

## Building a new military? The NATO Training Mission-Iraq

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### Contents

The birth of a mission	1
The new Iraqi Armed Forces	2
Focus of efforts: The Iraqi Army's officer corps	3
Key Challenges ahead	5
Conclusion	7

The military is the cradle of the state – simply because security precedes any social or economic development. In the 1990s, this consideration led to the advent of Security Sector Reform, essentially the consequence of the perception that building up strong and viable security institutions under civilian control is a precondition of state consolidation. The multiple defense reforms NATO assisted in many former Warsaw Pact member states, and the NATO Training Cooperation Initiative launched in 2006, are part of the consequent logic of military development aid, which is not entirely altruistic. Security is an intertwined construct, and the Alliance relies on stability and security in other states in order to ensure its own. In this context, NATO's Training Mission - Iraq (NTM-I) is just a logical step – although surprising to some, given that it was Iraq that caused the Alliance a “near-death experience”<sup>2</sup>. Four years later it was followed by a sister mission in Afghanistan, indicating a trend in security force assistance that is likely to grow.

Considering these developments, a closer look at NTM-I, its achievements and challenges is worthwhile, teaching us best practices as well as areas for further improvement. Although NTM-I is active in fields of both external and internal security, this paper will focus on the Iraqi armed forces, as it is the efforts related to these that stand out. A lot remains to be done on the way to the establishment of a fully grown and capable Iraqi military that can be a provider, and not a consumer, of security.

### THE BIRTH OF A MISSION

Before NATO Training Mission - Iraq (NTM-I) could come into being, the Alliance had to overcome the serious divisions created by the invasion of 2003. Just days before the Istanbul summit in June 2004, which coincided with the re-establishment of Iraqi sovereignty, Iraq's Prime Minister Ilyad Allawi sent a letter to then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, requesting NATO support through training based on UN Security Council Resolution 1546<sup>3</sup>. The request revived divisions within the



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<sup>2</sup> Interview with US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns, *BBC News*, “NATO turns to terrorism fight”, October 18, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3201578.stm>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1546, “The situation between Iraq and Kuwait”, June 8 2004, S/RES/1546 (2004), [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1546%20\(2004\)&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1546%20(2004)&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)



Alliance. France and the United States clashed, especially over the question of in- or out-of-country training: for those Allies that had opposed Operation Iraqi Freedom, such as Germany, sending their men to Iraq simply remained unthinkable, or “unwise” as France’s President Jacques Chirac called it<sup>4</sup>. Apart from the choice of training site, France was also opposed to putting NTM-I under the operational command of the US-led multinational force, fearing that the US might transfer responsibilities to NATO<sup>5</sup>. These rifts were overcome by September 2004, when NATO finally opted for a Training, Education and Doctrine Center located in Iraq before moving on to start the mission in February 2005.

Since then, NTM-I has grown considerably in scope, expanding to gendarmerie-type training of the national police, navy and air force leadership, defense institution-building, and standardized officer education and training. The latest development is Italy’s decision to provide specialized training in oil policing, which will ensure security of Iraq’s oil pipeline infrastructure.

Changes in Alliance governments and the positive developments of NTM-I have made it possible to overcome initial reticence towards the mission, with 23 of NATO’s member nations having to date contributed personnel, funds, equipment or out-of-country training. The main staff-contributing nations remain a core of 14 countries, providing 170 personnel located in and around Baghdad, of whom more than half are Italian – thus disproving claims that NTM-I is just an American mission with a NATO label on it<sup>6</sup>.

To avoid overlap, NATO’s mission in Iraq is intermeshed with the US-led Training and Assistance Mission, which is part of the United States Forces - Iraq (USF-I), formerly known as Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq (MNSTC-I). NTM-I’s commander is thus double-hatted, and at the same time the commander of USF-I. Within this framework, NTM-I covers three areas that are exclusively its own: professionalizing the Iraqi armed forces through training and education of (mostly) the officer corps, supporting the Iraqi Command and Control structure through the development of operations centers and, since 2007, Carabinieri-led gendarmerie training. NTM-I is therefore a mission that trains, educates, assists and mentors, but does not actually engage in combat.

