

Gender, Peace and Security

Off the Bench and on the Team: Operational Gender Mainstreaming

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Gender Advisors (GENADs) are responsible for implementing gender perspectives in military organisations. International policy and practice positions the employment of GENADs as specialists in the field working directly to the commander. While such appointment assigns a level of importance to gender related issues, it can also result in the GENAD to be sidelined as a niche capability – present and consulted but not considered an essential component. To counter this problem, a model utilised in the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), which commanded the international coalition to defeat Da'esh in Iraq and Syria, has been shown to provide more holistic and mainstreamed outcomes. The CJTF-OIR model embeds the GENAD within the Strategy and Plans branch to provide specialist knowledge and integrate gender perspectives within operational level planning. By analysing the efficacy of this model, this paper contributes to the continual learning cycle of the Operational GENAD capability and highlights an effective model that can be adapted for future operations.

1. Introduction

The early implementation of Gender, Peace and Security (GPS)¹ principles in military operations was conceptual due to an absence of practical, real-world experience. Now, with Gender Advisors (GENADs) deployed to operations, it is valuable to reflect on the experiences and lessons of these advisors to comparatively evaluate theory against practice. This paper examines the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of operational gender mainstreaming; the most critical were found to be operational relevance, where the GENAD sits within the headquarters and leadership engagement and support.

International policy and practice situates the GENAD as a specialist who reports directly to the Commander (Australian Defence Force, 2022; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2017). This continues to be the best practice for implementing gender perspectives in military organisations. While this approach assigns a level of importance to the issue, it can also result in the GENAD being sidelined as a niche capability—present and consulted but not considered an essential component. To counter this problem, a model used in the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), which commanded the International Coalition to defeat Da'esh² in Iraq and Syria, has been shown to provide more holistic and mainstreamed outcomes.

To achieve gender mainstreaming, the CJTF-OIR model embeds the GENAD within the headquarters' main element: the Strategy and Plans Branch (branch code CJ5). This paper summarises the experiences and observations of a CJ5-based GENAD, whose specialist knowledge can be employed to integrate gender perspectives within operational-level planning. By applying and understanding the lessons learned, this paper contributes to the continuous learning cycle of the operational GENAD capability and highlights an effective model that can be adapted for future operations.

This research analyses the efficacy of the CJTF-OIR model to achieve operational gender mainstreaming. Note, however, that the analysis offered here is not to the exclusion of the experiences of other deployed GENADs; how and where they are employed is context dependent. The role and scope of a GENAD differs depending on the level of the headquarters, the operating environment and mission end states. It is also important for the GENAD's role to be agile and responsive to changes in the operating environment, and as such, the role may differ between missions. When reviewing the historical contributions of GENADs within the CJTF-OIR, it is clear that each advisor operates in different phases of the campaign and states of the operational environment. As such, the analysis here covers the evolution of the GENADs' role from the onset of the CJTF-OIR operation up to Phase IV, the 'Normalisation' phase (sup-

1 Gender, peace and security (GPS) is the term adopted by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) mandate into operations.

2 The Islamic State (IS) is known by its Arabic acronym Da'esh

port stability),³ which provided security, planning and support to Iraq and Syria.

2. Gender mainstreaming in Operation Inherent Resolve

Gender mainstreaming is ‘intended to improve the effectiveness of mainline policies by making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes’ (Walby, 2005). In the operational context, this means understanding the effect of gender roles, responsibilities and biases on both own forces, adversary forces and the civilian population involved within the operation. Understanding and addressing the relevant gender considerations can then deliver more effective and tailored outcomes.

CJTF-OIR is the international coalition led by a three-star Commanding General and joined with 77 contributing nations to defeat Da’esh in Iraq and Syria. Employing a GENAD within CJTF-OIR enabled the operation to identify and address the gender-related vulnerabilities, threats and opportunities to the mission. To enable the campaign and operation plan, it is important to understand Da’esh’s gender tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to mitigate their ability to exploit gender for regeneration. Moreover, it is important to recognise the differing effects the conflict was having on the population (men, women, boys and girls), which provided more tailored recovery activities to support regional stability.

