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Developing Iraq's Security Sector

The Coalition Provisional Authority's Experience

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Summary

Soon after the coalition's occupation of Iraq began in April 2003, it became evident that prewar assumptions about the security situation that would follow the ouster of Saddam Hussein had been unduly optimistic. The environment was not benign—in fact, it was deteriorating. Iraqi security forces had largely disintegrated, and those that remained were incapable of responding to rising criminality and political violence. In this environment, the coalition confronted three security imperatives: (1) to restore order and neutralize insurgents and terrorists; (2) to rebuild Iraqi security forces, which could eventually take on responsibility for Iraq's security; and (3) to build security sector institutions, such as national security management institutions, the interior and defense ministries, and the justice sector, to ensure that the Iraqi security sector could be an effective bulwark for a democratic Iraq in the future.

At the time that the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) handed over authority to the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) on June 28, 2004, it was clear that the coalition had made little progress in the first task. Insurgent and terrorist violence was escalating, organized crime was flourishing, and the security situation was threatening both the political transition and the reconstruction program. The coalition's record on the second and third tasks, however, is somewhat less simply categorized. From April 2003, the coalition embarked on efforts to rapidly field Iraqi security forces and to build security sector institutions. This effort was broad in scope, but its

implementation was patchy, its results were varying, and its ultimate success or failure remains difficult to determine.

Significant analysis has focused on the inability of the coalition to adequately counter political violence and crime in post-Saddam Iraq. There has also been considerable discussion about the coalition's effort to develop Iraqi security forces. The matter of institution-building, however, has been largely ignored by observers and policy-makers; it is often seen as a long-term issue that is too far removed from immediate security needs. But the three efforts are interdepend-ent: Iraq's future security depends on its indigenous security forces, and these forces' success and sustainability depend on the institutions that support them. This report concerns itself with the efforts to build both forces and institutions in Iraq. It provides a historical record of the coalition's experience and seeks, insofar as is possible at this early stage, to draw lessons from the successes and failures of that experience.

Invalid Assumptions

Coalition prewar planning had assumed a benign security environ-ment and an Iraqi police force able to maintain order. A limited amount of preparation had been undertaken to provide advisory teams to reform the Iraqi security ministries and forces, but a large-scale program to restructure and rebuild them was not envisaged. When prewar assumptions proved invalid in the course of 2003, the coalition struggled both to maintain order and to improvise plans for the reconstruction and reform of Iraq's security sector.

In the face of growing and multiple insurgencies, these plans increasingly focused on rapidly training and fielding Iraqi forces. Institutional development proceeded in parallel but as less of a prior-ity. When the November 15, 2003, agreement shortened the CPA's timeline, setting a dissolution date at the end of June 2004, the coali-tion began to focus much more on building Iraqi capacity for self-governance. However, programmatic delays combined with the very

short time horizon hampered the implementation of the capacity-building, reform, and institution-building programs.

The Security Sector at Transition—and Beyond

It is not surprising that, at the end of June 2004, when the IIG took power, the Iraqi security sector was unable to guarantee basic public safety, let alone enforce the rule of law. Nor should it come as a surprise that this remains the case in early 2005, at the time of this writing. Whether assessed in terms of numbers of trained personnel, deployment of equipment, creation of infrastructure, unit operational capability, institutional development, command and control mechanisms, or governance arrangements, the reconstruction and reform program is clearly still in its early stages. This can be seen in the following seven key elements of Iraq's security sector.

Iraqi National Security Institutions

Despite a late start, there was actually significant progress in this area, perhaps in part because it was considerably less labor intensive than several others. The CPA had, by June 2004, helped Iraq's political leaders to establish national security institutions, most notably a Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS). This committee had engaged in policymaking and strategy development, and its supporting institutions had begun to be built. The committee was continued under the IIG by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. However, there is little sign yet of the development of true coordination between ministries at working levels, facilitated by a national security advisory staff. The reversion to hierarchical, patronage-based stovepipes is a real danger in Iraq, which, if it occurs, would reduce the quality of national security policymaking.

