

# Independent Task Force

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on

# Progress and Reform

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# **Cooling the Streets: Institutional Reforms in Iraq's Ministry of Interior**

## **KEY FINDINGS**

We believe that the Iraqi Ministry of Interior has turned an important corner in how it operates, particularly over the last two years. As one senior Iraqi official stated, "The Ministry is cooling the streets." This is not to say all the problems of the Ministry have been fixed; as with many aspects in Iraq, gains may always be reversed. What we are saying is that meaningful reform efforts have been put in place, and they show signs of real promise. Much progress originates from the Ministry's most senior leadership who have candidly acknowledged previous problems and shortcomings and made addressing them a top priority. It is important to place such progress in the context of the tasks and challenges, both past and present, that the Ministry continues to face. Historically, the Ministry has been plagued by lack of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and professionalism. The Ministry has not yet solved all of these problems, nor can it do so alone, but it is important to acknowledge that it is engaging in a substantive reform effort. The challenge facing the Ministry now is how to deepen and build on the progress that has been achieved, continue the momentum for greater transparency, accountability and professionalism and make these reforms permanent so they can withstand future changes in leadership or government.

## **INTRODUCTION & HISTORY**

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) has been tumultuous since 2003. In the past, it has been accused of gross incompetence, serious human rights violations, mass corruption and being a primary accelerant to sectarian violence. In recent years, it has expanded from its traditional role of supervising the nation's police and has grown to take on many more roles. The Ministry currently finds itself as a leading element in the effort to stabilize the country in the throes of an insurgency, as it attempts to manage forces, equipment and missions far more numerous than those for which the institution was originally designed. Adding further stress to the Ministry and its operations is the fact that over the past five years the Ministry has been led by five different ministers. Today, it is an organization under dynamic pressure originating from a dramatic growth in size, mandate and scrutiny.

Just as the country has struggled to define its identity since 2003, so too has the MOI. The Ministry is where top-down policy decisions and bottom-up challenges, such as crime or reconciliation efforts, converge. The Iraqi people's most frequent interactions with their government occur with the police in their local cities, towns and villages. The Ministry is where political and sectarian forces across the country wrestle for power and authority. And it is a target of opportunity for foreign governments who attempt to infiltrate or influence its ranks. More than any other ministry, the MOI is a microcosm of the nation of Iraq.

The Ministry today is not the same as the one that existed in 2005 or 2003, let alone that which existed during the former regime. At present, the MOI is the largest employer in the country. The number of people drawing a paycheck from the Ministry is quickly approaching 500,000.<sup>1</sup> It coordinates, maintains and commands a growing variety of police and security-related forces, including the Iraqi Police Service, the National Police, the Department of Border Enforcement and the National Information and Investigations Agency, to name just a few. The task of coordinating these diverse mandates is further complicated by the ongoing assimilation of the

<sup>1</sup> This number could reach closer to 600,000 as elements such as the Oil Police, Electricity Police and other Facilities Protections Service members transition to the MOI. These numbers and this entire assessment report do not encompass the Kurdish Ministry of Interior and the forces they have in the provinces of Dahuk, Irbil and Sulaymaniyah.

Sawaa (commonly referred to as the “Sons of Iraq”), as they transition from being Coalition-led neighborhood security organizations to being absorbed into numerous government departments, including the MOI.

This larger size and set of responsibilities stands in stark contrast with the MOI under Saddam Hussein, when it numbered approximately 60,000 staff and engaged in a form of basic policing, civil administration and traffic management. In general, the police were a relatively low-level security organization during that era, and serious internal security issues were handled by an assortment of other forces and intelligence bodies, all of which were disbanded or dissolved with the overthrow of the Saddam regime.

Unlike Saddam’s other security agencies and the Iraqi Army, the police and the Ministry of Interior were not formally disbanded in 2003. While many of the police forces “self-dissolved” at that time, leading to the abandoning of many police stations, a call went out from the Coalition almost immediately for the police to continue their work. Despite efforts by the remaining Ba’athist elements to halt returns, approximately 50-60% of the force continued policing. However, many of the senior police leadership failed to return, which left low and mid-level officers to cope as best they could.

Shortly thereafter, the Ministry was restructured by the Coalition Provisional Authority. Changes included being stripped of some responsibilities, such as control over detention facilities, while other responsibilities were added, such as border enforcement. The Ministry was also restructured into six different directorates, with responsibility then allocated to people from different political parties and backgrounds, in an attempt to ensure that the MOI did not come to be dominated by any single political group. Compounding the already mounting confusion, in autumn 2003 the Coalition command instituted wildly ambitious and unrealistic hiring programs such as “30,000 in 30 days” and later “60,000 in 60 days”. This approach may have helped resolve some short-term concerns with getting unemployed people paid employment, but it created massive long-term problems. For example, it severely strained the relationship between the provinces and the central government since few people knew who these new hires were or where they went after receiving their pay.

