

**IRAQ: DEMOCRACY OR CIVIL WAR?**

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That America's involvement and role in Iraq has become the most contentious issue of our time is a reflection of the complexity and frustrations of ensuring the security and stability of that country. It is compounded by a decidedly mixed picture of progress in some critical areas of Iraqi security alongside continued stasis and serious reversals in others. Little clarity or consensus, moreover, emerges from conversation and e-mail exchanges with senior American and Coalition diplomats, advisers and military officers in Iraq, or from journalists assigned there and other informed observers with immediate or recent direct knowledge of the situation in that country. This much in terms of Iraq's security, however, is perhaps clear: the great progress made in training and improving the Iraqi Army and associated military forces has not been matched by similar improvement with the Iraqi police—the essential mainstay of law and order and the foundation upon which stability security in any country must ineluctably be based. It is on this specific issue that I will focus most of this testimony before turning to issues such as the security of Baghdad, a prognosis of overall U.S. security policy and efforts in Iraq, and potential dangers and consequences of a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq.

## THE IRAQI ARMY AND NATIONAL POLICE

The central objective of U.S. security policy for Iraq is to train, equip and build-up Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) so that they can assume responsibility from American and Coalition forces for the stability of their country. As President George W. Bush put it: "As they stand up, we'll stand down."<sup>1</sup> With respect to Iraq's military forces, advances in training and deployment has indeed been considerable (although it should be noted that despite these improvements with the Iraqi Army, they are still dependent on the U.S. for intelligence and logistical support). A survey of the monthly reports provided to Congress by the U.S. Department of Defense measuring this progress reveals remarkable success over the past eleven months. As of 7 August 2006, the number of Iraqi Army combat units who had assumed lead responsibility for security in their areas of operation amounted to five division headquarters, 25 brigade headquarters, and 85 battalions. This compares very favorably to the two division headquarters, 14 brigade Headquarters, and 52 battalions reported as of 30 March 2006 and even more so with the one division headquarters, four brigade headquarters, and 23 battalions that were in the lead on 30 October 2005.<sup>2</sup> Some two-thirds of Iraqi Army combat units, accordingly, have assumed lead responsibility for their assigned areas of operation and at least 106 combat battalions and eight Strategic Infantry Battalions (SIB) are reported to be "conducting operations at varying levels of assessed capability." The police, however, present an entirely different, and more depressing, picture.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the same DoD report for the period ending 7 August 2006 measuring progress in the training, equipping and deployment for the National Police<sup>4</sup> reveals zero division headquarters, zero brigade

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<sup>1</sup> White House, "President Discusses War on Terror, Progress in Iraq in West Virginia •Capitol Music Hall• Wheeling, West Virginia," March 22, 2006, accessed at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060322-3.html>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, August 2006, Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2006* (Section 9010), p. 43. See also the monthly report for April 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Iraqi National Police are charged with maintaining law and order while an effective community police force is developed." The

headquarters, and only two battalions having been able to assume lead responsibility for security in their areas of operation. These latest numbers, moreover, contrast unfavorably to the situation reported respectively for March 2006 and October 2005 when two brigade headquarters and six battalions each were deemed in the lead. Hence, even though some 27 National Police battalions "are now operational and active,"<sup>5</sup> their ability to function independently of U.S. or Coalition forces, remains severely impaired.

The situation regarding the Iraqi police is all the more lamentable given that 2006 was supposed to be the "year of the police"—when the resources and attention hitherto focused mainly on building the Iraqi Army were instead to be devoted to the National Police.<sup>6</sup> President Bush specifically cited the centrality of this goal to American ambitions with respect to strengthening the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in a speech given in March 2006. "We got work, by the way, in '06," the President declared, "to make sure the police are trained as adequately as the military, the army."<sup>7</sup> Thus the lack of progress, and reversal of previous advances, regarding the Iraqi police are all the more disappointing and disheartening.

The importance of police both in civil society as well as in countering insurgency cannot be overstated. The fundamental tenet concerning public security in the modern, democratic nation-state is that the police, and not the military, should play the predominant role in upholding the law and maintaining order. The reasoning behind this is quite obvious: policemen are trained to deal with the public and to meet a variety of exigencies with the minimum use of force. Soldiers, generally, are not. Soldiers are trained to kill and to fight. In no

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Iraqi Police Service's mission, by comparison, is to "enforce the law, safeguard the public, and provide internal security at the local level." Its main responsibilities include "patrol, traffic, station, and highway" duties throughout Iraq's 18 provinces. Ibid., pp. 44 & 46.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, General George Casey, Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad, Iraq, 18 April 2006.

