

JIC Assessment, 9 June 2006

THE IRAQI SECURITY FORCES: FIT FOR DUTY?

This paper was discussed by the JIC and approved on 7 June 2006.

Key Judgements

- I. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) continue to grow, but capability remains very variable. Deficiencies in logistics, strike capabilities - armour, artillery and air - command and control and intelligence mean that unless the scale and sophistication of the insurgency diminishes, ISF will need support from Multinational Force (MNF) combat units beyond 2007 in Baghdad and the Sunni heartlands. Outside these areas the prospects for progressive hand-over of security responsibilities to Iraqis are better.
- II. **The Iraqi Army** is the most capable force. Iraqi units now take the formal lead in 5 of 18 provinces, including Baghdad. But this does not necessarily mean autonomous control: most remain restricted to supporting roles and basic military tasks such as static security and routine patrolling. None are capable of independent operations against sophisticated insurgents.
- III. **Iraqi Police Service (IPS)** effectiveness is patchy. The more capable National Police, largely confined to the Baghdad region, have provided effective support to MNF counter-insurgency operations. But there are serious problems of corruption, criminality, and divided loyalties; elements have taken part in sectarian attacks and are prone to Shia militia influence. We know little about the activities of the local IPS outside Baghdad and Basra.
- IV. Sectarianism within the ISF is probably growing, especially in the IPS reflecting the general rise in sectarian hostility following February's Samarra mosque bombing. The activities of some Shia elements of the police are fuelling the problem. There has been no significant intra-ISF violence to date, but in the event of more serious sectarian conflict, the cohesiveness of the few mixed units would be severely tested.
- V. The new government will take time to agree critical strategic security policy. Even if the Ministers of Defence and Interior prove capable and non-partisan, robust administrative capacity in these Ministries will take time to build. There is likely to be only limited progress during the rest of this year.
- VI. In southern Iraq, the Army's 10th Division is increasingly effective at basic duties, but remains untested in counter-insurgency operations without MNF support. The Police in the south are a cause for much greater concern. Many local Police officers, in Basra and Maysan in particular, remain loyal to their political faction or militia rather than to formal command structures.

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This paper was commissioned by MOD and examines progress in developing the Iraqi Security Forces, updating [the JIC assessment] issued on 12 October 2005.

Strength and effectiveness

1. The Iraqi security forces (ISF) continue to grow (see Annex), although many of the challenges we highlighted in October 2005 are still present. Since then the armed forces have expanded from 91,000 to 115,000 in May and Ministry of Interior (Mol) forces (mainly Police) from 106,000 to 138,700. Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq (MNSTC-I) predict that all 10 divisions of the Iraqi Army and all Mol forces will be fully "manned and equipped" by December 2006. This will require the rapid processing of a further 50,000 recruits in the next 6 months: for many, training continues to be basic. The ISF are increasingly being supplemented by dozens of private security companies and Ministries' own "Facilities Protection Services", with an estimated total of 144,000 personnel – larger than the Army. The loyalty and accountability of these forces is of serious concern.

2. According to current Iraqi security doctrine the Iraqi Army has the lead over Iraqi Police Services (IPS) in counter-insurgency operations outside Baghdad. The reverse applies in Baghdad. The Army is the most capable force, with many units contributing to the counter-insurgency effort. Basic capabilities and effectiveness are improving slowly, but the picture remains very variable. In October 2005, MNSTC-I judged that 35 out of 112 Iraqi Army battalions were capable of undertaking operations with Multinational Force (MNF) support; this figure has now risen to 64. Iraqi units now have the formal lead in 5 of 18 provinces including Baghdad; MNSTC-I assess this will be the case in all provinces, less al Anbar, by the end of this year. But "lead" does not necessarily mean autonomous control and the majority of units remain restricted to supporting roles, carrying out basic military tasks such as static security and routine patrolling. None are capable of independent operations against sophisticated insurgents in the Sunni heartlands and Baghdad. All depend on the MNF for armour, artillery and air.