## THE NEW IRAQI ARMED FORCES

NATO Training Mission - Iraq’s main goal is to assist the Iraqi security forces, notably the military in its reconstruction. The old Iraqi Army, an established institution, had been disbanded by order of Coalition Provisional Authority director Paul Bremer in May 2003. The decision was met with outrage by Iraqi military personnel, leading to a demonstration the next day by 5,000 officers who threatened organized resistance if they were to be dismissed<sup>7</sup>. Shortly afterwards, the riots began. Criticisms of the Iraqi military’s disbandment have been controversial, but it undeniably contributed to the subsequent insurgency, as it put 500,000 frustrated men out of work. More importantly, it robbed the United States of an important possible ally in crushing the emerging uprising.

In spite of this, the United States “did not attempt to seriously train and equip Iraqi forces for proactive security and counterinsurgency mission until April 2004”<sup>8</sup>. Although the creation of a new Iraqi force was decided in August 2003 (three full months after the disbanding of its predecessor), it was hampered by a clause that declared that the new Iraqi Army would not include Baath party members, or anybody associated with the former regime and its security institutions. This effectively excluded most of the officer corps of the previous Iraqi Army. While this requirement was eventually overruled by the urgent need for qualified men (70% of current officers, and virtually every general officer, served in the old Iraqi armed forces)<sup>9</sup>, lack of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) continues to hamper the Iraqi military even today, with only 73% and 69% respectively of required positions in these two categories filled (as opposed to 157% of enlisted personnel)<sup>10</sup>. It is estimated that it will take a decade to close this gap.

The Iraqi Security Forces, including armed forces and police, started to grow at an impressive rate during the ‘surge’ in 2007. Fourteen thousand men were brought into the new Iraqi Army every five weeks, meaning that it theoretically reached its approved manning level of near 200,000 men in 2008. Within six years, the Iraqi military thus quadrupled in size – a number much higher than originally anticipated by the United States, which was aiming for a small force of 44,000.

<sup>4</sup> “Schröder: No German Soldiers in Iraq”, *Deutsche Welle*, 14 October 2004, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1360828,00.html>; “NATO agrees to train Iraqi security forces” *International Herald Tribune*, 29 June 2004.

<sup>5</sup> “NATO scheme to train Iraqi security forces is blocked”, *The Independent*, 29 July 2004, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/nato-scheme-to-train-iraqi-security-forces-is-blocked-554813.html>

<sup>6</sup> As of August 2010: Albania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, plus Ukraine as a partner country.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Lacey, “Jobs in Jeopardy, Iraqi Soldiers Vow to Fight if Allies Don’t Pay”, *The New York Times*, May 25, 2003, pp.1, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Cordesman, “Inexcusable Failure: Progress in Training the Iraqi Army and Security Forces as of Mid-July 2004”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 20 July 2004, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted by the author with NATO Training Mission - Iraq Personnel, Baghdad, 7 June 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense, “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq”, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, March 2008, p. 45, March 2008.



But how professional are these now almost 180,000 enlisted men serving in the Iraqi military and their 20,000 officers? It is estimated that almost all of the enlisted men have been trained in one form or another, as have 68% of the officers<sup>11</sup>, and yet the extent of training is difficult to assess. Double counting remains a significant issue – in 2007, 22,000 personnel had to be removed from the lists when it emerged that they had been included as a result of a major miscount.

The Iraqi Ministry of Defense, in sole charge of training activities, has a curious way of keeping track of numbers of trained men, and some statistics even record training accomplished under the Baath regime<sup>12</sup>. The variety of training is staggering and leads to very uneven results, ranging from Jordanian to American training conducted by contractors and military forces<sup>13</sup>.

Basic combat training capacity has been increased to 152,000 annually (thanks to the U.S. Training and Assistance Mission), and there are today seven annual training cycles for basic combat, for NCO training and for special occupation qualification, such as mechanized equipment, artillery, engineering and logistics capabilities<sup>14</sup>. However, there is no data available on the numerical output of these courses, and there seem to be different standards for the length of basic training – those who had served in the old Iraqi Army received three weeks of training, whereas for newcomers the duration ranges between five and 13 weeks. Generally speaking, there is now a gradual shift from counter-insurgency to national defense, and 64% of officers are estimated to have undergone specialized occupation qualification, although it is not clear what this entails. All in all, the United States has spent \$19 billion on the reconstruction of the Iraqi armed forces in the years since the invasion<sup>15</sup>.

