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PROFESSIONALIZING THE IRAQI ARMY: US ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE ISLAMIC STATE

C. Anthony Pfaff

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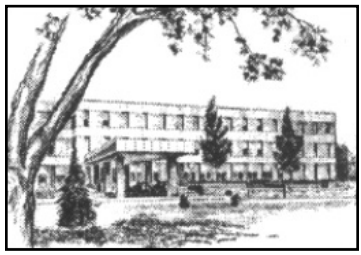

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January 2020

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ISBN 1-58487-819-3

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SUMMARY

While the US intelligence community worries about the emergence of "Da'esh 2.0," the US security cooperation community has to worry about the development of the "Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) 4.0" that will have to fight Da'esh and meet a broad range of other security and defense requirements. Here, the "4.0" refers to the facts that this is not the United States' first attempt to assist the Iraqis in building their defense capacity and the United States is not the first security partner to try. Britain and the Soviet Union also took their turns developing Iraqi military capabilities, both with similar results.

None of these difficulties, however, should be a surprise. A survey of Iraqi military history suggests a pattern of strengths, weaknesses, and performance that includes courageous soldiers, cohesive units, incompetent leaders, divided loyalties, poor combat support, and weak institutions that have, on occasion, risen to the defense challenge. As a result, the Iraqi Army continues to be plagued by a number of crippling deficiencies including a disunified command; endemic corruption; poor communications, intelligence, and logistics; and high rates of absenteeism, all of which are exacerbated by sectarian divisions inflamed and exploited by Iran.

Moving forward, the United States needs to first determine the purpose of this cooperation. Security cooperation with Iraq is not just about defeating the Islamic State or other terrorist groups. It should also not be about establishing a partner that can threaten Iranian interests. The Iranians and the Iraqis fought a long, bloody war and have no interest in doing so again. However, the United States stands to gain

when Iraq can play a constructive security role as an accepted member of the broader regional and international community. Iran cannot get the Iraqi military to that point, but the United States can. Thus, the long-term goal of US security cooperation with Iraq should be to establish its military as a valuable security partner, capable of participating in regional security arrangements, much in the same way Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and even Oman does.

Now is the time to reinvigorate efforts to develop the Iraqi armed forces. Iraq's victory over the Islamic State has allowed it, for the first time in its history, to play the role of liberator in a way that bridges Iraq's sectarian cleavages. For the United States and its partners to take advantage of this opportunity, however, they will have to overcome significant challenges. Despite widespread protests against malign Iranian influence, Iran's control over the Iraqi government is undiminished and will constrain what kind of cooperation it can have with the United States. Moreover, despite the image of Iraqi soldier as liberator after the fight against the Islamic State, its role in suppressing widespread protests in southern Iraq risks mediating that image with that of oppressor. At the same time, the establishment of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) as a separate armed force threatens competition for roles and resources, which will undermine the Iraqi military's effectiveness.

On that point, it is often said when it comes to Iraq, the Iranians are playing chess while the United States plays checkers. That's not exactly true. The United States is playing chess. Like the Iranians, the United States engages a range of diplomatic, security, economic, and social actors and institutions. Unlike the Iranians, it does so to encourage them to set aside

sectarian difference and corrupt practices to build an inclusive, prosperous Iraq that is a contributing member to global society. More to the point, and again unlike the Iranians, it provides billions of dollars in reconstruction and security assistance and connects the Iraqi government to regional and international partners to further assist development of critical institutions.

Still, while the United States may be playing chess, it is more apt to say the Iranians are playing "Settlers of Catan." By playing chess, the United States seems to think that this "game" ends when it captures the king, or in the context of Iraq, when the Iraqi government behaves consistently according to US interests. Meanwhile, the Iranians will have built a road over the chess board taking not only the king, but the park in which everyone is playing. In the Iraqi context, however, this game never ends. But more to the point, losing one source of power or influence does not end the game, it just requires one have others to rely upon. Unlike the United States, Iran gains this influence by exploiting the sectarian differences and corrupt practices that the United States seeks to discourage.

Still all is not lost. The United States has a number of comparative advantages over Iran that, if used properly, can set conditions for a more professional army. Those comparative advantages do not just include superior weapons, equipment, and maintenance support. They also include superior intelligence and logistics support as well as, when appropriate, access to coalition air and indirect fire assets. After the experience of fighting Da'esh with US assistance, it will be difficult for Iraqi leaders to turn down the quality of equipment, support, and expertise the United States-led coalition can offer. This point

suggests that a significant component of US security cooperation should emphasize interoperability where Iraqi forces can "plug into" US capabilities with relative ease so it can better support Iraqi military operations.

