



# Training Indigenous SECURITY FORCES at the Upper End of the Counterinsurgency Spectrum

Colonel John R. Martin, U.S. Army, Retired

*The Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq... is a model for the future: helping others to help themselves is critical to winning the long war.*

—Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 6 February 2006

Colonel John R. Martin, U.S. Army, Retired, is Visiting Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College. He received a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy and has Masters degrees from the National War College, the Naval Command and Staff College, and the Naval Postgraduate School. He has been an experimental test pilot and served in various command and staff positions in the continental United States, Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

PHOTO: Iraqi Police perform a pass and review during a graduation ceremony in Numaniyah, 3 November 2006. (DOD)

**T**HE “COUNTERINSURGENCY SPECTRUM” may be less of a linear phenomenon than a multifaceted matrix. In that matrix, various factors define the nature of the fight and the challenges facing those who seek to train indigenous security forces to battle the insurgents. The basis of the insurgency is one of the factors: a sectarian insurgency may be more intractable than one based on a particular ideology. An insurgency that limits itself to attacks on valid military targets should be fought differently from one that attacks the population indiscriminately. A low-level insurgency with some “acceptable” level of attacks requires a different approach from one which has advanced to the stage of civil war, where the insurgents are complemented by conventional forces operating from territory controlled by the insurgents, perhaps governed by their political arm. The job of training the host country’s security forces is also affected by a variety of determinants. Those include whether sovereignty in the nation involved is being exercised by an indigenous government or by a U.S. or coalition element. The latter gives the occupying force more freedom of maneuver, but the former is key to legitimate governance, a key goal of any counterinsurgency. If the host nation is sovereign, the quality of the governance they provide also has an impact. The scale of the effort is another factor; what works in a small country like El Salvador might not work in a large one like Iraq. A large “occupying” force or international counterinsurgency effort is a factor that can facilitate success in training indigenous forces, but one that also clearly complicates the situation in the host country. There are certainly other factors, but the idea is that many things have an impact on training an army to combat insurgency. Trainers must be acutely aware of the challenges involved and be quick to adapt to changing situations.

By almost any measure, the war in Iraq, from 2003 to the present, must be considered as occupying the “high end” of any counterinsurgency and indigenous training model, so not all of the lessons of Iraq will apply across the spectrum of insurgent conflict. As with any “lessons of history,” lessons from the Iraq example must be treated skeptically and applied judiciously, but the war and the training of Iraqi Security Forces present several valuable guidelines for success in that continuing fight and for any similar situations in future wars.

## Pillars of Indigenous Security Force Training

Success in the training effort in Iraq, according to the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, hinges on three pillars: training and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces to standard, the use of transition teams to guide the development of leaders and staffs, and partnership between the U.S./coalition forces on the ground and the developing Iraqi forces.

**Training and equipping to standard.** “To standard” may be the operative term in this pillar of indigenous security force training. The standards for the training and equipping of an indigenous force must be developed by studying and adapting to the tactical and operational situations on the ground. In Iraq, organizing the Iraqi Security Forces was the first step in defining those standards. Initial plans called for three infantry divisions oriented on defending against external threats, complemented by various police forces (mostly in community stations) to maintain law and order within Iraq’s borders. Because the coalition could provide combat support and other combat enablers, the original force design focused on combat organizations.

An enduring lesson from Iraq is that the U.S. and coalition forces must be flexible and adapt to changing situations. As the insurgency matured on the ground, the desired size of the Iraqi military grew and their focus went from external threats to counterinsurgency. While maintaining the Iraqi Army’s ability to evolve into a more conventional military, the organizers of the Iraqi Army changed the organizational design from that of a force to defend Iraq’s borders to one designed to work with the police and the coalition forces to eliminate a deadly insurgency. The organization of the police forces similarly matured, from the Western and peacetime notion of lightly armed forces operating in a benign environment to that of a more paramilitary organization. Individual police stations *enforcing* law and order remained the goal, but the evolving organization needed some larger units for *establishing* law and order in the most troubled regions of the country. The organization of the Iraqi Security Forces was adapted to the situation as the insurgency unfolded.