<sup>7</sup> White House, "President Discusses War on Terror, Progress in Iraq in West Virginia •Capitol Music Hall• Wheeling, West Virginia," March 22, 2006.

area is this distinction more critical than in acquiring intelligence and countering insurgency. Clearly, effective police work—be it against common criminals or terrorists—“depends on intelligence, and intelligence depends on public co-operation.”<sup>8</sup> Policemen, for example, are specifically trained to interact with the public; again, soldiers generally are not. Not only does the average soldier’s training mostly ignore this important aspect of public relations, but police typically have better access to human intelligence sources than the military. This information, whether freely provided by citizens to beat cops known to them or obtained by police from informants, snitches and other sources in and around the criminal underworld is essential to detect and apprehend terrorists or insurgents, identify safehouses, seize arms caches, and generally disrupt terrorist and insurgent communications, movement, logistics, and planning. It is also essential in undermining local support for terrorists and insurgents and breaking their control or influence over communities.

Yet, despite the critical role of police more often than not has from the start of our involvement in Iraq largely been ignored by the American authorities responsible for building the security forces in that country.<sup>9</sup> As one Coalition adviser, with long experience in Iraq dating from the summer of 2003 recently lamented, “The Coalition never got its arms around the police as they did with the [Iraqi] troops on the ground that we were training.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a U.S. military intelligence officer currently in Iraq explained in an e-mail communication how,

The Iraqi police across the country have been a thorny issue, more so than training the IA [Iraqi Army]. First of all, most of the resources had been sent to the IA to fight the

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Thackrah, “Army Police Co-operation: a General Assessment,” in *Police and Society Research Centre Papers*, vol. 1, no. 7 (October 1982), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Author’s personal experience while serving in Iraq with the Coalition Provisional Authority, March-April 2004; interviews with senior American, British, and Australian advisers to Iraq’s Ministry of the Interior since 2004, August and September 2006; e-mail communication, senior U.S. military officer in Iraq, 20 August 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Telephone interview with senior Coalition adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, Iraq, 4 September 2006.

insurgents; secondly, the [police] recruitment process was broken, allowing the bad guys to join. Some of those problems have been addressed but now the game of catch up is in play.<sup>11</sup>

This "game of catch up," however, has in fact been in play almost since the widespread looting and civil disorders that followed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in May 2003. The inadequacy of planning for post-invasion stability operations beyond the initial military assault on Iraq is already well documented.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the failure to take this critical aspect of U.S. military operations and policy planning into account arguably breathed life into the insurgency that emerged in the spring of 2003 and gathered increasing momentum throughout the remainder of year and has continued ever since.<sup>13</sup> Thus a critical window of opportunity was lost to stabilize and secure the country because of the failure to anticipate the lawlessness and unrest that followed the capture of Baghdad.<sup>14</sup> That opportunity has seemingly never been regained. Indeed, it was further compounded by the failure early on in the occupation to recruit and train a competent police. The Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) main approach to building a new Iraqi

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<sup>11</sup> E-mail communication, U.S. Navy intelligence officer, Baghdad, Iraq, 20 August 2006.

<sup>12</sup> See Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq: Too Uncertain To Call* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14 November 2003; James Dobbins, et al., *American's Role In Nation-Building; from Germany To Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, MR-1753-RC, 2003), pp. 167-222; James Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 293, no. 1 (January-February 2004), pp. 52-74; Joshua Hammer, "Tikrit Dispatch: Uncivil Military," *The New Republic*, 1 March 2004; Steven Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1, Winter 2003-04; and David Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess," *New York Times Magazine*, 2 November 2003. For Department of Defense's performance in this respect, and a refutation of the arguments about inadequate planning, see the Letter to the Editor from Joseph J. Collins, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, in response to Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," published in the April 2004 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2004/04/letters.htm>. The argument that plans were commissioned and prepared, but not taken into account, however, was substantiated by the author in discussions with U.S. Department of Defense officials, April 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq: Too Uncertain To Call*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," pp. 73-74; and, Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," p. 27.

police, for example, was a three week training block conducted at an U.S.-run training facility in Amman, Jordan called the Jordan International Police Training Center and at the re-named Baghdad Police College. The training course was as ill conceived as it was inappropriate to conditions in Iraq. It was in essence a compressed version of a longer, more detailed program developed by U.S. security forces for Kosovo. It assumed erroneously that competent police officers could somehow be properly trained in so short a period of time. Moreover, its emphasis on teaching the techniques of the canonical community policing prevalent in the U.S.—that is, in an environment not wracked by terrorism, insurgency, sectarian bloodletting and rampant crime—was irrelevant to the realities of post-invasion Iraq.