2.1. Da’esh gender tactics, techniques and procedures

Da’esh employed gender as a central mechanism to their strategy from the outset. The gender TTPs used by Da’esh allowed them to gain control of the population by instilling fear and destabilising communities through targeted acts of sexual and gender-based violence.⁴ During the raid on Mt Sinjar, Da’esh killed men and boys who refused to join their cause and trafficked women and girls to raise finances. They used gender in a vacuum of social support by targeting male youth from rural areas, where employment, literacy and income rates were much lower, through offering an income and a wife—two key social markers in Islamic society.

Gender is featured as a significant component of Da’esh’s recruitment strategy. They recognised women’s influence within family structures to build the caliphate (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2017). Official Da’esh doctrine typifies women as a ‘wife and mother of lion cubs’, where her role is the teacher of generations and the producer of men (Bradley, 2017). The mothers’ influence was also used in

mobilisation efforts by encouraging and supporting their male family members to join the caliphate.

Da’esh also exploited gender biases by using women as couriers and smugglers. Their gender roles afforded them a level of anonymity and were viewed as less threatening. This, combined with limited women in security roles, meant they had greater access to restricted areas and could pass through checkpoints unsearched. Interestingly, as Da’esh began losing the caliphate, they endorsed women as combatants under the somewhat deceptive pretence of women’s empowerment despite having subjugated women for the preceding period. Nonetheless, Da’esh women continue to enforce the ideology within Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps through the indoctrination of children and punishment of those not following strict Da’esh ideology in return for financial support, which thereby creates a cycle of dependence and obligation.

However, it is important to note that the role of women in Da’esh extends to a broad spectrum between victim and combatant, and the delineation is not clear and incredibly complex. Not all women are willing participants and are forced into sexual slavery and service. Understanding these TTPs enabled the CJTF-OIR to mitigate Da’esh’s ability to exploit gender for regeneration.

3. Components of the CJTF-OIR model

3.1. Off the bench and on the team – situating the Gender Advisor

Early literature characterised the role of an Operational GENAD as a specialist who works as part of the Commander’s executive staff,⁵ which can be advantageous, particularly if the Commander is considered an advocate and works to actively support the role. However, these advantages are often offset by certain limitations, which results in the GENAD being somewhat sidelined or removed from the main headquarters staff and planning efforts. This sidelining contributes to the role being understood as a niche capability that is an adjunct to the headquarters rather than being part of the headquarters. Sidelining often results in the GENAD being under-used during planning efforts with limited direct impact and consulted only to meet requirements rather than as an enabler to operational outcomes. In addition, commanders at the top level of the organisation have wide remits, which means there is limited capacity to invest in individual portfolios, which can affect the material support commanders are able to offer.

Notwithstanding the specialty skillset GENADs bring to the Commander, they can be more effective when embedded at the core functional level to deliver a more main-

³ The CJTF-OIR campaign design consisted of 4 phases: (I) Degrade – Conduct strikes against Da’esh, (II) Counterattack – Support the local partners to liberate territory under the control of Da’esh, (III) Defeat – Conduct strikes in support of decisive battles against Da’esh and (IV) Support Stabilisation – Provide security, planning and support to the Governments of Iraq and Syria.

⁴ Case study authored by WGCDR Jade Deveney published in the ADF Doctrine (Australian Defence Force, 2022, p. 41)

⁵ Australian Defence Force, Joint Doctrine Note 2-18 *Gender in Military operations*; and NATO, 2017, Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-001, *Integrating UNSCR1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure*

streamed approach. This allows a gender perspective to be integrated into all core elements of the operation across staff functions and decision-making levels, thereby avoiding standalone, isolated gender activities that by themselves do not create meaningful long-term change. If the GENAD remains an abstract concept that effectively provides ‘comments from the sideline’, it struggles to become part of the normalised operational effort.