It also exacerbated another glaring deficiency – that there were not adequate mechanisms in place to train new or existing policemen. A massive Coalition effort was put in place to address this issue. By July 2004, a program was created to train 135,000 policemen by 2006. This number grew as the security threat worsened. At the same time, there were various attempts to vet existing policemen and the MOI leadership, as well as other institutional reforms. However, few of these programs were ever able to take serious root due to frequent political changes and upheavals, including three ministers in less than the first twelve months of the new program.

It was also at this time that the MOI created a paramilitary force called the Special Police Commandos, later to be known as the National Police. At the time, the ministerial leadership saw them as, “an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem.” The Iraqi army had not yet taken form in any meaningful size and the insurgents posed a threat that the standard police could not combat. So the Commandos were stood up in an attempt to bring back some former regime fighters and combat the growing insurgency in such areas as Fallujah, Baghdad, Tikrit and Samarah. Distinguishing this commando force from other MOI entities was that they were established by ministerial fiat as opposed to institutional regulation or legislation, which would have taken more time to adopt. The Iraqi government in place at this time knew it would be in power for only six to nine months and was battling a growing and vicious insurgency, so such formalizing legislative processes were never attempted in earnest.

The result was a force that grew to be independent in many ways from the rest of the Ministry, developing its own intelligence, operations and logistics capabilities. Inadvertently, this also made the force more susceptible

to potential politicization. These fears were disastrously realized during the 2005–06 period as the makeup and mission of the National Police changed dramatically. In short, the force became one of the primary sources of sectarian violence.

Throughout this time, the Ministry continued to grow in size through Coalition training, but not necessarily in institutional capability since reform efforts constantly encountered “political resets” that altered the leadership, priorities, missions and personnel. Those reforms that were enacted could never be institutionalized; momentum was never able to be sustained. It was only in mid-2006 with new, reform-minded, apolitical leadership that had a timeframe in office of years, not months, that the Ministry was in a position to implement policies and procedures that could start to turn the situation around.

## **THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR IN CONTEXT**

Since 2003, there has been a constant desire to transform the Iraqi police into a Western modeled force. While admirable, these desires must be confronted and tempered by a realistic understanding of the challenges they impose. Institutional reform is difficult at any time, in any country, but especially in a conflict or post-conflict environment. In the case of the MOI, such challenges have been exacerbated by the constantly shifting political and security dynamics of the country. Since 2003, there have been four national governments and five different Ministers of Interior. Not surprisingly, security has become one of the most politicized aspects of Iraq – a reality that is amplified and complicated by the ongoing conflict.

A central challenge lies in establishing an appropriate balance of power within the Ministry. The politics of the MOI represent a history of conflicting interests between a range of personalities, private interests and political parties. Repeatedly in the past, a new manager would no sooner settle into his job than he would be promoted, arrested, retired or killed. Trust became nonexistent.

