

NATO Training Mission–Iraq

Looking to the Future



NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer speaking at NATO Training Mission–Iraq with Gen James L. Jones, USMC, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and LTG David H. Petraeus, USA, Chief of Office of Security Transition–Iraq

By RICK LYNCH *and* PHILLIP D. JANZEN

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been called the most successful military alliance in modern history. Achievements in forestalling Soviet expansion in Europe and in conducting the peace and stability operations in the Balkans demonstrate future utility for the organization. However, NATO is at a crossroads. Terror attacks on Western interests during the last decade were punctuated by the events of September 11, 2001. The former collective defense posture of the Alliance is now challenged both

politically and militarily to engage in broader world policy. As a result, NATO politicians and strategic planners are confronted by operational considerations well beyond the bounds of Europe but with serious implications at home.

The transformation into this new era is highlighted by creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the deployment of Allied forces to Afghanistan to command the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The NATO Training Mission–Iraq (NTM–I) represents the most recent test of the organization's resolve and future direction. Still in its infancy, NTM–I provides

insight into the Alliance decision process while highlighting implications for future NATO-led, out-of-area operations.

NATO Transforms

The transformation of NATO has progressed rapidly in the 21st century. Beginning in 1999 with the expansion from 16 to the current 26 nations, the Alliance has embarked on ambitious ventures that have tested the resolve of old and new members. In the midst of the expansion (consisting of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999 and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004), members outlined future objectives at the Prague Summit in 2002. There, then-Secretary General Lord George Robertson stated, "NATO must change radically if it is to be effective. . . . It must

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International Security Assistance Force vehicles in Afghanistan

NATO

modernize or be marginalized.” Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General James Jones, USMC, emphasized the need to move NATO beyond its Cold War thinking of static defense, while capitalizing on its capabilities to shape and influence the 21st-century security environment: “We have too much capability for the past and not enough capacity for the future.”¹

To meet the challenge, NATO realigned its command structure from a static, defensive posture embodied in two strategic-level commands, two regional operational-level commands, and several joint subregional commands, to a more streamlined functional structure. The new structure is based in a strategic command responsible for transforming the Alliance—Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia (formerly Strategic Allied Command Atlantic), and a second strategic command responsible for the operational aspects of NATO—Allied Command Operations, or Strategic Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). The transformation further devolved the regionally based command structure into a more flexible, operationally based hierarchy with land, maritime, and air component commands.

With new focus and energy derived from the Prague Summit, NATO embarked on a historical out-of-area mission, taking command of ISAF in Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 11, 2003. The German commander, Lieutenant General Norbert Van Heyst, marked this event, stating, “During the 1990s, we saw NATO starting to take

on peacekeeping duties, first in Bosnia and later in Kosovo and Macedonia. But that was limited . . . to the Euro-Atlantic region. But as of today, the Alliance will for the first time be leading an operation outside Europe, in Asia, and that is quite unique.”² Later that year, NATO inaugurated the NRF, an operational concept designed to use modern, flexible, rapidly deployable joint forces to combat asymmetric threats, namely terrorism.

NATO’s most recent and arguably most challenging out-of-area operation is the NTM-I. The hard political and military lessons identified in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan are being relearned in Iraq: success in NATO-led operations will always rest on political will, funding, and personnel resources, all inextricably linked to the requirement for unanimity among members.

The Road to Baghdad

ISAF marked a sea change in Allied operational vision; however, NATO resolve to engage worldwide problems was soon tested again with Operation *Iraqi Freedom* in March 2003. Under authority derived from United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1441, coalition forces invaded Iraq to remove Ba’athist dictator Saddam Hussein and eliminate the suspected threat from weapons of mass destruction. As early as November 2002 at the Prague Summit, Alliance members pledged full support for UN efforts to ensure full compliance by Iraq with UNSCR 1441, stating that it remained an Alliance policy. However, there were no further discussions of specific involvement in Iraq

until Turkey requested Article 4 defense of its borders with that country in February 2003. Later that year, Poland requested support to its leadership of a coalition-based international sector in Iraq, fully embroiling NATO ministers in debate about how the Alliance could further support coalition efforts in Iraq and with the government in Baghdad.³

Early in 2004, planning staffs began considering support options to the fledgling government. An assessment visit made in February 2004 facilitated initial contacts with coalition leadership and provided early ideas for a potentially enhanced role in Iraq. Results from that trip indicated a spectrum of possible roles, all capitalizing on NATO core competencies and recent experience from stabilization operations in the Balkans. Early thoughts focused on the possibility of helping train Iraqi military leaders. A second and more robust assessment visit was planned to identify specific training requirements for presentation to NATO political leadership in the North Atlantic Council.

