

## Cover Story

IRAQI TROOPS

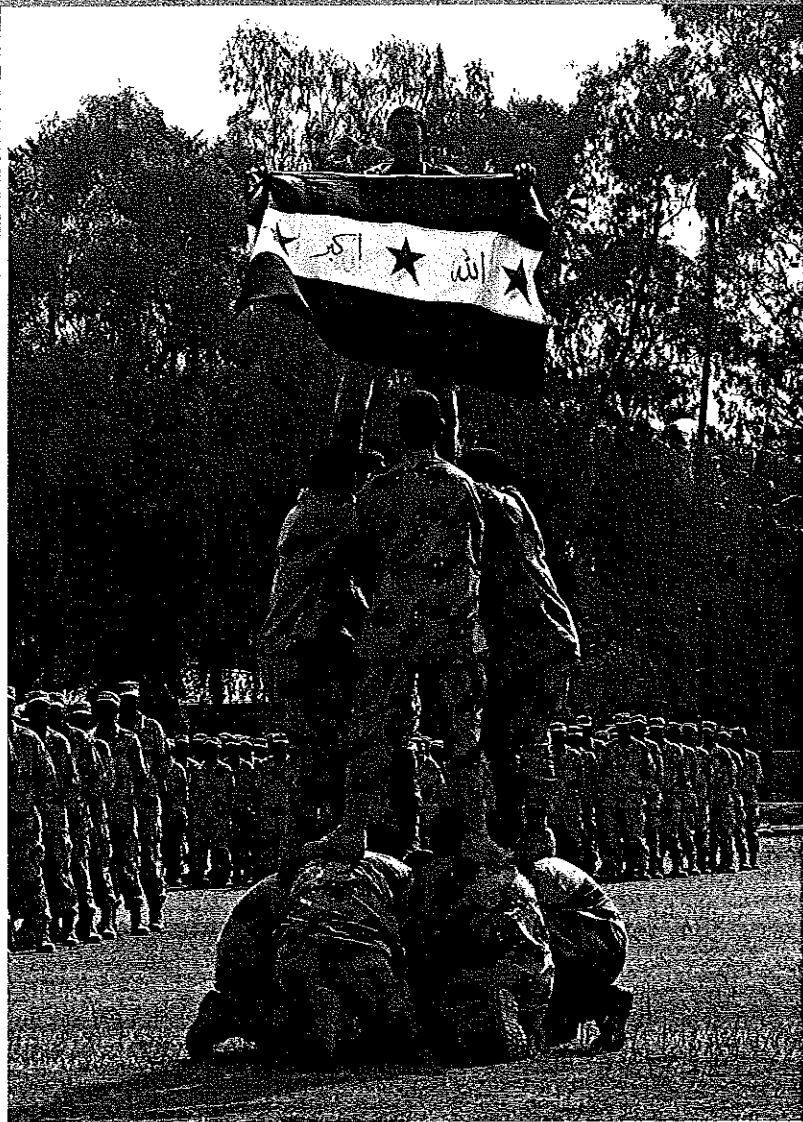
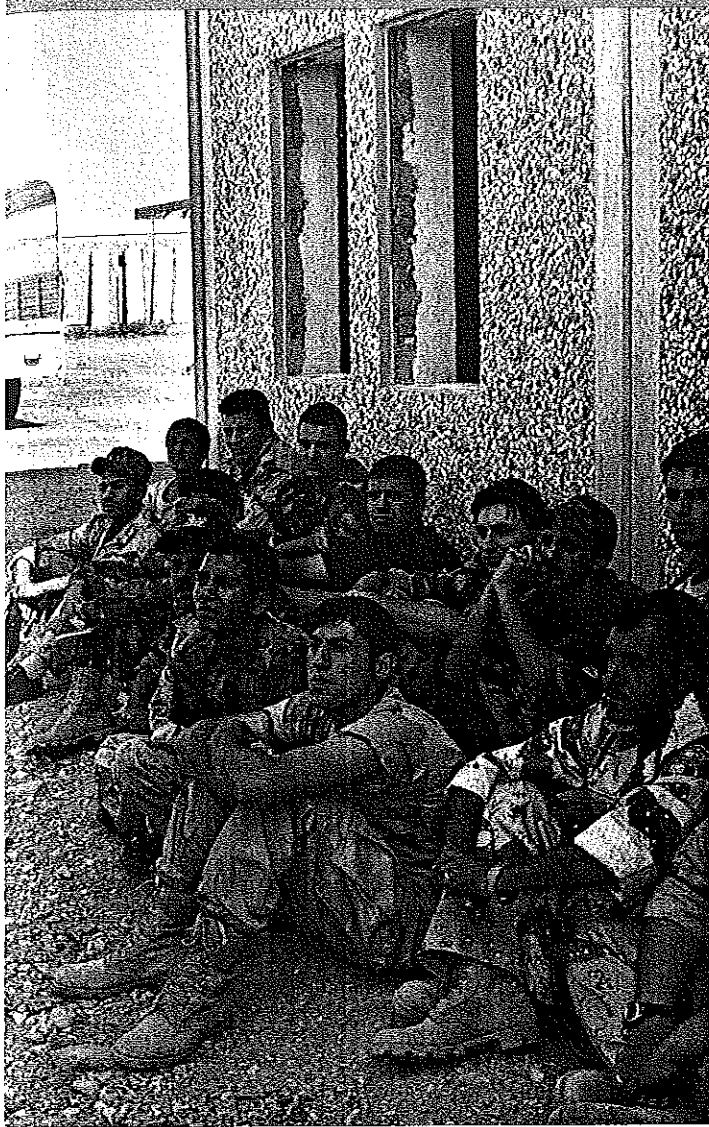
Can the U.S. train Iraq's military and police to be the anchor that steadies the country, or will they become part of the sectarian storm that tears it apart?

