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Iraqi Security Forces

Kalev, Sepp I.

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Kalev I. Sepp

Assistant Professor of Defense Analysis, Naval Postgraduate School

Prepared Statement before House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats,
and International Relations

Washington, D.C.

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor for me to have this opportunity to discuss the training of Iraqi Security Forces.

I recently returned from my second visit to Iraq as a member of the Office of Strategy, Plans and Assessment in the headquarters of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) in Baghdad. I want to commend to you Major General Stephen Sargeant of the United States Air Force, the Deputy Chief of Staff in charge of that office, for assembling a world-class team of strategic analysts who literally work sixteen hours a day, every single day, to discern the best courses of action for the Coalition to help build a free Iraq. In particular, the contributions of the British and Dutch military officers who serve on his staff have been invaluable.

The mission of building Iraqi security forces belongs to the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), under the able leadership of Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus of the United States Army. That mission was an integral portion of the developing Coalition strategy in Iraq, and so I was familiar with its objectives and outlines. Also, during my military service as an Army Special Forces officer, I was a brigade adviser during the Salvadoran Civil War – one of the “fifty-five” – and trained soldiers in several other Latin American countries. Many of the lessons of training foreign military units in the Salvadoran Civil War in particular can be useful to our forces in Iraq.

Your committee has called for answers to several questions on the ongoing effort to build Iraqi security forces. In order to provide those answers, please let me first establish the context for the situation that brings this subject to the attention of the committee and the American people.

It is well established at this point that in planning the military operations to remove the dictator Saddam Hussein and his government from the leadership of Iraq, the then-Commander of United States Central Command and his staff misunderstood the difference between fighting a war and winning a war. Thus, they wholly neglected the actions subsequent to destruction of the Iraqi military forces – which was fighting the war -- necessary to stabilize a defeated country, provide for the security and welfare of its population, and establish a new government – that is, winning the war. These actions are referred to in the current and apparently misread U.S. Army doctrine as “Phase Four” of a military campaign.

This strategic error was compounded following the fall of the Hussein regime, when the responsible U.S. commanders did not establish and enforce martial law, particularly in Baghdad. No plans had been made for this contingency, even though there are historical examples available for study and emulation, particularly Operation ECLIPSE during World War Two. This contingency plan called for the entire 82nd Airborne Division to parachute into Berlin in the event of the sudden collapse of the Nazi German government to secure the city and establish martial law. The failure to do this in Baghdad constituted a tacit sanction of lawlessness, and resulted in the looting and destruction of the Iraqi national infrastructure and bureaucracy by the Iraqis themselves. Study of basic texts on Arab history, such as the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T.E. Lawrence – the famous “Lawrence of Arabia” – reveal the possible consequences of removing governmental controls from an Arab populace.

The subsequent mismanagement of the recovery effort by the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, which is also well established, allowed time for a nascent insurgency to coalesce and develop. The Coalition Provisional Authority which followed was disjointed and uncoordinated, and contended with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for the management of affairs in Iraq. In particular, the U.S. military leadership anticipated a rapid two-thirds reduction of the number of Coalition troops in Iraq in less than a year, while the chief of the Coalition Provisional Authority simultaneously disestablished the entire Iraqi armed forces – ostensibly to eliminate members of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath Party. This left only traffic police and local militias to enforce law and order against a growing insurgency and organized criminal gangs. In many cases, these insurgents and outlaw elements are materially supported by Syria and Iran, who strategically prefer a weakened Iraq consumed by internal conflict.

The insurgents are not a unified single entity, but they generally share the goal of driving the foreign occupation troops out of Iraq. They are primarily Iraqis, but include foreigners, principally from other Arab states. Among the Iraqis, many of the insurgents are disaffected Sunni Muslims, a religious minority in Iraq, who enjoyed privilege and prestige during the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, himself a Sunni. There are forty to sixty major groups of insurgents of various motivations and ideals, and combined they number from thirty to forty thousand active combatants fighting as urban guerrillas. Hundreds of thousands more Iraqis provide both active and passive support to the insurgents.