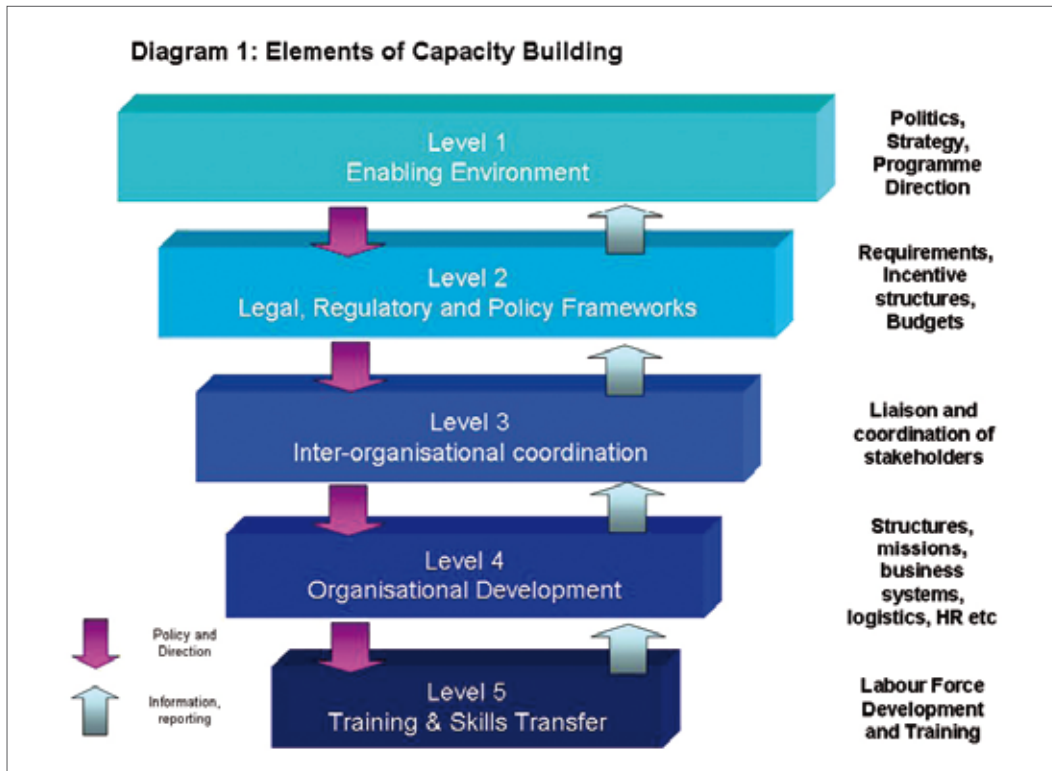
Overall, as the security environment deteriorated from 2003 through 2007, institutional elements were increasingly driven to rely on themselves and to protect their own, causing duplication of effort and undermining coordination. All the while, the MOI underwent unprecedented growth in size, disposition, composition, budget, assigned tasks and responsibility, outstripping management’s capacity to coordinate, direct and coherently resource its forces, and thereby leaving many tasks poorly defined and resourced. As a result, the MOI grew helter-skelter as an organization, with security functions that were independent and isolated from one another in terms of systems, methodologies and tools.

In many ways, the Ministry today still struggles with this legacy. Political influence remains pervasive in the Ministry, but not to the same divisive level that was publicly reported in 2005 and 2006. The Assessment Team made a specific effort to interview Iraqis on as many different floors of the Ministry as possible and was not hindered in doing so. A stark change was clearly apparent. One explanation is that under new, less politically charged leadership, the Ministry has had time to move beyond constant crisis management mode and let operations begin to become routine.

## **CURRENT REFORMS AND TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES**

Another challenge is finding the balance between leadership and institution building. The desire to build a stronger institution is based on the premise that such measures then make it less susceptible to political shocks and extremist desires. At present, the Ministry is still personality driven as opposed to bureaucratically capable, but a number of programs have already been put in place to shift the balance.

A reform agenda would not have been able to gain momentum had all of the nefarious actors remained in the Ministry. Recently, the MOI has taken significant steps in removing corrupt and sectarian elements from its ranks. For example, since 2006, in conjunction with the Inspector General and Internal Affairs offices, nearly 3,000 people have been removed for administrative corruption and handed over to the judicial system. Moreover, much of the leadership within the National Police has been removed. This includes division commanders, brigade commanders and most of its battalion commanders, not to mention thousands of its rank and file. This is not to say the MOI is corruption or sectarian free, but efforts such as these are bold and a sign of institutional progress.



Andrew Rathmell, *Fixing Iraq's Internal Security Forces: Why is Reform of the Ministry of Interior so Hard?*, (Center for Strategic & International Studies, Post Conflict Reconstruction Project *Special Briefing*, November 2007)

Institutional development is generally established along five levels that must work together in order for reform to take root. Since 2003, the primary focus by far has been on labor force generation and training. A continued approach, which focuses more on rank and file force generation, will widen the gap between the leaders and the led. There have been, however, welcome efforts to increase the number of police officers (as opposed to enlisted police) to manage the force. While standard policemen only go through a 10-week basic training course, police officers must go through a three-year course if they have a high school degree or a nine-month course if they have a college degree. Over the past two years more than 4,500 have graduated and an additional 2,800 are expected to graduate in early 2009.

But for reform to work in this environment it must take into account the institution, rather than just the forces.

Over the last two years, growing cadres of Iraqi leaders have been exposed to the fundamental aspects of institutional development, particularly through the MOI's developing Strategic Planning process. This

Strategic Planning initiative has gradually grown. It has allowed objectives to be set across a range of areas, from building tailored security plans for different parts of the country, to creating requirements-based training curricula in such areas as investigations, and developing anti-drug offices in the provinces.

Still, like any large organization, the MOI is affected by bureaucratic politics, the stove-piping of its command structure, and limited information sharing. Much work remains on this front, but there are a growing number of measures in place to address these problems, such as cross-administrative and operations councils that include representatives from all departments in the Ministry.