By James Kitfield



# The Thin Iraqi Line

**B**AGHDAD—Even to the trained eye, Iraq is a land of deep shadow and blinding light. And shades of moral ambiguity are as infinite as the ever-changing russet tones of the desert. Look closely past the bright smiles and pleasantries of some Iraqis in uniform and you will find dark deeds and blood-soaked hands, just as many a stern visage hides acts of courage and selfless patriotism. Each day, U.S. commanders in Iraq try to decide where between those extremes lies the true face of the Iraqi forces they are constantly training.



On this morning, U.S. Army Col. J.B. Burton peers out the window of his armored Humvee as it navigates the badlands of northwestern Baghdad. He's trying to discern, simply by the cut of their uniforms, the nature of Iraqi security units at the numerous checkpoints that sift traffic throughout the city. Because Burton and his fellow brigade commanders directly oversee the U.S. Military Transition Teams embedded full-time with Iraqi security forces, they have unusually keen insight into the uneven nature of the new Iraqi army and police units.

At a checkpoint in a religiously mixed neighborhood, Burton nods approvingly toward an Iraqi army soldier in full body armor, his AK-47 at the ready, the reflection of a unit that means business. As Burton's small convoy moves north into an overwhelmingly Shiite neighborhood, the colonel points to a checkpoint sentry wearing the familiar powder-blue uniform of the Iraqi police. The man has neither body armor nor a personal weapon.

"He knows he has nothing to fear, because his unit is totally in league with the JAM militia," Burton said, referring to the local followers of anti-American firebrand Moktada al-Sadr, whose Jaish al-Mahdi militia (more commonly known as the Madhi Army) is increasingly active in this Shiite stronghold. Last year the militia was largely responsible for death-squad

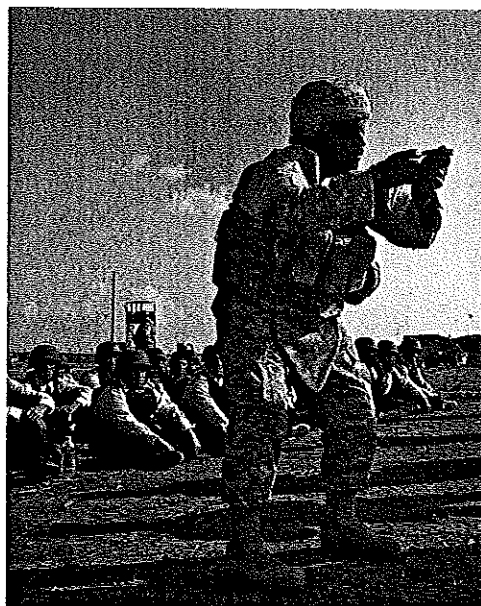
**SCHOOL DAYS**  
A U.S. general talks to an Iraqi national police brigade (left), and Iraqi army soldiers (right) celebrate graduation from basic training.

murders that nearly pushed the country over the precipice into all-out civil war. Recently, Burton had to intercede when the Iraqi police unit in question began openly flying the distinctive black flag of the Mahdi militia at its checkpoints.

### A Sovereign Nation

Burton is driving across town for a weekly intelligence briefing with one of his Iraqi counterparts, Col. Fallah Hassan Kinbar, commander of the Shiite-dominated Kadamiya Security District in northwest Baghdad. In a tribal society that prizes interpersonal relationships and one-on-one transactions, such frequent face time is essential to the U.S.-Iraqi military partnership. During the briefing, the two officers talk candidly, both expressing relief that an Iraqi army brigade from the southern Shiite city of Basra had recently been redeployed out of Baghdad. The brigade's ill-treatment of young men in a Sunni neighborhood had exacerbated sectarian tensions. Burton and Fallah hold many midnight visits, sipping tea or sharing ice cream as they attempt to bridge the gulf between two very different worlds and military cultures.

Back at the headquarters of his Dagger Brigade Combat Team, Burton peers deeper into the shadows, requesting a classified briefing on sectarian influences in the Iraqi security



■ **The fledgling Iraqi security forces** will almost certainly not be ready to independently stand up to the powerful forces tearing at Iraqi society any time close to the 18 to 24 months cited by some U.S. officials.

■ In a little over a year, Iraqi and U.S. officials have adjusted upward by 50 battalions the number of Iraqi troops **needed to keep order**—well over 100,000 additional soldiers and police officers.