The program, which was overseen by the Ministry of Interior and its American and Coalition advisers, was deemed so anemic and the recruits so inadequately trained, that in May 2004 the CPA established CPATT (Coalition Police Assistance Training Team) and moved the training effort under the aegis of the U.S. military as part of the Multi-National Security Transition Command (MNSTC-I).<sup>15</sup> Although U.S. military supervision provided better management of the police training effort—which now expanded to entail an eight week basic training curriculum—many of the American personnel responsible for this oversight did not know much (if anything at all) about civilian policing, police training or police work. Another, more serious problem arose, however, when graduates were subsequently incorporated into largely unsupervised police units commanded by persons who, in the words of one American adviser deeply familiar with the process, “either had nefarious intentions [e.g., death squad activity or distinctly sectarian agendas] or who were themselves corrupt or inept.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Its first commander was then Major (now Lieutenant) General David Petraeus, the previous commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division when it had been deployed to Mosul in 2003. There, Petraeus had successfully embraced precisely the types of innovative approaches with respect to the Iraqi civilian population and newly constituted Iraqi security forces at the heart of sound, effective counterinsurgency operations. See Hammer, “Tikrit Dispatch: Uncivil Military.”

<sup>16</sup> Discussions with senior U.S. State Department official, Baghdad, Iraq, 18 April and 3 September 2006.

Accordingly, in hopes of establishing more rigorous supervision of the police, in May 2006 the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, the Coalition's main tactical combat force, assumed responsibility for mentoring the Iraqi police. While this has generally been a positive development, the number of mentors—whether American military police or more appropriate civilian police advisers serving as International Police Liaison Officers (IPLOs)—has proven woefully inadequate<sup>17</sup>—and both their quality and skills have been remarkably uneven.<sup>18</sup> “Some parts of the mentoring program are quite good,” one adviser to the Ministry of the Interior and police with long experience in Iraq noted, “but it is still not as effective as the mentoring given to the Iraqi Army, where military advisers were embedded. Police mentoring is jointly done by MPs and civil advisers: but there are not enough and the quality is variable.”<sup>19</sup> And, even the stop-gap measure adopted by MNSTC-I in Baghdad of making up for the shortfall in civilian advisers by assigning MP companies to police stations is not a good solution. Military policing is significantly different from civilian policing and many of the MPs themselves have no experience of policing outside military bases and the military itself. “The required numbers [of mentors],” an American official at the American embassy in Baghdad explained, “means that most don't have police experience and even the MPs assigned to Iraqi police themselves aren't trained” or familiar with civilian policing much less counterinsurgency. Further, the deployment of MP companies notwithstanding, as of June 2006 some 40% of police stations throughout the country were reported to have no Coalition oversight or supervision whatsoever.<sup>20</sup>

This dearth of supervision has also had enormous consequences on the professionalism of the Iraqi police forces: vitiating whatever successes have been achieved in training. For example, while the new instructional regimen may have improved the technical competence of individual policemen in terms of investigative and forensic skills, it

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Telephone interview with senior Coalition adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, Iraq, 4 September 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

did nothing to counteract the sectarianism and corruption permeating the MoI and police. "There has been some progress in technical skills," a Coalition adviser to the Iraqi police noted, "but that does not address the political loyalties [e.g., the sectarian allegiances of the police]—especially in the countryside and provinces."<sup>21</sup> This now-entrenched corruption in both the police and Ministry of Interior ranges from ministers who "just wanted jobs for [their] constituents" to senior government officials and police officers using the power of their office or command to pursue sectarian agendas, settle old scores or simply generate income through the coercion, extortion and intimidation of ordinary citizens.<sup>22</sup> The crux of the matter, according to one immensely experienced American adviser in Iraq is that:

