

Afghan National Police patrol near Forward  
Operating Base Baylough, Zabul Province

U.S. Army (Eric Cabral)

# THE SECURITY TRINITY

## Understanding the Role of Security Forces in COIN

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In 2006, General James Jones, USMC (Ret.), led a team of analysts assessing the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at the height of the sectarian violence in that country. The basic tone of the Jones report reflected uneven progress in the overall ISF structure. However, while the Iraqi military was generally considered capable, the analysts found Iraqi police forces to be almost universally problematic.<sup>1</sup> The report's most scathing assessment was leveled against the Iraqi National Police (INP), which were described as riddled with sectarianism, deeply mistrusted, and suffering from a potentially paralyzing identity crisis.

This crisis stemmed from the lack of understanding about the nature of the force—specifically, whether it was supposed to be a counterinsurgent force or a local police force with national jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> While acknowledging the need for a national level police force under the control of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, the report nevertheless recommended that the INP be disbanded.<sup>3</sup> This recommendation was a stinging rebuke to the police wing of U.S. counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts in Iraq, essentially concluding that significant portions of its work had been wasted.



Iraqi police search vehicle for potential threats at control point in Kirkuk

## Background

I began serving with the INP in June 2008 and found that many of the critical problems within it—particularly the perception of sectarianism—had been addressed and largely solved. Helping to dispel that perception was the INP performance at the battle of Basrah, where two INP brigades fought for 3 days against Shia militias within the city even as the Iraqi army initially collapsed. Although the INP remained haunted by the perception of sectarianism, the problem was significantly reduced. In practice, the organization's loyalty was to the central government. By the middle of 2009, the force was perceived as politically reliable enough that there were efforts to put a Sunni general in charge as a balance to the Shia-dominated Iraqi army. The INP had also become an effective counterinsurgent force that successfully fought rebels in Diyala Province and was an instrumental element in calming problems in Iraq's northern Ninewa Province. The INP was, for all practical purposes, a highly potent light infantry force conducting COIN operations.

Despite the clear improvements in its capabilities and its undeniable success against Iraqi insurgent groups, however, there were looming problems in the force. The observation in the Jones report that the INP suffered from “a lack of clarity about its identity—specifically whether it is a military or police

force” proved to be particularly astute.<sup>4</sup> With the relative decline of insurgent forces across Iraq in early 2009, there was a push to remove Iraqi military forces from the cities and shift the burden of security there onto police forces. This process demanded a skill set that an infantry-centric COIN force was ill prepared to execute. The INP had few ties with and little understanding of the Iraqi judicial process, its evidence collection procedures were archaic and ineffective, and its primary motivation remained defeating insurgents rather than deterring or capturing criminals. Simply put, the INP was a force in name only and was unprepared to assume the responsibility of a force proper. Worse, the local police—insufficiently equipped and staffed with 60,000 completely untrained personnel—were wholly unable to take on a prominent security role. After 6 years of war and a return to normalcy seemingly within grasp, it came as a shock to many to discover that there basically was no police force to facilitate that return.

Coalition forces often exacerbated the problem of creating an effective police force. U.S. military forces tended to push Iraqi police into extremes of usage. Police battalions, both local and national, were sometimes utilized as static guard forces with no police function or in roles that duplicated U.S. and Iraqi military efforts, such as manning checkpoints and conducting deliberate clearance missions and cordon and search operations. Military forces

had little understanding of the role of police in security. Civilian advisors were embedded within many police organizations, but they were often confined to coalition base camps, and their advice on developing police security functions was either poorly understood or ignored by commanders, whose overriding concern was the defeat of the Iraqi insurgency. This was the situation that drove me to take a fresh look at the relationships between police and military forces.

## COIN and Police Forces

What is the role of military forces in counterinsurgency? What is the role of police forces during and after a counterinsurgency? More important, how do these two professions cooperatively divide the security requirements of counterinsurgency? It is clear that they have vastly different approaches to a defined enemy—as either a combatant or a criminal—and the two approaches often run at cross purposes.

The COIN effort in Afghanistan is a complex environment that brings many of the problems of developing a police force to the forefront. After 9 years of war, there are significant problems with the Afghan police. Saying that the effort to develop these forces has been chaotic would be an understatement.

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The problem of ineffectiveness begins at the highest level, and there is little concurrence among the multiple agencies working to develop the police.