■ American trainers must temper their professional “can-do” attitude with an awareness of the **major setbacks and failures that have plagued past efforts** to build up Iraqi security forces.

forces in his area. Intelligence analysts have constructed a pyramid schematic tracing command relationships and ties between Iraqi military and police leaders and various militias and extremist groups. Next to Col. Fallah’s picture is a yellow mark that designates a trusted leader. Roughly a third of the officers in the command schematic, some more highly placed than Fallah, are tagged with a red mark indicating corruption, criminality, or participation in sectarian violence.

The uniformed miscreants include a general fired for corruption who still meets with former subordinate officers for private dinners; a senior Iraqi officer with ties to Iranian intelligence who runs a kidnapping, extortion, and murder ring on the side; and a fiercely anti-coalition commander who directs cells that plant roadside bombs aimed at U.S. forces. Multi-National Force-Iraq has issued arrest warrants for some of the officers, but others are considered virtual “untouchables” because they enjoy protection from well-placed Iraqi politicians.

“There are cases where we can’t touch corrupt officers who are too insulated politically, and in those instances I try and make it an Iraqi problem, because at the end of the day this is a sovereign nation with its own rules and laws,” Burton said. At first the Iraqis almost invariably insist that their hands are tied. But Burton and other U.S. commanders say that relentless pressure usually brings results: Corrupt or tainted officers are either quietly fired or, more likely, reassigned to desk jobs, the better to avoid unduly dishonoring their families or tribes.

“I constantly take up the issue of bad apples with trustworthy Iraqi commanders, letting them know that *we know* these guys are corrupt and that we can’t work

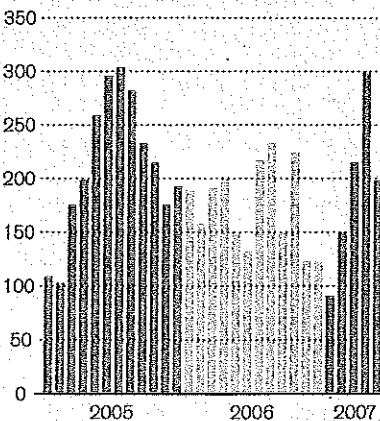
with them effectively,” Burton said. “But unless the Iraqi government changes policies that seem to support one sectarian group or agenda over another, we will continue to face these sectarian challenges within the Iraqi security forces.”

The problems of corruption, sectarian favoritism, and anti-coalition activities involving Iraqi forces are not just academic for Burton and his Dagger Brigade. A few months ago, Col. Tom Felts, the chief of a brigade Military Transition Team, left a late-night meeting at headquarters to drive back to the Iraqi army unit where he lived and worked as a full-time mentor and trainer. Along the way Felts and his driver came upon an unmanned Iraqi army checkpoint on a deserted Baghdad street.

As they slowly rolled through the checkpoint, a roadside bomb exploded, killing the men instantly—two more victims in a land of deep shadow and blinding light.

■ **Dangerous Detail**

**IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY DEATHS, BY MONTH**



NOTE: Totals are compiled from news reports and are not independently verified; actual totals may be much higher.

SOURCE: *icasualties.org*

**A Moving Target**

With a Democratic majority in Congress clamoring for an expedited withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, and with many U.S. military leaders increasingly pessimistic that the current Iraqi government can move beyond sectarian agendas to reach a political reconciliation that tempers the violence, the country’s future may hinge on the answer to a simple question: Will Iraqi security forces prove capable and incorruptible enough to anchor a fractious and violence-racked society when the time comes for them to stand up as U.S. and coalition forces inevitably begin to stand down?

A reporter’s recent trip through the cogs of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, the unit in charge of training Iraqi forces—which included interviews with numerous senior generals and Iraqi officials in palace head-

quarters and ministry penthouses, as well as visits to Iraqi training centers and with front-line U.S. and Iraqi forces—suggests that no easy answer exists. As overly optimistic assessments by U.S. commanders in past years have shown, sweeping generalizations about the true size and readiness of Iraqi security forces are apt to be misleading and counterproductive.

On paper and in briefing slides, the Iraqi forces are impressive. But the figures bear parsing. Officially, the MNSTC-I (“min-sticky” in soldierspeak) has helped to train and equip 348,000 Iraqi security personnel, including 151,800 Iraqi army troops, a 26,300-member paramilitary national police force, and 135,000 local police officers. Of the 110 major forward operating bases, about 88 have been transferred to Iraqi control. Eight of 10 Iraqi army divisions have taken the lead in battling the insurgents in their assigned areas of operations, according to the U.S. Defense Department. All nine national police brigades have been committed to the U.S. troop surge in Baghdad.

Despite those apparent signs of progress, the view from the ground in Iraq strongly suggests that fledgling Iraqi security forces will almost certainly not be ready to independently stand up to the powerful forces tearing at Iraqi society any time close to the 18 to 24 months cited by some U.S. officials as far back as November 2005.

Although MNSTC-I may have trained and equipped 348,000 troops and police officers, a conservative estimate would reduce that total by 15 to 25 percent because of battlefield attrition, desertions, and absences without leave. Even determining how large a force is needed to control the country is difficult—in a little over a year, Iraqi and U.S. officials have adjusted that number upward by 50 battalions, or well over 100,000 additional soldiers and police officers.