Political support for involvement in Iraq reached a crescendo in June 2004. The NATO Secretary General premised further participation on three conditions: a UN Security Council Resolution pledging international support to the government, a request from the government for military support, and unanimous consent within the Alliance.

The first of these three conditions was met by the passage of UNSCR 1546 on June 8, 2004, which endorsed “the formation of the new interim Iraqi government” and “developing effective Iraqi police, border enforcement, and, in the case of the Facilities Protection Service, other Iraqi ministries.” It asked “member states and international organizations to assist the government . . . in building the capability of these institutions.”⁴

On June 20, the second condition for support was achieved with receipt of an official request from interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi to the Secretary General for training and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in four priority areas: the Department of Border Enforcement, police service, national guard, and army. Iraqi leadership emphasized the desire for training *in Iraq*—an effort to bolster public support for the ISF and demonstrate national resolve for restructuring the security forces in line with democratic principles.⁵

Finally, during the NATO Summit in Istanbul on June 28, the expanded Alliance

pledged its full support to the interim government. In the Istanbul Statement, heads of state announced, “In response to the request of the Iraqi interim government, and in accordance with UNSCR 1546 . . . we have decided today to offer NATO’s assistance to the government of Iraq with the training of its security forces.” The declaration ended with a call for further

nations with political restrictions on deploying forces to Iraq can remain supportive by training forces at outside sites

proposals to support the nascent Iraqi security institutions “as a matter of urgency.”⁶

Energized by the UN resolution, the official request from the government, and unanimity in the Alliance, a second 11-man reconnaissance and assessment team deployed in July 2004 with officers from Joint Forces Command (JFC) Naples, Allied Command Transition (ACT), and SHAPE. The JFC Naples commander initially accompanied the team, facilitating access to the highest levels of Iraqi and coalition leader-

ship, including Defense Minister Hazim al-Sha’lan, who emphasized his priorities for training support *within Iraq* and highlighted the sense of urgency for NATO support preceding the 2005 national elections. At the conclusion of the visit, three liaison officers were left in Iraq to further coordinate efforts with the coalition headquarters. The resulting trip report captured key elements of training and equipment shortfalls and outlined further possible assistance to the ISF.

The NATO Training Implementation Mission

NATO acted on its unanimous political support for Iraq when SACEUR ordered JFC Naples to deploy a training and equipment needs assessment team on July 30, 2004. Under the leadership of Major General Carel Hilderink of the Netherlands, the mission was named the NATO Training Implementation Mission–Iraq (NTIM–I) and was composed of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from nine nations and four NATO commands. The NTIM–I was tasked to assess the training and equipment needs of the Iraqi Security Forces, identify the best methods for conducting training both inside and outside the country, and report

the findings to SACEUR. It was also tasked to initiate immediate training assistance to the ISF in leadership and command and control. The team included specialists from ACT, directed to coordinate and conduct the detailed training needs analysis. Also on the team were functional area specialists from the NATO Joint Warfare Center and NATO School Oberammergau, tasked to assist with the assessment and then to commence immediate, needs-based training of officers. In less than 3 weeks, the NTIM–I had developed a fully coordinated training needs analysis based on direct consultation with officials of the Interim Iraqi Government and the coalition’s Multinational Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC–I).

The final report in August 2004 confirmed earlier assessments of training gaps in middle to senior ISF leadership and the need for a formalized Iraqi training command structure. Other identified training needs included army brigade and division staff training and professional officer/NCO development. The report analyzed all identified training shortfalls from 16 broad categories and isolated immediate equipment requirements. While the report emphasized *in-country* training, it also



Iraqi Security Forces patrolling in Tal Afar

Fleet Combat Camera Group Pacific (Alan D. Moriyelle)

addressed recommendations for training outside Iraq.

Commensurate with the completed training needs analysis, training of officers began on August 24, with Allied officers mentoring their counterparts in national command and control centers of the Ministries of Defense and Interior. This early effort was termed *right-seat mentoring* and was characterized by NATO officers providing real-time, day-to-day assistance on operational and strategic command and control functions. Topics were determined in consultation with Iraqi military leadership and the Iraqi staff directors of each organization. Mentors addressed topics ranging from crisis action reporting to operational communications. While difficult to quantify, the success of the NTIM-I training was quickly recognized by both Iraqi and coalition leadership for its immediate value and future potential for an expanded NATO training mission in that country.