Considering the enormous effort by the United States, NTM-I's contribution seems minimal. The figures for in-country training are 9,000 federal police, 2,500 officer cadets, 200 Senior Non-Commissioned Officers, almost 460 Joint Staff College officer graduates, an estimated 31 National Defense College graduates (General officers of 2-star rank and above) and 450 Defence Language Institute graduates. In addition, over 1,800 individuals have been trained abroad at the NATO School Oberammergau, NATO Defense College and Joint Warfare Centre Stavanger, as well

as at the Center of Excellence in the Defense against Terrorism and the Partnership for Peace Training Center, both located in Ankara<sup>16</sup>. But numbers do not give us the full picture.

Training alone does not make an armed force, especially one that has been built from scratch. Training is usually most effective in units with existing structures and experienced officers, NCOs and team members. The rushed creation of whole new units is always difficult, since time and, most importantly, officers are needed for this task. The Iraqi military is currently short of officers, who need time and training to grow into the crucial role they are playing. This is especially important at this stage, because the Iraqi armed forces have taken in very large amounts of enlisted personnel who need supervision by officers. As General Dempsey stated, "we've been growing young second lieutenants through the military academies for about three years, but it's really difficult to grow majors, lieutenant colonels and brigadier generals. It simply can't be done overnight. So we've had to rely heavily on officer recalls and retraining programs. However, the pool of qualified recalls is beginning to thin out"<sup>17</sup>.

While the Iraqi military has reached its scheduled size, it thus continues to face two key challenges, namely lack of qualified officers as well as logistic capacity.

### FOCUS OF EFFORTS: THE IRAQI ARMY'S OFFICER CORPS

Because the lack of officers currently constitutes the biggest problem for the Iraqi military, their recruitment and training stand at the center of efforts. Oddly enough, the Coalition reacted rather late to this shortage. The first training for officers started in December 2004, conducted by NATO Training Mission - Iraq. Since then, several steps in the re-establishment of officer education have been accomplished by the mostly British-staffed Officer Education Training and Advisory Branch. The Iraqi National Defence College, which is the highest-level military institute and focuses in its one-year course on strategic issues, was opened in 2006. The following year saw the inauguration of the Military Academy in Ar-Rustamiyah, where basic officer training was centralized in 2010 after having been scattered all over the country, and where about 300 Second Lieutenants graduate

<sup>11</sup>Anthony Cordesman, "The U.S. Transition in Iraq: Iraqi Forces and U.S. Military Aid", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 21 October 2010, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup>Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2008, p. 98; Anthony Cordesman, "Inexcusable Failure: Progress in Training the Iraqi Army and Security Forces as of Mid-July 2004", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 20 July 2004, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Associated Press, "Group of Iraqi Police Recruits Ends training in Jordan", 16 December 2004.

<sup>14</sup>Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2010, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup>Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2010, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>NATO Training Mission Iraq, NATO's Assistance to Iraq, 9 March 2010, [http://93.63.251.100/ntmi/information/NTMI\\_Assistance%20to%20Iraq.html](http://93.63.251.100/ntmi/information/NTMI_Assistance%20to%20Iraq.html)

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Congress, House, Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Hearing, Development of Operational Capability of the Iraqi Security Forces (110th Congress, 1st sess., 12 June 2007), Lieutenant General Martin F. Dempsey, former Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq, the coalition command responsible for recruiting, training, and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces.



every year after a two-year course. Also important was the re-opening the same year of the Iraqi Staff and Command College, conducting three Captain's Preparation Courses per year, a 12-month Joint Staff Course for Majors as well as Command Courses for Battalion and Brigade Commanders. The Iraqi War College was inaugurated in September 2010, with its first one-year course for officers up to the rank of Colonel. In addition, NTM-I supports the Defence Language Institute, which focuses on English language training. NATO's mission is thus involved in all levels of officer education, selection and training.

As mentioned before, the official narrative of the New Iraqi Army, which assumes the rebuilding of an armed force from scratch, does not reflect the real situation: 70% of the officer corps in general, but especially the general officer ranks, were actually drawn from the old Iraqi Army.