## History Is Not Promising

Within that total of 348,000, wildly disparate capabilities are represented, even among regular Iraqi army units. As the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington recently reported, Iraqi army troops are considered relatively well trained and equipped as light infantry, and less influenced than the police by sectarian agendas; Iraqi national police are moderately well prepared but somewhat more susceptible to sectarian influences; and the local police are frequently outgunned by insurgents and highly susceptible to sectarian influences. It’s commonly agreed that Iraqi forces are acutely short of qualified midlevel leaders in a leader-centric military culture, and that for many years they will likely require such U.S. “enablers” as logistics support, airpower, reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities, and high-tech command-and-control systems.

U.S. and coalition commanders at MNSTC-I must also temper their professional “can-do” attitude with an awareness of the major setbacks that have plagued past efforts to build up Iraqi security forces. Most notably, in spring 2004, some Iraqi army and National Guard units trained by the U.S. Army and private contractors refused to fight when confronted by a Sunni insurgent uprising in Falluja and a revolt by Sadr’s Mahdi Shiite militia. In 2005 and again in 2006, U.S. attempts to speed up the handoff to Iraqi forces and begin a pullback to fewer bases collapsed when the Iraqis were unable to cope with militia attacks and rising sectarian violence.

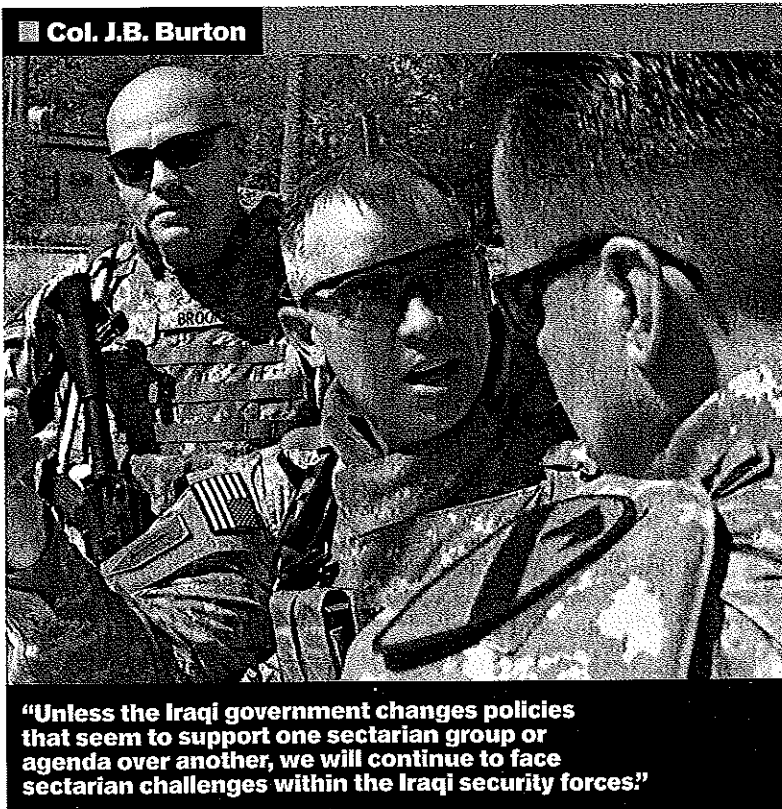
Proponents of a speedy transfer of authority to Iraqi security forces should also ask themselves some of the questions that bedevil U.S. commanders in the country every day. How are U.S. authorities to judge official corruption in a culture where graft is an accepted part of doing business? What is an unacceptable

level of sectarian influence among security forces whose roots are grounded in tribes and religious sects? Even if you conclude that Iraqi forces are adequately trained and equipped, and that enough of them are able and willing to fight, you still haven’t answered the most imponderable question of all: For whom or what will they fight? Will it be for Iraq, or for some sectarian allegiance or ethnic faction?

## Some Hard Lessons

The insurgent mortar barrage that rocked the Green Zone on a recent morning was the largest in anyone’s memory—a dozen thunderous explosions tracing a ragged path of destruction that sent workers at MNSTC-I headquarters scrambling for their helmets and body armor. In the public-affairs office, old soldier and press officer Edgar Castillo muttered to himself as the blasts came steadily closer, reverberating in the sternum and sending a neural message to the brain to flee or take cover, whichever was handiest. “This is not good,” Castillo said under his breath. “This is *not* good.”

The attack killed two Iraqi workers. The near-daily mortar assaults on the Green Zone (which one security supervisor there called “less green by the day”) illuminate a larger truth that bears directly on the development of Iraqi security forces. U.S. officials once thought that those forces would have time to expand and mature in a relatively benign environment;



Col. J.B. Burton

JAMES KITFIELD

**“Unless the Iraqi government changes policies that seem to support one sectarian group or agenda over another, we will continue to face sectarian challenges within the Iraqi security forces.”**

now the Americans acknowledge that raw Iraqi units are quickly being thrown into the maelstrom.

