

Iraq: NATO Assists In Building New Middle East Proxy Army

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A North Atlantic Treaty Organization website recently posted an article by the commander of the NATO Training Mission - Iraq, American Lieutenant General Michael Barbero, entitled "NATO Training Mission - Iraq: Tactical Size...Strategic Impact" which reflected on the six-year-old but little known role of the Western military bloc in the Middle Eastern nation.

Barbero, who is simultaneously Deputy Commanding General for Advising and Training, United States Forces - Iraq, stated that "NATO has made an important commitment to Iraq....Government leaders readily recognize the contribution of NATO Training Mission-Iraq's (NTM-I) to its security and they have expressed a strong desire to continue this relationship into the future. [C]onditions are set for a long-term relationship between Iraq and the Alliance." [1]

He reminded his readers that the NTM-I was established by a decision made at the 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul, Turkey, which also formalized the largest expansion of the military bloc in its now 61-year history, with seven Eastern European states - Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia - absorbed into the U.S.-led alliance. Six of those nations had been in the Warsaw Pact, three of those were former Soviet republics, and the seventh country had been a republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The last four mentioned were the first countries in either category to join NATO.

The 2004 summit also launched the eponymous Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to qualitatively advance NATO's role in the Middle East and North Africa through an upgrading of the Mediterranean Dialogue military partnership with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, and an analogous relationship with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. All but Oman and Saudi Arabia to date have entered into bilateral partnerships with NATO and hosted its officials and warships.

The deployments in the Persian Gulf supplement U.S. efforts to contain, challenge and confront Iran.

The NATO Training Mission - Iraq was inaugurated less than six months after the Istanbul summit, in December of 2008, and its first commander was then Lieutenant General David Petraeus, who subsequently became head of U.S. Central Command and is now in command of 150,000 American and NATO troops in Afghanistan. He was already the commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq when he also took over the NATO role.

At the time it was announced that “NATO is working with the Iraqi government on a structured cooperation framework to develop the Alliance’s long-term relationship with Iraq.” [2]

Only 20 days after the U.S. and Britain began the so-called Operation Iraqi Freedom war against Iraq, an article by Philip H. Gordon, then Senior Fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution and since last May the Barack Obama administration’s Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, appeared on the Brookings website called “Give NATO a Role in Post-war Iraq.”

Adopting a tone of false familiarity and insouciance, he queried: “Wouldn’t it be nice...if we had at our disposal a multilateral organization to which we could turn for help, a body more effective and efficient than the UN but that would still confer legitimacy on the operation and help spread some of the costs? Imagine, in fact, a grouping composed of over two dozen democracies, including our most prosperous European allies, that had interoperable military forces, experience with peacekeeping and disarmament tasks, an available pool of troops, and existing command arrangements.”

The question was rhetorical, a leading one to set up an already prepared response: “If such an organization did not exist, we would certainly want to invent it.

“Fortunately, such an organization does exist. NATO has all these attributes and there would be many advantages to giving it a key role in post-war Iraq. First, nowhere else is there a large group of available and experienced peacekeepers who could gradually replace the thousands of exhausted American and British soldiers currently deployed in Iraq.

“Fresh troops will have to come from somewhere, and no organization is better placed to provide them than NATO.” [3]

Gordon, who in the interim has mainly distinguished himself by abrasively taunting Russia on several scores, was already – as American and British troops were still pouring into Iraq – speaking on behalf of the more strategically forward-thinking members of the U.S. foreign policy elite planning to move on from Iraq to other deployments and war fronts.

He was also preparing the groundwork for the transition to a post-George W. Bush administration, one which has appointed him to a critically important post, in regard to restoring, solidifying and strengthening a unified Western – U.S., NATO and European Union – alliance for global dominance. [4]

Gordon, for example, advocated the following:

“Involving NATO in post-war Iraq would also help to legitimize the reconstruction process in the eyes of many around the world — making a UN mandate more likely and clearing the way for EU reconstruction funds.

