

Backgrounder #33

A Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) Status Report

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In spring 2008, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) markedly increased their conduct of independent operations throughout Iraq. Between April and May, the ISF mounted offensives in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul. The ISF's ability to execute these three simultaneous operations was a sign of immense improvements in force density, planning capacity, and mobility. This progress, while far from complete, indicated that Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq's (MNSTC-I) three-year effort to build Iraqi military forces was beginning to bear fruit. Indeed, MNSTC-I's programs enabled the force generation, equipment acquisition, and capacity building that the Iraqi Security Forces required for Operation Charge of Knights in Basra, Operation Peace in Sadr City, and Operation Lion's Roar/Mother of Two Springs in Mosul.

MNSTC-I formed in 2005 to work with the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior. The command's overall responsibility was to grow and sustain Iraq's military forces. Within this framework, its mission fell into four categories: force generation, increasing ISF independence, improving Iraqi institutional capacity, and enhancing ISF professionalism.¹ During the past three years the command emphasized force generation as its main priority and has focused its efforts on building an Iraqi counterinsurgency force capable of combating Sunni and Shi'a militia groups as well as Al-Qaeda in Iraq.²

During the course of 2007, MNSTC-I helped the Interior and Defense ministries to recruit, train, equip, and assign more than 124,000 new Iraqi Security Force members.³ In May 2008, the two-year growth rate for the Iraqi Army (IA) alone was approximately 220 percent.⁴ This rapid expansion in the Iraqi Army was, perhaps, the most important enabler of the recent spring 2008 operations in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul. Due to insufficient troop levels, these offensives would not have been possible six months earlier.⁵ The Iraqi Army's substantial expansion, however, allowed the Ministry of Defense not only to maneuver forces, but also to clear and hold decisive terrain.⁶ MNSTC-I's 2007 shift to force generation through Unit Set Fielding was a key driver of this fast-paced growth.

Before the Unit Set Fielding program began, Iraqi soldiers received training and then joined their assigned Iraqi unit individually. Experiences in the field indicated that this method was not the best way to create cohesive and effective formations. MNSTC-I, therefore, changed the training and assignment process so that entire Iraqi Army brigades formed and trained as an entire unit. The transition command implemented this process by assembling Iraqi soldiers, officers, and non-commissioned officers who finished their basic training courses into units of approximately 2,438 members.⁷

The Iraqi troops then formed the same squads, platoons, companies, and battalions that they would maneuver with in battle. Once assigned to formations, the Iraqis conducted drivers training, weapons qualification, and crew drills.⁸ This training allowed the IA soldiers and leaders to create working relationships, building a more cohesive team.⁹ After completing Unit Set Fielding, the new IA brigades received orders from the Ministry of Defense and deployed to locations as security conditions dictated. This force generation process helped the Iraqi Army grow to thirteen divisions and provide the units required to fight in Basra and Sadr City.¹⁰

During both Operation Charge of Knights and Operation Peace, newly fielded brigades participated in efforts to clear Shi'ite insurgents from their strongholds. In Basra, the 14th Iraqi Army Division drew upon "three brand new brigades" to help clear the city of criminals and extremists.¹¹ The 11th Iraqi Army Division, a unit composed only of a headquarters in October 2007, grew by four brigades by 2008, fought in Sadr City and provided services to the neighborhood's residents.¹²

While building an independent counterinsurgency was MNSTC-I's main focus, the command also established the Iraqi Air Force. Due to the combined efforts of MNSTC-I, the Ministry of Defense, and the Government of Iraq, the Iraqi Air Force obtained a fleet of 56 aircraft, including C-130 cargo planes and Mi-17 reconnaissance helicopters.¹³ The command also recruited the pilots and crews needed to conduct re-supply, intelligence gathering, and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) missions.¹⁴ Based on these improvements, the Iraqi Air Force increased its number of missions from 30 to 225 missions per week.¹⁵ Iraqi airmen greatly contributed to enhanced mobility, sustainment, and security during the ISF's three concurrent operations. This surge in capability was particularly important during Operation Charge of Knights because it enabled Iraqi pilots to conduct transport, re-supply, and reconnaissance missions in and around Basra.¹⁶ The Iraqi Air Force used these same enablers to support Operation Lion's Roar/Mother of Two Springs in Mosul.¹⁷ These improvements in the ISF's capability to conduct independent maneuvers and sustainment missions would not, however, have happened without rigorous efforts to procure vital vehicles, equipment, and weapons systems.