In conjunction with the right-seat mentoring, the first NATO team in Iraq established a coordination body for future training and equipment support to the ISF. The Training and Equipment Coordination Committee became a forum where Allied leadership could routinely meet with both coalition and Iraqi officers to discuss national priorities, deconflict bilateral support with alliance proposals, and present training and equipment offers from member nations to the ISF. The NATO Training and Education Coordination Group (NTECG) was also established in

Brussels to maintain solid interface among members, ACT, SHAPE, JFC Naples, and the Allied headquarters in Baghdad on all issues related to out-of-country training requirements as well as equipment and training offers.

NTIM-I Becomes NTM-I

The first chapter of the NATO mission ended with delivery of the training needs analysis to SHAPE in September 2004. The report identified ISF training and equipment needs and recommended a way forward for the Alliance. Training and mentoring in Iraq continued with a small cadre of staff, while work commenced in Naples to translate the August 2004 report into military advice for Allied political leadership. Based on the NTIM-I recommendations, NATO political authorities agreed to expand assistance, including establishment of an Alliance-supported, Iraqi-led formal military training institution in Iraq. In November 2004, a strategic-level operations plan received political approval, codifying training and equipment support. On the heels of that approval, NATO authorities issued an activation order on December 16, authorizing expansion in Iraq to 300 trainers and staff, and transitioning from the Training Implementation Mission-Iraq to the current NATO Training Mission-Iraq.

The period between September and December 2004 was fraught with debate. During the political process to approve an expanded NATO mission, JFC Naples continued its presence in Baghdad with a second rotation of the NTIM-I followed by a third,

which marked the transition to the NTM-I. Both teams continued mentoring Iraqi leadership and deepened liaison arrangements with MNSTC-I and the Ministry of Defense. The NATO staff in Baghdad also expanded coordination of training and equipment support. More importantly, work continued on developing the crown jewel of the mission: an Iraqi-led military leadership academy focused on professional development and training.

In little more than 5 months, NATO had conducted an operational assessment and a detailed training needs analysis and expanded the training and equipment support mission in Iraq from 14 mentor/trainers to a mission of 85 personnel in Baghdad and 12 in Brussels. To date, maturing assistance is credited with training 516 officers in Iraq and 126 in NATO education and training facilities elsewhere. Equipment support is equally impressive. Benefiting from restructuring militaries in both new and old Alliance members, Iraq has received donations of primarily former Warsaw Pact hardware ideal for rebuilding an Iraqi military familiar with that equipment. Highlights include 77 refurbished T-72 main battle tanks, 14,000 assorted small arms, and over 4 million rounds of small arms ammunition. Pending offers could more than triple current donations.

The Way Ahead

The August 2004 report emphasized the need for an institutionalized training hierarchy within the officer and NCO professional development system. The Iraqi request for a formal military education institution motivated a NATO search for sites to house what is now known as the Training Education and Doctrine Center (TEDC). NTIM-I members analyzed several locations with the final proposal focused on the town of Ar Rustamiyah, 25 kilometers southeast of Baghdad, selected because of the Iraqi desire to return the professional military academy to its traditional site. Operational advantages included infrastructure considerations and force protection. The site has existing administrative, training, and life support facilities and capacity for expansion. Force protection is enhanced through proximity to coalition forces posted in a compound adjacent to the site.

Early development of assistance at Ar Rustamiyah began in September 2004 when NATO assigned liaison officers to assist



Iraqi Border Enforcement and Ministry of Human Rights officials arranging transportation for protected persons to Iran

U.S. Air Force (Dave Ahlswede)

MNSTC-I with ongoing training efforts there. They were also tasked to develop and refine an infrastructure plan for the future site of the TEDC. A complete site development plan is now being implemented. Once fully developed, the center will be an Iraqi-led, NATO-supported operation that will include a basic officer commissioning course, a junior and senior staff college, and eventually a senior officer war college. The TEDC is expected to train over 1,000 officers annually. The center will eventually offer a full spectrum of professional military leadership training while parallel assistance continues in the form of NATO right-seat mentoring in the national-level command and control centers, sustaining instruction received at the TEDC.