Additionally, partnership with the United States can facilitate greater connectivity to the international community, which will increase the resources available for development and which can, over time, bolster the country's legitimacy as a responsible, international actor. Though there is not necessarily a correlation between positive international engagement and an increasingly trusted and competent Iraqi Army, the benefits of such do serve as incentives for the Iraqis to make at least some of the necessary reforms.

In exploiting these advantages, the United States needs to ensure that whether support is offered or withheld, it is done so with specific behaviors in mind. Prior to the rise of the Islamic State, the United States withheld much critical support, especially intelligence, because of Iraq's relationship with Iran. What was missing from that dynamic was specific asks regarding Iraq's cooperation with Iran that could open up mutually beneficial space for the United States to better cooperate with Iraqis to prevent an Islamic terrorist resurgence. As a result, Iraqi requests for support often went unmet while there was nothing specific individual Iraqi partners could do to address US concerns.

At the same time, the United States also provided much critical support, including aircraft and major weapon systems in addition to an ongoing training relationship with the counterterrorism service (CTS). The result was predictably mixed. The Iraqi military had a number of high-end systems they could not

maintain or use effectively while the CTS transformed into the Iraqi armed forces most capable unit. It may have been possible to expand that kind of positive influence, but only had the United States made provision of these systems contingent on access and minimum standards of professional behavior, including adherence to effective maintenance practices.

In addressing these concerns, the United States is not going to compete with Iranian influence using the same means as the Iranians. In fact, it is a strength of the US approach that it seeks to remove the corruption and sectarianism the Iranians exploit. This asymmetry in approaches, however, gives Iran the upper hand in the short term, as they are able to benefit individual Iraqi decisionmakers who use the Iraqi government as a source of revenue with which they can build their own patronage networks. Meanwhile, US efforts benefit the Iraqi state but individuals more indirectly. As a result, progress is slow to take hold and easily undermined.

However, as the protests in 2019 clearly demonstrated, the Iraqi people want to be part of a state that is not only more functional, but better integrated with the international community. Thus the protestors' demands place pressure on Iraqi leaders to make meaningful reforms. However, without the proper encouragement and support, there will not likely be sufficient collective will to withstand Iranian influence and overcome barriers to progress. In providing that encouragement and support, the United States should use its comparative advantage to incentivize the following measures to address critical shortcomings that must be resolved if the Iraqi Army is to professionalize.

UNITY OF COMMAND

- Encourage the appointment of a non-sectarian and militarily competent Chief of Defense who would answer for all security services, including the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), to the prime minister.
- Recruit and train capable junior leaders who respond through the chain of command to the "clearly recognized leadership" of the Chief of Defense. US leadership can quietly identify such leaders and encourage the Iraqi government to appoint them.
- Identify alternative chains of command and continue to discourage their use by reinforcing the formal chain. To facilitate this effort, US advisors should reinforce ties between the Ministry of Defense, the National Operations Center, and the Chief of the Army.
- Identify overlapping areas of responsibility within the army and other services, including the PMF, and seek ways to make competing roles and responsibilities more complementary.

CORRUPTION

- Make US support, including training and equipment, contingent on units adopting accountability practices, in the same way the United States does end-service monitoring. The idea is to set up a dynamic where a relationship with the US Army brings sufficient benefit—tangible and intangible—such that abandoning corrupt practices will be worthwhile.

- Leverage US support to get the Iraqis to adopt procedures to reduce the opportunities for corruption, such as establishing individual bank accounts from which Iraqi soldiers would be paid.
- Leverage technology to the extent Iraqis can adequately absorb it to reinforce corruption-resistant procedures.
- Encourage senior Iraqi leadership to develop and promulgate a professional ethic compatible with Iraqi culture which establishes an Iraqi Army identity encouraging commitment to humanitarian ideals, competence, and effective stewardship of the profession.

POOR COMBAT SUPPORT: COMMUNICATIONS, INTELLIGENCE, AND LOGISTICS

- Encourage Iraqis not to use civilian communications infrastructure, especially cell phones, that is extremely unreliable and unsecure. Rather, encourage the use and maintenance of military communications.
- Improve intelligence sharing and, more importantly, interoperability of the US and Iraqi intelligence organizations to provide Iraqi forces with timely and actionable tactical intelligence.
- Discourage the use of intelligence and security services to monitor each other's activities.
- Encourage Iraqis to develop sustainable technical solutions that provide independent accounting for supplies, spare parts, and maintenance activities.

- Emphasize logistic interoperability so US logistics capabilities can assist the Iraqis quickly in times of crisis.