Acknowledging this issue, the CJTF-OIR GENAD position was embedded within the CJ5 Strategy and Plans Branch to achieve more integrated and mainstreamed outcomes. The Strategy and Plans Branch is often described as the influencer and integrator of an operational headquarters responsible for visualising the future and designing operational efforts. By situating the GENAD within the CJ5 branch of the CJTF-OIR, the GENAD was provided with enormous insight and information into all planning efforts and connections with all other staff directorates. This enabled gender issues to be integrated at all stages of planning and execution, which thereby reduced the likelihood of the GENAD being inadvertently sidelined. The status and function of the CJ5, and its connection to the CJTF-OIR Commander, also provided the GENAD with a level of influence and credibility, particularly with a clear chain of command that fitted within the normalised operational headquarters structure. It created a senior level of ownership and responsibility for the capability and outputs. In simple terms, it made the CJ5 Director accountable for what the GENAD delivered. The CJ5 is understood as one of the core branches of the CJTF-OIR Commander that provides great influence and buy-in with senior leaders and access to key stakeholders. This allows the GENAD to build effective, influential relationships from the centre outwards, both at the practitioner and leadership levels. Consequently, it allowed the GENAD to leverage benefits from both models in maintaining access to the CJTF-OIR Commander while also being suitably integrated into the main body.

For GPS to be successful, it must be normalised within operational planning and execution - this must be driven by staff leadership. As the primary integrating element within a headquarters⁶ the CJ5 Plans Directorate is a natural place for normalising the gender perspective. The CJ5 Plans consistently engages the Commander and across all Directorates providing access and influence. Integrating the GENAD into the CJ5 allows gender consideration and integration at the earliest time of operational design.⁷ (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

The integrated nature of the CJ5 enabled the mainstreaming of gender considerations throughout the CJTF-OIR Campaign Plan’s design to defeat Da’esh. This resulted in gender being incorporated into the main body and spe-

cialised elements of both the Campaign Plan and Operational Order (the two main documents referenced by the entire headquarters) that facilitated the identification of gender risks, opportunities and vulnerabilities in the mission. This was vital to establish the foundations of, and situate gender perspectives in, the operational environment, which provided the why, what and how gender considerations contributed to the mission. The ability to overlay the gender effects onto the campaign plan provided a level of legitimacy and a clear demonstration of how gender considerations contribute to mission end states:

In order to normalise gender into operational level planning, it is essential that a gender perspective is integrated throughout the Campaign Design and Operational Planning process. It needs to be considered across the lines of effort and integrated into the assessment framework. This not only ensures its consideration into the success criteria (end state) but ensures ongoing analysis. (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

3.2. Operational relevance

When GPS is discussed in the operational context, the phrase ‘contribute to operational effectiveness and mission success’ is often used. But what does this truly mean? Contribution to operational effectiveness behoves military GENADs to provide tangible relevance in demonstrating what gender considerations contribute to the operation. This is not about forcing gender issues where they do not fit, nor demanding the attention of staff because of one’s view that gender issues are the most important issue for the operation. Contribution to operational effectiveness requires an understanding of how considering gender creates more informed and tailored operational effects.

The role of the GENAD in mainstreaming is to translate the specialised gender theory and concepts to be meaningful and applicable to the operation. Without translation, the gender theory will remain just that: theory. Translating gender perspectives to operational outcomes requires the ability to demonstrate effects to create purpose and consequence in a way that the staff can easily grasp. Gender dynamics are inherently complex; the skill is being able to take gender dynamics and reframe them to deliver the ‘so what’. It is also adapting and tailoring inputs so that it moves beyond generalisations. What this means in practice is having a core understanding of gender theory and societal gender dynamics and then overlaying the mission effects to identify where the connections exist. This also relies on being fluent in operational planning processes, systems and frameworks. Without this context, the gender advice will be rendered irrelevant and risks being overlooked.

⁶ Plans are usually relatively small Directorates that integrate the ideas and concepts of all other headquarters staff to visualise the future for the Commander, staff and related external organisation.

⁷ An operational design’s initial focus is on helping the Commander visualise the operational environment, understand the problem that must be solved and develop a broad operational approach that can create the desired end state.

