz: How do you used to identify targets? Were there any intel-based operations that you became a part of at any time?

Mike: It was mostly by chance. Intelligence wasn't that good because the Taliban were good at blending in with the local population and had support amongst them.

Faisal Aijaz: How was your co-operation with other military units of United States, France, United Kingdom?

Mike: We worked with the Latvian and American Soldiers and they all were very professional.

Faisal Aijaz: Any specific weapons used by your unit in Afghanistan?

Mike: We mostly used Glock 17, HK-416, 40mm, MG3, .50 Cal. and 84mm.

Faisal Aijaz: During your stay in Afghanistan, did you get to experience any fight against the Taliban?

Mike: To be honest, I didn't experience anything like that during my deployment there. Our role was Force Protection, so we did defensive operations only. You can say that we were lucky as no one attacked us during my deployment.

IRAQ, KURDISTAN & PESHMERGA

Faisal Aijaz: How did you then move to Iraqi Kurdistan and got the chance to join Peshmerga – Iraqi Kurdistan’s independent military force? Any motivational factor?

Mike: Well, I just took a plane to Kurdistan and told them that I would volunteer to fight Daesh. My motivation was to help the people of Kurdistan fight the cancer known as ISIS.

Faisal Aijaz: Who mostly provides ammunitions and weaponry to Peshmerga? What is the name of your unit If I may ask?

Mike: Different countries mostly the United States assisted us. My unit is called Duhok Anti-Terror Unit but ISIS gave us a nickname ‘The Black Devils’.

Faisal Aijaz: How weak have ISIL become now? And who mostly funds them according to your military sources out there?

Mike: They’re not weakened as much as the US recently claimed. They get their weapons from Turkey mostly, and from captured Iraqi Army Units.

Faisal Aijaz: Can you share other notable things after engaging the terrorists and arresting them?

Mike: The prisoners are handed over to Assayish, which is a Kurdish Intelligence and Security Unit. So are the dead ones.

Faisal Aijaz: Iraqis say that Kurds were at first quite happy to live alongside Dai’sh until they threatened to take over Erbil. What do you have to say about this?

Mike: Not true at all. There was only an unofficial truce between KRS and ISIS in the beginning, but I think that was because the Kurds had no idea how to deal with ISIS.

Faisal Aijaz: During your fight against ISIS in Iraqi Kurdistan, U.S Navy SEALs also fought alongside your unit. How was your experience?

Mike: Yes, they did. U.S Special Forces engaged ISIS outside Mosul. These guys were embedded with us during the initial phase of Mosul operation and trust me when I say this: They kicked ass!

Faisal Aijaz: Why could not Peshmerga go for a military offensive in Mosul along with the Iraqi Army?

Mike: I was very much excited about Mosul Ops. We were asked to stop at Batnay, a town north of Mosul and let the Iraqis continue towards Mosul alone. The Iraqi Army have had some progress but a friend of mine who volunteered as a Medic with the Iraqis, told me that they received 40-50 casualties every day when the Iraqi Army moved towards Mosul.

Faisal Aijaz: What was the situation before Peshmerga liberated Batnay from ISIS?

Mike: Before we liberated Batnay, a Christian village outside Mosul, it was controlled by ISIS for over two years. My unit commander, General Wahed Kovle, led us from the front and I had the honor of being at his side.

Faisal Aijaz: Tell us about your experience during the operation in Teleskuf, which was also described by the US-led Combined Joint Task Force as one of the deadliest offensives in which the US Navy SEALs lost Charles Keating IV.

Mike: Those were the intense days. I was at the front line in Teleskuf with my unit and during our fight, ISIS broke through our defence line on our right flank, something I had never imagined would ever happen. Later on, we found out that that over 300 terrorists were using over 50 vehicles, half of them suicide vehicles.

The US Coalition, realizing the seriousness of the situation, scrambled pretty much all of their air power. Drones, F-15's, F-16's, A-10's and even B-52's were engaging the enemy and for the first-time during Operation Inherent Resolve, the Jets actually ran out of bombs and had to use cannon guns. Teleskuf is a Christian town that was abandoned when the war broke out in 2014. The town was garrisoned by several units from the Peshmerga, the Assayish, which is an intelligence agency and different Christian militias. The U.S Navy Seals were there to support the American advisory team as well as my unit and fought extremely well in the battlefield. Unfortunately, one of the Seals, Charles Keating IV, lost his life when he was struck by a single bullet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As Deputy Director General – Operations of CommandEleven, Faisal brings his hard-charging and reliable analysis to spearhead the domains of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and national security. He brings a great deal of understanding about military affairs, strategy and tactics, helping his team to better analyze the current and potential security situations in the region.

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