



Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan

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Abstract: The effort to raise host nation security forces was central to the U.S. strategy in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. poured massive resources into both countries. Unfortunately, U.S. planners failed to understand the cultural and political environments in which these forces would have to operate. Thus, the United States attempted to build ministries and forces based on U.S. models that simply were not appropriate for those nations. Although the training teams successfully recruited, trained, and deployed almost a million Afghans and Iraqis, Iraqi forces have collapsed and the Afghans are struggling to keep the insurgents at bay.

Security force assistance played a leading role in both Iraq and Afghanistan where local security forces often were spoken of as “our ticket home.” Yet for years the advisory effort was ad hoc, under resourced, complicated by internal bureaucratic struggles in Washington and undercut by corrosive corruption and mismanagement within the host nation governments.

While there are many similarities, there are also significant differences between the efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as between the army and police in each country. This article considers in turn Afghan National Security Forces—the army, national police, and village police program and then the Iraqi Army and National Police. It includes discussion of the efforts to establish effective Ministries of Defense and Interior in both countries also.

Each section tracks the effort chronologically, highlighting key issues the training teams struggled to overcome. As with all lessons-learned efforts, this one will focus on the problems encountered in the period being examined. However, one remarkable success cannot be denied. Starting from scratch in functionally destroyed nations, the Coalitions, led by the United States, raised, trained, and equipped an Afghan security force of over 350,000 personnel and an Iraqi force of over 625,000. These are truly remarkable accomplishments and speak highly of the dedication and talent of the military and civilian personnel who made this happen. They

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accomplished this despite the absence of institutions in either country and the obstinacy of U.S. bureaucratic processes. Subsequent events in both countries indicate that host nation politics and culture will remain the dominant factor in the effectiveness of future advisory efforts.

Afghan National Security Forces

The very rapid U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks meant that military planners had almost no time to consider post-conflict security. Thus, after ousting al Qaeda, the United States turned to the United Nations. On December 20, 2001, UN Security Council Resolution 1368 established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)¹ with a goal of a 50,000-person Afghan National Army and a 62,000 person Afghan National Police.² But the UN provided no resources to meet those goals.

Afghan Army

In January 2002, the United States took on the lead nation role in raising the army.³ In May, U.S. Special Forces (SF) arrived to begin the training. The SF training was not centrally directed nor did it attempt to build the Army as a national institution. It focused on small units. It was not until October 2002 that Major General Karl Eikenberry arrived as Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation—Afghanistan (OMC-A) with the mission of building the Afghan Army. Eikenberry noted the Afghan army lacked a recruiting force, trainers, living facilities, equipment, and any form of logistics or personnel support. OMC-A had to build the Afghan Army's supporting base as it was training and deploying the Afghan combat units. The training mission initially was assigned to the 2d Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division. Despite the fact it did not arrive until May 2003, late notification meant the unit had only a couple of months to prepare for this unique mission.⁴ After six months, the mission passed to the National Guard, which assigned a new brigade headquarters (HQs) to the mission every six months. Because brigades are not manned to do so, the training for Corps HQs and Ministry of Defense was conducted by Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI), a private company.⁵

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1368 (2001), <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-in/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3c4e94557>.

² CSTC-A, "United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces, June 2008, p5, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/united_states_plan_for_sustaining_the_afghanistan_national_security_forces_1231.pdf.

³ Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its Way* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2011), p. 119.

⁴ Interview with MG Karl Eikenberry, in Michael G. Brooks, (ed.), *Eyewitness to War Volume III: US Army Advisors in Afghanistan*, Fort Leavenworth, KS, no date.

⁵ Interview with COL Mike Milley, in Michael G. Brooks, ed., *Eyewitness to War Volume III*, pp. 95-111.

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