“Giving a role to NATO — some of whose members have recently proven their willingness to stand up to Washington — would prove that Iraq was not a mere American protectorate, while still giving us confidence that security would be ensured.

“Getting NATO involved in Iraq would not only help share the burden of what could be a difficult and costly occupation, but it could be a first step toward repairing a vital transatlantic relationship currently in tatters.” [5]

In January of 2004, Senator Chuck Hagel, who though a Republican was one of the first major U.S. officials to sense the debacle that the Iraq war had become, had an article posted on the website of the U.S. Mission to NATO which stated:

“The strategic focus of NATO’s efforts in the first half of the 21st Century will be the Greater Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Mediterranean, and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The shifting dynamics of history in this new century have settled the ‘out of area’ debate for NATO. NATO has recognized this reality with its presence in Afghanistan....NATO will need to play a significant role in helping bring security and stability to Iraq.

“Last year, NATO committed to providing force generation, communication, logistics, and movement support for Polish forces in Iraq. That’s a good start. However, NATO should initiate discussions to take over the duties of the Polish sector in central Iraq, or possibly assume responsibility for a division in northern Iraq. I am encouraged by German Chancellor Schroeder telling the German parliament last week that his government could support the deployment of NATO troops to Iraq.” [6]

Four months after retiring from the Senate last year Hagel became chairman of the main American organization promoting NATO expansion, the Atlantic Council. [7]

A think tank piece appeared in 2008 advocating the same posture toward NATO’s role in Iraq. An abbreviated version of a presentation delivered at the (pause for breath) 2008 annual conference of the International Security Studies Section of the International Studies Association and the International Security and Arms Control Section of the American Political Science Association (ISAC-ISSS) by David Capezza of the Center for a New American Security appeared on the website of the Atlantic Council.

The original piece was titled “NATO Training Mission – Iraq: The Broader Picture for NATO’s Future,” and included these observations and recommendations:

“Today all twenty-six NATO members provide funding for NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) and sixteen countries are providing staffing for the mission. Since its inception, this out-of-area mission has challenged the conventional wisdom about the future purpose of NATO, demonstrating that the alliance can remain a relevant actor in the European and international security environments.

“NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) represents a model for how NATO can help perform successful European Security and Defense Policy missions; modernize member state forces and work interoperably; support the United States...and work in the absence of member-state consensus....The mission in Iraq also provides NATO with a framework for future missions.” [8]

In fact NATO’s involvement in Iraq is more extensive and of longer duration than most people suspect.

Twenty years ago, on December 17, 1990, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker met with fellow NATO foreign ministers in Brussels and his colleagues agreed “to support the use of force in the Persian Gulf even if Saddam Hussein begins to pull his troops out of Kuwait.”

A joint communique obligated all 16 NATO member states at the time “to the best of our ability...provide further support” for the war which would begin a month later. [9]

Major NATO partners assisted Washington in its first war against Iraq, Operation Desert Storm, in 1991. Britain supplied 43,000 troops, 69 warplanes and 2,500 armored vehicles. France provided 18,000 troops and 42 warplanes and Canada deployed 24 and Italy 8 aircraft. Belgium, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Spain also volunteered military forces. In all, three-quarters of the bloc's members of the time.

Although NATO did not formally endorse the second war against Iraq in 2003, in February and early March the military bloc deployed Airborne Early Warning and Command System aircraft (AWACS) from Germany and three Patriot missile batteries from the Netherlands to Turkey.

Also, "Preparations were made to augment Turkey's air defence assets with additional aircraft from other NATO countries." [10]

The U.S. and British "coalition of the willing" that provided troops for the subsequent occupation of Iraq was overwhelmingly composed of nations that had recently joined NATO, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland; those that would join the following year, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; ones that would be rewarded with full membership in 2009, Albania and Croatia; and candidates for the next round of expansion, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine.

With the fall of Baghdad, Iraq was carved up into four zones, with at the time new NATO member Poland put in charge of the South Central sector with control over 65,000 square kilometers and five million Iraqis. The Polish military ran the Multinational Division Central-South with troops from Armenia, Bosnia, Denmark, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine and the U.S. under its command.