Importantly as well, operational plans and strategic plans are coming together and will contribute to the shaping of the budget for the first time in 2009. This is essential if the Ministry is to effectively execute its budget. In 2007, the Ministry executed nearly 90% of its budget (over \$2.8 billion), which was a more than a 10% increase over 2006. Ensuring that the budget is driven by strategic and operational planning will mean that budget execution should reflect more closely the achievement of agreed operational objectives.

Likewise, in an effort to define missions and regulations, legislation has been passed and other measures are working their way through the government in order to become laws. Most recently, the “Police Penal Code” came into effect in April 2008, rewriting and defining police regulations, violations and punishments more clearly. These laws took approximately two years to pass from ministerial concept to approval in parliament and signature by the Presidency Council. Other laws, such as an MOI structure law, which defines the duty of the Ministry and its departments and directorates, are currently in front of Parliament.

Reform in the area of logistics not only helped institutionalize practices but also reduced corruption. For example, prior to 2007 weapons issued were not regularly accounted for. Ten weapons may have been issued to one individual, with the intent that the individual would then distribute those weapons appropriately to ten people. But the Ministry lacked accountability mechanisms. The MOI has changed its distribution and accountability practices dramatically, with encouraging results. Detailed attention has been placed on procedure, and programs such as one-for-one replacements have been instituted. “It is essential to have a plan in place before you send out equipment,” said a director in the logistics department. This may be obvious to Coalition force members, but it is a critical step forward for the MOI in the way it now does business.

This greater level of accountability has also helped at local crime scenes. After one recent incident, the police found weapons that were used by criminals in Baghdad. The guns were clearly MOI-issued, but the investigators were able to search their data base and establish that the guns used came from police who had been killed in an earlier attack.<sup>2</sup>

A snapshot of how the Ministry has changed was best observed by interacting with security forces on the ground. At approximately 1am on our final evening in Baghdad, an Assessment Team member requested an impromptu drive through Baghdad. Traveling in a single armored car with a driver, ministerial assistant and a translator, we drove through the city for close to 45 minutes. We were stopped at approximately 15 checkpoints which were manned by Iraqi police, National Police and Iraqi army. At one point we were pulled over by a police vehicle questioning why we were on the road. Overall, we did not have a single problem. All of the security officials we encountered performed admirably. Importantly, not one Coalition vehicle or soldier was seen on the road the entire time. This trip would not have been possible two years earlier, when sectarian violence raged throughout the city and other parts of the country.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2003 there have been more than 7,000 police martyrs and over 15,000 policemen injured throughout the country.

Unfortunately, virtually all administrative data is still paper-based. And while computers are available to store the information, much more work remains ahead. Comprehensively collating this information and migrating it to IT systems, and then having properly trained people to maintain these systems will take time and a significant culture change to implement. There is, however, a growing and genuine desire to take these steps.

Work also remains to be done in terms of linking up the respective logistical elements of the police, National Police and border forces, but the procedures to replenish and distribute equipment are increasingly institutionalized. Additionally, there are sincere attempts to gain greater accountability of equipment issued prior to the implementation of these policies. This is no easy task since so much materiel was given out under earlier governments, directors and Coalition officials.

The art of planning has caught on in the Ministry. In reality, many of these efforts are being driven by a small but professionally-minded planning office and equally small and focused cadres in the administrative directorates. While there is still an urgent need to coordinate human resources, operations, logistics and information technology (and to augment the small numbers of competent administrators responsible for these areas), there are an increasing number of directorates that see the benefit of breaking from past practices.

## FUTURE CHALLENGES

The Ministry faces a multi-year challenge of transitioning from a conflict environment defined by the requirement to provide security, to building an institution with a greater focus on traditional law enforcement services and the provision of justice to citizens. The heart of this transformation rests with the demilitarization of the police. Such an evolution in requirements and mission calls for, as an example, a shift in practices and perceptions of how best to employ police. Civil policing should not ultimately be focused on providing security to the state, but on serving the people – through the traditional roles of law enforcement. This shift also requires that security be defined in terms of its ultimate customers, the Iraqi people, for whom it involves more than men with guns at checkpoints. Without proper management and support, law enforcement and security cannot exist. This is increasingly understood and accepted within the MOI.

As the MOI reassesses and responds to the evolving security environment, it will also have to deftly weave Sawaa – or the Sons of Iraq (SOI) – into its architecture. With over 12,500 SOI already on the payroll, the Ministry has provided employment for a sizeable portion of the Sawaa's able-bodied personnel. Its current path towards integrating another 10,000 will necessitate a carefully managed plan.