This has two implications: first of all, the highest echelons of the new Iraqi Army are dominated by Sunnis and Kurds from the old Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga forces, for a simple reason: the old Iraqi military's officer corps was an estimated 80% Sunni Arab. The remaining 20% were, after a large-scale purge of Kurdish officers in the 1990s, mostly Shi'a Arab<sup>18</sup>. Although the Shi'a were adequately represented at battalion level, they were less so at the higher echelons<sup>19</sup>. As a result, the Sunni Arabs had greater military experience, as did the Kurds from their time in the Peshmerga militia. This qualified them better for positions in the new Iraqi Army.

It is important to note, however, that Shi'a Arab discrimination in the officer corps did not start with the regime of Saddam Hussein; indeed, Shi'a were traditionally under-represented in the Ottoman Army officer corps and in the early Iraqi armed forces. Limited access to the military academy, appointment to unattractive branches, posts in the Kurdish North and mistreatment by Sunni officers were symptomatic of the officer corps' disregard for Shi'a officers long before Saddam Hussein came to power<sup>20</sup>. Shi'a troops were, however, present in large numbers in the rank and file. Of course, these numbers stand in stark contrast to Iraq's population, which is made up of about 15 - 20% Sunni Arabs, 60% Shi'a Arabs and 18% Kurds. Young officers are currently recruited on a quota basis, following Article 9 of Iraq's constitution, which states that 'the Iraqi armed forces will be composed of the components of the Iraqi people with

due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion<sup>21</sup>' (i.e. selection takes place in an 'ethnically fair manner', though without explicit statement of what this means in numerical terms)<sup>22</sup>; the new Iraqi Army officer corps thus resembles a sandwich of different political, ethnic and religious layers, with Kurds and Sunni Arabs dominating at the highest level, a rough balance of 33:33:33 in the middle ranks, and the junior level comprising about 60% Shi'a Arabs, 20% Sunni Arabs and 18% Kurds to reflect the country's estimated overall population breakdown. Whether this inconsistent representation of the three groups at different levels might lead to problems in communication and leadership remains to be seen.

The second implication of the reintegration of old Iraqi Army members is the structural heritage. Not only is it occasionally difficult for NTM-I advisors, who are usually lower in rank than the officer they are assisting, to introduce their Iraqi counterparts to new methods, but there are structural oddities connected both to the officers who served in the old Iraqi Army and to Iraqi culture generally.

The most striking example of this is the difficulty in establishing a strong NCO corps. From a Western perspective, NCOs are critical to establishing effective command, cohesion and control in the Iraqi military. Iraqi military personnel from all levels, however, find the NCO concept alien to their hierarchical structure and prefer a system built on officers and enlisted personnel.

There are several reasons why it is so difficult to implant the NCO concept into the new Iraqi Army. To begin with, the old Iraqi Army did not know such a system, and had officers perform the small-unit supervision normally associated with NCO duties in the American or British armies. Mostly, however, the mindsets have not changed when it comes to hierarchy. Not only do Iraqi officers have a sense of entitlement and lack respect for NCOs, the same is true for the enlisted men. Problem-solving, whether it involves the NCOs themselves or the troops, remains focused on the officers. Changing this attitude will probably take a generation, if such a change is desired by the Iraqi leadership at all<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, the NCO corps remains the most understaffed section in the Iraqi military (and police, one should add), with unfilled vacancies for 18,000 corporals, 14,500 sergeants and 7,500 sergeants first class in late 2007 – a situation that has not significantly improved

<sup>18</sup>Ahmed Hashim, "Saddam Husayn and Civil-Military Relations in Iraq: The Quest for Legitimacy and Power", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.57, No.1, Winter 2003, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Congress, House, Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Hearing, Hearing on Iraqi Security Forces, Non-Government Perspectives (110th Congress, 1st sess., 28 March 2007), Dr. Anthony Cordesman's testimony.

<sup>20</sup>Ahmed al-Zaini, *Al-bina al-maanawi lil-quwat al-musallaha al-iraqya*, "The Building of Cohesion in the Iraqi Armed Forces", Baghdad 2000.

<sup>21</sup>Republic of Iraq, National Security Advisory, "Iraqi Constitution" in Iraqi National Security Strategy 2007 – 2010, Annex I, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Interview conducted by the author with NATO Training Mission Iraq Personnel, Baghdad 7 June 2010.