In May of 2003 the North Atlantic Council, NATO's main governing body, authorized support for the Polish operation "including force generation, communications, logistics and movements." [11] (From a NATO document, repeated verbatim by Senator Chuck Hagel above.)

Iraq was the war zone baptism of fire for new and prospective NATO members from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Nine of the troop contributing nations joined NATO in the interim.

In December of 2008 most of the 16 above-mentioned former Warsaw Pact and Yugoslav states began the redeployment of their troops from Iraq to Afghanistan where they remain.

In September of 2009 the NATO Training Mission - Iraq opened its new headquarters in Operating Base Union III in the International Zone in the nation's capital, which is now called NATO Headquarters Baghdad. Attending the ceremony marking the new site and expanded role were U.S. Army Lieutenant General Frank Helmick, commanding general for NATO Training Mission-Iraq, his deputy commanding general, Italian Major General Giuseppe Spinelli, and U.S. Admiral Mark Fitzgerald, commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command in Naples.

The pledge of six years ago to continue "the Alliance's long-term relationship with Iraq" was not a vain one.

In recent months NATO has not been idle in the nation bordering Iran and Syria.

This April the deputy commander of NATO Training Mission – Iraq, Major General Giuseppe Spinelli, gave an address at the Ar-Rustamiyah Joint Staff and Command College in Baghdad at a ceremony for 16 Iraqi officers graduating from Brigade Command and Battalion Command courses conducted by NATO personnel. In the same month the Italian ambassador to Iraq, Maurizio Melani, gave a lecture at the NATO training mission at the Iraqi National Defense College (NDC) – which NATO launched in 2006 – and “inaugurated a cycle of conferences that will be held by Ambassadors of NATO nations, in the framework of the NTM-I initiative to support the Iraqi NDC.” [12]

In May NATO’s Military Committee held a meeting in Brussels of 49 Chiefs of Defense from NATO and Partner nations (over a quarter of the countries in the world) which included the participation of NATO’s two top military commanders, Supreme Allied Commander Europe Admiral James Stavridis and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Stephane Abrial. A NATO statement on the meeting revealed: “Concerning NATO’s Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I), important achievements have been made, particularly in the establishment of the Iraqi Federal Police.

“There is, however, a continuing need for contributions from NATO nations in terms of resources and expertise, in support of Iraq’s Security Forces, which will contribute to regional stability.” [13]

Last month Major General Claudio Angelelli, who replaced his countryman Spinelli as NTM-I deputy commander on June 10, “presented NATO Medals for personnel leaving the NATO training mission during a parade at Forward Operational Base in Ar Rustamyah,” and discussed future military cooperation with Iraqi General Salim Jasim Hussain, commander of the National Defense College, and Brigadier General Sabeeh Bahool Atti, commander of the Iraqi Military Academy Ar Rustamyah. It was reported at the time that “the Military Academy Ar Rustamyah is hosting the 101 Basic Officer Cadets Course consisting of 319 cadets from the Army and 265 from the Air Force of which 140 are pilots.” [14]

Also in July the NTM-I supervised the sixth Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Course held at the Infantry NCO School in Taji, Iraq. “The course has recently been revamped. NTM-I officers, together with the Infantry NCO School’s leadership modernized the previous programs creating a single standardized curriculum for the IAF [Iraqi Armed Forces] troops.” [15]

On July 12 NATO Training Mission – Iraq sponsored a week-long visit by a delegation from the U.S. Army War College to the Iraqi War College. “The two military colleges, which are considered gateways for officers destined for senior positions, are seeking to build a mutually supporting and enduring relationship that will continue beyond 2011.” [16]

NATO Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero and Iraqi Defense Minister Abdul Qader Mohammad Jassim Al-Mafriji “signed an agreement between the Government of the Republic of Iraq and NATO regarding the training of Iraqi Security Forces” on July 26. “The agreement will provide the legal basis for NATO to continue with its mission to assist the Government of the Republic of Iraq in developing further the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces.” [17]

A delegation from the NATO Defense College arrived at the National Defense College in Baghdad on July 28 to conduct the first ever crisis management exercise with senior Iraqi leaders.