In addition, there appears to be no consensus on how to define the problem of Afghanistan. For example, in academic circles, Thomas Barnett considers Afghanistan a gap state: the root of the problem is that Afghanistan is not linked into the global economy.<sup>5</sup> This idea assumes that the role of the Afghan police force would be to protect economic development sites and transportation networks rather than to deter crime and defeat insurgent groups. In contrast, many international agencies define

Afghanistan as a failed state and posit that building institutions within Afghanistan is a solution.<sup>6</sup> This focuses the police effort on protecting government facilities and carrying out the rule of law. Furthermore, the U.S. Army's doctrine on stability operations defines Afghanistan as a *fragile state* and lists police forces as an integral part of almost every aspect of the stabilization effort.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the situation in Afghanistan is believed to require a COIN strategy, and our doctrine envisions the police force's primary role as one of counterinsurgency.<sup>8</sup> These multiple views bring us no closer to answering the question: What is the role of Afghanistan's police force?

The diverse interpretations of the role of Afghanistan's police force have created many competing, unprioritized programs that have pulled the small force in different directions. To envision these requirements properly, we have to consider the differing capabilities of military and police forces. For example, we would never expect the Los Angeles police department to engage and defeat an entrenched enemy force. Conversely, we would not expect U.S. Army paratroopers to be in Los Angeles enforcing zoning laws.

Nevertheless, these competing visions of the Afghan police force have created the expectation that it will be able to produce the security effects of both a military and a police force. Whether this is feasible is debatable, but it is clear that Afghan police forces are having problems adjusting to so many different

demands.<sup>9</sup> At some point, these contending visions must be prioritized, and it is interesting to see how the security realm was divided in Afghanistan (see figure 1). According to Robert Perito:

*The Afghan security sector was divided into four pillars with one lead nation assigned to each pillar to oversee support and reforms. Under this plan, the United States was assigned responsibility for the military; Germany, the police; Italy, the judiciary; and Britain, counternarcotics. The framework was meant to ensure burden sharing, but assignments were made with little expertise,*

four areas of security under the auspices and conditions of four different nations. In direct contrast, the Afghan National Army benefited from the priority of effort and mentorship of the parallel U.S. military force. It should come as no surprise that the Afghan National Police are struggling to become an effective force as a result of this disjointed effort.<sup>13</sup>

The problems arising in creating police forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan are not only a cause for concern, but also should be genuinely alarming given a U.S. military doctrinal focus that advocates that the "primary frontline COIN force is often the police—not

*competing visions of the Afghan police force have created the expectation that it will be able to produce the security effects of both a military and a police force*

*experience, or resources, and there was no mechanism to ensure a coordinated approach to reform efforts.*<sup>10</sup>

The problems of training a force in capabilities mirroring those of the German police and then using that force as "little soldiers" to perform military COIN tasks that they simply are not prepared for are evident.<sup>11</sup> In fact, there appears to be little coordination between the training base and the combat forces that subsequently employ the Afghan police.<sup>12</sup> The Afghan National Police were being pulled into all

the military. The primary COIN objective is to enable local institutions. Therefore, supporting the police is essential.<sup>14</sup> We continue to grapple with the role of the police, often allowing our competing visions to make this task more complex than it needs to be. The requirement for a single concept for police forces is paramount when we involve the whole of not just our own government but also of multiple national governments in COIN efforts.<sup>15</sup> Without this concept, the probability of unfocused and overlapping solutions regarding the development of police forces will remain high.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 1. The Afghan National Police Problem



**The Security Trinity**

A look at the general security model of stable states is worthwhile in order to understand what we are trying to create with police forces. Generally speaking, most nations have three arms to their security forces: the military, a national police force, and local police forces. As we envision this security arrangement, we must be mindful of the professional cultures and predispositions of the security agencies involved in each of the wings of security (see figure 2).

When considering the professional requirements of each arm, we see the divergence between police and military views of security. For example, the function of the police is described as “crime control, crime prevention, [and] problem solving,”<sup>17</sup> while it is said of the military function that, “once deployed, the Army operates for extended periods across the full spectrum of conflict, from stable peace through general war.”<sup>18</sup> These different views about what constitutes security create organizations and professional cultures best suited to establishing that envisioned endstate. It is therefore probable that indigenous police forces in COIN operations will be influenced by and attempt to emulate the culture and capabilities of the profession that is developing them. We can clearly see this problem in the debate surrounding the Afghan police.