ABSENTEEISM, ADMINISTRATION, AND RISK AVERSION

- Improve administrative capabilities to ensure better accountability, resources, and pay for soldiers as well as limit opportunities to inflate unit rosters with "ghost soldiers." Better accountability will improve soldier quality of life and begin to build trust between soldiers and their leaders.
- Recruit college graduates, particularly those in technical fields, to assume roles as junior officers.
- Emphasize individual and small-unit skills with the aim to build a competent base of skilled soldiers and junior leaders while setting the conditions for developing capabilities for larger unit operations.
- Emphasize relationships between US professional military educational schools with Iraq's. These relationships should emphasize both tactical and operational skills and the standards associated with establishing and maintaining a profession. Additionally, the United States should attempt to reinvigorate Iraq's Defense Language Institute English language programs, as doing so would facilitate interoperability with US forces and the larger coalition.

SECTARIANISM

- Avoid zero tolerance policies regarding Iranian presence. Certain kinds of Iranian influence should limit US cooperation, but making the Iraqis always choose between a relationship with the United States and a relationship with Iran simply cedes space to the Iranians. Rely on US advantages the Iranians cannot replicate and make any support contingent on taking steps required to build a more professional, non-sectarian Iraqi Army.
- Publicize instances of malign Iranian influence.
- Discourage the Iraqi government from creating new security institutions and encourage it to place all security organizations under the direct operational control of either the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior, as appropriate.
- Maintain a relationship with and support for Kurdish Regional Guard Brigades. Play a role in building up the Regional Guard Brigades, but in a way that builds, or at least does not undermine, ties with Baghdad. Avoid the zero-sum game of Iraqi politics: supporting the Kurds could be seen as a threat by Baghdad and result in restrictions on its cooperation with the United States. Alienating Baghdad risks ceding more space to the Iranians, as good relations with Baghdad are necessary to contesting malign Iranian influence.
- Encourage more international cooperation to increase the resources available to the Iraqi Army and legitimate the US presence in ways the Iranians will not be able to replicate.

- Encourage a local role for the various militias similar to the model the British employed during the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman. In Oman, the British convinced the Omani sultan to establish *firqat*, which were platoon-to-company-sized organizations of tribal fighters who came from the same tribes that were rebelling. They were employed locally, had a few British Special Air Service advisors, and served as scouts, guides, and "home guards" that were able to consolidate regular Omani force gains.

With Da'esh no longer in control of Iraqi territory, the rationale for US direct action, large numbers of advisors, and robust intelligence and logistics support will disappear. This point is true from the perspectives of both the Iraqis and the United States. For the Iraqis' part, they will likely accept—and the Iranians will likely tolerate—only limited forms of US cooperation against Da'esh and any other militant groups that again threaten Iraqi sovereignty. For the United States' part, limited resources and growing global security challenges will likely divert its attention—and, with it, security cooperation resources—elsewhere. These points suggest whatever bilateral US cooperation survives in post-Da'esh Iraq will be inadequate to the task of wholly professionalizing the Iraqi Army, much less the other defense and security institutions.

Engagement will have to steady and successes will likely be small and incremental.

Despite this bleak assessment, all is not necessarily lost. It should be clear from this analysis that no external party, neither the United States nor Iran, will ever be in a position to entirely address the political, social, cultural, and economic factors that impede

the Iraqi Army's ability to professionalize. But by directing attention to the conditions that facilitate the growth of a professional officer and noncommissioned officer corps, one can help develop institutions that communicate and expand expert knowledge as well as the factors that undermine trust. In this way, external actors can influence the Iraqi Army to make the reforms necessary to become an effective fighting force.

Moreover, the current moment in Iraq's military history gives it rare momentum to reform. As long as it does not embrace again its role in the suppression of domestic opposition, the Iraqi Army can capitalize on its image as national liberator and defender to attract the right kind of recruits as well as the urgency of its ongoing defense requirements to enact the right kinds of reforms. To support such efforts, the United States should engage in continued, steady efforts emphasizing the critical areas discussed above to set conditions for meaningful improvement when political and social conditions permit. Of course, no one measure is going to improve the Iraqi Army. But, taken together, these recommendations represent a good chance for US security cooperation efforts to achieve a "tipping point" that enables the kind of reform that can allow the Iraqi Army to move beyond its historic limitations.

As US security cooperators attempt to set those conditions on what will likely be a shoestring budget, getting to that tipping point will require implementing measures aimed at building trust within the Iraqi Army and with the other security services and the civilian government. Building that trust will allow the Iraqi Army to better harness the resources it has, establish the kinds of institutions that can sustain its

current momentum toward meaningful reform, and establish itself as a professional, effective military force in a region in desperate need of stability.