This happens when a Gender Advisor first seeks to understand fully all aspects of the campaign, the plan and on-going operations, and future operations, before applying a gender perspective in the most appropriate way. This doesn't happen when instead they force generic, untar-geted and at times, irrelevant lists stating legal obligations instead of analysing the potential benefits (or risks) of the gender perspective brings. (Hellier, personal communication, 2020)

Military commanders are charged with delivering operational effects and end states. A GENAD must be able to draw threads through the operational plan to illustrate how the Commander can leverage gender to contribute to those outcomes or, conversely, the risk of not doing it. If commanders and staff are not able to see the direct link of how gender contributes to the mission, it will prove difficult to maintain support and traction.

As the CJTF-OIR entered Phase IV (the Support Stabilization phase), the focus shifted from tactical combat and training organic forces to a focus on operational-level advising and mentoring. During this phase, it was essential to shift the focus of the GENAD contribution to align with the progress of the campaign. This required adjusting to changes in the operational environment to avoid becoming entrenched in traditional gender activities that lose sight of operational-level opportunities.

A critical element to achieving this is the immersion of the Gender Advisor into the Operational Planning Team (OPT) – not as a specialist advisor but as a planner with specialist knowledge. If a Gender Advisor cannot value add to the planning effort then their specialist knowledge is often sidelined. (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

3.3. The nexus between Gender Advisors and Operational Planners

The ability to mainstream gender relies on the balance and diversity of skills between gender and military operations. The relationship between the GENAD and Operational Planners is complementary, with each party bringing their own expertise in their specialised areas. In the same way that gender subject matter experts bring a more in-depth understanding of the complexities of gender dynamics in populations, gender mainstreaming is equally reliant on the expert knowledge of operations staff to understand how gender can be operationally meaningful. The nexus between these areas makes gender theory operationally relevant and enables gender mainstreaming to be incorporated into operational planning activities (see [Figure 1](#)). The CJTF-OIR modelled best practice; it was the coming together of these two functions, the GENAD and the Plans Chief, that enabled gender to be applied to the CJTF-OIR Campaign Plan and Operational Orders in a way that was relevant, targeted and meaningful for the audience.

This can only be achieved when the planners fully understand and appreciate the importance and relevance of the gender perspective, and when the Gender Advisor fully un-

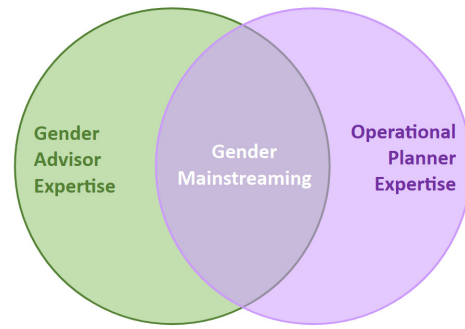


Figure 1. The Nexus between Operational Planners and Gender Advisors

derstands the plan, the phase and the activity. (Hellier, personal communication, 2020)

3.4. Leadership engagement

Commanders rely on headquarters staff leadership to identify and understand problems, visualise the future and drive change. For GPS concepts to be successful, it is essential that senior leaders embrace it as an enabler to operations and that a gender perspective is appropriately considered across all staff. (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

The level of authentic leadership support provided to the GENAD is the single most critical factor to its success. However, leadership support cannot be demanded or expected but rather needs to be garnered by demonstrating operational relevance and contributing to the mission. Success also relies on identifying and then influencing appropriate stakeholders who can facilitate outcomes and enable tangible operational contributions. This authentic leadership support was demonstrated in CJTF-OIR when the CJ5 Director had the foresight to identify opportunities at his level and progress gender within the higher headquarters and partner forces, thus, providing concurrent momentum to the work the GENAD was providing at the operational level.

Leadership is also important as it sets the tone for the staff to follow. Embedding the GENAD within the CJ5 provides a level of established leadership support that enables them to work across the breadth of staff functions, which facilitates access and influence across the headquarters. The leadership support provided by the CJTF-OIR Command Team created a permissive environment for the GENAD to operate. This working environment also relies on genuine leadership engagement on gender issues that pave the way for the GENAD to work at the practitioner level. Establishing leadership support through understanding and engagement highlights the importance of the capability where the leader creates an expectation of gender input from their staff rather than the GENAD having to push relevant information.