Once organizational design and size are determined, defining an ideal force seems fairly simple: that force would have the latest in weapons and

technology, would be highly trained utilizing the best training methodologies found around the world, would be free of corruption and any tendency to violate human rights, and would be loyal to the central government. But just as organizations must adapt to tactical and operational imperatives, so must training and equipping. The most modern equipment was not the right equipment for the Iraqis. The new Iraqi Army, like the old one, was to be equipped with less modern Warsaw Pact equipment. Many of the Iraqis knew how to operate and maintain it. Their cash-strapped government had a better chance of being able to afford its acquisition, operation, and maintenance. (Acquisition was especially helped by the willingness of the newer NATO nations to donate the surfeit of Warsaw Pact equipment they had on hand.) For forces well trained in the modern military system, the Warsaw Pact equipment meets the equipment standard. A well-trained force facing a technologically superior force with a lesser level of training will very likely be able to achieve its goals or at least to thwart achievement of the enemy’s goals.

Training also must adapt to the tactical situation. Approximately twenty weeks of basic police academy training are required in Pennsylvania before a rookie policeman is commissioned. That initial investment of time may then be followed by significant amounts of on-the-job training and mentoring by an experienced police officer/trainer. In the U.S. Army, basic military training is approximately eight weeks long, followed by advanced individual training that takes several more weeks. As with police forces, Soldiers are then released to units where more on-the-job training is accomplished. The “ideal” training regimen might be expected to follow these same models.

For the Iraqi Security Forces, many contend that the only way to teach professionalism and avoid corruption and human rights violations is to take the police and military forces out of the country for training in an unhurried environment that is conducive to instilling major cultural changes. Unfortunately, the enemy has a vote in this election. A longer training period means that fewer soldiers and police are put on the streets or on the nation’s borders. The forces ultimately deployed would theoretically be better forces, but the Iraqi citizenry would have paid for this with longer exposure to



DOO

A scout attached to the 4th Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, looks through binoculars at an improvised explosive device that he and other scouts discovered on a road in the Nasser Wa' Salaam area of Fallujah, 31 October 2006. Iraqi and coalition forces cordoned off the area while an explosive ordinance disposal team destroyed the device.

the ravages of a brutal insurgency. There must be a balance struck between fielding the ideal force and fielding one that lacks the ability to protect itself and the populace; consideration of that balance point must include the needs of the people. In Iraq, former policemen (and some military) received three weeks of police training and were sent to work in neighborhood police stations. Recruits with no previous police or military experience underwent eight weeks of training, still far less than that received by police in Western countries. As the forces were developed and fielded, the training lengthened and changed in response to the increased lethality of the insurgents and terrorists and tactical lessons learned. This evolutionary process must continue in any counterinsurgency effort.

Shortcomings in organizational design, equipment or training must be addressed eventually. In Iraq, the focus on combat units in the military became more evident as the coalition felt itself more and more burdened with the need to provide logistics, intelligence, fires, and other support. As a result, the indigenous training base started to focus on building combat enablers.

As an example of how those shortcomings were addressed with the police forces, the training evolved with the addition of two more weeks of training to ensure new police were familiar with the operating environment in their assigned region. This brought the total training required for police in Iraq to about half of what it takes in Pennsylvania, but that will continue to evolve. In 2005, preparations were underway to restart the Baghdad Police Academy with an initial course length of six months, ramping eventually to as much as three years for police officers. As it regained sovereignty, the government of Iraq started to be the driver for training, equipping and organizational design changes.

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program is frequently touted as a “solution” to the need to train foreign military leaders. This is especially true for those personnel from countries where exposure to U.S. processes and values is expected to produce leaders with better attitudes toward human rights violations, corruption, treatment of subordinates, etc. IMET is clearly a valuable program, but the size of the program is not sufficient to make major headway in developing leaders for a major military force. Other nations similarly offer out-of-country training, sometimes even promising the volume of training needed to make a significant difference. These offers must be evaluated in light of the cost to the indigenous forces. The bill is not one paid only in the nation’s currency; the cost also includes the absence of quality personnel from the ongoing fight. Out-of-country training must be considered and employed where appropriate, but is often insufficient to train the significant numbers of personnel required in a short time and may be more expensive than the embattled country can afford.

**Transition teams.** In Vietnam, advisers to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) provided valuable services, but in many instances went beyond a purely advisory role and acted as “shadow commanders” of ARVN units. With Americans essentially commanding their units, ARVN officers and noncommissioned officers of all ranks were denied needed opportunities for development as leaders. In Iraq, the effort to avoid this pitfall started with the naming of the organizations that would provide the same advisory services.