PROFESSIONALIZING THE IRAQI ARMY: US ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE ISLAMIC STATE

INTRODUCTION

While the US intelligence community worries about the emergence of "Da'esh 2.0," the US security cooperation community has to worry about the development of the "Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) 4.0" that will have to fight Da'esh and meet a broad range of security and defense requirements.[1] Here, the "4.0" refers to the facts that this is not the United States' first attempt to assist the Iraqis in building their defense capacity and the United States is not the first security partner to try. Britain and the Soviet Union also took their turns developing Iraqi military capabilities, both with similar results.[2]

Of course, neither the intelligence nor security cooperation tasks are easy; however, developing the Iraqi Army poses a number of challenges that are as much a function of Iraqi military history and culture as they are about choices regarding equipment, doctrine,

1. For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant by the English rendering of the Arabic acronym, "Da'esh."

2. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus exclusively, except where noted, on the Iraqi Army, as described in the Iraq entry in the Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: The Gulf States database. IHS Markit, *Iraq*, Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: The Gulf States, September 10, 2018, *https://my.ihs.com/Janes?th=JANES&callingurl=https://janes.ihs.com*. The army includes 13 infantry divisions, 1 armored division, supporting units, and special operations forces. Many of the conclusions here apply to Iraq's other security services. I will use "Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)" to refer to the combination of Iraqi military and law enforcement organizations.

and training. Even before its decisive defeat in 2003 by the United States-led coalition, the Iraqi military lost to Kurdish rebels, the Israelis, the Iranian Army, and the United States. Moreover, despite several years of focused security assistance and cooperation by the United States, the Iraqi military was again decisively defeated by a small number of Da'esh fighters who seized significant parts of northern Iraq in 2014.

These defeats occurred despite assistance from partners with effective militaries. The British trained the Iraqi Army that lost to the Kurds in the 1930s and Israelis in the 1940s.[3] The Soviet Union trained and equipped the Iraqi Army that lost to the Israelis in the 1970s and the Iranians in the 1980s. The Iraqi Army did eventually enjoy some limited success against the Iranians at the end of the Iran-Iraq War, which had as much to do with Iranian weaknesses as it did the strengths the Iraqi Army does possess. Up to that point, the Iraqi military's most significant successes were against its own people, especially rebellious Assyrians and tribal groups, as well as its own government, which it overthrew no less than five times between 1936 and 1968.

A number of scholars account for the Iraqi military's difficulties by pointing to the "human factor," rather than size, training, and equipment. Ken Pollack attributes its poor performance to inadequate military effectiveness, which he describes as the "ability of soldiers and officers to perform on the battlefield, to accomplish military missions, and to execute strategies devised by their political

3. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: The Westview Press, 2012), 54–55.

leaders."[4] Trevor Dupuy, in his analysis of Arab army performance against the Israelis in 1973, suggests the Iraqis were simply not as tactically proficient as even the other Arab armies, though he does little to account for why.[5] Anthony Cordesman, on the other hand, attributes the Iraqi military's poor combined arms capabilities to its focus on regime protection and internal stability.[6] Others, like Norvell De Atkine, would ascribe the Iraqi Army's failures to a variety of cultural influences that resulted in an inflexibility that prohibited effective maneuver warfare.[7]

Though any full explanation would take all of these factors into account as well as many others, what any external partner can do about them remains elusive. For the United States' part, security cooperation efforts have emphasized professionalizing the ISF, which includes institution building as well as the provision of training and equipment.[8] But limited access for US personnel, often due to security concerns, and generally incoherent execution on the part of the Iraqis, whose complex cultural and political environment

4. Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 4.

5. Trevor Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1948–1974* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978), 537.

6. Anthony Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2003), 17.

7. Norvell B. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," *Middle East Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (September 1, 1999), *https://www.meforum.org/articles/other/why-arabs-lose-wars*.

8. *Terrorism and Iran: Defense Challenges in the Middle East*, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of General Joseph L. Votel, Commander, US Central Command).

places competing demands on their priorities and resources, have restricted the impact of these efforts.[9]

None of these difficulties, however, should be a surprise. A survey of Iraqi military history suggests a pattern of strengths, weaknesses, and performance that includes courageous soldiers, cohesive units, incompetent leaders, divided loyalties, poor combat support, and weak institutions that have, on occasion, risen to the defense challenge. If the United States is going to be more successful in this next round, it will need to change its approach to better account for these factors and how they shape the Iraqi Army's professional culture.