Ensuring successful integration of a gender perspective requires leaders, both commanders and staff leadership, to understand its' value and promote its application. While

the Gender Advisor provides specialist knowledge it cannot be left to them to drive its integration. The Gender Advisor must be empowered by leaders who understand and actively reinforce the opportunities provided by incorporating a gender perspective rather than just the risks of not doing so. (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

3.5. It's not me, it's you – empowerment and ownership

A critical enabler for gender mainstreaming is to create ownership and buy-in of the capability and its outcomes. Ownership is created 'through the process of association; the individual becomes psychologically tied to the target with it becoming part of their extended self', which leads to feelings of responsibility, protectiveness and stewardship (Pierce et al., 2001). Ownership of the role is important for the GENAD to generate will and patronage to facilitate their work. The mainstreaming approach taken in CJTF-OIR was based on a foundation of entrustment and delegation to empower staff to understand and apply gender perspectives in their work area and own the outcomes.

The more the Gender Advisor contributes to others, allowing others to champion, raise and echo the benefits of the gender perspective (or the risks of ignoring it), the more the gender perspective is bought into the core and not ignored or sidelined. (Hellier, personal communication, 2020)

Mainstreaming requires a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach. While the CJTF-OIR Command Group sets the tone and holds authority, it is at the practitioner level that peer-to-peer relationships are required to achieve mainstreaming. Investing in these relationships assists in building gender into the vernacular of practitioners across the headquarters to achieve normalisation. This also relies on gender perspectives to be applied in a way that is useful and digestible to enable staff to become confident in owning the content. Some of the notable achievements gained in CJTF-OIR were not due to the direct injection of the GENAD. It was the Information Operations and Civil-Military Teams who took carriage of gender considerations within their own portfolio with the GENAD supporting them. Once the staff branches of the CJTF-OIR were empowered, the results spoke for themselves: it was common for gender issues to be discussed by staff in operational forums.

To achieve gender mainstreaming in CJTF-OIR, there was a conscious effort to avoid the work of the GENAD being exactly as that. Preferring it to remain largely indistinguishable from routine operational effort, there was a deliberate approach to refrain from dedicated Gender Advisor products. It was not that gender-related issues were never featured during operational planning; rather, it was ap-

propriately integrated into broader remits. The point here was not to view gender as a standalone side concept that was part of the briefing and just as quickly forgotten. In the CJTF-OIR model, gender inputs were included as part of the product delivered by each staff function, including intelligence, information operations, civil environment or strategic communications. By building gender considerations into the operational product, it becomes normalised and demonstrates operational relevance. As one planner reflected, 'you have to bake it in, not sprinkle it on' (an effective analogy despite its gender nuances!).

Gender mainstreaming also ensured that gender issues were advocated by others and did not rely solely on the GENAD. As the often sole staff position, the GENAD simply cannot cover all bases. Therefore, by creating buy-in with other staff, gender issues are being driven by multiple people at multiple levels. For example:

- The Civil-Military Team brief on returning IDPs highlighted the challenges facing women and children IDPs.
- The Fires Advisor⁸ identified gender considerations in a target pack.
- The Public Affairs Team highlighted the role of women in organic security forces.
- The Operational Plans Chief discussed the risk of Da'esh women as part of briefing the Campaign plan.
- The CJ5 Director discussed gender as one of the four supporting concepts to the campaign to defeat Da'esh and build stability with his Iraqi Security Force counterpart.

Delivering gender in this way made it more powerful because it was part of the total force. It also allowed gender to become normalised and ensured a level of legitimacy because it was not understood as an add-on or an independent endeavour. The true measure of success is the survivability of the work independent of the Gender Advisor, which cannot be achieved without others being empowered to own it.

3.6. Know your scope, stay in your lane

The military environment is a unique and complex space to implement the GPS mandate. Gender equality resides within a global framework and exists at the national level of social, economic and political progress. As one element of national power, the military machine provides great leverage through the inherent influence, resources and planning that it commands. Yet, a military operation is often limited in scope and duration and bound by the requirements of a sovereign government or the United Nations. In CJTF-OIR, these limitations were temporal (2,500 personnel by January 2021), political (transition from Phase III to Phase IV), geographical (designated areas of Iraq and Syria) and threat based (Da'esh). The ability of the GENAD to successfully

⁸ The Fires Advisor is responsible for briefing on proposed joint effects for the Commander's approval.

navigate implementing the GPS mandate within the scope of the military mission was critical to being effective and relevant.