To counter this insurgency, a comprehensive strategy is required. This is being prepared by the Multi-National Force-Iraq headquarters. Whatever the final form of that strategy, sizeable and effective Iraqi security forces will be a necessity. These forces will need to provide internal security against insurgents and criminals, and external security against the threat of large-scale military invasion primarily from Iran, which fought a costly war with Iraq from 1981 to 1988. With the destruction and disbandment of the Iraqi armed forces and the collapse of the former regime, no Iraqi national training facilities or staff have been available for the Iraqis to rebuild their own security forces. The now-defunct Coalition Military Assistance Training Team made an initial effort to create what was to be called the New Iraqi Army, but the team had the wrong strategic focus, emphasizing

the establishment of U.S.-style mechanized divisions to defend the territory of Iraq from invasion, instead of providing security for the Iraqi population from insurgents and criminals. Now, this critical mission is the responsibility of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq.

The United States Army trains itself better than any other army in the world, but it does not have a good record of training foreign armies. Before World War Two, the Army trained the Philippine armed forces in anticipation of their promised independence. The Filipinos were handily defeated by the invading Japanese. Some surviving elements performed fairly well as guerrilla units, but it was a U.S. field army that landed in the Philippines that drove the Japanese out. In 1947, the United States provided 250 U.S. Army advisers to the Greek National Army during their Civil War against communist rebels, but the British had already largely organized and trained the regular Greek troops. Ultimately, banishment of the rebels from their Yugoslav sanctuaries by Marshal Josip Broz Tito, diplomatic pressure on the royal Greek government by President Harry Truman, and strategic blunders by the communist commander pushed the war to its conclusion by 1949. On the other side of the globe, however, American advisers and equipment couldn't prevent the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese armies by Mao Zedong's communist forces in 1949. When Kim Il Sung's North Korean Army invaded the Republic of Korea in 1950, the U.S.-trained and equipped South Korean divisions mostly collapsed. As the war ground on, an intensive American training effort helped the South produce viable units which, with American material and firepower support, could hold their own against the Northerners and the Chinese. Ironically, it was after the war ended in 1953 and the U.S. advisory effort wound down that the South Korean army professionalized itself into what a journalist called "the Prussians of Asia."

With the French withdrawal from Indochina after their defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the division of Vietnam into North and South, the United States assumed the sponsorship of the new Republic of Vietnam as a bulwark against communist expansion in the region. Drawing on what it felt was its success in Greece, the U.S. Army conceived Operation REDLAND to create a South Vietnamese army in precisely its own image. Then-Lieutenant Colin Powell was an adviser in Vietnam in 1961, where ten thousand U.S. advisers were stationed in Vietnamese units, down to company level. After several years of this large-scale training and advisory effort, however, a Viet Cong insurgent force mauled a much larger South Vietnamese regiment at the battle of Ap Bac in 1963. One of the outcomes of this defeat was a growing sense inside the senior U.S. military leadership that regular U.S. forces might need to join the war, as they soon did. The other was a gradual improvement in the structure and operation of the advisory system that generally improved the quality and effectiveness of the Republic of Vietnam forces. However, even though the U.S. officers serving in the Vietnamese units were called "advisers," because of their rank and status, they tended to act as the co-commanders of the units. The Vietnamese officers became reliant on their American partners to make tactical and operational decisions. After the major withdrawal of U.S. forces and advisers beginning in 1972 and the "Vietnamization" of the conflict (the French had started a similar program they called *jaunissement*, the "yellowing" of the war effort) the South Vietnamese military was vulnerable. When the North Vietnamese army

invaded the South in 1975, the termination of U.S. military aid had already weakened the defense. But the South Vietnamese military leadership had not matured under exceeding U.S. supervision, and could not respond decisively to the Northern offensive.

