

JIC Assessment, 17 January 2007

IRAQI SECURITY FORCES: PROSPECTS IN 2007

This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on 17 January 2007.

Key Judgements

- I. The Iraqi government's approach to security reflects its sectarian make-up: the Shia and Kurds want to take control of security in their own areas first. Plans for dealing politically with the Sunni Arab insurgency remain unclear. There is no coherent Iraqi national security strategy.
- II. The lack of united national political direction is reflected in Iraq's national security machinery which remains un-coordinated and only partially effective: undermined by personal and party rivalries, endemic corruption and the absence of a capable bureaucracy. This is unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future.
- III. The Iraqi security forces (ISF) – particularly the army – continue to develop. But the speed of improvement is still not matching the deteriorating and increasingly complex violence. The army is far more capable than the police, but standards vary considerably between units. Effectiveness depends on the quality of Iraqi leadership and willingness to fight but, more importantly, on the command, control, and logistic support provided by embedded Multinational Force (MNF) teams.
- IV. The bulk of the Iraqi Police Service is largely ineffective in tackling crime or supporting counter-insurgency operations. Many police turn a blind eye to insurgent or militia activity; others are actively involved. The National Police (NP) is a more capable force, but a large minority is also involved in sectarian kidnappings and executions. Such deep-rooted problems in the NP may be irreversible in the current sectarian climate.
- V. The success of new US plans will depend in part on the willingness of the Iraqi government to take on sectarian and political militias. Maliki will not take action which risks breaking the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and bringing down his government. Only a small proportion of the ISF are currently both willing and able to take on the Shia militias. In Baghdad the ISF will need support from MNF combat units beyond 2007. Similar support will be required in the Sunni Arab heartlands if *de facto* control of large areas is not to pass to the insurgents.
- VI. Outside Baghdad and Sunni Arab areas, prospects for transfer to Iraqi security control are better. Successful transfer to Iraqi (Kurdish) control in the north is imminent. In the south, although attacks on the MNF will continue, the ISF can provide basic security. But in the event of serious intra-Shia fighting, the police would probably fragment and the army would try to remain on the sidelines.

IRAQI SECURITY FORCES: PROSPECTS IN 2007

This paper was commissioned by the Iraq Senior Officials Group and examines developments in Iraqi security strategy, the readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces and the prospects of transition of security to Iraqi control. This updates [the JIC assessment] dated 9 June 2006.

Iraqi security strategy

1. The first six months of Prime Minister Maliki's government has seen deepening sectarian violence and attacks on Multinational Forces (MNF) reaching new highs. There has been no coherent Iraqi national security strategy in response; attention has focussed almost entirely on Baghdad, where security is worst. The government continues to press hard for accelerating Iraqi control of security throughout the country. We judge its approach to security reflects its sectarian make-up: the Shia and Kurds want to control their own areas first. So far three provinces have been handed over in the south with the three Kurdish provinces in the north expected to follow shortly. In these areas – where the threat from Sunni insurgents and jihadists is least – we judge Maliki's government is prepared to take more risks by relying increasingly on Iraqi security forces (ISF) and reducing the MNF presence.
2. This is not the case in Sunni Arab areas. Plans for dealing politically with the Sunni Arab insurgency remain unclear. We continue to judge that national reconciliation is making little progress: long-standing Sunni Arab concerns remain largely unaddressed while the continuing lack of any tangible government action against Shia militias and the handling of Saddam's execution have added to Sunni Arab alienation. Most senior Iraqi politicians recognise that continued MNF support remains critical in the Sunni Arab heartlands and Baghdad (and increasingly in mixed provinces).
3. Iraqis remain uncomfortable with unfamiliar MNF processes; many are being circumvented. We judge the Iraqis will increasingly adopt their own measurements of effectiveness of the ISF. These will not always match Coalition expectations or standards: they may not need to do so.

National security structures

4. The Ministerial Committee for National Security - chaired by Maliki - is taking on more strategic planning. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has benefited from MNF engagement, performing better than the Ministry of Interior (Mol). We judge that both ministries are better able to direct their forces, albeit inconsistently. Some efforts have been made to correct deep-seated problems. But the lack of united national political direction is reflected in Iraq's security machinery which remains largely un-coordinated and, we judge, only partially effective: undermined by personal and party rivalries, endemic corruption and the absence of a capable bureaucracy. This is unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future. [...]
5. Both the Mol and MoD still face significant difficulties in effectively administering their rapidly expanding forces. Both the army and police are still heavily dependent on MNF logistic support: there have been several instances where units have run out of ammunition. Corruption and sectarianism still permeate the Mol. [...]

The Iraqi armed forces

6. Iraq army strength stands at some 135,000 on paper (see Annex). Maliki has asked for an increase of about 30,000: MNF believes this figure will be met by December 2007. But average divisional strength in the army is only 87% of the establishment; operational strength is reduced further by high absenteeism in some units, and the training of new recruits is not keeping pace with increasing casualties, now averaging 25 a day. Recruitment in Sunni Arab areas is a particular problem; divisional strength in Anbar is only 59% on paper and in reality likely to be much less.

