



Under the Gun in Iraq: My Year Training the Iraqi Police

Robert Cole

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"One moment, I was standing there with my buddies unloading a truck. The next moment, my ears picked up the distinct 'pssst' sound homing in on us....

"Hit the ground!" someone yelled.

"Right behind the first mortar was a second, then a third, then a fourth. They each slammed into the earth with an enormous impact. The ground shook. The eight-story building above us shuddered, and we all covered our heads when the windows blew out.

"As I lay there with glass and debris raining down on me, all I could think was, 'Holy sh*t, what did I get myself into?'"

President Bush is fond of saying, "When Iraq can stand up, America can stand down." A large part of "standing up" is having a well-trained police force in place to maintain peace and order.

Why is it taking so long to put a solid police force together? How prepared are the Iraqis to carry out their duties? What pitfalls are Americans facing as they try to get Iraqi police up to speed?

In this book Robert Cole--a retired California police officer hired by DynCorp as an international police trainer--presents a vivid account of the challenges of training the Iraqis to handle their own security. In blunt, everyday language, Cole gives the reader an unusually candid and often hair-raising glimpse into reality at the street level as he and his colleagues navigate the dangerous sectors of Baghdad, Tikrit, and Kirkuk, dodging explosions and bullets aimed at them by young, Iraqi, wannabe heroes.

Cole describes situations not shown in the media that fly in the face of the party line from Washington: men in their sixties being hired as policemen, Iraqi detectives who extract information from people by ramming toothpicks under their fingernails, officers suggesting that the best way to subdue potential suspects who flee is by shooting them in the back, police hunkered down in their barracks who refuse to patrol neighborhoods for fear of violence, an enemy that easily blends into a population armed to the teeth with loaded AK-47s, and the routine frustrations of cultural and language barriers to communication.

In sharp contrast to the usual bromides about staying the course, *Under the Gun in Iraq* paints a brutally realistic picture of the bleak, perilous road ahead. This is essential reading for all Americans seeking an honest understanding of the dire situation in Iraq.

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