"In the early days, we built Iraqi forces on the assumption that the levels of violence would go down, but now we assume that they will have to take over in an environment of elevated violence, and that's affected our view of how the Iraqi security forces need to change in the next couple of years," said Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey, head of MNSTC-I. As the commander of the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad in 2003-04, a division whose tour was extended because of Sunni and Shiite attacks on American forces in the spring of 2004, Dempsey knows all about adjusting on the fly.

In an interview in his Baghdad headquarters, Dempsey told *National Journal* that MNSTC-I has fully incorporated the hard lessons of 2004 into its operations, most notably in the greater emphasis on continued U.S. mentoring of and partnership with Iraqi units in the field. (See Q&A, p. 33.) Dempsey and MNSTC-I have also focused considerable energy on reforming Iraq's Defense Ministry (which oversees the Iraqi army) and Interior Ministry (which oversees the national and local police forces). Indeed, for the first time the Iraqi government this year will spend more on its security forces than the United States will (\$7.5 billion versus \$5 billion). Although their performance has been uneven, the Iraqi ministries have also assumed primary responsibility for paying security-force salaries, providing basic training, buying fuel, and purchasing major equipment.

"One of the chief lessons of 2004 was that we had built up, and paid the salaries for, Iraqi security forces that were loyal to us rather than to a government of Iraq, and when pressed they weren't willing to put their families at risk for a coalition they weren't sure would be around very long," said Dempsey, who took over MNSTC-I in 2005 from Gen. David Petraeus, now the top commander in Iraq and the architect of the surge policy. "That convinced us we had to also take responsibility for developing the ministries of Defense and Interior, so we had visibility over the entire system from the individual soldier or policeman all the way up to the ministers' offices. Today if a soldier is having pay problems, for instance, we now have the ability to go all the way to the top to fix it. So that was a really important milestone in this mission."

### Trial by Fire

Shortly after the launch of last year's unsuccessful Operation Together Forward, which was designed to reclaim Baghdad from sectarian violence, warning signs once again began flashing in U.S. headquarters in Iraq, signaling a critical shortfall in Iraqi forces. Army brigades designated for the joint operation were arriving in the capital with only 60 to 65 percent of their authorized manpower. Even worse were reports that some Iraqi field commanders were urging their troops not to deploy. Al-

### Iraqi Police



About 135,000 local police have been trained, and plans call for training another 60,000. Numerous senior police officials have been replaced recently for incompetence, corruption, or sectarian leanings.

though the Defense Ministry moved quickly to replace the rebellious officers, some observers saw the situation as depressingly reminiscent of the crisis of 2004, raising doubts about the entire effort to establish Iraqi security forces as institutions of national unity.

On further study, however, it became apparent that the new Iraqi units had not been designed or adequately equipped to be a mobile, readily deployable force. That was especially true of the five Iraqi divisions that began life as National Guard units, because their ranks were filled by locally recruited soldiers who had expected to stay in their home areas where the divisions were based.

"Early in Operation Together Forward, Iraqi units arrived in Baghdad below strength, and people took that as a big signal that Iraqi commanders were unwilling to send troops to fight in Baghdad. But there was a lot more to the story," said Brig. Gen. Terry Wolff, who commands the Coalition Military Assistance and Training Team in Iraq. "We assumed the new Iraqi battalions should be able to deploy like our own, but we should have

known better. Why would we believe that, when the Iraqi battalions were being deployed from contested battle space near their families and homes?"

Because of the danger of leaving home districts and military bases unprotected from insurgents and looters, Iraqi commanders left approximately 20 percent of their forces behind as a rear guard, Wolff said. In addition, roughly 20 percent of the troops were on leave, official or otherwise. The result was the badly undermanned units that initially arrived in Baghdad.

"In my estimation perhaps as much as **40 percent** of the Iraqi police are still tied into some militia group."

—Col. Michael Galloucis



PHOTOS (L TO R) AP/GETTY IMAGES/MOHAMMED SAVAH; AP/GETTY IMAGES/MARWAN IBERAHIM

age. "By and large, the reports we get from our Transition Team leaders is that the Iraqi army units in the field are a work in progress," Wolff said. "They are slowly improving but not in great leaps, and we often don't know how good or bad they are until we get into a fight and can assess their leaders in combat."

### The Problem Is Iraqi Politicians

As his Black Hawk banks low over the desert of southeastern Iraq, Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hunzeker looks out at flocks of sheep and occasional camel herds as they scatter and run, spooked by the helicopter's rotors. The shepherds in flowing white robes hardly glance skyward. Once the outer belt of Baghdad disappears in a dun-colored haze, the Iraqi countryside is revealed in all its poverty and primitive grandeur, vast tracks of scrubland dotted with villages of small mud huts without windows or doors, and the ragged tent encampments of the Bedouin. Locals will tell you that the nature of modern Iraq is inseparable from that of the desert nomads and their ancient bloodlines—tough, tribal, fiercely combative.

A tall officer with an imposing build and an infectious laugh, Hunzeker is flying to the Numaniya National Police Academy southeast of Baghdad. As the commander of MNSTC-I in charge of developing the Iraqi national police, he wants to view firsthand a brigade that has experienced extended combat in the capital and has suffered from poor leadership.