The United States Marine Corps has only a marginally better record of training foreign armies. While they supervised the Haitian *Gendarmerie* and the Nicaraguan *Guardia Nacional* which they raised and trained between World Wars One and Two, those forces functioned effectively. After the Marines departed, though, these paramilitary units quickly succumbed to corruption and brutality. The Marines' Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program in Vietnam, modeled in part on the successful U.S. Army Special Forces concept, had mixed results. The U.S.-trained Vietnamese Marines fought as well as their counterpart Army units, like the Vietnamese Rangers and paratroopers, but their numbers were too small to avert the final defeat.

The conflict providing the most successful example of U.S. military advisers, both Army and Marines, raising an indigenous army in wartime to fight an insurgency is the Salvadoran Civil War. In 1979 when the insurgency began in earnest, the Salvadoran army consisted of some 5,000 "parade-ground" soldiers. In five years, the army grew ten times in size to over 50,000 troops, the majority of them infantrymen. A modern air force with a helicopter fleet and close-support bombers provided by the Americans helped this U.S.-trained force beat the communist guerrillas to a draw, forcing a negotiated settlement to the war. There are several important distinctions about this advisory effort – it was remarkably small, with only fifty-five permanent advisers (or "trainers" as they were officially called); the U.S. personnel were almost exclusively Army Special Forces sergeants and officers; the war was ignored by the larger Army, which denied the award of combat decorations and tax exemptions to the advisers; while paradoxically the Administration's policy was consistent, and support for the defense of El Salvador and the U.S. advisory effort never waned.

With this context established, here are responses to the committee's questions:

1. What are the different types of Iraqi security forces?

Currently, the Iraqi security forces are in a constant state of reorganization. In general, the military forces consist of the Iraqi Army (IA), concerned with defense against external threats; the Iraqi Intervention Force (IIF), which is focused on internal defense – that is, the insurgency; the Iraqi National Guard (ING), which had its origins as the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC), which are locally-oriented, although the new Iraqi government has just declared the ING to be under the control of the national Iraqi Army, rather than local political leaders. There is also an Iraqi Counter-Terrorist Force (ICTF), a national-level unit trained by U.S. Army Special Forces. The Kurds maintain their own military units and police forces as well. An army of 57,000 regular soldiers is planned.

The Iraqi Police (IP) forces include community-based police units and paramilitary and auxiliary units, such as the "special police commandos," public order battalions, a mechanized brigade equipped with Russian BTR armored personnel carriers, and an

Emergency Response Unit (ERU), much like the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hostage Rescue Team. The Iraqi Ministry of the Interior (MoI) has been rapidly creating an array of new police paramilitary units with various names, many with the designation "special," although they possess no apparent quality making them so. Note: During the Saddam regime, the police fell below the armed forces in the hierarchy of influence and importance, and were divided into Traffic Police in white shirts, and the somewhat more prestigious Civil Police in blue shirts. This distinction has been removed.

Border Protection Forces are being raised to perform the role previously the responsibility of the Iraqi armed forces during the Saddam regime. Also, Facilities Protection Services (FPS) personnel guard parts of the Iraqi national infrastructure, such as oil pipelines and power stations.

At least a dozen "Irregular Units," sometimes called "pop-ups" by American military personnel, have appeared around the country. These are not considered militias, which are supposedly illegal, but are not part of the formal Iraqi security force structure. Nonetheless, they are reported to receive support and funding from the Iraqi government, and U.S. military officers have judged them to be effective in combat and policing operations against the insurgents. There may be as many as 15,000 of these irregular fighters.

2. How are Iraqi security forces recruited and vetted?

Recruiting and vetting of Iraqi security forces varies widely throughout Iraq. In one of the most conflictive zones, Al Anbar province, recruiting was most recently accomplished by asking tribal chiefs to provide members of their clan to the ISF. No vetting was done, as there is no means to conduct individual background investigations, interviews, or records searches.