The Ministry of the Interior has been taken over by Shi'a Islamists and that is a huge part of the [professionalism] problem. If you could fix that, you could fix other problems. It is do-able if uniform police can have American mentoring; but you need to fix the ministry first and hold accountable criminals in uniform. There is tons of court-useable information on people in charge in the MoI [Ministry of the Interior] and the National Police detailing death squads, detainee abuse, and corruption, but there is absolutely no political will to bring guys to trial. As long as police can act with impunity for sectarian and other reasons, this problem will remain. There is just no accountability and no political will to change this.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, reports of the subversion of the MoI by Badr Corps and SCIRI<sup>24</sup> *apparatchiks* on the one hand and by followers of Moqtada al Sadr, belonging to the Army of the Mahdi (AoM) on the other, seem to be endemic to any discussion about corruption in the ministry and police. When General (retired) Barry R. McCaffrey visited Iraq in April 2006, he was struck by the "corruption and lack of capability" of both the MoI as well as the Ministry of Defense (MoD): averring that, despite the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Discussion with senior U.S. State Department official, Baghdad, Iraq, 3 September 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Telephone interview with senior Coalition adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, Iraq, 4 September 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a Shi'a political party led by Abdul Azziz Hakin and closely associated with Iran. The Badr Corps is its militia.



"dramatic and rapid growth in capacity and competence" evident over the preceding year, the "police are heavily infiltrated by both the AIF [anti-Iraq forces] and the Shia militia." Consequently, he continued, "they are widely distrusted by the Sunni population. They are incapable of confronting local armed groups. They inherited a culture of inaction, passivity, human rights abuses, and deep corruption." Addressing this problem, General McCaffrey, concluded, "will require several years of patient coaching and officer education in values as well as the required competencies."<sup>25</sup> The dimension of sectarian infiltration of the police is so pervasive, one source claimed, that the MoI's intelligence arm has now been completely subverted by the Badr Corps while parts of the National Police have been heavily seeded with Sadr loyalists.<sup>26</sup> The dangers of this development have gone unrecognized. Indeed, the DoD's *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* report for August 2006 specifically cited the "[u]nprofessional and, at times, criminal behavior [that] has been attributed to certain units in the National Police. This behavior and the decrease in public confidence in these forces has been the impetus for a National Police reform program."<sup>27</sup> The special commando units operating in Baghdad were seen to be especially problematical in this respect, but reportedly are now being re-trained and vetted to address this problem.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Memorandum for Colonel Mike Meese, Department Head, Department of Social Sciences, U.S. Military Academy and Colonel Cindy Jebb, Deputy , Department Head, Department of Social Sciences, U.S. Military Academy from General (retired) Barry R. McCaffrey, Subject; Academic Report—Trip to Iraq and Kuwait, Thursday 13 April through Thursday 20 April, 25 April 2006 [hereafter, "McCaffrey memorandum, 25 April 2006"], pp. 1 & 2 accessed at:

<http://img.slate.com/media/57/AAR%20General%20McCaffrey%20Visit%20to%20Iraq%20April%202006%20USMA.pdf#search=%22McCaffrey%20memo%20Meese%22>.

<sup>26</sup> Telephone interview with senior Coalition adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, Iraq, 4 September 2006.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, August 2006*, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Telephone interview with senior Coalition adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, Iraq, 4 September 2006.

#### SECURITY PLAN FOR BAGHDAD AND PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS

While it is true, as many less pessimistic commentators often claim, that violent instability directly plague and threaten only 4 of Iraq's 18 provinces, those four are the most populous and important ones. Until stability is established there, and especially in Baghdad, the public neither in the U.S. nor in Iraq will not believe that a corner has been turned in this struggle. Although implementation of the latest security plan for Baghdad has gone reasonably well, it is still too early to tell whether this attempt will be any more successful than any of its predecessors. The newest iteration involves a three-phase operation whereby Iraqi and American military forces enter a specific neighborhood and secure it from insurgent and terrorist activity as well as sectarian bloodletting. Once it is deemed cleared, responsibility for the neighborhood's security is turned over to Iraqi control as the military units move on to the next neighborhood. Although cautious optimism prevailed in most discussions and e-mail exchanges with senior U.S. and Coalition officials in Baghdad, some skepticism was expressed that there were sufficient American and trained Iraqi security forces in the city to achieve a positive lasting impact. There is "still not sufficient security in any of the areas that the U.S. has completely left," a recent official visitor to Baghdad noted.