To fix the problem, MNSTC-I and Iraqi officials last year approved a pool of 30,000 Iraqi troops to fill out deployed forces, part of a 24-battalion increase in the total number of Iraqi forces. A new assessment of force levels is expected to yield a plan for 25 more battalions. The plan would also include an additional 60,000 police officers. Efforts are also in place to give Iraqi army units additional armored protection and route-clearing capability to increase their mobility.

U.S. commanders chalk last year's initial troop shortage up as one more lesson in a steep learning curve for what was always a high-risk operation: birthing an Iraqi security force to throw into combat even as the units are still learning to stand on their own. Another hard lesson of last year's Baghdad offensive was the recognition that, especially in Iraq, good field leaders make all the difference in combat performance, and that the country has too few of them.

"What we've learned from recent Baghdad operations is that the quality and readiness of Iraqi army units varies widely, and the difference usually comes down to leadership," Wolff said. The Iraqi military culture's reluctance to delegate authority to junior officers, its emphasis on rote obedience, and its lack of a strong noncommissioned officers corps, he said, all place greater emphasis on the quality of battalion commanders and their midlevel officers.

"We've seen that good Iraqi leaders have good units and bad ones don't, and we shouldn't kid ourselves about the fact that the Iraqi army is short of midcareer officers and NCOs," Wolff said. "We know it, the Iraqis know it, and we're working together to address it." Wolff noted, however, that the Iraqis have so far resisted U.S. advice to speedily promote promising junior officers and sergeants who prove themselves in combat. Some senior Iraqi commanders apparently view such field promotions as usurping their authority and ability to dispense patron-

Originally built on an isolated patch of desert to house Saddam Hussein's intelligence services, the sprawling Numaniya complex includes the National Police Academy and an Iraqi army training ground, and it represents an American faith in continuous professional education that MNSTC-I officials are trying to transplant to Iraq's military culture. At Numaniya the message is emphasized repeatedly: Even combat-seasoned units need ongoing training to further the professional development of officers and the tactical proficiency of front-line troops. By the end of this year, all nine Iraqi national police brigades will rotate out of operations in Baghdad to undergo a four-week training regimen at Numaniya; there they will service equipment, requalify soldiers on weapons, promote junior leaders, and essentially recharge the brigade's batteries.

The new commander of the 6th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division is Col. Raad Ismael, and in talks with Hunzeker and the Numaniya instructors he is frank about his unit's struggles in Baghdad. Raad said that the 6th Brigade probably succeeded in only 60 percent of its missions, because of faulty intelligence from headquarters about the location of insurgents and militiamen, and because of the brigade's own mistakes. His soldiers had not yet learned to care for their equipment properly, and some even refused to wear their helmets regularly—at least until snipers began firing on them. Then the helmets were strapped back on in a hurry.

According to Raad, in the past 30 months the 6th Brigade has suffered 143 killed and about 375 wounded out of an authorized strength of 2,500 soldiers. That relatively high casualty rate, coupled with death threats to the families of some of his troops, adds up to a monthly attrition rate of 5 to 8 percent. On the bright side, Raad insists that morale and discipline remain generally high and that some of his troops are excellent marks-

men. He says he has discovered some educated soldiers in his junior ranks whom he hopes to promote to sergeant.

"Tell your Congress that even though Baghdad has not gotten much better yet, the problem is not the Iraqi army or police," Raad said to a reporter, a comment that was repeated by others in Iraq's professional military ranks. "The problem lies with Iraqi politicians."

### Time Is a Precious Commodity

The head of the U.S. Military Training Team embedded with the Iraqi 6th Brigade is Lt. Col. Douglas Metcalf, a weathered reservist who seconds most of Raad's comments. Echoing other MiTT Team members, Metcalf said the 6th Brigade struggles mainly with training and developing junior leaders and with supporting itself in the field, a challenging task because of the inadequate Iraqi logistics systems.

"I will tell you that we spend a disproportionate amount of our time trying to come up with ways to sustain junior officer training, and to improve an immature logistics system," Metcalf said, noting that U.S. forces are still supplying more than half of the fuel that keeps his unit rolling. "On the other hand, at the individual soldier level, they are willing to fight. We've been in a number of firefights with them, and my personal feeling is that if we pushed them harder, the Iraqis are ready to step up and take more responsibility for combat operations."

