



USIPEACE BRIEFING

IRAQ'S INTERIOR MINISTRY: THE KEY TO POLICE REFORM

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BACKGROUND

Iraq's Ministry of the Interior (MOI) is responsible for the supervision, training and administrative support for Iraq's non-military security forces. These include: the Iraqi Police Service, the Iraq National Police, the Iraqi Border Enforcement Service and the Facilities Protection Service. In total, MOI is responsible for nearly 600,000 men under arms or a force that is three times the size of the new Iraqi Army, Navy and Air Force combined.

In July 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Iraq's MOI had become a "federation of oligarchs" with various floors of the building controlled by hostile militia groups. According to the report, police officials moved between floors protected by heavily armed bodyguards and internal power struggles were settled by assassinations in the parking lot. This negative assessment was confirmed in a September 2007 report by the congressionally mandated "Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq," which stated that Iraq's MOI was crippled by corruption and sectarianism, and posed the main obstacle to developing an effective police force in Iraq.

To address this situation, a U.S.-led MOI Transition Team of American and British advisers was assigned the task of ministry reform. A panel of distinguished experts discussed the result of the two-year effort at a public forum hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace's Security Sector Reform (SSR) Working Group on June 18, 2009. Principle speakers included:

- Alex Martin, director of the U.K.'s Iraq MOI Reform Project;
- Michael Gordon, chief military correspondent for *The New York Times* and USIP Jennings Randolph senior fellow;
- Colonel James Coffman, military adviser to the Iraq Interior Minister from 2007 to 2009; and,
- Matt Sherman, senior adviser to the Iraq Interior Minister from 2003 to 2006.

Robert Perito, director of the SSR Working Group and a senior program officer at USIP served as moderator. Perito introduced his new USIP Special Report entitled “The Interior Ministry’s Role in Security Sector Reform,” which features a case study on Iraq’s interior ministry. The following is a summary of the views expressed during that meeting.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR REFORM PROGRAM

Police are the first line of defense and the most visible face of the government to the population. The Iraqi police are supervised, administered and trained by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), a massive institution that does not have a U.S. parallel. MOI’s responsibilities in addition to supporting Iraq’s police forces include protection of government facilities, border control, tribal affairs, and immigration and passport regulation. Currently, the MOI is the largest employer in the country. Success in reforming the ministry and improving the quality of its personnel and procedures has ramifications that go beyond merely improving levels of security.

Between 2003 and 2005, coalition efforts to reform and develop capacity in the MOI alternated between two approaches – capacity substitution (‘doing it for them’) and capacity building (‘helping them do it for themselves’). This tension was at the heart of the advisory effort in Iraq as a whole.

During the “Year of the Police,” which the U.S. military declared in 2006, the coalition’s police assistance program broadened its efforts to include a major push to build institutional capacity. The U.S. State Department and USAID provided 169 capacity development advisers to ten Iraqi civilian ministries, and Department of Defense provided 215 advisers to the ministries of defense and interior.¹ For the MOI, this program focused on improving the ability to plan, program, budget, and execute in order to improve the effectiveness of Iraq’s police forces.

Two years after the American and British ministerial advisory program began in earnest, there is a consensus view that progress has been made within the MOI.

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. “Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Iraqi Revenues, Expenditures, and Surplus.” August 2008. Available: www.gao.gov/new.items/d081031.pdf

CONSISTENT LOCAL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Ministry reform is a highly political process, particularly in a contentious post-conflict environment. In 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority disbanded the Defense Ministry, but left the MOI intact. The MOI was reorganized into six directorates, with leadership assigned to different political factions to ensure that one political party did not dominate. In the next three years, there were four interior ministers, each with a different approach to organizing and running the ministry. Diffusion of authority and 'revolving door' leadership created confusion and prevented reform.

From April 2005 to May 2006, Bayan Jabr's tenure as interior minister highlighted the negative consequences of having a highly politicized leader. On his watch, Shiite militiamen swelled the ranks of police commando units, which operated as sectarian death squads. On June 8, 2006, Jawad al-Bulani, a technocrat, was appointed by Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki as interior minister. Bulani promoted comprehensive reform of the ministry, removed corrupt officials and worked with the U.S. military to purge sectarian elements from the police.

Minister Bulani's leadership for the past three years has enabled MOI to move beyond a state of crisis management to more efficient operation. Bulani merged the administration and finance directorates to increase effectiveness, while simultaneously reshaping the MOI staff. Because of these reforms, MOI is less politically charged than it was during the years of constantly shifting political and security dynamics. Political influence remains in the ministry but not to the divisive level that existed in 2007. Much progress originated from the ministry's senior leadership who have acknowledged previous problems and made addressing them a top priority. The challenge now is making the reforms permanent in order to withstand future changes in leadership or government.

