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## The Iraq Drawdown Is Proof of Success

U.S. forces will remain to assist the Iraqi army.

By FRANK G. HELMICK

A major transformation is underway in Iraq. Each day U.S. forces hand over more responsibility for security to the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police. As this moves along, the number of U.S. forces in Iraq will shrink to no more than 50,000 by August 2010 from approximately 132,000 now. Further, as directed by President Barack Obama, all U.S. forces will be out of Iraq by the end of December 2011. As we proceed with this drawdown, the role of U.S. forces in Iraq will transition to primarily focus on advising Iraqi forces instead of fighting terrorism directly.

From 2003 to 2008, the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq was authorized by the United Nations. Since then, U.S. forces have remained at the invitation of the Iraqi government under the terms of a security agreement negotiated between our two countries. Among the provisions of this agreement is a requirement for U.S. combat forces to be out of Iraq's cities by June 30, 2009.

The term "combat forces" in the agreement is important. At the request of the government of Iraq, the requirement for combat forces to be out of Iraq's cities does not apply to U.S. troops serving in other roles. There will still be some U.S. forces located in Iraq's cities who are serving in an advisory or liaison capacity. Additionally, the Iraqi government reserves the right to request assistance from U.S. combat forces if necessary.

Primary responsibility for advising Iraqi security forces is assigned to an organization called Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq. MNSTC-I is presently comprised of more than 5,600 of America's best soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Defense Department civilians, and contractors. Its mission is to help train and equip Iraq's security forces to the point where they are able to protect the Iraqi people and do so within the rule of law, in accordance to international standards, and while respecting human rights.

In addition to MNSTC-I's efforts, Iraq's security forces will benefit from a range of professional development activities conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Thirteen NATO countries are presently teaching and advising the next generation of leaders in Iraq's military staff colleges and police academies.

Together, the efforts of MNSTC-I and NATO are helping the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government toward a free and prosperous future. Many democratic nations, including our own, required the assistance of others at some point in their history. This was true for the United States during the fight for independence, it was true for the United Kingdom and France during World War II, and it was true for the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe in the 1990s. It is also true for Iraq. Not only do we have a moral obligation to support the Iraqi people, but a stable Iraq is critical to peace in the Gulf region and to the national security of the U.S.

The men and women of MNSTC-I are committed to helping the people of Iraq. We are committed to fulfilling the requirements of the security agreement, including the drawdown of combat forces and the transition to an enhanced advisory and support role. We are proud to help the Iraqi people in their pursuit of two of the greatest gifts of all --security and freedom.

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## Lt. Gen. Helmick is the commanding general of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq and the NATO Training Mission-Iraq.

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