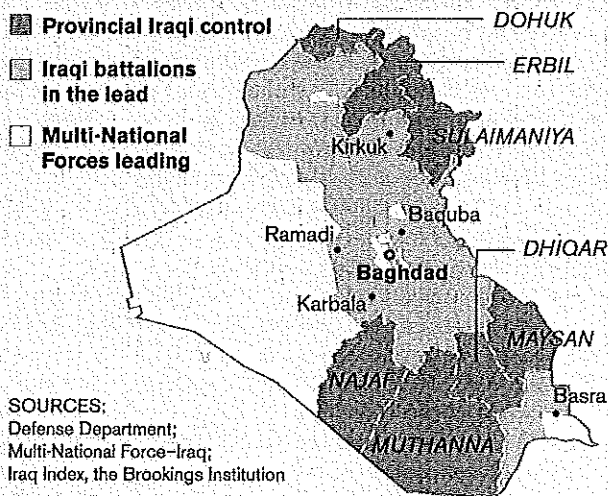
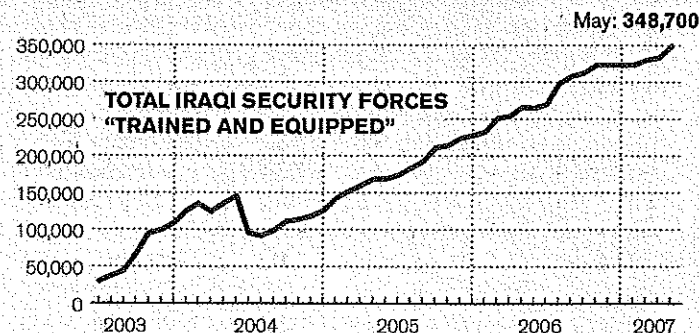
Back at MNSTC-I headquarters, Gen. Hunzeker is asked how far he thinks the United States has come in building an institutional framework that can support the Iraqi army and police force after the Americans withdraw, especially given the lack of democratic traditions in Iraq and the fact that Iraqi security forces are coming of age in the middle of a vicious war and insurgency.

"The two biggest surprises to me since coming to Iraq are the complexity and time involved in this enterprise, because we haven't attempted nation building on this scale probably since Germany," Hunzeker said, emphasizing that it took U.S. forces nine years in a relatively benign post-World War II environment to launch a German police force. By contrast in Iraq, he says, de-Baathification virtually wiped out the entire civil service of competent professionals. Relevant ministries operate on only a few hours of electricity a day. The officials in charge come from opposing political and sectarian parties with competing agendas. And insurgents continue their campaign of bombings, ambushes, and assassinations against the nascent security forces.

"In that scenario, time becomes a precious commodity because when you look at the history of successful counterinsurgency campaigns, they are endurance events," Hunzeker said. When pressed on why he believed Iraqi security forces would stay above the sectarian fray and evolve into institutions of national unity—rather than become a club in the hand of one

## Assessing Iraq's Security Forces

The U.S. has trained nearly 350,000 Iraqi troops and police, but their capabilities and reliability are uneven. Iraqi authorities are now in control of seven provinces, but that includes three in Iraq's north that have long been stable under Kurdish forces. Iraqi troops are leading in other areas but with strong U.S. backup.



### 44% Army

The strongest of the Iraq security forces, the army is considered relatively well trained and equipped, and serves primarily as light infantry. Overseen by the Defense Ministry, its units are the least susceptible to sectarian influences and corruption.

### 8% National Police

A paramilitary force not unlike a U.S. National Guard Military Police unit, the Iraqi national police are trained in basic military tactics as well as policing duties. Wards of the Interior Ministry, they are considered somewhat more susceptible than the army to sectarian influences.

### 39% Local Police

Viewed as enforcers during the Saddam Hussein era, local police today are the most uneven and vulnerable of the Iraqi security forces. They are often outgunned by insurgents, and are considered highly susceptible to sectarian influences and intimidation. They come under the Interior Ministry.

### 9% Other Forces

This hodge podge of troops includes border patrol and facility guards, as well as personal security detachments. Under current plans, most will come under Interior Ministry oversight.

NOTE: Iraqi air force and navy, part of the Defense Ministry Forces, make up less than 1% of the total.



**A Trusted Partner**

**Col. Fallah Hassan Kinbar (in light uniform), a commander in northwest Baghdad, is highly regarded by U.S. officers, but others in the Iraqi army hierarchy are marked by corruption and criminality.**

sect or another—Hunzeker ticks off the numerous cases of senior police officials who have been recently fired, including a corrupt police chief and a battalion commander whose unit was suspected of extrajudicial killings.

“That represents a huge breakthrough!” Hunzeker exclaimed, referring to a process that has weeded out seven of nine national police brigade commanders for incompetence, corruption, or sectarian leanings. “The fact is that despite immense political pressure placed on the minister of Interior, every single time I’ve taken a case of incompetence or sectarian behavior by a senior commander to him, corrective action has been taken.”

### One Honest Man

Every approach to the massive Iraq Interior Ministry building on Baghdad’s east side tells of human drama with a violent end. Suicide car bombers have attacked all three of the building’s major entrances. A pair of suicide bombers with explosive vests killed 36 police officers and cadets in December 2005 at a nearby police academy, one of the worst attacks on Iraqi police. A few months ago a group was caught trying to smuggle explosives into the building.

A U.S. liaison team stationed at the ministry believes the attacks are evidence of the unwanted attention that one honest man in power can attract in Iraq. Maj. Gen. Ahmed Taha Hashim Mohammed Abu-Ragheef is the ministry’s head of Internal Affairs. Ahmed, 39, is the man responsible for policing the Iraqi police. In a ministry and police force that was notoriously infiltrated and co-opted by Shiite militias and officials blind to rampant corruption, Ahmed’s honesty, U.S. officials say, has made him the proverbial one-eyed king.