3. IPS effectiveness is patchy. The more capable National Police¹, largely confined to the Baghdad region, have provided effective support to MNF counter-insurgency operations. But we judge that there are serious problems of corruption, criminality, and divided loyalties; elements have taken part in sectarian attacks and are prone to Shia militia influence. We know little about the activities of the local IPS outside Baghdad and Basra, but the poor security situation, the need to support the counter-insurgency campaign and a lack of institutional experience means they are almost wholly ineffective in their prime role of tackling crime.

Sectarianism and the militias

4. We judge the scale of sectarianism within the ISF is probably growing, especially in the police, reflecting the more general intensified sectarian hostility following February's Samarra mosque bombing. The activities of some Shia elements of the police are fuelling the problem. We judge that Shia militia influence in the IPS is particularly strong: their loyalty remains largely to their political and militia leadership.

¹ Re-named Special Police Commando and Public Order Battalions.

[...] the National Police have been heavily infiltrated by the Badr militia; the exposure of the human rights abuses at Mol run detention facilities have reinforced Sunni fears of what they see as Shia-dominated Mol.

5. Data on the ethno-sectarian make up of the ISF remains limited. MoD policy is to seek sectarian balance where possible. Of the 10 Army divisions, 3 are heavily Shia (over 90%), a further 3 are Shia-dominated, 2 are mostly Kurdish and 1 is relatively mixed, which is unsurprising given that 5 are based on National Guard divisions recruited locally in 2003. Among the top three senior Army officer grades, representation broadly reflects the national confessional breakdown: Sunnis 20%; Shia about 50-60%; the Kurds 20%-30%. The National Police are Shia-dominated (72% of personnel), although Sunnis are better represented at senior levels. Local police are recruited from the communities in which they serve: Sunni, Shia, and Kurds largely policing their own areas.

6. There has been no significant intra-ISF violence to date. There have been a few small-scale clashes, but the causes are often unclear and may be due to tribal or criminal rivalries. But in the event of more serious general sectarian conflict, we judge that the cohesiveness of the few mixed ISF units would be severely tested.

A difficult environment

7. The ISF have expanded rapidly in a very difficult operating environment. In some areas (such as Sadr City) ISF have to compete with militias for primacy in the delivery of security. As the ISF grow, they are increasingly being attacked by insurgents: suicide and vehicle bombings, large-scale co-ordinated attacks, and assassinations have resulted in rising casualty levels. They lack the MNF's ability to protect themselves: only some 20% of attacks target the ISF, but they suffer 25% more daily casualties than the MNF. Intimidation and kidnapping is common. Confirmed cases of infiltration of the ISF by Sunni insurgents and jihadists are rare, but fear of such infiltration continues to be divisive. Overall morale of ISF personnel varies between units and is difficult to gauge, but operational confidence depends heavily on MNF presence. Polling suggests that popular support for the ISF has fallen in recent months and is significantly lower than a year ago, particularly among Sunnis. Nevertheless, recruitment levels remain generally strong: in some areas the ISF offer one of the few sources of paid employment.

Strategic policy stagnation

8. The Ministerial Committee for National Security were effective in providing strategic security guidance for the December 2005 elections and in responding to the Samarra mosque bombing. But in general the effectiveness of central government security structures has been patchy, and operational planning remains MNF-led. Progress on some of the key administrative issues undermining ISF effectiveness has been stymied by the protracted negotiations over government formation, and the continued lack of Ministers of Defence, Interior, and National Security, capable of working together. The ITG was unable to achieve consensus on a national security strategy to address the insurgency, criminality or the problem of militias.

9. There is a lack of trust between the MoD and the Mol; [...]. Co-ordination between the two has been poor. Administrative capacity is developing very slowly, hampered by overly bureaucratic working practices, unwillingness to delegate responsibility and [...] Neither the MoD nor Mol can administer their rapidly expanding forces effectively. [...] and equipment shortfalls continue. The ability to disperse funding

effectively or completely remains fragile. Corruption is endemic and [...] it may have intensified as some officials have sought to take advantage of the delay in government formation. The problem has been made worse by senior Ministry officials, provincial governors, and Police chiefs using ISF employment to reward loyalty to their respective political parties and tribes. In MND(SE) the 38,600 registered IPS are more than a third above the agreed number; salaries now consume 70% of the MoI's budget.