The Defense Sector

The effort to create a defense ministry from scratch in less than half a year was, from the beginning, recognized to be likely to produce a partial solution. The effort focused on identifying appropriate per-

sonnel at a variety of levels. This decision may serve Iraq well if the new Ministry of Defense (MoD) is permitted to mature into a well-established organization. However, the failure to institutionalize key reform processes in the MoD, evidenced by the speed with which some of the personnel were bypassed upon the departure of the CPA, makes it uncertain whether this maturity will be achieved. The institutional weaknesses of the MoD are a particular problem because the Iraqi Armed Forces are developing rapidly. While this is important to meet immediate security requirements, it poses two serious risks: (1) that the armed forces will grow rapidly into a powerful institution, only nominally governed by a weak civilian ministry, or (2) that they will become primarily an internal security force, rivaling a range of other internal security actors.

The Interior Ministry
When the CPA formally abolished all the other Iraqi security institutions, the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) was thrust into the front line of both public safety and counterinsurgency. This was a mission for which it was not postured, trained, or equipped. Under Saddam, the police had a secondary status; all serious internal security tasks were handled by other security and paramilitary entities. Not only did the coalition expect the police to move from being a neglected, secondary player to being a professional police force, it encouraged the police to do so in the face of an extreme level of violence that no democratic police force in the world would have likely been able to face.

Against this background, by July 2004, the police recruiting, training, equipping, and infrastructure development programs were making progress, compared with their abysmal state early in the occupation. These improvements have largely continued. With the continued injection of foreign funds, equipment, advisors, and military support, the police and border forces are likely to develop considerable capability by mid-2006. However, delays in particular programs, such as the police communications network and national identification systems, are likely to constrain the effectiveness of these forces considerably.

Furthermore, there remain serious concerns in two areas. First is the ability of the IPS to deal with political violence and with serious, well-armed insurgents and organized criminals, efforts that may admittedly be beyond the scope of any police force. This creates a requirement for specialized internal security units and leads to the continued domestic use of MoD troops. Second is the slow pace of institutional development in the interior ministry. This creates concerns about the long-term governance structures and democratic accountability of Iraq's internal security forces.

Infrastructure Security

The bulk of the infrastructure security forces, the Facilities Protection Service, is, by design, minimally trained and has limited functions. However, such critical ministries as oil and electricity are deploying increasingly professional security forces that are helping to make their infrastructure more resilient. An important outstanding issue to be dealt with is the regulation of private security firms and the ability of the state to dispense with the services of tribal guards. The legal framework regulating such structures is not being effectively enforced, and semiprivatized guard forces continue to proliferate.

The Justice Sector

Considerable progress was made in judicial reform between April 2003 and the end of June 2004, with the completion of a process to vet all sitting judges and the passage of legislation to create an independent judiciary. This progress, however, was in spite of the fact that this sector never received the support it deserved. A long-term program of institutional development and training across the rule-of-law continuum was not developed by the coalition during the occupation and is only now being defined. It is also vital that combined judicial and law enforcement institutions be developed, ones that are able to confidently tackle organized and violent crime. The wider anticorruption effort, meanwhile, was pursued in a piecemeal manner; there is no certainty that the measures taken will succeed. Furthermore, bringing Iraq's prisons up to a humane standard will take

many years of intensive commitment by Iraqi and international bodies.