Ahmed, supported by Interior Minister Jawad al Bolani, is cleaning house. In one four-month period, 2,000 ministry personnel were arrested, fired, or forced into retirement, includ-

ing 30 brigadier generals. Ahmed’s investigations led to the firing of Ramadi’s inspector general for chasing his wife through the streets firing his AK-47, and to the arrest of a brigadier general for selling passports. Ahmed sacked seven major generals for not reporting to work. He fired at least 1,450 employees for having criminal records and 40 for cowardice. He suspended an entire police brigade suspected of taking part in death squads.

U.S. officials in Iraq point to this cleaning up at the Interior Ministry, led by Gen. Ahmed and Minister Bolani, as the basis for much of their faith that the Iraqis can eventually purge their ministries and security forces of the worst sectarian influences. No one kids themselves, however, that the job is complete—or risk-free.

Though Ahmed is rumored to be a distant descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, his aggressive efforts to bring legitimacy to Iraqi police forces have made him a marked man. He has survived 13 assassination attempts that killed six of his personal security guards and wounded three others. Insurgents have killed one cousin and wounded another cousin and his brother. Ahmed’s deputy director was assassinated, and the father of his personal driver murdered. After an unexploded bomb was removed from his

house, Ahmed moved his family to an undisclosed location. Since 2005, 34 of the ministry’s Internal Affairs officers have been killed, and another 45 wounded.

In his 11th-floor ministry office, Ahmed was asked by a reporter why in the world anyone would want such a job. For a moment he broke into a broad grin that softened the stern face set off by short-cropped black hair and a goatee already flecked with gray. The overall impression was of a man of substance and great self-confidence.

“If I listened to my family I would never even leave the house! I would just stay home,” Ahmed told *National Journal*. “When I took this job I told the minister that there were some bad actors in the department, and I asked whether he would support me. Because there is no doubt that political influence is everywhere, and this work is a fertile field for political interference. And Minister Bolani said that he would stand up against political interference, and that we would work together for all Iraqis, and for all of Iraq.”

Whenever he talks privately to friends and family about the terrorism and rampant criminality that grip Iraq, Ahmed says the conversation inevitably turns to the need for good Iraqis to unite to overcome the threats. “God willing, that is the example I’m trying to set,” he said. “I hope American leaders will continue to support Iraqis who are trying to help unite the country. Not the sectarians or the nationalists, but the Iraqi patriots. That’s who I would ask America to back.”

### A Sectarian Cancer

Almost every U.S. commander in Iraq has a measurement, official or otherwise, for gauging the level of sectarian corruption in the Iraqi security forces. As the officers methodically train and equip Iraqi forces, watching them grow and mature faster than Iraq’s body politic and worrying about that imbalance, they of course want to answer the most impor-

**6th Brigade of Iraqi National Police**



**Army Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hunzeker (tallest man in back) is helping develop Iraq's national police. He said that the task is the equivalent of what the U.S. Army faced in Germany after World War II.**

derable question of all: For whom will these forces fight?

Col. Michael Galloucic, commander of the 89th Military Police Brigade in Baghdad, has accompanied Gen. Ahmed's Internal Affairs teams on enough surprise inspections of local police stations to tip his scale in the direction of the patriots. "I will tell you that we have strong evidence of militia influence in all of the Iraqi security forces, and in my estimation perhaps as much as 40 percent of the Iraqi police are still tied into some militia group," Galloucic said. The number involved in actual illegal behavior or sectarian activities is much lower, he said, probably between 15 and 20 percent. "And because of General Ahmed's very robust Internal Affairs investigations, that number is trending down. We're seeing more police leaders untainted by sectarian ties or corruption."

Weighing down the other end of the sectarian scale is the recent example of the Samarra brigade. Sunni insurgents' bombing of Samarra's Golden Dome mosque last year lit the powder keg of sectarian violence that nearly tore Iraq apart. Consequently, U.S. officials have carefully watched the formation of the police brigade for Samarra—a majority Sunni town—whose job it will be to protect the rebuilding of one of the holiest sites in the Shiite religion.

U.S. officials were initially pleased that brigade commander Lt. Gen. Adnan Thabit submitted a roster for his unit that was relatively balanced between Shiites and Sunnis. Later, Iraq's Office of the Commander in Chief dismissed Thabit, however, and submitted another proposed roster for the Samarra brigade that

was made up of 99 percent Shiites, with many of the proposed commanders known to have links to Shiite militias.

Brig. Gen. David Phillips has spent so much time in Iraq and among Iraqis that colleagues sometimes accuse him of "going native," but Phillips said he had never seen such blatant sectarianism at such a high level. "That was the smoking gun of a sectarian agenda that we never had before, because it revealed a high-level and concerted effort from inside the Iraqi government to insert Shiite leadership with militia ties into an important security organization, and to polarize security forces," said Phillips, MNSTC-I's deputy commander for civilian police assistance.

After Gens. Petraeus and Dempsey threatened to withhold all U.S. training and support for the Samarra brigade, the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki eventually relented, reinstating Gen. Thabit. "The lesson of the Samarra brigade is that we have to maintain absolute, constant vigilance, and use all of our resources and influence as leverage to press back against sectarian agendas and keep this system honest," Phillips said. "Because sectarianism is a cancer in this country, and it could eat the Iraqi security forces from the inside out." ■

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