10. Operational command and control capabilities are developing slowly. National and Provincial Joint Co-ordination Centres have been established across Iraq, bringing together police and military personnel. But the system is only partially capable. Effective MoI command and control is limited to Baghdad. Their relationship with provincial police remains confused. Iraqi Army divisional and brigade headquarters have been established, but leadership and effectiveness varies and depends on MNF advisers and parallel MNF structures. Intelligence collection and analytical capabilities are improving, particularly in the MoD, but suffer from lack of co-ordination between competing Ministry organisations. [...]

The situation in the south

11. The ISF in the south reflect the deep-rooted local tribal and political influences. The Army's 10th Division in MND(SE) is rated by the MNF as increasingly effective. It has performed basic tasks such as patrols and static guard duties successfully, but remains untested in counter-insurgency operations without MNF support. The Police in the south are a cause for much greater concern. Many local Police officers, in Basra and Maysan in particular, remain loyal to their political faction or militia rather than to formal command structures. Both Badr and JAM retain support among the ISF in different parts of the south. We judge that these divided loyalties would affect the ability and willingness of the police to cope in the event of an intensified campaign of violence by Shia militias against the MNF, or fighting between Shia factions. Under MNF pressure, some remedial action has been taken by local authorities: a Basra Police intelligence unit involved in supporting attacks on the MNF has been disbanded (although the personnel have been reassigned rather than sacked). But Baghdad's central institutions have been unable to exert any control over the police in Basra.

Prospects

12. The ISF is steadily improving, but we continue to judge that to generate the capabilities required to combat a sophisticated insurgency will take time. The MNF plan is to maintain substantial forces capable of supporting the ISF until the end of 2007, and for advisory teams to stay at least until 2009. But deficiencies in logistics, strike capabilities - armour, artillery and air - command and control and intelligence mean that unless the scale and sophistication of the insurgency diminishes, ISF will need support from MNF combat units beyond 2007 in Baghdad and the Sunni heartlands. Outside these areas the prospects for progressive hand-over of security responsibilities to Iraqis are better.

13. The new government will take time to agree critical strategic security policy. Even if the Ministers of Defence and Interior prove capable and non-partisan, robust administrative capacity in these Ministries will take time to build. We judge there is likely to be only limited progress during the rest of this year in the face of a virulent insurgency and continuing sectarian violence. The need to absorb Shia militias will add to the challenges and could exacerbate sectarian tensions; but a failure to do so would undermine the authority of the government.

ANNEX

Iraq Security Force Levels (as at 1 May 06)

Iraqi Security Forces – Ministry of Interior

COMPONENT	CURRENTLY TRAINED AND EQUIPPED	
	1 May 06 ²	4 Oct 05
POLICE ³	97,300	69,949
NATIONAL POLICE ⁴	19,800	17,866
BORDER ENFORCEMENT	21,000	17,303
DIGNITARY PROTECTION	600	662
TOTAL	138,700 ⁵	105,780

Iraqi Security Forces – Ministry of Defence

COMPONENT	CURRENTLY TRAINED AND EQUIPPED	
	1 May 06 ⁶	4 Oct 05
ARMY ⁷	104,600	79,277
SPECIAL OPERATIONS	1,100	1,487
AIR FORCE	600	262
NAVY	800	750
COMBAT SUPPORT, SERVICE SUPPORT & TRAINING UNITS	7,900	9,646
TOTAL	115,000 ⁸	91,422

² Approximate figures, not including Facilities Protection Service personnel estimated at 144,000.

³ The regular Police incorporates former Highway Patrol units.

⁴ The National Police incorporates former Public Order Battalions, Police Commando Battalions, Mechanised Police Battalions and the Emergency Response Unit.

⁵ Latest figure for June 06 is 148,200

⁶ Approximate figures.

⁷ Includes mechanised and armoured elements and the former National Guard.

⁸ Latest figure for June 06 is 117,400