3. What types of training do Iraqi security forces receive, and what is the length of their training?

Training varies from the most cursory orientations lasting only two days for police volunteers who had prior police or military service, to eight weeks for new police recruits who are designated to become commanders. The quality of the training also depends on the instructors. American observers from U.S. Central Command headquarters assessed the military basic training conducted under contract by the Vennell Corporation to be unsatisfactory, and the contract was terminated. The Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion has been trained continuously for a year by U.S. Army Special Forces teams, and is evaluated as a first-rate combat unit. Officers from MNSTC-I observing U.S. Army National Guard units training ISF judge the training to be almost wholly substandard, as a function of the limited training and experience of the National Guard soldiers themselves.

4. How many Iraqi security forces have been fully trained, and how many are considered capable of assuming security duties?

According to the unclassified U.S. Department of State “Iraq Weekly Status Report” of February 16, 2005, a total of 136,342 ISF personnel have been trained and equipped. However, that number does not include soldiers who are “absent without authorization.” This term is not further defined. In the Al Anbar, Babil, Najaf, and Al Qadisyah provinces, Marine officers estimate that only 10 percent of the police personnel trained by Coalition forces and contractors are still on duty. The others have either joined or returned to insurgent bands. Thus, the exact number present and capable of combat or police duties is indeterminate, but certainly less than 136,342.

5. What is the current strategy for developing Iraqi security forces and transferring Coalition security force missions to Iraqi government control?

The plan is currently in development at MNF-I headquarters.

6. What challenges confront the Multi-National Forces-Iraq transferring its security mission to Iraqi forces?

One critical challenge is for MNF-I and MNSTC-I to take actions that are proven to produce positive results in training foreign military and police forces, and to avoid those that historically have not contributed to success. Chief among the “right choices” are assignment of the best personnel available to advisory duties. For example, Lt. Gen. Petraeus has personally selected First Lieutenant Seth Moulton, U.S. Marine Corps, to his staff. Moulton is a Harvard College graduate who led a Marine rifle platoon with distinction during the invasion of Iraq, and was among the first Americans to fight their way into Baghdad. He is the model of the exceptionally intelligent, combat-tested and culturally savvy officer to work with foreign officers and soldiers. At the unit level, U.S. Army Special Forces detachments are specifically organized and schooled, and their members carefully selected to train foreign military forces.

Conversely, U.S. Army National Guard units have none of this background or experience, and it is likely that the Iraqi units they train will perform poorly in combat. This allows impressive numbers of Iraqis “trained and equipped to be posted on charts, but the reality is that those personnel will not be able to carry out their assigned tasks, and will require more time and resources to re-train them later.

Another “right choice” is the equipping of the Iraqis with the right technologies, such as the “COIN-Judo” personnel tracking system, to enhance their intelligence operations against the insurgents. While embedded advisers are an well-established “right choice,” the selection of the best possible personnel for those jobs is critical. The services have the administrative means to identify top-tier officers and sergeants for posting as advisers and trainers.

Further, the rank structure of the advisers in relation to their Iraqi counterparts is critical. Advisers must be of subordinate rank to the Iraqi commander they support, serving as a staff officer and allowing the Iraqis to make the hard decisions and take responsibility for them. Equivalency in rank, wrongly thought to be necessary to gain access and mutual

respect, actually creates the Vietnam-era “co-commander” relationship, and leaves the Iraqi soldiers wondering which officer, the American or the Iraqi, is their actual chief.

In the same way, “partnership” relations between Coalition and Iraqi units do not obviously promise beneficial results. Among first-tier militaries, such as those in NATO, these unit pairings encouraged common understanding. However, a partnership between a U.S. combat unit and a like-size Iraqi force will likely foster resentment and jealousy on the part of the Iraqis, who know they will never have the resources the Americans do, while the Americans will expect the Iraqis to perform to U.S. standards. What an American commander will think of as friendly competition in training or operations, may likely be seen by his Iraqi counterpart as an opportunity to be humiliated by the lavishly-equipped and superbly trained Americans.

Choosing the right courses of action in the advisory and training effort now, rather than what is simply expedient, will actually accomplish the training of the Iraqi security forces sooner, and yield the best results.