The Ministry remains susceptible to political shocks and changes of leadership. The MOI is still leadership-driven as opposed to institutionally driven. This is one of the primary reasons why the MOI has had so much difficulty following through on reforms or building any momentum since 2003. With each new government came new ministerial leadership, personnel, direction and priorities. Since mid-2006, however, the leadership is less politically driven. This approach has also generated a growing confidence among the more reform-minded people in the Ministry. These principles must continue to work their way through the Ministry at all levels. Increased transparency and oversight mechanisms will help deflect inappropriate political influence. This extends specifically to the National Police. By developing more detailed legislation of their authorities, it will gradually make them more institutionalized and connected to other ministerial practices.

Similarly, political shocks and hostile influence can also originate from outside Iraq. The United States and other governments have pointed to instances of Iranian interference in particular. A ministry that improves its intelligence and administrative practices will not only reduce this threat within the MOI but become more effective at eliminating it throughout the country.

The upcoming provincial elections will present a further challenge, ushering in measures to shift police authority to the provincial governments. This will require greater capacity Iraq-wide to conduct civil service functions such as planning, budgeting, human resource management and procurement in a uniform manner according to consistent methodologies. While provincial headquarters do have some planners, there is a pressing need to create an MOI Iraq-wide planning system. Addressing this challenge will require more than standard management courses for provincial staff. If anything, it will involve developing extensive curricula in all administrative functions, not only within the provinces but also in Baghdad. The Higher Institute, the MOI's embryonic officer staff college, has the potential to act as a center for learning these essential administrative functions.

Finally, it is important to mention that while the Ministry has taken steps to implement reforms, it will never be able to address Iraq's security and criminal justice/law enforcement challenges by itself. For example, reducing overcrowding at detention facilities will require an expanded judicial counterpart that can process detainees in a timely manner. Likewise, as Ministry of Justice officials observe, for detainees to be tried and convicted at a higher rate, more substantive investigation skills and practices must be instilled with an ever-growing police force. Similarly, if the MOI or Iraqi government as a whole wishes to take part in a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process to transition police, Sawaa or other security forces to civilian life as the security threat recedes, it will require support from the appropriate ministries that provide social services, training and economic incentives. These are complex issues that go beyond the scope of this study, but highlight the need of heightened civil affairs capacity throughout the government.

## CONCLUSION

As one Ministry of Interior official stated to us, "We cannot deny that the Ministry was sectarian." This is true. Significant challenges still remain with the MOI, but the institution has turned an important corner. When compared to the actions of 2005-2006, the Ministry is no longer a driver for sectarian violence. Leadership is what drives the Ministry. Not only at the top starting with the Minister but also among the generals that command the National Police and the police officers who run their stations. However, shocks to the political system and Ministry are still possible. Extremist agendas could still take hold if there were to be a radical diversion in leadership direction. This is why strengthening the institution is critically important as it attempts to reach the goal of providing social peace.

## SCOPE OF PROJECT

### *Terms of Reference*

The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior to the Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Specifically, this report's objective is to independently assess the institutional reform measures the Ministry of Interior has attempted to put in place during the past few years.

### *Methodology*

An Assessment Team was brought to Baghdad and conducted its study during October 2008. Data presented in this report comes from multiple Iraqi sources to ensure as much analytical rigor as possible under the current conditions in Iraq. While this assessment is not meant to be comprehensive -- the Ministry of Interior is a massive institution, numbering approximately 500,000 people throughout the country -- we reviewed administrative procedures, strategic planning, training initiatives, leadership development and other institutional reforms. Special emphasis was placed on witnessing first-hand how the Iraqi police and National Police are engaged in providing security throughout Baghdad.

This report is also based on conversations with more than 50 Iraqi and Coalition officials. The vast majority of these interviews were with Iraqis, ranging from current and former Ministers of Interior to checkpoint policemen. All meetings were held in Baghdad and nearly all were conducted outside the International Zone.

Because information is sometimes difficult to verify, the numbers presented should be viewed as approximations to give a sense of trajectory and trends. Some information has been cross-referenced with Coalition and other Iraqi sources, and every attempt has been made to confirm the data independently. The Assessment Team's judgments and conclusions are informed by years of experience working in Iraq, specifically with the Ministry, by an understanding of historical trends with the data and by the personalities who make up the institution.

## **About the Authors**

**Matt Sherman** has served more than three years in Iraq since 2003. His first two years were spent working with the Ministry of Interior, where he personally advised four separate ministers. He is currently a principal with Sherman Consulting International.

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## **About the Editor**

**Mitchell B. Reiss** was Director of Policy Planning for Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2003-05 and the President's Special Envoy to the Northern Ireland Peace Process from 2003-07.

## About the Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations at the College of William and Mary

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