On August 2 leaders of NATO Training Mission - Iraq and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense conducted the third Committee for the Future Training meeting at Forward Operating Base Union III, and NTM-I Deputy Commander Major General Claudio Angelelli “offered three NATO schools Iraqis could attend using NATO funds.” Lieutenant General Hussain Jassim Salim Dohi, Iraqi deputy chief of staff, said on the occasion that “We appreciate NATO support and would like to continue our collaboration on this important topic.” [18]

The following day senior military leaders from NATO Training Mission - Iraq and United States Forces - Iraq met “to discuss Iraqi military doctrine at the Iraqi Military Doctrine Conference in Baghdad,” which would “enable the Iraqi Armed Forces to develop and deliver a doctrine that will endure beyond 2011.” Iraqi General Babakir Badir-Khan stated, “With [the] significant support of our NATO partners, we have provided the tools necessary for Iraq to defend itself in the face [of] external aggression.”

NTM-I commander Lieutenant General Barbero was even more explicit, saying “As we approach 2011, and the focus for the Armed Forces switches from internal security to external defense, it is necessary to review...conventional capabilities and determine how to employ them in the event of external aggression.” [19]

Iraq borders six nations: Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and NATO member Turkey. Barbero was not alluding to Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

In his article quoted from earlier, Barbero repeatedly made the same point, stating:

“The Mission [NTM-I] influences professional institutions of the Iraqi Security Forces to build enduring, sustainable capabilities, working directly with partners in the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior to build capabilities that provide internal security and build a foundation to defend against external threats. [It conducts] training and education which includes officer training activities, professional development at the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy, doctrine development as well as the coordination of out-of-country training.”

“It is important to note that regenerating capacity to educate and train officers started on the ground floor, completely rebuilding these institutions and courses.”

“NATO advisors and mentors are shaping the future leadership of the Iraqi Army, at all levels, from the Basic Officer Commissioning Course, to the Joint Staff and Command College, the Iraqi War College, and the Iraqi National Defence College.”

“Complementing institutional education is the NTM-I role in the development of Iraqi military doctrine. The development of doctrine is essential as the Iraqi Security Forces become a modern force capable of defending Iraqi sovereignty. An equally important program supporting this line of activity is NATO Out-of-Country Training. In 2010 to date some 300 Iraqis have attended specialized training abroad in NATO schools. An additional 300 in have attended courses in counter-terrorism at NATO Centres of Excellence in Turkey.”

He also spoke of “Operations Centres in Baghdad where embedded NTM-I advisors mentor personnel at the Prime Minister’s Operation Centre, Ministry of Defense Joint Operations Centre, and Ministry of Interior National Operations Centre” and of NATO’s development of Iraq’s internal security apparatus:

The Western military bloc “directly supports professionalism of the Iraqi Federal Police Forces. Recognized as NATO’s flagship program, this Carabinieri-led training has produced a dramatic transformation in the Iraqi Federal Police, formerly the National Police....The Carabinieri training is a prime example of how NATO training activities contribute to the professionalization of the Iraqi Security Forces at multiple levels.

“The proposed Spanish Guardia Civil training program meets a critical Iraq requirement for border security and planning is underway to improve training for the Oil Police.”

In a section titled “Post-2011 Iraq-NATO Relationship - Supporting the New Strategic Concept,” the general elaborated the role of Iraq in the Alliance’s 21st century global ambitions:

“NATO has successfully fulfilled its commitment, and the contributions of NTM-I have opened new doors for greater cooperation and regional stability. The positive reputation enjoyed by NATO in Iraq, and the region, presents a strategic opportunity. Senior leaders in the Government of Iraq have indicated a desire for a long-term relationship with NATO. This is an opportunity the Alliance must seize. The Alliance should start the dialogue now to extend the mandate of current NTM-I charter beyond 2011 and also begin discussions to frame a follow on long-term agreement that links NATO with Iraq well into the future.