7. We continue to judge that the army is far more capable than the police, but standards vary considerably between units. Effectiveness depends on the quality of Iraqi leadership and the willingness of Iraqis to fight, but more importantly, the command, control, and logistic support provided by embedded MNF teams. Equipment capability is improving, but many units still lack armoured vehicles for patrolling, and in many cases, the firepower to take on well armed insurgents and militias. In December the MNF assessed that only 12 out of 112 Iraqi army battalions were capable of independent operations; most of these are to be found within certain largely Kurdish brigades. A further 77 battalions were assessed as capable of taking a lead with MNF support. MNF predict that all units will be capable of planning, executing and sustaining counter insurgency operations independently by September. We judge this is unlikely.

8. We continue to lack complete data on the ethnic make-up of most Iraqi army units. We judge that many army units contain individuals and groups who cooperate with either Sunni Arab insurgents or Shia extremists. We have little hard evidence to show the scale. The problem may be worse in largely Shia units: [...] This collaboration with Shia militias is increasing tension with more mixed and Sunni Arab led units. But across Iraq there has still been no reported intra-ISF violence.

9. In MND (SE) the predominantly Shia 10th Division is already operating independently in the provinces of Muthanna, Dhi Qar and much of Maysan. As with other units, their performance has been mixed. In August elements refused orders to deploy to Baghdad, and in September they allowed Shia militias to overrun Camp Abu Naji in Maysan. But despite reported comments by the former Commander of 4 Brigade that up to 50% of his unit was sympathetic to JAM, they successfully and impartially policed a cease-fire in Amarah between JAM and Badr. In Operation Sinbad in Basra units conducted cordon and search operations independently and effectively and in one instance intervened in a public order disturbance. We judge 10th Division is slowly improving and gaining confidence, but it remains prone to interference from local government and militia pressure. It is likely to prove fragile if confronted by serious Shia militia violence.

10. The Iraqi Navy and Air Force were transferred to Iraqi control in September. The Navy currently has a handful of patrol boats and is not expected to acquire anything larger for at least 12-18 months. We judge its ability to provide protection to Iraq's critical offshore oil infrastructure will depend on MNF support well into 2008 and possibly beyond. The Air Force maintains a small transport and reconnaissance fleet and is looking to establish a small armed helicopter capability. There are no immediate plans for acquiring strike aircraft.

The police and other law-enforcement agencies

11. The Iraqi Police Service (local police) has reached its manning target of 135,000. We continue to judge that the bulk is largely ineffective (certainly by Western standards) in tackling crime or supporting counter-insurgency operations. Corruption is endemic. Many police turn a blind eye to insurgent or militia activity; [...] Plans to bring the Facilities Protection Service (about 140,000) under Mol command have not been implemented: they still report to 27 separate Ministers and elements have been heavily implicated in kidnapping and sectarian killings. The Department of Border Enforcement (28,000) is similarly prone to tribal and militia influence. It is having limited effect in preventing movement of extremists and weapons; [...]

12. The National Police (NP) (a centrally controlled paramilitary force), largely confined to the Baghdad region, is a more capable force of about 24,000. We believe the great majority of the NP is Shia. Some specialist units have proved particularly effective against both AQ-I and JAM, but we judge a large minority is involved in sectarian kidnappings and executions; [...] A (four week) process of retraining and longer term reform is underway, but we judge that such deep-rooted problems may be irreversible in the current sectarian climate.

13. Reporting from all sources shows that the police in MND (SE) are plagued by corruption, poor leadership and the entrenched influence of Shia militias. [...] Disruption of the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) in Basra and continuing efforts at reform are having some impact. [...] 69 sealed arrest warrants against SCU officers remain outstanding.

Prospects for transition

14. The ISF – particularly the army – continue to develop. But the speed of improvement is still not matching the pace of the deteriorating violence, which is increasingly complex and sectarian. The Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) has had only partial and temporary successes, partly due to the limited effectiveness of the ISF, but also because operations have been restricted to mainly Sunni Arab areas for political reasons. New US plans are focussed on tackling the complex security challenges in Baghdad. Their success will depend in part on the willingness of the Iraqi government to take on sectarian and political militias. We continue to judge that Maliki will not take action which risks breaking the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and bringing down his government. We also judge that only a small proportion of the ISF are currently both willing and able to take on the Shia militias. We continue to judge that in Baghdad the ISF will need support from MNF combat units beyond 2007. Similar support will be required in the Sunni Arab heartlands if *de facto* control of large areas is not to pass to the insurgents.

15. MNF are now scheduled to transfer control of security to the ISF in all 18 provinces by November 2007. In Baghdad and Sunni Arab areas transfer is feasible, but it will be untidy and ill-defined (an Iraqi solution) and risks friction with local MNF commanders. Outside these areas, prospects are better. Successful transfer to Iraqi (Kurdish) control in the north is imminent. In the south, although attacks on the MNF will continue, we judge that the ISF can provide basic security. They are already doing so in Muthanna and Dhia Qar provinces. But in the event of serious intra-Shia fighting, we judge that the police would probably fragment and the army would try to remain on the sidelines.

Annex - Manning establishments

	Current establishment	Target establishment
Army ¹	134,783	166,057
Special Forces	1,523	1,523
Navy ²	1,135	1,492
Air Force ³	902	1,900
Police	135,000	135,000
National Police	24,400	24,400
Border Guard	28,360	28,360
Dignitary Protection	500	500
Facilities Protection	144,000	144,000

¹ The army currently fields an unknown number of light to medium armoured vehicles from 4x4s to medium armed HMMWVs and BTRs.

² The navy currently maintains 5 Patrol boats and 34 small craft including ribs and small assault craft.

³ The air force currently maintains 3 C-130s, 15 helicopters and a handful of light aircraft for reconnaissance.