Despite the Iraqi priority for training ISF leadership in Iraq, a significant portion of current training support involves training outside the country. This has both political and functional advantages. Those nations with political restrictions on deploying forces to Iraq can remain supportive of the NTM-I by training forces at outside sites. On the functional side, existing NATO education and training facilities provide excellent resources for training leadership disciplines. Also, officers are exposed to Western democracies while receiving expert instruction on specific subjects not offered in Iraq. Out-of-country training throughput in 2005 was expected to be 380 officers attending courses at the Joint Warfare Center in Norway, the NATO Defence College in Italy, or the NATO School in Germany.

The NTECG continues to refine its procedures in working with Allied, national, Iraqi government, and NATO coordination mechanisms in Iraq. The group not only synchronizes Iraqi requirements with national offers, but also facilitates the import of offered equipment as well as movement of Iraqi officers to and from training facilities outside the country.

Observations and Lessons Learned

As with all democratically run military operations, the NATO assistance mission to Iraq depends on political support for funding and personnel. The Alliance has struggled to apply outdated mechanisms and policies to the fluid environment of the out-of-area support mission. Funding rules for this operation follow the “costs-lay-where-they-fall” approach, which effectively puts fiscal

responsibility on nations contributing to the mission. NATO training and infrastructure expenses in Iraq have also given rise to a new Alliance financial challenge, the trust fund. Hesitant to commit common funds to the NTM-I, NATO political leadership established a Byzantine system of NTM-I trust funds initially to support training and presumably to fund transportation of donated equipment to Iraq. The training trust fund is currently prioritized to “out-of-Iraq” training, while the trust fund for transportation costs is nonexistent. Additionally, these trust funds allow nations to attach “restrictions” or “caveats” on how their contributions can be utilized. Finally and most notably, development of the TEDC at Ar Rustamiyah languishes from the lack of committed NATO funds for infrastructure improvements.

NATO personnel issues are equally unwieldy. Some contributing nations attach operational restrictions on personnel that are not commensurate with the political commitment at Istanbul. In addition to operational caveats on personnel, members can have

for the training institution at Ar Rustamiyah, some countries have capitalized on the Alliance regimen of consensus to block significant advances. Not only has the mission been needlessly delayed by political debate, but these debates consume immense energy and focus from all levels of command. As one J-5 planner stated, “Instead of planning for the future fight, we are repeatedly fighting yesterday’s battles.”

The lesson is that once the political decision is made to commit national treasure and personnel, the Alliance must close political ranks and stand behind its decision with determined unanimity. Once accord is reached for a NATO-led operation, ensuing operational decisions should not be held hostage to the political process. This may require rethinking the 50-year policy of consensus decisionmaking. When even the most picayune operational decision requires a 26-member consensus, any nation can block progress on overarching objectives with the wave of a finger. For example, some Allied nations that stood behind the

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differing limitations or requirements on the length of deployment, predeployment training, mid-tour leaves, and other personnel issues unforeseen to operational planners.

In short, the way ahead for NATO in Iraq will always return to the issues of political support and consensus, money, and people. The history of the training mission harbors significant insights for future Allied joint and combined operations. The following capture some of the lessons and their implications for NTM-I and the Alliance.

The most significant lesson from this mission involves supporting political pronouncements with political will. At the Istanbul Summit, all 26 members committed to support the government of Iraq “with the training of its security forces” and sought further proposals for that support “as a matter of urgency.” This statement soon rang hollow as political consensus was overshadowed by political posturing over involvement in Iraq. With each step, from the reconnaissance mission in July 2004 to the delay in funding

Istanbul pledge to support Iraq and have contributed to out-of-country support have also in practice politically blocked progress on the main effort of in-country training. The lesson is clear: once the commitment is made and plans are approved, nations must be obligated to support the efforts politically if not materially. There are many ways to improve the political dimensions of NATO decisionmaking, but in the end, success always depends on political commitment throughout the operation.

Revising Funding Policy

The Alliance is well into the transformation process from a static defense organization to a more flexible, deployable mechanism for operations in and out of Europe. The NRF concept and its inherent structures illustrate how NATO is transforming into a more responsive joint and combined force. However, as the command structure and strategic and operational concepts have rapidly evolved to meet changing threats, financial support mechanisms have not adapted. For

example, the concept of “costs-lay-where-they-fall” restricts participation to countries able to pay, while excluding willing but less financially capable members. This drastically reduces the pool of force contributors while burdening contributors. A related and misunderstood financial concept is NATO common funding. Common funds and nationally borne costs are separate sources. However, in reality, both are paid from the same pool of resources, national defense budgets. In essence, NATO pays both ways—through common funding or a member’s own purse.