REDUCTION OF CORRUPTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

With a reform-minded leader in charge, ministry officials were able to target problems endemic to the MOI, such as corruption and human rights abuse. A ministry court system was developed, which in the last two years removed 10 percent of ministry employees from their roles for various types of misconduct. Moreover, the Iraqi National

Police leadership that was involved in sectarian violence was replaced. Approximately 1,500 policemen were fired and 2,000 were disciplined in 2008. For corrections, Minister Bulani appointed a Director of Human Rights to improve the deplorable conditions of MOI holding facilities. In June 2009, the MOI opened an inquiry into complaints of prisoners being tortured and the slow processing of cases in two jails in southern Iraq. The commission is likely to recommend the transfer of interrogators and prison officials responsible for abuse. Holding employees accountable for their actions is an important step toward institutionalizing capacity within the ministry.

While human rights abuses continue, the Ministry is creating an independent advisory, inspection, and accountability mechanism tied to “IG-5000 Plan.” The goal of the plan is to increase the Inspectors General workforce to 5,000 people, including administrative and support personnel, to allow the Iraqis to build the infrastructure necessary to train and support a force of 5,000 IG employees. The ministry has a critical role in providing guidance, logistical support, and training for Iraq’s various police forces. These efforts, while they have not made the MOI corruption- or sectarian-free, are a sign of institutional progress that improves the performance of Iraqi police.

IMPROVED PLANNING AND BUDGET EXECUTION

Ministry reform requires integration of the strategic planning and budget execution process to insure that operational objectives are achieved. Between 2006 and 2007, more than 100 senior MOI and provincial officials participated in institutional development through the MOI’s strategic planning process. These leaders set objectives across a range of areas, including building tailored security plans for different parts of the country, creating requirements-based training curricula, and developing anti-drug offices in the provinces. In 2007, the ministry executed nearly 90 percent of its budget, more than a \$1 billion increase in total expenditures from the previous year. Reform in the area of logistics helped institutionalize practices and procedures at the local level. The MOI made progress in a basis of issue plan for its three major elements – the Iraq Police Services, National Police, and Directorate of Border Enforcement – to conduct the necessary fiscal planning for the ministry as a whole.

A comprehensive legislative framework is essential for ensuring the proper functioning of the ministry and for institutionalizing reforms. As a result of the ministry reform program, critical legislation has been enacted and other measures are working their way through the government and parliament and are expected to become law. For example, the “Internal Security Forces Penal Code,” which went into effect in April 2008, rewrote police regulations concerning violations and punishments. These laws passed from ministerial concept to parliamentary approval and finally signature by Iraq’s Presidency Council, a process that previously had been impossible to complete.

THE IMPACT OF IMPROVED SECURITY

In late 2007, security in Iraq began to improve following the “surge” of U.S. forces, the Sunni “Awakening” and the stand-down of militia loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr.

With the reduction in violence and an end to the insurgency, Iraqi officials and American advisers need to begin transforming the Iraqi police from a counterinsurgency force to a law enforcement organization and adjust police training, procurement and logistical support accordingly. MOI must lead this transition by moving from operating in a conflict environment to building an institution that focuses on traditional law enforcement and providing protection to citizens.

There are broader, structural problems in providing effective security. Iraq’s security sector challenges cannot be solved within the MOI alone. Other elements of the criminal justice system are weak. Improving the delivery of security to the people creates a need for reforms of other systems. The police alone can implement a rough sense of order but they cannot enforce the law or administer justice without an effective investigatory and judicial system. Secondly, the broader public administrative systems on which the ministry relies are equally weak. Although total Iraqi government expenditures grew from 2005 to 2007, the Iraqi government was unable to spend all the funds it budgeted.¹ The wider Iraqi government lacks capacity to manage budgets, procure goods and services, and administer and educate its employees, which restricts the efficacy of the MOI.

CONCLUSION

While progress has been made, the MOI remains susceptible to changes of leadership and budgetary crises. Each new national government has brought changes in ministerial leadership, personnel, direction, and priorities. This is a primary reason why the MOI had difficulty following through on reforms from 2003 to 2006. Increased transparency and oversight mechanisms will help deflect inappropriate political influence, especially with the upcoming election cycle in 2009-2010.

With the June 2009 withdrawal of American military forces from Iraqi cities and the forthcoming reduction of U.S. combat forces, U.S. forces will shift to advising, training and institutional development. Reforms, however, will require funding. Iraq is strapped for cash due to the low oil prices. The shift of U.S. attention to Afghanistan and the global economic crisis will also limit available resources. A recent hiring freeze has impacted plans to increase the size of Iraq's civilian security forces. This could provide a useful opportunity to pause after a period of unprecedented growth to reassess and consolidate the progress made.

The effectiveness and professionalism of the Iraqi police depends on the performance and operation of the Ministry of Interior. Advisers from the UK and the U.S. have succeeded in beginning to build long-standing institutional capacity within the ministry, which has seen subsequent improvements in security effectiveness by the police. The future challenges are substantial, however, and will require the ministry to assume responsibility for building a police institution that provides security and justice to the Iraqi people.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This *USIPeace Briefing* was written by Robert Perito, a senior program officer in the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace, and Madeline Kristoff, a research assistant in the center. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

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The Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations aims to transform societies emerging from conflict by promoting stability, democracy, economic development, and social reconstruction. The Center also conducts research, identifies best practices, develops new tools for post-conflict peace and stability operations, and supports related training and education efforts. Daniel Serwer is vice president of the center.

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