The Intelligence Services

The failure to develop an integrated, coordinated Iraqi intelligence apparatus ranks as an important CPA failure. Although there was initial reluctance within the CPA to work on intelligence reform, given the terrible record of Iraq's intelligence services in the past, it should have become quickly evident that an Iraqi-owned, democratically accountable intelligence capability coordinated across the security sector would be critical to the success of both the counterinsurgency campaign and the fight against organized crime. Iraqi intelligence capacity was instead developed in a stovepiped and uncoordinated manner.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)

A formal DDR process was not appropriate in Iraq, since the armed forces had self-demobilized. It is clear that the loss of status among former officers, the lack of jobs, and a plentiful supply of weaponry have been factors in fueling the insurgency. The coalition addressed these concerns with a stipend program and the appointment of "clean" former officers to the security forces and ministries. The lesson may be that, while demobilization was unnecessary and disarmament perhaps unfeasible, more resources should have been devoted to reintegration from the start of the occupation.

In relation to militias, the late start and limited staff and budget applied to the transition and reintegration (TR) process made success unlikely from the start, even if the political circumstances had been more propitious. From February through June 2004, significant progress was made, but without ongoing support from either the IIG or the coalition nations, the TR effort was doomed to languish.

Assessing Progress

Based on a threefold model of progress in security sector reform that includes change at the level of individuals, institutions, and integrative tendencies, we can make some tentative, qualitative generalizations as to how much progress was made in the Iraqi security sector.

At the level of individuals, the coalition did make a major effort to remove Saddam-era officers and senior officials steeped in the abusive and corrupt ways of the old regime. These individuals would otherwise have been a brake on reform, as has indeed happened in the interior ministry, where many Saddam-era personnel remained in place. The coalition also had some success in informing Iraqi political leaders and senior officials about the principles of good security sector governance.

The bulk of the coalition's reform work concentrated on building effective security sector institutions, notably the ministries. The primary focus was on building their managerial and administrative capacity, but efforts were also made to inculcate reformed practices. There is a striking difference, for instance, between the defense ministry—rebuilt from scratch along U.S.-UK lines—and the interior ministry, which has been only marginally touched by reform efforts. Institutional reform has therefore been patchy but in any case is a very long-term process that will only succeed if future Iraqi leaderships champion the cause.

Integration across the security sector and with the wider society is also a mixed story. The MCNS and to some extent local-level joint coordination centers were partial success stories. The coalition, however, failed to overcome the rigid ministerial compartmentalization inherited from Saddam. As for wider integration with society, the CPA and its successor Iraqi government did make some progress in reorienting the security sector into one that services society rather than one that preys on it.

Thus, although the security sector capacity-building and reform program was behind in many of its targets, in the longer view it was moving in the right direction and laying the foundations of what is

likely to remain for some years a tremendously ambitious reconstruction and reform program.

Underlying Problems and Lessons

This report identifies six problems underlying the coalition's approach to the Iraqi security sector that the authors believe lie at the core of the failures identified. These problems are also broader lessons for security sector reform (SSR) programs in Iraq and elsewhere.

1. **A lack of worst-case and contingency planning.** Both in the run-up to the war and during the occupation, there was a failure to conduct worst-case (or even other-case) analysis. This meant that coalition planners were unable to prepare effectively even for expected contingencies or failures. In regard to the security sector, this led, for example, to a failure to prepare for the infiltration and intimidation of police forces, which forced coalition troops to step back into the front line of security in key urban areas.
2. **Structural constraints on rational policy development.** At the outset, the CPA had sought to adopt an integrated approach to the development of the Iraqi security sector that coordinated its myriad aspects, but this approach rapidly unraveled. A failure to view that integration as a priority and to establish the right structures to incentivize coordination among coalition personnel made it inordinately difficult to implement a unified effort toward the development and implementation of policy on Iraqi SSR.
3. **Mobilization of funding and personnel inputs from home countries.** In most nation-building operations, the mobilization of nonmilitary resources has been problematic. In Iraq, the scale of the operation and the security situation severely tested established mechanisms and the reliance on untested mechanisms via the U.S. Department of Defense delayed mobilization and deployment of resources.
4. **Balancing the long-term goals of institution-building with the short-term needs of fielding Iraqi security forces.** The coalition's

initial inclination was for sweeping reform to ensure the construction of a security sector that would underpin a transition to democracy. This, however, soon came into conflict with the increasingly pressing need to supplement coalition forces in filling the immediate security vacuum. The effort to build structures that could serve Iraq well in its transition to democracy was in constant tension with the need to respond to immediate requirements. Inevitably, some of the responses to the immediate security situation, such as a reliance on tribal guards and the creation of a more centralized police command and control structure, were contrary to the coalition's long-term political goals.