The idea of trust funds to support an operation is also fraught with disaster. Announcing support for an operation plays well in the international arena; however, trust funds allow nations to avoid any financial obligation associated with their verbal pronouncements. A nation can politically support an operation at absolutely no cost to its own treasury. Trust funds also attract an even more complex political dimension: the caveat. Contributing nations can place restrictions and constraints on the use of their contributions, creating an unwieldy system of accounting checks and balances.

NATO should revisit its funding policy, which penalizes contributing nations by forcing them to pay for their participation. The use of trust funds is also a growing failure. NATO has committed the political capital of the Alliance and all 26 nations represented to train Iraqi officers. It is now prepared to squander that capital by failing to fund the commitment. Through trust funds, NATO has, in effect, put out the tin cup for interested donors. As one budget officer put it, “What we really need is Jerry Lewis, some air-time, and a phone bank, and then we would be talking real money.” These are just a few operational issues directly related to funding that highlight what any military thinker will understand. Without adequate financial resources, and the flexibility to apply those resources at the decisive points in an operation, mission failure becomes a strong possibility.

Caveats and Preferences

National caveats on personnel participating in NATO-led operations are not a new challenge. Lessons learned from operations in the Balkans often emphasize the impact of caveats on that mission. Nations contributing personnel to the NTM-I also apply operational caveats to their force offerings, to include restrictions on the place of

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duty and length of deployment. Operational impacts from caveats are countless but include restricting force protection troops from securing vehicle convoys. Another case involves limiting personnel to duty in Baghdad’s International Zone. In all cases, the NTM-I commander is forced to find other solutions to operational requirements. When nations transfer operational control of their personnel to the NATO command structure, they should also transfer the trust in the command for proper employment of forces. This trust is built on careful national consideration of the operational plans, which are politically supported or rejected well in advance of deployment.

As stated throughout, Iraqi leadership has always emphasized a preference for training assistance *in* Iraq. The symbolism, practicality, and cost-effectiveness of in-country efforts cannot be overstated. Defense Minister Hazim al-Sha’lan said in early meetings with NATO leaders, “Iraqis must see the ISF being trained in their cities and provinces. Only in this way can they build confidence in the future security forces of Iraq.”⁷ In-country training is also the most effective means to train large numbers of officers in a formal setting run by Iraqis for Iraqis. Yet NATO budget managers have prioritized training trust funds for out-of-country training, favoring the political appeal of training in Europe over the more difficult task of training in Iraq. As the TEDC matures, a cost-benefit analysis will undoubtedly favor training support in Iraq. Finally, while arguably beneficial for the few officers fortunate enough to leave, out-of-country training has limited value and scope by any comparison with training conducted in-country.

The Iraqis have clearly voiced their preference for a course of action readily supported by numerous advantages. NATO leadership should now refocus NTM-I on its original priority—delivery of support *in* Iraq.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has embarked on a determined transition to a more responsive and deployable posture amidst emerging global threats and instability. Adapting to that environment will be the

greatest challenge for an enduring Alliance. Matching the developing NATO Response Force capability and the additional resources of an expanding organization with politically supported mechanisms to support the use of those resources demands the full attention of Allied leadership. As NATO considers its potential response to disaster relief, humanitarian intervention, and future stability operations, the now-familiar lessons identified from the training mission in Iraq must become lessons learned and applied. Only then will NATO maintain its place in history and further its reputation as the modern world’s most successful military alliance. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ SHAPE News, September 25, 2003, available at <www.nato.int/shape/issues/shape_nrf/030820.htm>.

² NATO Issues, 8 (February 2005), available at <www2.rnw.nl/rnw/en/currentaffairs/region/internationalorganisations/nato030811.html?view=Standard>.

³ NATO Issues, 14 (April 2004), available at <<http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2003/05-may/e0521b.htm>>.

⁴ Available at <www.iraqcoalition.org/transcripts/20040609_UNSCR_Text.html>.

⁵ Available at <www.nato.int/docu/update/2004/06-june/e0622a.htm>.

⁶ Available at <www.nato.int/docu/pr/2004/p04-089e.htm>.

⁷ Notes from NTM-I meeting with Minister Sha’lan, August 27, 2004.