The Iraqi 36th Battalion and U.S. Trainers

A notable example of the issues involved in training Iraqi men to be soldiers is the formation, training and employment of the 36th Battalion, labeled by some official sources as an “elite” unit.

Early in November 2003, then-JTF-7 commander Lieutenant General Carlos Sanchez permitted Iraqi political leaders to establish an Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) unit of their own accord. The INA, INC, SCIRI, PUK and KDP political parties each contributed one hundred of their own militia members to this new unit, and Lt. Gen. Sanchez ordered the Coalition’s Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) to train them.

The CJSOTF directed half of four U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs, commonly called A-Teams), and all of ODA 533 from the veteran 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group to conduct the training. The base for the battalion was at Baghdad International Airport. The SF trainers planned to complete the training in a single month, with the first two weeks of December dedicated to basic training – primarily shooting – and the second two weeks to the unit’s integration into U.S. direct action operations.

Each of the half-teams, called “split teams,” was initially responsible for one of the four companies of the Iraqi battalion. The U.S. leaders mixed all five hundred militia personnel, precisely balancing them evenly through the four companies. However, the senior Special Forces commander soon had to send the “split teams” back to reunite with their parent teams, because they lacked enough soldiers to maintain their ongoing operations. The seasoned ODA 535 joined ODA 533 to train the companies, and the understrength ODA 534 organized and ran the battalion headquarters.

The name of the new unit changed several times over the following month. It began as the “Composite ICDC Battalion,” then became the “Special ICDC Battalion,” then was numbered in January 2004 as the “36th Special ICDC Battalion.” Eventually, the Special Forces trainers discovered that the U.S. brigade commanders who would be employing the unit’s companies didn’t trust their own local ICDC units to perform combat operations. To improve their image, the trainers dropped the “ICDC” designator and changed the name to simply “36th Battalion” and finally “36th Commando Battalion.”

The Americans did not “vette” the recruits, and accepted all five hundred for training. The U.S. Special Forces trainers presumed the political leaders had already vetted the candidates, as it seemed to be in their best interest in terms of their relationship and status with the new Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) to provide adequate recruits for the new unit. Besides, with a deadline only a month away to produce a functioning combat unit, they had no time, let alone the means, to conduct background investigations to determine the reliability and loyalty of the recruits.

The quality of the Iraqi recruits varied. Certainly, they were not the “best men” promised by the political leaders. Most were of good quality, with combat experience gained from their militia service. Others told the Americans that their leaders said they were going to the airport to get jobs working for foreign contractors. One recruit showed up with a ping-pong paddle, having been told he was joining the Iraqi Olympic team. The U.S. Special Forces soldiers suspected the political parties retained the best men in their own militias, rather than give them up to Coalition control.

While the U.S. Special Forces trainers did not initially vette the Iraqis, they lost and discharged recruits as training progressed. Of the 130 men in First Company, the American captain in charge dismissed twenty for misconduct and counted another fifteen who didn’t return from leave after their training – a 26 percent loss overall at the end of the first month. The deserters took all their equipment and uniforms with them.

Two weeks after the completion of training, the captain also relieved the Iraqi company commander, Major Mustafa Gaber Alawi, who had been given his rank and position by his political party sponsors. On payday, the trainers caught him attempting to steal payroll money by using the identification cards of deserters. The Special Forces captain had already assessed the Iraqi commander to be a weak leader – he preferred not to leave the base when his soldiers went out on raids.

The Americans informed the IGC of the desertions and dismissals, but did not know if any particular action was taken against the miscreants. The captain was told by the unit members who were sponsored by the Kurdish PUK and KDP parties that Kurdish deserters would be hunted down by their own militia, and imprisoned for six months as punishment.

Support and equipment for the battalion came slowly. The trainers scavenged the unit’s weapons from captured stockpiles. Newer AK-47 rifles purchased from Jordan, distinguished by their plastic stocks and grips, were poorly machined, even by Soviet

standards. Their locally-sewn uniforms were new, but cheaply made, and constantly tore at the seams during training. Nonetheless, Iraqi morale was generally good because of the purposeful and professional training.

