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Iraq effort by the numbers

Details in little-seen government reports.

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WASHINGTON - Iraq has less than 30 percent of the trained police it needs. Radios for the Iraqi police service are in short supply - as is body armor, with the sets on hand constituting only about one-third of the number required.

Meanwhile, insurgent attacks are widely spread throughout the country. While a majority occur in Baghdad and the hotbed of the Sunni triangle, few parts of Iraq seem immune. In August and September almost 16 percent of incidents involving coalition or Iraqi forces took place in the northern city of Mosul.

These figures come from the US government's official weekly status reports of the situation in Iraq. While unclassified, and widely disseminated within the government, these reports have generally not been made public.

They don't sugarcoat the situation, as the figures on police shortfalls show. But neither do they depict a country overwhelmed by chaos. Some aspects of reconstruction appear to have made progress: Iraq has more telephone subscribers now than it did before the war, according to status reports. And trend lines for some important security-force measurements are shown going up.

"We are involved in a low-intensity conflict. That should not be minimized.... But that doesn't mean you can't win this campaign, or more important that Iraqis can't win it," says Anthony Cordesman, a military expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington who has kept careful track of Iraqi statistics.

In the United States the intensity of the campaign for president has not made it easy to gain understanding into what's happening in Iraq. To President Bush, the situation is bright, and getting brighter by the day. To Sen. John Kerry, things are dire, with no improvement in sight. At times it seems as if they are talking about two different countries.

In this context, the Department of State's Daily Updates and Weekly Status Report, and the US Agency for International Development's Iraqi Reconstruction Weekly Update, provide at least glimmers of insight.

Take the status numbers on Iraqi security forces. The US has recently raised its estimate of the number of police Iraq will need by about 30 percent, to 135,000. About 85,000 are now on duty, but that figure has actually been declining of late, due to desertions and resignations.

Only about 33,000 on-duty police have been through adequate training, according to US figures. That trend line is going up, however, and may increase quickly under the direction of Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who has taken charge of all Iraqi security training.

As for police equipment, the number of weapons on hand is something less than half of the requirement, as of the end of September. Vehicles on hand are about one-third of the requirement. All 135,000 Iraqi police are supposed to get body armor, but as of September only 42,941 sets were on hand.

It took US commanders a full year, from the invasion of Iraq until the spring of this year, to realize that the insurgency was serious, say some analysts. Thus it is only now that they are pulling together a serious effort to develop indigenous Iraqi security forces.

"In terms of training efforts ... I do think they will be able to do more and more," says Michael O'Hanlon, a military expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

They will need to, because the insurgency is obviously "very strong," in Mr. O'Hanlon's estimation. September was a particularly deadly month for US forces, with 71 fatalities. Insurgent attacks and general crime seem to be on the rise throughout the country.

Figures for attacks vary widely, depending on what kind of attack is being measured and the definition of "attack." According to a report in Wednesday's New York Times, there were more than 2,300 attacks against all targets in Iraq in September.

The US State Department's Daily Updates, however, track a more narrow measure of major incidents involving coalition or Iraqi troops. By its count, there were 172 attacks in August and September.

Of these, 54 were in Baghdad, and 67 more occurred in other areas of the restive Sunni triangle. The next-most dangerous area was Mosul, with 27 attacks. Remaining incidents were spread across all areas of Iraq.

The attacks are carried out by a broad variety of groups, from Sunni insurgents to Shiite insurgents and some foreign terrorists. They should not be minimized, according to CSIS's Mr. Cordesman.

"We also have to keep in perspective that this is not a nationwide popular movement. There is no cohesion [among insurgents]," says Cordesman.

Meanwhile, some measurements of civilian progress are going up. There are now more than 1.5 million telephone subscribers in Iraq, including some 738,000 cellphone subscribers, according to the US Agency for International Development. That's 85 percent more than existed before the war.

Crude-oil production inched up in September, although the energy sector remains a favorite insurgent target. Some 2,000 schools nationwide have been rehabbed. In northern Iraq, the Kurdistan regional government has opened an Internet cafe and training center that will allow 2,000 people access to the Web.

Iraqis overwhelmingly disapprove of the US occupation. But one retired military officer still employed by the Pentagon notes that "on virtually every poll I have seen, even in the worst of conditions the Iraqi people reflect the belief that their lives are improving and will continue to improve."

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