Instead of adopting the “adviser” term—and the pejorative connotation from association with the failures of Vietnam—those organizations were called transition teams and were meant to focus

on development of leaders and staffs at battalion, brigade and division levels. A training program for indigenous security forces can have solid curricula, sufficient training facilities, and capable trainers, but still seem disjointed to the unit being trained. Transition teams help to overcome this by performing an integration and continuity function, starting with the indigenous force in the training base and continuing with them even after they become operational. Once the indigenous unit becomes operational, the transition team members should accompany them at times on operations to see the results of their training and mentoring efforts and to establish or maintain credibility with the indigenous forces. However, transition team members should remain focused on staff and leader development, not oversight of operations.

Recognizing the complexity and challenges of training security forces while simultaneously engaged in combat and understanding that successful training of the indigenous security force is key to counterinsurgency victory, the military should assign the best personnel available to the transition teams. One of the lessons of Vietnam is that the best people weren't always assigned to the advisory teams; the development of the ARVN suffered as a result. If, as in the case of Iraq, transition becomes the main effort, the Army should assign its best qualified personnel to the transition teams, making even TOE assignments a lower priority. Because of the increased amount of time they have available for training, the best team members generally would be active duty personnel, including personnel in the training base in the United States. Reserve Component personnel can backfill these personnel in active units (even if deployed) and in the training base and other positions. Conversely, the best personnel for a police training mission may be found in the Reserve Component, where some law enforcement personnel serve as citizen-Soldiers. Unless they are assigned to Military Police units, this may cause them to be diverted from the unit with which they had been assigned. The adverse impact of this action must be considered before "cherry picking" Soldiers who have law enforcement experience for transition teams.

Any personnel assigned to transition teams will need supplemental training, which becomes especially important if the highest quality Soldiers are not assigned to the transition task. To the maximum

extent possible, this should be done in specialized pre-deployment training. Some training may be best conducted in the host country, but limitations on deployment lengths mean that training done in-country decreases the time spent with the indigenous forces.

A common misconception is that Special Operations Forces (SOF) are the best forces for conducting indigenous security force training. SOF are especially talented at the mission of foreign internal defense when the host military and police need only limited training to accomplish their counterinsurgency mission. In a country the size of Iraq, with military and police forces being completely rebuilt, the limited numbers of SOF suggest that significant augmentation by conventional forces is required. Conventional forces may also be better suited for training other conventional forces, perhaps allowing the SOF to focus on training the host country's elite nonconventional forces.

Some analogy can be drawn between SOF and Military Police (MP). There is a tendency to draw on the MPs to conduct training of indigenous police forces. They offer a valuable asset in police training, but the skills required of Military Police are not exactly the same as those required for civilian police forces. As with SOF, there are also not enough MP units to train the civilian police forces in a country as large as Iraq. Civilian police make excellent indigenous police trainers and can contribute significantly to the overall effort. Such police forces may be available through the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), although these personnel have a significant price tag and security considerations often limit their employment. Military leaders of indigenous security force training efforts must plan to incorporate civilian police trainers and overcome the inherent challenges of employing civilians on the battlefield.

Planning for transition team employment must consider replacements. Because of their proximity to operating indigenous forces, transition teams will regularly suffer casualties. The size of the transition team will be determined by its mission and force protection guidelines, but few teams will be large enough to absorb casualties without adverse impact on the team's ability to move about the battlefield and accomplish its mission. Replacements must be considered holistically: personnel casualties are usually accompanied

by equipment losses. Individual equipment will come with the personnel replacements, but an operational readiness float must also be immediately responsive to the need to replace vehicles, weapons, and other specialized equipment. Replacements must be made quickly; each day lost in training or in operations requires a corresponding correction later.

**Partnership.** Because of the small size of transition teams and their limited reach and focus, their efforts must be complemented by partnership of the indigenous unit with the U.S. or coalition forces operating in the country. If oversight of operations is needed, the U.S./coalition forces should have the manpower to perform that task at all levels, from squad/team to division. Making partnership with indigenous forces a specified mission for the multinational operating forces ensures that some degree of ownership is felt; without that ownership, multinational forces may focus instead on accomplishing missions themselves, rather than figuring out how to incorporate and develop indigenous forces.