MNSTC-I's ongoing Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program significantly enabled operations in Basra, Sadr City and Mosul by providing the materiel that Iraqi Security Forces needed to train, maneuver, and fight. The FMS program began many years ago and has been implemented in approximately 120 countries throughout the world.¹⁸ The U.S. State Department is in charge of Foreign Military Sales and its Security Assistance Offices (SAOs) share administrative responsibilities with the Department of Defense.¹⁹ When countries, like Iraq, approve their defense budget and decide to purchase military equipment, they must submit a Letter of Request (LOR) to their Security Assistance Office.²⁰ The LOR then proceeds to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) in Washington D.C.²¹ DSCA tasks the U.S. Army, Navy, or Air Force to procure the desired equipment.²² Once ready, the equipment travels from the United States to the country that requests it. Because the U.S. government conducts all FMS transactions on behalf of the requesting government, it is less prone to corruption and allows greater accountability than other methods of acquisition.²³

The GoI began using FMS in 2006 and, since then, the program has supplied the ISF with M16s, Humvees, Armored Personnel Carriers, boats, and aircraft.²⁴ Indeed, FMS was an essential supplement to the force generation efforts, allowing MNSTC-I and the Iraqi government to build garrisons for the brigades generated during Unit Set Fielding.²⁵ Moreover, the large number of vehicles as well as the C-130s provided by this procurement process allowed the ISF to deploy forces and fight insurgents throughout Iraq.

According to Lieutenant General James Dubik, the MNSTC-I commander, the Iraqi Army obtained 700 up-armored humvees between 2007 and 2008 bringing the total number to 3,200.²⁶ This increase in vehicles was one reason that the Iraqi Army had the capacity to move two brigade-sized forces to Basra without coalition assistance.²⁷ Iraqi Security Forces have also made independent drives into Sadr City during Operation Peace and in Mosul during Operation Lion's Roar/Mother of Two Springs.²⁸ Although the FMS process can take over a year depending on the complexity of a given request, it helped MNSTC-I and the GoI make enormous advancements in ISF capacity.²⁹ Due to its transparency and well-established procedures, this procurement process also helped MNSTC-I increase ministerial capacity within the Ministries of Defense and Interior.

Using FMS helped the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior execute their budget in a more efficient and professional manner. Indeed, in 2008, the GoI began spending more on Iraqi defenses than its coalition partners.³⁰ Its ministries also displayed a larger amount of confidence and competence during the process.³¹ This independence emerged during the planning and execution of operations in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul. Iraqis planned and executed each of these efforts with little to no coalition assistance.³² Although Operations Charge of Knights, Peace, and Lion's Roar/Mother of Two Springs, were not without difficulties, they netted a considerable number of positive gains for the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government, and the ISF.

In Basra, for example, Iraqis benefited from humanitarian assistance, clean up, and reconstruction provided by the ISF.³³ Basra's ports, also "registered a dramatic increase in trade, revenues, and productivity."³⁴ Because the city provides Iraq's greatest inlet for imports and exports and houses "90 percent of the nation's oil," the ISF's successes there offered a critical boost to the country's economy.³⁵ Sadr City residents also began receiving humanitarian aid from their local government and medical assistance from the 11th Iraqi Army Division.³⁶ These new strides in security and assistance contributed to increased Iraqi confidence in their security forces.³⁷ These improvements in public opinion, while slight, are extremely significant, especially in places like Sadr City where years of militia rule fostered anti-GoI sentiments. Although the ISF still have many advances to make, especially with regard to logistics and other combat enablers, MNSTC-I's efforts fielded forces that are now capable of planning and maneuvering with far less direct coalition support.³⁸

Despite seemingly gradual improvements, MNSTC-I made monumental progress during the past three years. The command recruited, trained, equipped, and fielded more than 500,000 Iraqi service members.³⁹ It also built bases such as Besmaya Range that enabled Iraqi forces to train more than 1,700 soldiers at a time.⁴⁰ Furthermore, MNSTC-I initiated programs that will build the ISF's combat enabling capacity in the future. These ongoing initiatives range from the Iraqi Bomb Disposal School that teaches Iraqis how to conduct explosive ordnance disposal missions to logistics specialty and maintenance courses.⁴¹ As they continue, these efforts will help the ISF become less reliant on coalition enablers during future operations.

