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Battling for Iraq

**By David H. Petraeus Sunday, September 26, 2004**

BAGHDAD -- Helping organize, train and equip nearly a quarter-million of Iraq's security forces is a daunting task. Doing so in the middle of a tough insurgency increases the challenge enormously, making the mission akin to repairing an aircraft while in flight -- and while being shot at. **Now, however, 18 months after entering Iraq, I see tangible progress. Iraqi security elements are being rebuilt from the ground up. The institutions that oversee them are being reestablished from the top down. And Iraqi leaders are stepping forward, leading their country and their security forces courageously** in the face of an enemy that has shown a willingness to do anything to disrupt the establishment of the new Iraq.

**In recent months, I have observed thousands of Iraqis in training and then watched as they have conducted numerous operations.** Although there have been reverses -- not to mention horrific terrorist attacks -- **there has been progress in the effort to enable Iraqis to shoulder more of the load for their own security, something they are keen to do.** The future undoubtedly will be full of difficulties, especially in places such as Fallujah. We must expect setbacks and recognize that not every soldier or policeman we help train will be equal to the challenges ahead.

Nonetheless, **there are reasons for optimism. Today approximately 164,000 Iraqi police and soldiers (of which about 100,000 are trained and equipped) and an additional 74,000 facility protection forces are performing a wide variety of security missions.** Equipment is being delivered. Training is on track and increasing in capacity. Infrastructure is being repaired. Command and control structures and institutions are being reestablished.

Most important, Iraqi security forces are in the fight -- so much so that they are suffering substantial casualties as they take on more and more of the burdens to achieve security in their country. Since Jan. 1 more than 700 Iraqi security force members have been killed, and hundreds of Iraqis seeking to volunteer for the police and military have been killed as well.

Six battalions of the Iraqi regular army and the Iraqi Intervention Force are now conducting operations. Two of these battalions, along with the Iraqi commando battalion, the counterterrorist force, two Iraqi National Guard battalions and thousands of policemen recently contributed to successful operations in Najaf. Their readiness to enter and clear the Imam Ali shrine was undoubtedly a key factor in enabling Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani to persuade members of the Mahdi militia to lay down their arms and leave the shrine.

**In another highly successful operation several days ago,** the Iraqi counterterrorist force conducted early-morning raids in Najaf that resulted in the capture of several senior

lieutenants and 40 other members of that militia, and the seizure of enough weapons to fill nearly four 7 1/2-ton dump trucks.

**Within the next 60 days, six more regular army and six additional Intervention Force battalions will become operational. Nine more regular army battalions will complete training in January, in time to help with security missions during the Iraqi elections at the end of that month.**

Iraqi National Guard battalions have also been active in recent months. Some 40 of the 45 existing battalions -- generally all except those in the Fallujah-Ramadi area -- are conducting operations on a daily basis, most alongside coalition forces, but many independently. **Progress has also been made in police training. In the past week alone, some 1,100 graduated from the basic policing course and five specialty courses. By early spring, nine academies in Iraq and one in Jordan will be graduating a total of 5,000 police each month from the eight-week course, which stresses patrolling and investigative skills, substantive and procedural legal knowledge, and proper use of force and weaponry, as well as pride in the profession and adherence to the police code of conduct.**

Iraq's borders are long, stretching more than 2,200 miles. Reducing the flow of extremists and their resources across the borders is critical to success in the counterinsurgency. **As a result, with support from the Department of Homeland Security, specialized training for Iraq's border enforcement elements began earlier this month in Jordan.** Regional academies in Iraq have begun training as well, and more will come online soon. In the months ahead, the 16,000-strong border force will expand to 24,000 and then 32,000. In addition, these forces will be provided with modern technology, including vehicle X-ray machines, explosive-detection devices and ground sensors.

Outfitting hundreds of thousands of new Iraqi security forces is difficult and complex, and many of the units are not yet fully equipped. But equipment has begun flowing. Since July 1, for example, more than 39,000 weapons and 22 million rounds of ammunition have been delivered to Iraqi forces, in addition to 42,000 sets of body armor, 4,400 vehicles, 16,000 radios and more than 235,000 uniforms.

Considerable progress is also being made in the reconstruction and refurbishing of infrastructure for Iraq's security forces. Some \$1 billion in construction to support this effort has been completed or is underway, and five Iraqi bases are already occupied by entire infantry brigades.

Numbers alone cannot convey the full story. The human dimension of this effort is crucial. The enemies of Iraq recognize how much is at stake as Iraq reestablishes its security forces. Insurgents and foreign fighters continue to mount barbaric attacks against police stations, recruiting centers and military installations, even though the vast majority of the population deplors such attacks. Yet despite the sensational attacks, **there is no shortage of qualified recruits volunteering to join Iraqi security forces.** In the past couple of months, more than 7,500 Iraqi men have signed up for the army and are preparing to report for basic training to fill out the final nine battalions of the Iraqi regular army. Some 3,500 new police recruits just reported for training in various locations. And two days after the recent bombing on a street outside a police recruiting location in Baghdad, hundreds of Iraqis were once again lined up inside the force protection walls at another location -- where they were greeted by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. I meet with Iraqi security force leaders every day. Though some have given in to acts of

intimidation, many are displaying courage and resilience in the face of repeated threats and attacks on them, their families and their comrades. I have seen their determination and their desire to assume the full burden of security tasks for Iraq.

There will be more tough times, frustration and disappointment along the way. It is likely that insurgent attacks will escalate as Iraq's elections approach. **Iraq's security forces are, however, developing steadily and they are in the fight. Momentum has gathered in recent months. With strong Iraqi leaders out front and with continued coalition -- and now NATO -- support, this trend will continue. It will not be easy, but few worthwhile things are.**

The writer, an Army lieutenant general, commands the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq. He previously commanded the 101st Airborne Division, which was deployed in Iraq from March 2003 until February 2004.

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