Coalition partners will almost always be involved as transition team members and as operating forces. Capability limitations, as well as various national imperatives, can be expected to affect how well the coalition units partner with the indigenous forces. Some will be more concerned about force protection or addressing national interests than in achieving the desires of the multinational command, either for training or for operations. For that matter, capability—or leadership—limitations of some U.S. forces will also adversely affect how they work with their indigenous partners. The multinational training and operations commands must monitor the efforts of subordinate units and ensure effective and coherent partnership.

The partnership effort also complements the transition teams in mentoring and advising indigenous leaders. After indigenous units graduate from the training base, transfer of the transition teams to the command of the operating forces helps to ensure that the adviser/mentor roles are coordinated.

## **Moving Ahead: Two More Pillars**

As the advisory mission evolves and the indigenous forces grow in strength, force development efforts can move on to other important objectives: developing infrastructure and indigenous leadership.

**Civilian infrastructure development.** When the first few indigenous forces are fielded, the need

for a civilian infrastructure to support them is not always evident since the multinational force takes care of the soldiers and police. As more and more indigenous forces take the field, the need grows exponentially for the host nation to provide that support. This support includes contracting guidance, promotion regulations, life support for deployed forces, equipment acquisition, and development of maintenance systems. Development of the civilian force sustainment infrastructure, both military processes for broad force sustainment and governmental organizations to establish policies, is a task probably best accomplished by civilian organizations from the various nations contributing to the multinational force. Use of civilian agencies to accomplish this task sets a good example of civilian control of the military, but many civilian agencies—in the U.S. and elsewhere—are not resourced for the mission. In addition, many of them have an organizational culture that can impede the agencies' ability to provide the “nuts and bolts” development of the civilian infrastructure. Adequate resources and unity of effort in civilian infrastructure development are critical. If U.S. and other civilian agencies are not effective, those are probably best provided by assigning that mission to the multinational training force. This ensures unity of effort through unity of command. This has limitations: developing the civilian infrastructure for the military and police forces is probably at the limit. Taking the lead in developing the civilian infrastructure for administration of justice, penitentiary, financial, and other complementary security capabilities will be tempting, but must be passed to civilian agencies from the United States, such as the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, or other coalition governments. Contractor support to this effort may be the best way to accomplish the mission when personnel resources of civilian agencies are not adequate for the task.

Key in developing civilian infrastructure and training indigenous police and military forces is indigenous leadership. Early in an operation, coalition leaders may have direct control of leader selection; this control is quickly lost as the host nation regains sovereignty or asserts its own independence in such decisions. Cultural considerations may override what appear to be logical choices for leaders at various levels of police and military command.



DOD

Iraqi soldiers of the 4th Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, patrol Camp India, 31 October 2006, in one of the new Humvees. The vehicles were added to the unit's fleet to provide better protection for soldiers on missions.

While continuing to emphasize selection of the best person for leadership roles, multinational leaders must also hedge against selection of poor leaders because of tribal or other influences. One of the best ways to do this is through staff development, one of the key tasks of the transition teams. A mediocre commander, backed by a competent staff, can still produce a capable police or military unit.

Another hedge against selection of poor leaders is leader training and education. The multinational training command must plan for officer training from precommissioning and junior officer tactical training to operational training and education for mid-grade officers and through some “capstone” level for the higher operational and strategic leadership.

A similar comprehensive training and education program should be developed for noncommissioned officers. Whether it is in Iraq or one of the former Warsaw Pact countries, challenged militaries frequently do not have the professional NCO corps that traditional Western countries possess. This is even more important in the modern military system, which hinges on junior leaders executing independently in accordance with the commander's intent. The importance of capable junior leadership increases significantly in a counterinsurgency, where independent action is critical. In addition to schoolhouse training and education, indigenous NCOs—and their officer leaders—should be exposed as often as possible to their U.S. partner-unit NCOs performing their daily duties with their typical professionalism.

Imitation of U.S. NCOs will significantly improve the performance of indigenous NCOs; their officer leaders should also see from the U.S. example the value of having their own professional NCO corps. However, the cultural impediments to development of NCOs are significant. Many countries—Iraq, in particular—have cultures in which capable junior leaders are viewed as a *coup d'état* threat.

## Final Considerations

Below are additional considerations for training indigenous forces.