Fostering accountability within the ISF is a final and continuous MNSTC-I function. In support of this responsibility, the command will continue to build professional forces by implementing hardware and software like the human resources management system (HRIMS) to accurately track Iraqi equipment and personnel information.⁴² In addition, training like the Carabinieri course intended to professionalize the national police will continue to improve the Iraqi Security Force ranks.⁴³ These programs have already produced substantial improvements. As evidenced by concurrent operations in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul, MNSTC-I's efforts to grow and sustain the ISF displayed tangible results in 2008. With continued focus, resources, and cooperation with the Iraqi government, the Iraqi Security Forces will become increasingly capable.

In order for the ISF to sustain these positive trends, MNSTC-I and the GoI must overcome lingering challenges that, according to some timelines, may hamper the ISF until 2018 and beyond.⁴⁴ Creating viable logistics systems and fostering professionalism are particularly important tasks and, while MNSTC-I has already implemented programs that focus on these capabilities, much work remains to be done.⁴⁵ Enabling the ISF to sustain their operations will, in fact be MNSTC-I's main focus for the next year. In fact, the organization is working with the

Iraqi Army to stand up the remaining four divisional logistics bases needed to support the IA's thirteen divisions.⁴⁶

These bases will have transportation capabilities, storage and depot facilities, maintenance facilities, and medical facilities.⁴⁷ These "location commands" will substantially improve the IA's effectiveness and independence. The Ministry of Defense will, however, still have to recruit and train Iraqi soldiers to perform each of these logistics functions. That process will be incremental because it takes time and experience to create confident and competent mechanics, medics, and logisticians.⁴⁸ Building a corps of experienced and capable ISF leaders will also take time.

MNSTC-I must continue to work with the Iraqi Ministries of the Defense and Interior to recruit, educate and promote non-sectarian and professional Iraqi commanders. It may take years of training and combat experience to produce the senior officers and non-commissioned officers that the Iraqi forces need to thrive. Sectarianism in the Iraqi military may, in fact, endure for the next two generations.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the ongoing efforts of MNSTC-I and the GoI will remain vital as the Iraqi Security Forces build upon their current successes and become increasingly independent.

¹Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, *Building Capable Iraqi Security Forces*, Interview with the Defenselink Bloggers Roundtable, moderated by Jack Holt, Chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, Thursday, 22 May 2008, 11:00 a.m., transcript, pp. 1-2.

²Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 2.

³Colonel Michael Fuller, Chief of Staff, MNSTC-I, *Security Forces Capacity Building in Iraq*, Interview with the Defenselink Bloggers Roundtable, moderated by Jack Holt, Chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, Thursday, 27 March 2008, 11:00 a.m., transcript, pp. 2-3.

⁴Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 2.

⁵Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 5.

⁶Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 5.

⁷Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Swanson, Deputy Director for Future Plans and Force Generation, Coalition Assistance Army Training Team, MNSTC-I, Teleconference with the Defenselink Bloggers Roundtable, Thursday, 3 April 2008, 10:00 a.m., transcript, pp. 2-3.

⁸Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Swanson, Deputy Director for Future Plans and Force Generation, Coalition Assistance Army Training Team, p. 3.

⁹Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Swanson, Deputy Director for Future Plans and Force Generation, Coalition Assistance Army Training Team, p. 3.

¹⁰Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 6.

¹¹Colonel Michael Fuller, Chief of Staff, MNSTC-I, p. 2.

¹²Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraqi (MNSTC-I), *The Iraqi Armed Forces, Army, Navy, and Air Force Organization Chart*, Unclassified Briefing, 1 January 2008, slide 14, and Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, “ISF, MND-B Soldiers Kill Nine Criminals, Find Caches (Baghdad), Release No. 20080506-08, Camp Victory, Iraq, 6 May 2008, and Specialist April Campbell, “IA, GoI, Local Government Take Lead in Providing Aid to Sadr City Residents,” Multi-National Division-Baghdad, 15 May 2008, p. 2.

