Factors Impeding the Development of Capable Iraqi Security Forces

As of February 2007, DOD reported that it had trained and equipped 327,000 Iraqi security forces—a substantial increase from the 142,000 reported in March 2005. The Iraqi security force level is double that of the 153,000-strong U.S.-led coalition currently in Iraq. While the Iraqi security forces are increasingly leading counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, they and the coalition have been unable to reduce the levels of violence throughout Iraq. Enemy-initiated attacks per day have increased from about 70 in January 2006 to about 160 in December 2006.

Several factors affect the development of effective Iraqi security forces and help explain why the reported growth in Iraqi security forces has not decreased violence. First, the Iraqi security forces are not a single unified force with a primary mission of countering the insurgency in Iraq. About 40 percent of the Iraqi security forces have a primary mission of counterinsurgency—specifically, the Iraqi army. The other major component—the Iraqi police—has civilian law enforcement as its primary mission.

Second, high rates of absenteeism and poor ministry reporting result in an overstatement of the number of Iraqi security forces present for duty. The Ministry of the Interior does not maintain standardized reports on personnel strength. As a result, DOD does not know how many coalition-trained police the ministry still employs or what percentage of the 180,000 police thought to be on the payroll are coalition trained and equipped.

Third, sectarian and militia influences have divided the loyalties of Iraqi security forces. In November 2006, for example, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency stated that the Ministry of Interior and the police were heavily infiltrated by militia members of the Badr Organization and Mahdi Army. According to the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, sectarian divisions have eroded the dependability of many Iraqi army units.

Fourth, as we previously reported, Iraqi units remain dependent upon the coalition for their logistical, command and control, and intelligence capabilities. As of December 2006, the coalition was providing significant levels of support to the Iraqi military, including fuel and ammunition.

The extent of these problems cannot be fully assessed without detailed information on the readiness of each Iraqi unit. While DOD captures this information in its Transition Readiness Assessments (TRAs), it does not provide this critical information to Congress. These data provide information on capabilities and gaps in Iraqi units’ manpower, equipment, and training levels, and as of late 2006, assess each unit’s operational effectiveness. Congress needs this information to make informed appropriations decisions and engage in meaningful oversight. Despite repeated attempts over many months, we have yet to be provided the TRA information we are seeking.