**“Get after it!”** Don't study the situation to death; get on with development of military and police forces. Although police forces represent a somewhat greater challenge, the basic outline of the indigenous military forces can be divined very quickly. Even very junior officers understand the basic outline of a military force; they can use the doctrinal battlefield operating systems to make a rapid assessment that is “about right.” Delaying for more detailed assessments may eliminate some inefficiencies, but is seldom worth the time. The initial assessment should be buttressed with more thorough analysis as time permits. Adjustments should then be made, but initial steps taken after even perfunctory analysis will seldom require wholesale change. The tendency to synchronize every step of the effort must be avoided. Synchronization suggests some kind of smoothly operating machinery. Development of indigenous security forces from scratch in an active insurgency environment is more about overcoming fog and friction than about avoiding waste through perfect synchronization.

**Interagency.** Multinational operators and trainers must demand robust interagency participation in the training effort. This is particularly important in the realms of the police and the civilian infrastructure. Coalition partners should be asked to make “coalition interagency” contributions. Some partners will have more experience than U.S. forces with the type of police or military forces being developed. For example, the U.S. does not have a national police force, which is the norm in many countries.

Multinational operators and trainers must also hedge against not having robust interagency participation. Many tasks that would be better performed by other government agencies will have to be done by the military. Where possible, the interagency


contribution should be used to the maximum extent possible. To paraphrase T.E. Lawrence, it may be better for the interagency to do something tolerably than for the military to do it perfectly.

**Resources.** As in fighting the insurgency, money is ammunition for the training effort. Adequate funding needs to be readily available early. Funding should not have borders around it; commanders should be able to apply it where needed. Flexibility in contracting for projects is also critical. The commander needs to have the flexibility to contract with the agency that is best able to meet the command's requirements regarding cost, quality, and timing.


**Metrics.** Measures of effectiveness will be required in any effort. Selection of the appropriate metrics is key. Too often, measurements that are easy to take are mistaken for measurements that are needed. For example, counting the numbers of soldiers equipped or battalions fielded is fairly easy and reasonably accurate, but may be of little

value. Measuring the training level of fielded units is significantly harder, but immeasurably more informative. Even harder is measuring the loyalty of indigenous forces in a sectarian society. In assessing a nugget of coprolite, measurements of its size, the smoothness, of its texture, and the shine on its surface are fairly easy, but don't address the inherent value of the coprolite. In the end, the shine, smoothness, and quantity simply distract from the fact that the coprolite is nothing more than fossilized dinosaur dung. Some of the easy-to-measure metrics are important, but assessing progress in developing indigenous security forces far more often requires difficult and subjective analysis.

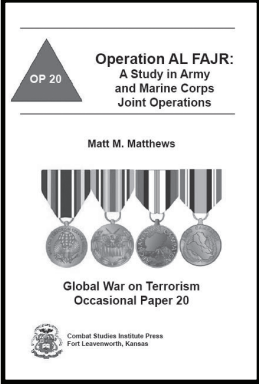
**Flexibility.** There are no universal answers about how to train indigenous security forces while fighting insurgents. Be prepared to adapt the pillars described herein based on the tactical situation, the culture, and direction from the host-country government. Adaptability is the key. *MR*



# COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS



## OUR LATEST PUBLICATION



– COMING SOON –

Interservice Rivalry and Airpower  
in the Vietnam War—Dr. Ian A. Horwood

Eyewitness to War: A U.S. Army Oral History of  
Operation Al Fajr—Mr. Kendall D. Gott (General Editor)

Security Assistance: U.S. and International Historical Perspectives  
Proceedings from the 2006 TRADOC CSI  
Military History Symposium—Mr. Mike Brooks (Editor)

## WHAT WE DO:

- Publish books and monographs covering current doctrinal issues from a historical perspective
- Assist, plan, and conduct staff rides around the world for U.S. Army units and agencies
- Develop, maintain, and coordinate an integrated progressive program of military history instruction in the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command service school system
- Conduct the annual CSI/TRADOC Military History Symposium

**For more information about CSI publications or assistance to your organization, contact the following:**

**CSI Publications and 2006 Military History Symposium:**  
Mr. Kendall D. Gott  
gottk@leavenworth.army.mil

**Staff Rides:**  
LTC Kevin Kennedy  
kevin.kennedy3@leavenworth.army.mil

**Military History Instructional Support:**  
LTC Gary Linhart  
gary.linhart@leavenworth.army.mil

\*CSI Publications are provided free of charge to military organizations