<sup>23</sup>Interview conducted by the author with NATO Training Mission Iraq Personnel, Baghdad 7 June 2010.



since then<sup>24</sup>. NTM-I and USF-I are jointly responsible for NCO training, with the U.S. forces in charge of the majority of the training and NATO offering specialization – such as the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Course at the Taji Regional Training Center 30 km north of Baghdad, which prepares Sergeant Majors for employment as Chief Warrant Officers and beyond. The course focuses on leadership and management, but also on the role and duties of NCOs. The length of the course has increased from 45 to 90 days, with about 182 students trained so far by Iraqi instructors, assisted by NTM-I advisors (in the NCO branch, these are mostly from Ukraine, which is not an Alliance member but part of the Partnership for Peace).

But problems remain: continuing understaffing of courses, with only 60% of staff vacancies filled; a manning shortfall by NATO (for the whole period never more than one of the six NCO posts was filled, and most of the time not even one); difficulties in maintaining supply of training material, lack of internet access, and power cuts – all of which not only have an impact on training but also reflect the Iraqi command's lack of interest in doing something about them. The key question, then, is whether the envisaged military structure suits Iraq's rather hierarchical society.

## KEY CHALLENGES AHEAD

In 2009, NTM-I replaced its quarterly management reports with an assessment tool designed to evaluate the mission's progress in a tangible manner, conducted in a dual-layered, subjective and objective process by units posted both in and out of theatre. Aligned with the military end-state ('A training level that produces functioning and self-sustaining Iraqi Security Forces'), the different areas of its activities are ranked from operational functioning capability to sustaining and eventually self-sustaining capability, which is the end state. Almost all areas reached sustaining capability in 2010, meaning that the capabilities are there, but NTM-I assistance is still required to make activities fully sustainable.

Yet time is an issue when it comes to the reconstruction of the Iraqi military. While all parties involved would like the internal and external security forces to be already up and running, the creation of such institutions from scratch takes a very long time. Some, such as the former Iraqi Defense Minister, Abdul Qadir, the Iraqi

Chief of Staff, General Babakir Zebari, the former Commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq, General James Dubik, and the Commander of the Iraqi Special Forces First Brigade, General Fadhil Jameel Birwari, go so far as to say that the Iraqi military will not be ready to secure Iraq from external threats until 2018-2020<sup>25</sup>. Yet public pressure both in Iraq and the United States calls for withdrawal of all troops, leaving behind the small NATO mission of 170 men and a contingent of 35,000 to 50,000 U.S. troops with mostly training duties, who are in any case supposed to leave by the end of 2011.

Whether or not the Iraqi military will be capable of defending the country will have to be tested, as assessing its real operational effectiveness is difficult. While the Iraqi military is fully in the lead after the withdrawal of US combat troops, there remain problems of leadership related to the already mentioned lack of qualified officers, absenteeism, lack of cohesion and under-equipment for missions. While logistics can be improved in a tangible way, the remaining issues require time and training.

Rumours that the Iraqi Army's ethno-religious composition will turn into a cohesion liability continue to exist; the even-numbered National Guard divisions, in particular, are prone to sectarianism as they are recruited and posted locally. Things are better in the nationally recruited and rotated divisions, though there are suspicions that some of these like the 5th Division Diyala have absorbed militiamen. There is undoubtedly potential for inter-sectarian fighting in the armed forces, yet the Iraqi military has been multi-ethnic since its inception. Hence, its current fragility depends entirely on the political environment and its professionalization.

So far, the cohesion issues encountered by the Iraqi military have not been of an ethnic or religious character. The high desertion rates during the battle of Basra were more the result of limited training. Thus, the 500 soldiers who abandoned their post during the offensive against the Shi'a militia Jaysh al-Mahdi were mostly from the same brigade that had just accomplished basic training. Most of these men were enlisted personnel, but officers (estimated at between 12 and 100)<sup>26</sup> deserted as well. This again underlines the importance of having sufficient time to rebuild an armed force: "Iraqi soldiers make do with 3 to 5 weeks of basic training before entering the battlespace. (...) The Iraqi brigade I advised went from initial soldier reception to independent operations

<sup>24</sup>United States Accountability Office, GAO-08-143R Operation Iraqi Freedom, 30 November 2007, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>"Minister Sees Need for U.S. help in Iraq Until 2018", *The New York Times*, 15 January 2008; "U.S. to help Iraq security for another 10 years, says general", *The Hill*, 17 January 2008; "Iraqi army not ready to take over until 2020, says country's top general", *The Guardian*, 12 August 2010; "Ready or Not, Iraq's Military Prepares to Stand on its Own", *The New York Times*, 28 June 2009.