“The continuing relationship between NATO and Iraq through NTM-I, and its evolution into a Structured Cooperation Framework, is a model of the potential for NATO operations out-of-area under the New Strategic Concept currently being developed by the Alliance....Looking forward, NATO has a ‘once in a lifetime’ Strategic Opportunity to build an enduring relationship with a democratic state in a critical region.” [20]

NATO will remain in Iraq when - or if - the last American soldier departs.

NATO is assisting the Pentagon is building a new army in the second most populous Arab nation. The military structure of the country was dismantled - hundreds of thousands of troops were abruptly demobilized and the officer corps purged - and rebuilt from the top down by the U.S. after the 2003 invasion, with its commanders trained by the U.S. and NATO at home and in Alliance nations. The first fully American-created armed forces in the Middle East. As during the Cold War, the U.S. controls the national army by training its officers and equipping and instructing its troops.

The U.S.’s building of what will be one of the major military powers in the Middle East, concentrating less on domestic security - assuming the fratricidal bloodbath triggered by the U.S. invasion ever subsides - and more on regional geopolitics, is part of a broader Pentagon strategy aimed in the first instance against Iran.

That strategy also includes a proposed \$60 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia for 84 F-15 jet fighters, warships, helicopters and interceptor missile systems. A recent Wall Street Journal article on the weapons package placed it in the following context: “The administration has championed advanced weapons sales to Gulf states as a way to check Iranian power. In addition to Saudi Arabia, the U.S. has moved to sell arms to the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf states, as well as support on a smaller scale [for] the Lebanese army and Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.” [21]

The figure of \$60 billion is from a Bloomberg News report of August 12, “according to a

government official familiar with the plan,” and is larger than total Russian military spending last year, by way of providing a sense of its magnitude.

In late July Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Alexander Vershbow, “a main adviser to Defence Secretary Robert Gates on US security and defence policies in the Middle East,” was in Lebanon where he “discussed US military aid to Lebanon which in recent years totalled more than 500 million dollars.” [22]

Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the U.S. has provided the nation’s military with far more than the half billion dollars mentioned above. U.S. Congressman Eric Cantor, the number two Republican in the House of Representatives, recently stated that the Pentagon had provided the Lebanese Armed Forces with \$720 million in military aid since 2006 “to build up a Lebanese fighting force that would serve as a check on the growing power of the radical Islamist Hezbollah movement.” [23] If in the case of Iraq the U.S. and NATO are building a national army out of whole cloth, with Lebanon they have attempted to purchase one.

After the 2006 war, NATO states deployed over 8,000 troops to patrol Lebanon’s border with Syria, to protect Israel along its border with southern Lebanon, and to enforce a naval blockade of Lebanon’s Mediterranean coast under an expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mandate, which also includes a new Maritime Task Force with warships from Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria. The Maritime Task Force is in truth an extension of NATO’s nine-year-old Operation Active Endeavor naval surveillance and interdiction deployment throughout the Mediterranean Sea.

It also represents “the first military deployment by Germany in the Middle East since World War II” [24] and “its biggest naval operation since World War II.” [25]

In addition to the \$60 billion dollar weapons sale to Saudi Arabia, the U.S. is arming another of Iran’s Persian Gulf neighbors, Kuwait, to the teeth.

It was announced this week that Washington plans to transfer 209 advanced interceptor missiles – MIM-104E Patriot Guidance Enhanced Missile-T Missiles – to Kuwait in a \$900 million deal that, according to the U.S., would “contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a major non-NATO ally....” [26]

A BBC News report added that “US officials say Patriot batteries also have been stationed in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.” [27]

The encirclement, in fact the siege, of Iran continues apace and Iraq, which shares with it a 1,458-kilometer border, is slated to play a major role in plans to isolate, undermine and attack Iran, replicating the model used with devastating effect against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq itself.

NATO is actively assisting the U.S. and Israel with those war plans.

Notes

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