As a general example of how these differing cultures can become problematic, we need look no further than terminology. For example, it is clear that the term *campaign* has different meanings within the two security organizations. The military defines a *campaign* as a joint process involving major operations to achieve a national strategic endstate,<sup>19</sup> but the word can also refer to a comprehensive plan to address a single issue (for example, the British police campaign to raise awareness of the National Terror Hotline<sup>20</sup>). There is likely to be considerable friction between police and military advisors without adequate consideration of these differing professional cultures. This problem is heightened when police advisors try to replicate a necessary local police function at the same time that military advisors are attempting to develop a counterinsurgency capability within the same force.

The divisions between the police and military can be further exacerbated by professional differences between local and national police forces (see figure 3). Additionally, these cultural norms are influenced by the history

Figure 2. The Security Trinity



Figure 3. Professional Differences in Police Forces



Figure 4. Historical-Cultural Differences in Police Forces



ISAF Commander GEN Petraeus and Afghan military and defense officials speak to ground commanders at conference in Kabul



U.S. Air Force (Bradley Lail)

and culture of a given nation and thus can vary widely.<sup>21</sup> For example, Russia currently has a Ministry of Interior national police force that is robust enough to participate in large-scale combat operations.<sup>22</sup> The French and Italians have national *gendarmeries* and *Carabinieri*, while the United States has a federalized police force in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In nations that have a history of revolutions and coups such as Russia, the need for a robust national police force as a counterweight to the military is an important consideration. However, an attempt to establish a police force with enough capability to match military forces would be met with derision in the United States.

Every national level police force is organized based on specific historical, cultural, political, and security requirements of the founding nation. Although this can lead to vastly different capabilities among national level police forces, the basic requirements of local and national police forces remain similar. For example, we would not expect the Boise, Idaho, police department to combat human smuggling among several West Coast ports. Conversely, we would not expect FBI agents to hand out speeding tickets or respond to a robbery in Boise. The issue is one of understanding what security forces are expected to do within the role they are assigned. Creating a police force for Afghanistan without reference to its history and culture not only produces a suboptimal police force, but also precludes the prioritization of police advisors (see figure 4).

Likewise, the issue raised by Afghanistan's police problems is identifying what the country's security requirements are. How will we fill the three security arms for Afghanistan? Does Afghanistan require a national police force capable of countering the Afghan National Army? Would Afghanistan be better served by a European model national police force that has larger organizational combat capabilities than the FBI? Would it be sufficient to have a police force capable of defeating criminal networks and reinforced by the Afghan National Army when an insurgent force overwhelms local security capability? How much overlap in capability is required by the Afghan military and police forces?

Answers to these questions are well beyond the scope of this article. However, it is apparent that the unfocused efforts with regard to Afghanistan's police forces are expensive and time consuming and may delay a positive outcome for years if not properly addressed.<sup>23</sup> There have clearly been successful police functions within previous COIN efforts, and it is incumbent on us to identify and implement these lessons to avoid further complications with police forces in our current operations. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.), Chairman, *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of*

*Iraq* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 6, 2006), 86–124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See the Fund for Peace, "Failed States Index 2009," available at <[www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549)>; see also Foreign Policy, "The Failed States Index 2009," available at <[www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/the\\_2009\\_failed\\_states\\_index](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/the_2009_failed_states_index)>.

<sup>7</sup> Field Manual (FM) 3–07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, September 5, 2008), 3–6.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3–24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 15, 2006), 6–19.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Michael Johnson, *Afghan Security: U.S. Efforts to Develop Capable Afghan Police Forces Face Challenges and Need for Coordinated, Detailed Plan to Help Ensure Accountability*, GAO–08–883T (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Perito, *Afghanistan's Police: The Weak Link in Security Sector Reform* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2009), 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Afghan National Security Forces: Shaping Host Country Forces as Part of Armed Nation Building* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), v.

<sup>14</sup> FM 3–24, 6–19.

<sup>15</sup> Luc L.P. Van de Goor and Mariska Van Beijnum, *Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>17</sup> George L. Kellig and Mark H. Moore, "The Evolving Strategy of Policing," *Perspectives on Police*, no. 4 (November 1988), 13.

<sup>18</sup> FM 3–0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, February 27, 2008), vii.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–9.

<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Police (London), "New Campaign to Urge Londoners to Report Suspicious Activity," available at <[www.met.police.uk/campaigns/counter\\_terrorism/index.htm](http://www.met.police.uk/campaigns/counter_terrorism/index.htm)>.

<sup>21</sup> Robert M. Perito, *U.S. Police in Peace and Stability Operations*, USIP Special Report 191 (Washington, DC: USIP, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Jim Nichol, *Stability in Russia's Chechnya and Other Regions of the North Caucasus: Recent Developments* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Perito, *U.S. Police*, 1–2.