<sup>26</sup>"More Than 1,000 in Iraq's Forces Quit Basra Fight", *The New York Times*, 4 April 2008; "Battle to retake Basra was 'Complete Disaster'", *The Telegraph*, 20 April 2008.



with Coalition support in a mere 10 months<sup>27</sup>. A newly formed brigade led by inexperienced officers is almost certain to find a mission like the one in Basra difficult. More recently, the Iraqi Army has fared better in similar operations in Mosul and Sadr City but, as it is suffering from leadership difficulties and limited experience, the cohesion question will remain prevalent.

This is particularly true since the absentee rate of the Iraqi Army remains high, with on average 25% of staff absent at any given time. This is related to the need of Iraqi soldiers to travel home to give their families their pay, the lack of enforcement of the Iraqi Code of Military Discipline, the counting of wounded or even non-existent soldiers among those expected for duty, and the number of soldiers actually on leave (which is occasionally extended beyond the authorized date). This rate goes up to 50% once the unit is deployed for combat operations outside its usual area of operation<sup>28</sup>.

The absentee issue is partly also due to the effects of the security situation on the Iraqi military's reconstruction. Not only does it make travelling difficult, but it also affects the military in other areas such as training, especially for specialized occupations. This is particularly the case when it comes to NCO training, which is frequently interrupted to send men into action. In addition, military facilities – and particularly recruitment stations – are frequent targets for terrorist groups.

In sum, however, Iraqi security has improved significantly since the violence peaked between 2006 and 2008, with the overall number of security incidents in the last two years decreasing by 83%<sup>29</sup>. More importantly, the incidents are now hardly at all of an ethno-sectarian nature, and the Iraqi Security Forces are fully in the lead. The rate of both civilian and military casualties has gone down, and most security incidents now cause minimal damage; they are concentrated mostly on Baghdad, as well as the provinces of Ninewah, Diyala and Salah al-Din. Not since January 2004 has the frequency of security incidents been as low as now. Yet Iraq is still not as safe as before 2003, and insurgency is still a threat. Sunni nationalist insurgent groups, such as Jaysh al-Islami, the 1920 Revolutionary Brigade, the Mujahidin Army and the Jaysh al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandia, continue to conduct attacks in different parts of the country, as do al-Qaida in Mesopotamia.

One particular concern in this context is the unguarded border with Syria, which is believed to give free passage to terrorist groups. Since Iraq is not yet able to secure the border itself, its request to NTM-I for border police training is especially salient. While Spain promised its engagement in 2009, no actual implementation of this announcement has taken place.

All in all, the Iraqi Army is faring rather well considering the worst case scenarios painted for the time after US withdrawal. So far, its image is rather positive, with 70% of Iraqis declaring they feel secure when they see the Iraqi Army in their neighborhood; this means that it rates especially high (85%) compared to other groups such as militias, tribes, U.S. Forces, etc<sup>30</sup>. This to some extent reflects the fact that the new Iraqi Army is not actually perceived as new, but rather as a continuation of the military institution that came into being with Iraq itself and embodied Iraqi nationalism long before Saddam Hussein came to power. Ultimately, the Iraqi armed forces' fate is connected to the political process in Iraq, which in itself still has several contentious issues to address, such as the question of Kirkuk, recurring Kurdish threats of independence, and the maturing of democracy.

There are also other issues of an internal nature. NATO Training Mission - Iraq has since its inception faced a particular challenge related to the undeniable cultural difference between Alliance nations (especially those deployed in-country) and Iraq. Cooperation between advisors and their Iraqi counterparts has been difficult at times, and remains so. Complaints from both sides abound; while Iraqis claim that their advisors do not respect them, soldiers of NATO nations question the Iraqis' courage, discipline and dedication, at times calling them "preschoolers with guns"<sup>31</sup>. Where different approaches to hierarchy, personal relationships, time, authority and planning clash as here, cultural training could do a lot to prepare NTM-I staff to adjust quicker to an environment that is generally speaking different from that of most NATO countries. However, "in the majority of cases, trainers arrive on scene without the requisite instructional, regional, cultural, or linguistic preparation"<sup>32</sup> and approach the rebuilding of the Iraqi military through the ethnocentric lens, imposing a Western-style military on a society that might have different working styles.