Pay was a major problem. Officers at JTF-7 headquarters announced that soldiers of the 36th Battalion would be paid the same as other ICDC members, but the American trainers argued that their troops served full-time, unlike the part-timers in the rest of the ICDC, and so deserved higher pay. The result was by Christmas Eve 2003, the unit's graduation day, there was still no pay for the Iraqi recruits. Duly cautious, the U.S. trainers carried loaded pistols at the ceremony against the chance of a revolt by the unpaid Iraqi troops who were carrying their weapons in the parade.

Before the U.S. Special Forces trainers could release their new graduates for two weeks' leave, CJTF-7 headquarters ordered that the battalion conduct an actual operation to "certify" that it was "combat capable." The U.S. captain in charge took twenty volunteers – many more wanted to go along – to cordon and search a suspected rocket launching site in a palm grove near the Green Zone in Baghdad. At nightfall, the *ad hoc* platoon rode to their objective in a dump truck, and in darkness under a soaking winter rain they surrounded the grove and searched it. They found nothing, but the Iraqi soldiers performed their task satisfactorily and expressed a sense of accomplishment.

The battalion's first firefight three weeks later was chaotic and inconclusive. Late on January 13, 2004, about one hundred troops of First Company were finishing another nighttime cordon and search operation. The American captain in charge and the new Iraqi company commander, Captain Saad, were talking with the imam of a local mosque while the soldiers gathered to board their trucks and leave. As the American turned to speak to the commander, a single shot rang out nearby, and Captain Saad dropped to the ground screaming. The American captain's first thought was that one of the Iraqi soldiers had accidentally fired his weapon, a common mishap among new soldiers with minimal training. Then, without orders, the Iraqi troops started firing indiscriminately in all directions – described later by the Americans at the site as "the death blossom." The four U.S. Special Forces trainers found it impossible to control the company and stop or direct the shooting. In the first moments of gunfire, Captain Saad, his second-in-command, two of his three platoon leaders, both interpreters, and the U.S. medic fell wounded. Five minutes later, the shooting stopped when armed humvee trucks from the 82d Airborne Division's Quick Reaction Force, called by the American captain, drove onto the scene. As it turned out, the wounds incurred by the soldiers were minor, and all soon returned to duty. The American captain never determined for certain whether the incident was an insurgent ambush, or an intramural firefight sparked by the unintentional triggering of a clumsy soldier's rifle.

Subsequently, the companies of the battalion performed better, and became proficient at "take-down" missions aimed at capturing suspected insurgents in various Baghdad neighborhoods. The battalion's companies gained a positive reputation with the CJSOTF and with the U.S. brigades they supported. During one of these operations, the Second Company captured several insurgents red-handed. The Iraqi troops discovered the

insurgents carried identification cards allowing them full access to U.S. military bases – and even had a photograph of themselves posing with a U.S. brigade commander. The insurgents had curried favor with U.S. military personnel by occasionally turning in items from their own large stock of demolitions and artillery shells they were using to make improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Now known as the 36th Battalion, the unit experienced a setback a month later in February when the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces left Iraq to return to the United States. The replacement unit – the same group’s 2nd Battalion – received erroneous information that the 36th Battalion was about to be disestablished, and so counted the unit’s continued training a low priority. Accordingly, the U.S. headquarters assigned its least-proficient and undermanned detachments to support the Iraqis. The result was debilitating, and then almost devastating. The companies of the 36th Battalion entered the first battle for Falluja in March 2003 insufficiently prepared for the hard fight there. The unit suffered heavy losses, including the death of First Company’s commander, the recently-promoted Major Saad.

When the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces returned to Iraq in July 2004, the American commander made the training and support of 36th Battalion a top priority. The Iraqis consolidated their four dispersed companies at the same base, which improved their operations. They also welcomed back their original trainers, ODAs 533 and 535, as well as elements of 1st Battalion’s “A” Company, specialists in urban combat.