Often FOBs and patrols are left behind. But the patterns of attack, once main force moves on, are that insurgent attacks then increase. In the last two weeks there has been resurgence of attacks once U.S. forces clear out. Formed units of National Police and Iraqi Army are performing fine. Regular civilian police who have [American and Coalition] mentors are good and in several areas police comportment has improved technically at check points and so on, but there is as yet no real sign that they all can hold ground by themselves [without American military forces present].<sup>29</sup>

The inadequate numbers of both American military forces and trained, reliable ISF was cited by another knowledgeable observer as a problem both with respect to the Baghdad operation in particular and Iraq's security in general. "Given that Iraq has a population of about 25 million people," he pointed out, "based on a 20:1 ratio of population

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

to security forces, you need 500,000 troops and police. However the envisioned total is only 325,000 security personnel."<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Two salient conclusions seem obvious from the preceding discussion of training and deploying of ISF. Iraqi military forces will likely continue to grow increasingly capable and will be able to assume the lead in more parts of Iraq. The Iraqi police, however, will continue to be both a problem and the Achilles Heel of Iraqi security. In this respect, whatever advancements have been achieved in terms of the Iraqi Army, the situation with their police counterparts remains as problematical as it is frustrating. Corruption remains a problem in the MoI—and is widely reported to be growing within the police. It is also reportedly beginning to infect the MoD. "The MoI," a person long involved with security issues in Iraq lamented,

is controlled by SCIRI/Badr Corps and plagued by corruption, nepotism and kleptomaniacs. The MoD is not nearly as bad, but the same signs of entrenched, endemic corruption are appearing. . . . The MoI though is certainly the biggest security problem here. If the MoI was fixed, we would have pretty decent police intelligence and an effective police force. Reforming the MoI is the biggest problem we currently face.<sup>31</sup>

Although reform of the MoI is a question of Iraqi political will, it is within our power to improve police on-the-job training and performance through the provision of an expanded CPATT/IPLO program and the priority

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<sup>30</sup> Discussion with senior U.S. State Department official, Baghdad, Iraq, 3 September 2006. Of the 325,00 figure about 144,000 are military, 148,000 police, 20,000 are border guards and 13,000 belong to various other Iraqi security forces. Significantly, to maintain stability and order in Northern Ireland, the ratio of British security forces maintained in Northern Ireland (military plus police from the Royal Ulster Constabulary) was at a ratio of 20 security force members per 1,000 inhabitants. See James T. Quinlivan, "Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations," *RAND Review*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 28-29. See also, *idem.*, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters* (Winter 1995), pp. 59-69 available online at

<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/parameters/1995/quinliv/htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Discussions with senior U.S. State Department official, Baghdad, Iraq, 18 April and 3 September 2006.

accorded to the recruitment of more and appropriately qualified civilian police advisers. Until that can be achieved the deployment of more U.S. Military Police units is a second best option, but nonetheless, helpful palliative. Our support and oversight of the Iraqi police from the start of the CPA has been a matter of too little, too late and of numerous passed opportunities. At this crucial juncture, renewed emphasis, focus and resources need to be devoted to this critical security effort. Sectarianism is rife and subversion is now the norm. Police will continue to be both a problem and the Achilles Heel of Iraqi security. This may be the last opportunity to address the existent shortcomings of the Iraqi police establishment.

Perhaps the greatest security threat now and in the future, however, is the danger of civil war. If U.S. forces were inadequately sized to counter widespread looting and civil disorders of May 2003, they would be overwhelmed by the outright and unmitigated emergence of civil war, and U.S. forces themselves likely to be targeted by multiple adversaries. The second greatest threat is that of a coup by one sectarian faction who is able to stave off challenges from rivals and consolidate power. Given that there have been 48 coups in the last 19 years in Iraq, this is by no means an idle threat. And, finally, there remains the threat of continued, protracted insurgency from multiple sources. The insurgent goal is not to win an outright or decisive victory against U.S. forces, but to prosecute a prolonged war of attrition designed to wear down American public support, Congressional resolve and the national will to remain in Iraq. Each of the above will likely remain salient challenges for the immediate future at least.

At this stage, it is difficult to predict at what point the ISF can take on additional security responsibilities with a reduced U.S. presence. Realistically, three to five years at least are required for the Iraqi military and seven to ten years for the police. It would not likely be for another seven years that ISF could completely replace all combat U.S. forces in Iraq.<sup>32</sup> At the moment, therefore, it is not

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<sup>32</sup>General McCaffrey has estimated similar durations in his assessment of ISF capabilities. With respect to the police, he believes "this will be a ten year project requiring patience, significant resources, and an international public face." With respect to the Iraqi

realistic to set a withdrawal timetable based on the current readiness of the ISF.

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Army, General McCaffrey opined that, "We should be able to draw down most of our combat forces in 3-5 years." See McCaffrey memorandum, 25 April 2006, pp. 4 & 7.