¹³United States Department of Defense Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March 2008, p. 54, available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Master%20%20Mar08%20-%20final%20signed.pdf>.

¹⁴Conference call with Colonel Gordon C. Peters, Coalition Air Force Transition Team (CAFTT), Washington, D.C. 17 January 2008. Colonel Peters spoke specifically about the Iraqi Flight Surgeon and MEDEVAC training programs.

¹⁵Lieutenant General James Dubik, Commanding General, MNSTC-I, Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Conference, transcript, 28 May 2008, p. 4, available from http://www.mnf-iraq.com/images/stories/Press_briefings/2008/may/080528_transcript.pdf.

¹⁶General Nasr Abadi, Vice Chief of Staff, Iraqi Armed Forces, Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Conference, transcript, 28 May 2008, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷General Nasr Abadi, Vice Chief of Staff, Iraqi Armed Forces, Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Conference, transcript, 28 May 2008, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 1.

¹⁹Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 1.

²⁰Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 1.

²¹Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 1.

²²Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 1.

²³Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 2, and Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 8.

²⁴Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Interview with the Defenselink Bloggers Roundtable, moderated by Jack Holt, Chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, transcript, Thursday, 28 February 2008, pp. 1-2, and 5, and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Scott, Security Assistance Office, MNSTC-I, Interview with the Defenselink Bloggers Roundtable, moderated by Jack Holt, Chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, transcript, Friday, 15 February 2008, p. 1.

²⁵Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 4.

²⁶Lieutenant General James Dubik, Commanding General, MNSTC-I, Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Conference, p. 4.

²⁷Colonel Michael Fuller, Chief of Staff, MNSTC-I, p. 2.

²⁸Major General Kevin J. Bergner, Multi-National Force-Iraq, Press Conference, transcript, 14 May 2008, pp. 1 and 6, and Eric Hamilton, "Operation Lion's Roar," Institute for the Study of War, 12 May 2008, available from <http://www.understandingwar.org/print/261>.

²⁹Lieutenant Colonel Keith Muschalek, Security Assistance Program Manager for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, p. 6.

³⁰Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 3.

³¹Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 8.

³²Gerry G. Gilmore, "U.S. General Cites Steady Progress in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul," American Forces Press Service, 16 May 2008, available from http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19495&pop=, and Michael R. Gordon and Stephen Farrell, "Iraqi Troops In Push To Regain Control of Sadr City," *New York Times*, 21 May 2008.

³³Captain Penny N. Zamora, "Basra is Now New City of Hope," Multi-National Division South East, Public Affairs Office, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release Number 20080521-19.

³⁴Leila Fadel, "Ports More Productive Since Militias Ousted," *Miami Herald*, 23 May 2008, p. 17.

³⁵Leila Fadel, "Ports More Productive Since Militias Ousted."

³⁶Specialist April Campbell, "IA, GoI, Local Government Take Lead in Providing Aid to Sadr City Residents," Multi-National Division-Baghdad, 15 May 2008, available from http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19471&pop=.

³⁷Lieutenant General James Dubik, Commanding General, MNSTC-I, Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Conference, p. 4.

³⁹United States Department of Defense Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March 2008, p. 31.

⁴⁰MC2 Elisandro Diaz, "Besmay Hosts Training," *The Advisor*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (March 3, 2007): p. 8.

⁴¹Staff Sergeant Christopher Frost, "Iraq's Bomb Squad: Iraqi Army, Police learn explosive ordnance disposal," *The Advisor*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (1 March 2008): 7, and Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 7.

⁴²Staff Sergeant Zachary Wilson, "New System Modernizes Iraqi Personnel Process," *The Advisor*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (13 January 2007): p. 5.

⁴³Specialist Emily Greene, "Italian Police to Train Iraqi National Police," *The Advisor*, Vol. 4, No. 26 (21 July 2007): p. 10.

⁴⁴Thom Shanker, "Iraq Defense Minister Sees Need for U.S. Security Help Until 2018," *New York Times*, 15 January 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁵Colonel Michael Fuller, Chief of Staff, MNSTC-I, p. 9.

⁴⁶Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 6.

⁴⁷Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 6.

⁴⁸Brigadier General Johnny Torrens-Spence, Deputy Commanding General, MNSTC-I, p. 6.

⁴⁹Colonel Michael Fuller, Chief of Staff, MNSTC-I, p. 9.