Two major problems were evident at the end of the unit’s first year of operations. First, since the 36th Battalion’s initial formation and training, it had lost another one hundred and fifty soldiers killed and wounded, with no replacements. Only by late 2004 did the battalion headquarters begin a recruiting drive, discreetly advertising for volunteers to join a “special unit.” Second, the U.S. Special Forces soldiers had become more than trainers and advisers – they were leading the 36th Battalion in combat. The Americans made the plans and tactical decisions, and then informed the Iraqi company commanders, who passed on those orders to the troops. Intelligence gathering by the Iraqis was restricted, and Iraqi troops were not allowed to wear civilian clothes to reconnoiter their targets – although the Americans could. A U.S. captain served as the full-time logistics officer for the 36th Battalion, managing their supplies and directing their motor pool. The Special Forces soldiers oversaw payroll and administrative matters as well.

The 36th Battalion’s administrative and logistical dependency existed because the Iraqi security forces lacked their own support system, and connectivity to the U.S. military logistics system by any non-U.S. unit is impossible without close assistance from American logistics experts. The reluctance of U.S. trainers and advisers to turn over the leadership of the 36th Battalion to its Iraqi officers was likely due to three factors – a desire to maintain firm control over the unit and its operations, enforced by the real or perceived expectations of their headquarters; the requirement to ensure the success of the unit they were essentially responsible for; and the inherently aggressive, combative character and warrior ethos of Special Forces soldiers driving them to get into every fight

and stand with “their Iraqis” in battle. Nonetheless, the Iraqis must be allowed, or must be made, to command their own units and fight their own war.

The 36th Battalion is unique in several ways, but its example may illustrate what to expect in training the larger Iraqi army and security forces. Seventy-five percent of a group of five hundred Iraqi men, chosen and vetted by local political leaders and generally above average in motivation and intelligence, remained after a month of basic military training. For the next year, thirty U.S. Army Special Forces officers and sergeants -- who are specifically and rigorously schooled in training foreign troops -- closely developed and led the battalion in continuous small-scale combat missions, and at least two major battles. At the end of that year, the Iraqi battalion is capable of planning and conducting platoon- and company-size raids, and fighting and defeating small bands of insurgents. This is a significant achievement.

In training other Iraqi forces, variations in this formula – in the means of selection and quality of the recruit, the quality of the adviser, the training and experience of the adviser, the adviser-advised ratio (initially about 1 to 12 in the 36th Battalion, later bettering to 1 to 8), experience, equipment, pay, native leadership, *et alia* – will affect the length of time required to train a unit to a given level of actual operational capability. The long-established Kurdish *Peshmerga* organization is an exception. If the same exceptional human resources invested in the 36th Battalion by both the Iraqis and the Americans are provided to other Iraqi security force units, it might be reasonable to expect that like units could be operational in the next year. If not, expectations for the Iraqi security forces, in terms of timelines, effectiveness, and self-reliance, must be accordingly adjusted.

Kalev I. Sepp is an Assistant Professor of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, teaching in the Special Operations Program. He co-wrote an official study of U.S. Army special operations in the Afghanistan expedition, and recently served in Iraq as a consultant on intelligence operations and theater strategy. He is a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer who served in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. He earned his Combat Infantryman's Badge as an adviser in the Salvadoran Civil War, and as a Special Forces A-Team leader in Panama. Sepp has direct experience in counter-insurgency, urban warfare, psychological operations and civil affairs, drug interdiction, interagency coordination, nuclear-chemical-biological defense, and strategy formulation. As an assistant professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, he taught courses on insurgency and civil wars, and military and international history. He was also a resident scholar at Harvard University, and is a commentator on military affairs on National Public Radio. Sepp has earned degrees from Harvard University (A.M., History, 1994, and Ph.D., American Diplomatic History, 2002) and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (M.M.A.S., 1992).

Telephone: 831.656.2116

E-mail: kissepp@nps.edu

Kalev I. Sepp is a full-time employee of the Department of the Navy.