It is widely acknowledged in the Australian doctrine that to effectively address root causes of conflict, a comprehensive, whole-of-government response is required. Particularly at an operational level, the military cannot operate in a vacuum. The CJTF-OIR Phase IV operations required close coordination with other Unified Action Partners to address a range of broader root causes, political issues and environmental threats. These issues did not reside within the CJTF-OIR mandate but were critical to resolving the conflict. In this way, and demonstrating how gender equality supports regional stability and, in turn, the military mission, it was essential the GENAD understood the role, scope, strategic messaging and overall operating environment of CJTF-OIR. Stepping outside these boundaries would undermine the GENAD's credibility both internally and externally to the campaign. This is often a point of contention when working within an operational environment and an important consideration to understand. However, when done effectively, the GENAD can be provided with more buy-in and collateral with operators and thereby increase their sphere of influence. As an area that garners a level of passion in individuals, it is easy for this unbridled motivation to become detrimental. It is here that the GENAD must demonstrate awareness and balance and know how to apply feminist theory and gender advocacy in equal measure to operational priorities and military capabilities.

3.7. Standing in rather than standing out

In a military context, increasing women's participation in security forces is important to delivering GPS outcomes. This is because, globally, many security forces remain male-dominated despite the recent focus on providing more gender balance and representation. Having more gender-balanced forces adds to the capability where forces are expected to interact with both the population (such as questioning, search and detainment activities), which contributes to national outcomes such as increasing women's economic security through employment and providing representative perspectives in operational decision-making, which results in more tailored and effective outcomes.

The focus on delivering gender programs in security forces often receives the most attention as it is a direct, visible way to demonstrate gender in the operational setting. Tactically, the inclusion of women in the security forces is critical. As highlighted in the work by True and Eddyono (2017) on women's roles in preventing violent extremism in Indonesia, 'if you want to know what the security situation is...don't ask the military, don't ask the government, ask the women.' Without women, the security force is unable to fully engage with the community, collect intelligence or protect the force.

However, balancing traditional GENAD programming with systematic mainstreaming across the headquarters is critical to building cumulative, enduring effects. The nature of gender programs, including strategic and long-term tenure, means it is often invisible to the broader operational headquarters effort. This contributes to a lack of awareness or limited understanding of the GENAD's role, which limits their effectiveness within headquarters. It is also a very one-dimensional view of what GENADs can deliver in terms of operational capability. Therefore, the weight of the GENAD's effort across the headquarters is vital to maintaining influence and relevance and to prevent gender from being sidelined.

The appropriate balance between external activities (such as increasing woman's inclusion in security forces) and internal activities (such as planning, information operations, intelligence requirements, enhancing GPS amongst Coalition partners) needs to be determined based on the stage of campaign, the permissiveness of the threat operating environment, and the willingness of the partner to embrace in GPS. Forcing GPS on a partner in the short term can be counter-productive to the operational and strategic progress. (Johnstone, personal communication, 2020)

4. Conclusion

Examining the spectrum of experiences of how GENADs are employed, the answer of which is the most effective model of implementation likely lies somewhere in the middle. Applying a gender perspective to operations is an art, not a science; therefore, no single model or experience can provide the absolute solution. Become too specialised and you risk limiting yourself, and becoming too broad loses the detail needed for meaningful outcomes.

Credibility and dedication of the Gender Advisor is essential, as is the ability to truly understand planning and operations in order to make it relevant. Highlighting in real terms the benefits of utilising the gender perspective and the risks of ignoring it, must be best practice, but in doing so, must not be generic but tailored to the time and space of the particular campaign and operation. (Hellier, personal communication, 2020)

The CJTF-OIR model of applying gender perspectives to operations has all the hallmarks of the critical success factors discussed in this paper. The model had committed leadership support, was delivered as part of the broader operational mandate (not as a standalone topic), was owned by the staff (not the GENAD), and, most importantly, the model was operationally relevant. Gender became normalised as part of operational considerations.

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