<sup>27</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Carl D. Grunow, U.S. Army "Advising Iraqis: Building the Iraqi Army", *Military Review*, July – August 2006, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, 6 September 2007, p. 56, 66 <http://media.csis.org/isf.pdf>

<sup>29</sup>Anthony A. Cordesman, "The Uncertain Security Situation in Iraq", February 17, 2010, Center for Strategic and International Studies, pp. 4, 15, [http://csis.org/files/publication/100217\\_iraq\\_security\\_study.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100217_iraq_security_study.pdf)

<sup>30</sup>Department of Defense, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110-252), December 2009, pp. 34 – 35.

<sup>31</sup>"Building Iraq's Army: Mission Impossible", *The Washington Post*, 10 June 2005.

<sup>32</sup>Barak A. Salmoni, "Iraq's Unready Security Forces: An Interim Assessment", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No.3, September 2004, p. 15.



One critical characteristic of Iraqi military personnel, for instance, is the way senior officers treat subordinates, which many Western nations perceive as aloof, disdainful or arrogant. However, it is in line with Iraq's hierarchical society. Hierarchical societies have a preference for centralized structures, which is also true for the Iraqi military (and explains their discomfort with NCOs). British and American advisors, who generally prefer decentralized structures, perceive this as bureaucratic, and find it difficult to understand why their Iraqi counterparts refer to their superiors before taking a decision independently. At the same time, Iraqis perceive the speedy, factual work style of many NATO nations as cold and inefficient, as in their perspective it is personal relationships that make things work (which, incidentally, is the exact opposite of most Western views).

Historical factors come into play as well: while some NATO officers complain about the lack of leadership in the Iraqi military, it is often forgotten that assertiveness in the old armed forces was a quality soon punished by execution: "No Iraqi officer could afford to be a leader in a system in which the supreme leader, Saddam Hussein, perceived persons with leadership abilities as potential threats to regime survival"<sup>33</sup>. Lack of initiative, as reported critically by NTM-I personnel, is thus related to a mixture of cultural and historical conditions and should not be judged too hastily. However, the short periods of deployment for advisors (usually 6 months, occasionally one year) do not facilitate this process of cultural adjustment<sup>34</sup>. Improving the way NTM-I personnel are prepared for their task will impact positively on their mission effectiveness.

Money is a problem as well. NATO's mission in Iraq is not by far its most expensive, costing 22.5 million euros per year (€ 16 million operating and maintenance costs, and € 6.5 million for in- and out-of-country training) in addition to the actual personnel cost, which NATO nations cover themselves according to the 'costs lie where they fall' principle. In comparison, the amount covered by the trust fund for the Afghan National Army is 49 million euros per year. The cost of the Iraqi mission might change in the near future: not only could it decrease, since Iraq itself will start shouldering more and more of the financial burden, but it could also increase with the withdrawal of the American forces that provide the bulk of support, especially in terms of force protection. The NTM-I Trust

Fund, due to expire in mid-2011, has just been replenished with the almost 6 million euros needed for this year (although the actual money has not arrived on the ground yet, which leaves some units already with low running budgets).

## CONCLUSION

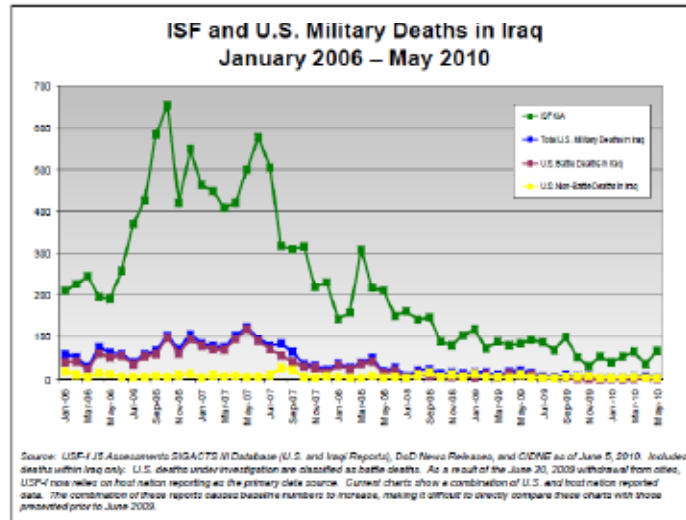
NATO's Training Mission - Iraq has achieved much, but there remain significant challenges, both inside and outside the Alliance. While understaffing, lack of cultural preparation and budget concerns hamper the mission from the inside, other aspects, such as cultural differences between an Arab and Western military force, the strong presence of personnel from the old Iraqi Army and political meddling with the institution are outside of NATO's zone of influence. Cooperating with officers with a very different view of how things are to be done in the military is likely to remain a challenge if the Alliance continues to provide training in countries with significant cultural and political differences.