Determining what needs to change requires a better understanding of what it means to professionalize a military force in the Iraqi context. Of course, it is trivial to say that the word "professional" means different things to different people. Within Western cultures the word is often used to signal a high degree of proficiency or, simply, one is getting paid for work. In the context of civil-military relations, it is often used just to convey that the military is subordinate to civilian authority. But, when considering its own development, the US military employs a specific understanding of "professional" that plays a large role in determining how it organizes itself to fight.[10] This understanding and what it fully entails, however, are a product of a long history of confronting specific challenges in a uniquely American context. That unique history, context, and culture in turn give rise

9. Mara E. Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2018), 193–194.

10. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *ADRP-1: The Army Profession* (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, June 2015).

to a unique way of war that does not always translate well into another history, context, and culture.

Given that the United States' history and context are not shared by the Iraqis, it should not be surprising that these efforts to professionalize often fail. Having said that, the universal nature of warfare settles to some degree what practices lead to effective militaries and which ones do not. So despite not sharing a history, both the Iraqi Army and its US partners share a desired outcome: a capable military. Addressing the barriers to developing that capability requires an understanding of the professional ideal as well as the historical and cultural barriers to achieving that ideal.

THE MILITARY AS A PROFESSION

A military's professional culture is part of a broader set of political and social relationships that give rise to a particular way of war which accounts for how a particular military organizes for war and performs in combat.[11] The modern US, if not Western, view of the military as a profession is heavily influenced by the views of Samuel Huntington, who argued that professions are characterized by three features: expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.

To be a professional in his view, one must first possess "specialized knowledge and skill in a significant field of human endeavor," apply that knowledge in service to society, and possess a sense of corporate identity that sets the professional

11. Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 42. Martin Shaw describes a "way of war" as a "particular way of organizing for war adopted by an actor or group of actors."

apart from the nonprofessional.[12] In the military context, Huntington characterizes that skill as the "management of violence," which includes "(1) organizing, training, and equipping the force; (2) the planning of its activities; and (3) the direction of its operations in and out of combat." Moreover, unlike professions such as medicine and law, the clients of which are typically individual members of society, the military's client is the state, to which it is responsible for providing expert advice regarding the application of military force in defense of the society the state represents.[13]

Professionalism, of course, is an ideal, and no occupation is ever entirely professionalized.[14] Having said that, it is not hard to see how such a professional ideal informs how a military organizes, trains, and equips itself to manage violence, as well as how it interacts with the state and civil society in doing so. In this view, the state, as the client, gives the profession the autonomy to recruit and certify its members and regulate their professional activities by a code of ethics, as well as, most importantly, a monopoly on applying their respective expertise in the service of human progress.[15] This monopoly, in turn, gives the profession *jurisdiction* over the provision of the relevant social good.[16] This jurisdiction makes sense,

12. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1957), 8–10.

13. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 11–18.

14. Allan R. Millett, *Military Professionalism and Officership in America* (Columbus, OH: Mershon Center of the Ohio State University, 1979), 2.

15. Millett, *Military Professionalism*, 3.

16. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Pamphlet 360-302: The Profession of Arms: The 1962 Lees Knowles Lectures Given at Trinity College, Cambridge, by Lt.-General Sir John Winthrop Hackett*

as Alan R. Millett observes, because the "profession, serving the vital interests of man, considers its first ethical imperative to be altruistic service to the client."[17] As long as the profession does not violate that imperative, it should have the trust of the client, and it should reasonably expect its autonomy over its jurisdiction to be secure. Or so the theory goes.

This view of professionalism is, of course, Western, which raises the question whether it can be applied in non-Western contexts or, if it can, whether it *should*. The short answer to both questions is "no." It would be futile, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, to try *again* to export a Western model of military effectiveness to the Iraqi Army. But there is an objective standard here. States want their armies to win wars. When armies do not do that, then *something* has to change. This point suggests that there should be some way of transferring some level of capability to armies that exist in different environments.

So though this view of professionalism may be Western, aspects of it do transcend culture. Expert knowledge, autonomy, and jurisdiction in service to a democratically elected civilian government set conditions for trust between the army and the state and between the army and the society it defends. Achieving these conditions do not ensure victory; however, they are necessary conditions for improving any army's military effectiveness. Security cooperation efforts should thus focus on achieving a level of professionalism, as described here, for an Iraqi Army that has only known it by exception. To understand

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(Washington, DC: The Pentagon, November 17, 1966), 3. Hackett stated the "function of the profession of arms is the ordered application of force in the resolution of a social problem."