5. **Ensuring Iraqi ownership of the reform process.** For the first half of its existence, the coalition imported foreign expertise to manage Iraqi government affairs, notably in the security arena. It was only after the November 15 agreement shortened the expected timeline for the transfer of authority that the CPA focused on developing Iraqi leadership and building Iraqi capacity. Therefore, although some of the institutions and programs had been well designed, by June 2004 there was patchy Iraqi ownership as well as limited capacity in the security sector institutions. The intention was to supplement this limited capacity with international assistance, but this assistance has since fallen short of planned levels. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether the fairly extensive efforts to educate Iraqi interlocutors about best practices in SSR will have a long-term impact.

6. **Clarifying long-term security relationships.** Put simply, if the United States and its allies explicitly guarantee protection for Iraqis against external territorial aggression for the foreseeable future, then Iraq will require a small military for external defense and can concentrate on building internal security forces. If these same partners remain committed to working with Iraq on developing its security sector and Iraqi officials are committed to long-term reform, then Iraq is more likely to achieve an effective and accountable security sector. This highlights the necessity to explicitly clarify such relationships early.

The Future

Iraq's future security environment will depend on a range of factors, notably its political evolution and its economic recovery. Another important factor will be the development of its security sector into an effective but accountable part of the governance framework. As this report argues, in order to make up for past failings and to build on the successes of the past two years, the problems identified above must be addressed.

Going forward, it will be critical that Iraqi leaders and their international advisors not become preoccupied with the fielding of large numbers of security forces, which is too often used as the metric of success. Although numbers are important, it is just as vital to invest in the security sector intangibles that cannot be so easily quantified. These include the development of joint judicial and police investigatory capabilities, institutional development of national security institutions and the ministries of defense and interior, development of coordinated intelligence structures, and sustained support to the justice sector, including anticorruption programs. Iraq confronts both significant short-term needs for security forces and a long-term requirement for sustainable institutions that can serve the country in its transition to democracy. It is crucial that the first need not be met at the expense of the second.

An important need is for the Iraqi government at the highest levels to develop the capacity to make and implement security policy. Iraq's leaders lack the institutional capacity to formulate and execute policy, to systematically examine options, and to plan for the longer term. As they develop their visions for the development of the security sector, the Iraqi leadership and their international advisors will have to raise their gaze beyond implementing the current programs and start to tackle some of the basic, unanswered questions surrounding the future of the sector.

These matters are essentially political. Throughout Iraq's history, the center has used the security sector to coerce Iraq's regions and communities. In the face of the current security crisis, the tendency to go down this route is already evident, as government leaders

seek to cement their own control. The reality of security in Iraq in 2005, though, is of a fragmentation of authority, as various political parties and state entities build rival security forces. The emerging Iraqi polity needs to give serious thought to the future of the security sector in terms of center-region relationships; state-society relationships; and the proportion of national resources allocated to security. Only by tackling these issues sooner rather than later can Iraq's leaders ensure that the security sector both copes with the current crisis and provides a firm foundation for a well-governed, democratic state.

Unfortunately, we need to be realistic about the likelihood of Iraqi governments having the vision to tackle these strategic issues in the short to medium term. Iraqi ministers and senior officials are likely to be more focused in coming months on their personal positions, even survival, than on long-term institution-building. The onus must therefore be on the United States, the United Kingdom, and their international partners to ensure that long-term institution-building remains on the Iraqi agenda.