But there are even bigger concerns: as it is, the Iraqi military is improving, but it has not reached the stage yet where it can operate fully by itself – at least not against a foreign power. In a worst-case scenario, the Iraqi Army, not as new as many would like to see it, could feel frustrated with the sectarian political system and resort, for the eighth time in its history, to a coup d'état. In this case, NATO could be accused of having trained a putschist force and ultimately failed at reforming the security sector. It thus remains crucial that the Alliance continues its efforts on the ground, and improves in those areas that show deficiencies. Otherwise, NTM-I could turn into an abortive mission.

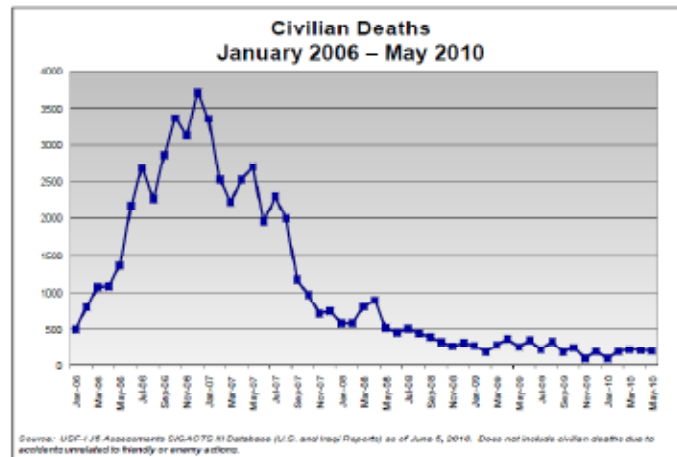
<sup>33</sup> William Bache, "Transferring American Military Values to Iraq", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2007, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> See also Florence Gaub, "Culture Matters: Improving Security Force Assistance to Iraq and Afghanistan", in *Complex Operations: NATO at War and on the Margins of War*, *Forum Paper 14*, ed. Christopher M. Schnaubelt, NATO Defense College, Rome, July 2010, pp. 81, 96 <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=201>

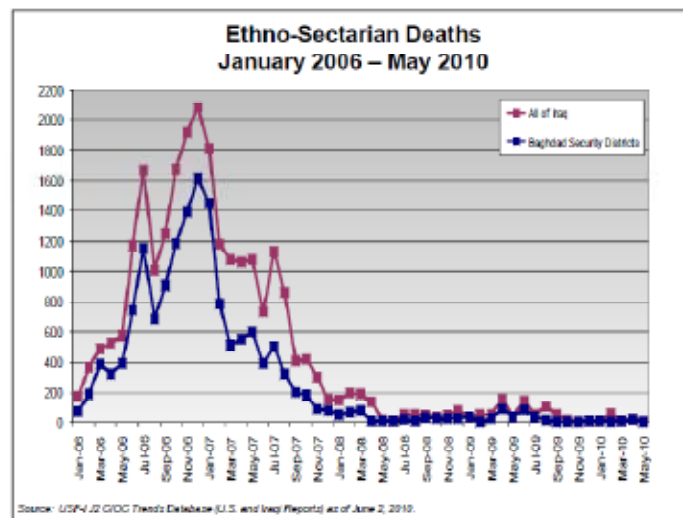
<sup>35</sup> NATO: Topics: International Security Assistance Force, Frequently asked questions about making donations to the Afghan National Army (ANA) trust fund, 18 June 2009, <http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/ana/faq.html>



Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq", Quarterly report to Congress, June 2010, p. 28.



Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq", Quarterly report to Congress, June 2010, p. 29.



Department of Defense, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Quarterly report to Congress, June 2010, p. 31.