17. Millett, *Military Professionalism*, 3.

how, one must first understand how the Iraqi Army's history has shaped its culture.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IRAQI ARMY

Prehistory of the Iraqi Army

The martial history of the Iraqi Army begins with the somewhat romanticized Bedouin raiding culture, which emphasized courage, stealth, and cleverness and deemphasized direct combat as a way to avoid blood feuds.[18] Islam moderated this identity, as the constant raiding and subsequent blood feuds made the Arab tribes vulnerable to the more unified Muslim armies, which exploited this vulnerability to rapidly expand the religion on the Arabian Peninsula.[19] Thus, for the first time on such a grand scale, Islam united people in the region to fight for a cause that transcended narrow tribal identities and transformed largely unknown tribal groups from the Arabian Desert into rulers of the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain.[20] Later this unity would set conditions for pan-Arabism, which had a profound impact on the Iraqi Army's identity.

By the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire had established itself as the dominant power in the

18. Ralph Patai, *The Arab Mind*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Hatherleigh Press, 2002), 86. *See also* Williamson Murray and Kevin M. Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5. Murray and Woods describe Arab military culture as "resting on a complex mix of myths and notions of bravery, tribal loyalty, raiding parties, and martyrdom" which were both features of that culture and measures of its effectiveness.

19. Patai, *The Arab Mind*, 222.

20. John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 192.

Muslim world, ensuring its place as a key influencer in the armies of almost every Middle Eastern state, certainly Iraq. For much of their history, the Ottoman armies were often more modern—and more effective—than their European counterparts. After some decline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Ottomans undertook a modernization effort beginning in 1826 and invited European advisors, one of whom was the Prussian general Helmuth von Moltke (the elder), to assist with military modernization.[21] The result was a competent, modern army, but one whose soldiers often loathed the empire they were supposed to defend.[22] This loathing was certainly the case of Iraqis in the ranks, who often joined secret Arab nationalist organizations, even while they served the empire.[23]

The Modern Iraqi Army

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the British took control over Iraq's boundaries, government, and military under its postwar mandate. After a tribal revolt in the south in 1920, the British installed King Faysal, a Sunni leader from Saudi Arabia, in 1921 and established a constitution that would integrate Iraq's disparate population under a partially, at least, democratic government.[24] Concurrently, it also established a small Iraqi Army capable of maintaining state authority

21. Keegan, *History of Warfare*, 32–39.

22. Sydney Nettleton Fisher and William Ochsenwald, *The Middle East: A History* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1990), 161–162.

23. T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York, NY: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1935), 46.

24. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 22–24.

over an often restive population but not large enough to challenge British rule.[25] As a hedge against the uncertain effectiveness of that army, the British more directly relied on Assyrian levies to see to their specific interests and used the Royal Air Force to bolster both the levies and the Iraqi Army.[26]

Recruitment, in the beginning, was difficult. A year after establishment, the army had only grown to 3,618 personnel, far short of the modest initial 6,000-soldier target.[27] The lower ranks were, for the most part, Shia, though members of other sects did join. Much of the mostly Sunni officer corps was composed of former Ottoman officials, mostly Sunni, who had previously participated in the Arab revolt against the Turks and returned to Iraq to take part in building the new state.[28] At the outset, the British had little trust in and less regard for the Ottomans, so they limited the number they commissioned to 250 and excluded any who had participated in the revolt of 1920 or opposed the British in Syria. Conscious of Iraq's diversity, the British tried to make up the difference by reserving positions for Iraq's Shia tribes, but largely made up the difference with recruits from well-off urban, Sunni families. So, despite attempts at integration, the officer

25. Ibrahim al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 20.

26. Paul P. J. Hemphill, "The Formation of the Iraqi Army, 1921–1933," in *The Integration of Modern Iraq*, Abbas Kelidar, ed. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 94; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 24–26.

27. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 21–22.

28. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 26. I owe the point regarding these officers' participation in the Arab revolt against the Turks to an anonymous observer.

corps remained largely urban and Sunni, much like the civilian leadership, and fervently nationalist.[29]

As a result, the Iraqi Army started off with an identity crisis. The British wanted a small, indigenous force that could share the security burden of controlling unrest and securing the borders as a means to realizing Britain's other interests. Iraqis, however, wanted a much larger army capable of maintaining order; building a national identity that would "make Iraqis out of peasants, nomads and townsmen alike, of Sunni and Shii, of Arabs and Kurds;" as well as play an important role as part of the larger Arab nation.[30] Perhaps more importantly, this new Iraqi soldier would become the "new model Iraqi citizen" who would take the ideals of patriotism, loyalty, and national service into civilian life.[31]

Building this identity would require a substantially larger army than the approximately 9,000 ground troops the British thought suited for Iraq's security needs. So, in 1927, the Iraqi parliament introduced a conscription bill to expand the army. The British opposed it because they believed Iraq did not have the financial or administrative resources to manage a large force. They, however, were not alone in their opposition. Nationalists opposed it because they saw the army as British-controlled, Shia opposed it because they saw the army as another mechanism for Sunni domination, and tribal sheikhs opposed it because they thought conscription would undermine their tribal authority. Thus by the time of independence in 1932, the Iraqi Army was still relatively small,

29. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 98–99; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 25–26.

30. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 92–100.

31. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 24.

numbering around 11,500.[32] With independence, however, the expansionists won and, by 1936, the Iraqi Army had grown to twice its original size, forcing the government to recruit officers from "promising sons of poorer families" and thus breaking class barriers that previously disincentivized wider participation.[33] Despite that expansion, the building of the Iraqi Army did not have quite the nationalizing effect desired.

Part of the army's failure to act as a nationalizing element lay with its culture. Iraqi society then, much as it is today, was essentially "personality-oriented and bound to a considerable extent by patronage and inter-personal ties."[34] As a result, institutional autonomy would often be hostage to the other social ties its members had. For senior leaders, that could mean prioritizing the political needs of particular patrons within the government over that of the institution. For those farther from the top, it meant seeing the Iraqi Army as a means to obtaining government patronage and resources. Loyalties, however, remained with the tribal, sectarian, or local community.

Despite these diverse loyalties, the army did play an important nationalizing role. The army was a venue for upward mobility for both those who would opt in to the Iraqi state and enforcers who brought back into line those who would not. The most iconic of the army's early enforcing roles came when it fought the Assyrians, who had become a well-armed, but recalcitrant, minority population that refused to submit to Baghdad.[35] The fighting was limited, consisting of one minor skirmish that quickly degenerated into

32. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 92–97.
33. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 100.
34. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 100.
35. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 39.

mass killings and looting of Assyrian villages.[36] But the Iraqi people saw this as the army's first real victory over forces of instability. The returning soldiers—especially their commander, the Kurdish general Bakr Sidqi—were greeted as heroes. The result was greater interest from Kurds and tribesmen in serving in the military, which set the stage for the passage of a conscription bill.[37]

These events established the emerging army's identity as either patron or punisher. For non-Sunnis, like Bakr Sidqi, opting in was a means of obtaining state patronage, which enabled the building of Sunni patronage networks. For those such as the Assyrians who chose not to buy in, the army functioned as a punisher and brought such would-be rebels in line. Thus, the Iraqi military leadership saw for themselves an integral role in ensuring popular compliance with Baghdad's rule and as a check when that rule took on a character that the army felt was detrimental to its or the nation's interests.

Ironically, the first such check came in 1936 against the government of Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi at the hands of Bakr Sidqi, now commander of the Iraqi armed forces, and Hikmat Sulayman, a former supporter of Hashimi's who had been denied the key post of minister of the interior.[38] Frustrated by Hashimi's dictatorial moves, which included using the army to crack down on opposition, as well as a recalcitrance to modernizing and reforming the

36. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 107. In one case, Iraqi forces killed around 315 civilians who had huddled around a police station in the city of Simele for protection; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 39.

37. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 40.

38. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 46.

economy and military, Sidqi and Sulayman overthrew him but left the monarchy in place.[39]

Unfortunately, Sulayman and Sidqi's government did not last long either. Sidqi, being a Kurd, feared Iraq's participation in a pan-Arab state would marginalize the Kurdish people, and thus did little to advance the pan-Arab agenda.[40] As a result, he was assassinated in 1937 on the orders of Arab nationalist officers.[41] This ushered in military rule until 1941, when the British intervened after another coup replaced the pro-British government with one sympathetic to the Nazis. When that government tried to prevent the British from moving troops into Basra, the British military intervened. With a small number of troops, the British military defeated the Iraqi Army in under 30 days and reinstalled the pro-British government, which allowed the British to maintain control of Iraq until after World War II.[42] As Trevor Dupuy observes, though by 1941 the Iraqi Army had been the longest-standing army in the Arab world, it was "an Army without much confidence in itself," having been repeatedly beaten by smaller, often less well-equipped adversaries.[43]

FIGHTING AGAINST THE ISRAELIS

The Iraqi Army's first action after World War II was to participate in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in which it sent a sizeable force of four infantry brigades and an armored battalion, along with support

39. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 43–46; Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 46–49.
40. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 52.
41. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 48.
42. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 54–55.
43. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 18.

personnel, to fight under the Arab Liberation Army. The Iraqi Army's performance in this conflict was entirely consistent with its past. As Pollack observes, senior leadership was unimaginative and uncreative, junior officers showed little initiative, and soldiers were poorly trained and uncommitted. Having said that, Iraqi units fought hard and showed a great deal of cohesion and courage. Perhaps surprisingly, the Iraqis also appeared to do well in logistics, having adequately moved a fairly large force hundreds of miles and supported it without relying on allies.[44]

The Iraqis largely missed the 1967 war, due largely to readiness deficiencies, the speed of Israeli operations, and devastating air attacks by the Israeli air force against the token force they did try to send.[45] This pattern repeated itself when the Iraqis entered the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In this war, Iraq sent a large force consisting of 2 armored divisions, 2 infantry brigades, 12 artillery battalions, and a Special Forces brigade, totaling approximately 60,000 men, 700 tanks, 500 armored personnel carriers, and over 200 artillery pieces. Here again, Iraqi logistics performed well and, this time, moved a corps-sized unit over 1,000 kilometers in just a few days and sustained it for several weeks.[46] Moreover, the Iraqis had some tactical success when elements of the Iraqi 3rd Armored Division showed up on the Israeli flank, forcing the Israelis to stop their advance on Damascus and deal with the threat the Iraqi forces represented. The Israelis never recovered their momentum, and the delay effectively stopped their advance to Damascus.[47]

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44. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 155.
45. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 167.
46. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 167–168.
47. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 468.

The Iraqis owe this victory more to accident than intention. Up until contact, they were not aware of their proximity to the Israelis, having failed to send out any reconnaissance or engage in tactical intelligence collection.[48] Over the next few days, the Iraqis would haphazardly try to push the Israelis back. Rather than attempt to maneuver around the exhausted Israeli formations, they drove straight into the trap set for them by the Israeli commander. Three days later, as a result of subsequent skirmishes with the Israelis, the Iraqis had lost 80 percent of the tanks it had committed to battle.[49]

FIGHTING AGAINST THE KURDS

The Iraqi Army arguably had more success against the Kurds, but certainly at a much higher cost than it should have paid. As Sidqi's overthrow demonstrated, the inclusion of Kurds in Iraq set up an irreconcilable tension in Iraqi politics: Baghdad's moves toward Arab nationalism alienated the Kurds, many Shia encouraged their own separatist tendencies, and any actor's moves toward an independent Iraqi identity alienated the pan-Arab nationalists.[50] Moreover, Kurdish aspirations for true independence, frustrated by the Treaty of Lausanne, set additional conditions for tensions with Iraq's neighbors, all of whom had their own restive Kurdish populations.[51]

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48. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 467–468; Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 174.

49. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 169.

50. David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, UK: I. B. Taurius, 1996), 142–144.

51. Edmund Ghareeb, "The Kurdish Issue," in *Iraq: Its History, People, and Politics*, ed. Shams Inati (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003), 168; McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 142.

Even under the British mandate, the Iraqi Army had often and unsuccessfully confronted Kurdish separatists.[52] As a result, the new government had little appetite for more fighting, so relations were relatively quiet from Iraq's independence to the 1960s. In fact, Kurdish participation in the army increased after the successes of Bakr Sidqi against the Assyrian levies and tribes.[53] The situation changed in 1958 when Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the Iraqi government in yet another coup, ending the British-backed monarchy. Qasim then reached out to the Soviets, who were more than happy to assist with Iraq's military expansion.[54] Ironically, the Kurds originally supported Qasim's rise to power, believing that he would support greater autonomy and independence for the Iraqi-Kurdish region. But despite an apparent desire to do so, Qasim could not find an appropriate balance between the pan-Arabists and the Kurds. To make matters worse, he also imposed land-reform measures that would have distributed more than half of tribal-held lands in Kurdistan as well as the rest of Iraq. As a result, the Kurds, under the leadership of mullah Mustafa al-Barzani, revolted.[55] In September 1961, fighting started after Barzani's *peshmerga* ambushed an army convoy.[56]

The first round of fighting ended in a stalemate. Though the Kurds were able to take almost all of Iraqi Kurdistan within two weeks, they were not able to hold it. As Pollack notes, they were "unprepared for serious combat" and retreated to the mountains for

52. Hemphill, "Formation of the Iraqi Army," 105.
53. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 40.
54. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 156.
55. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 156–157; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 105; McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 306–307.
56. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 105–106.

the winter.[57] The Iraqi Army's response, however, was not much more effective. The army maintained a defensive posture, garrisoned major Kurdish towns, and conducted operations largely to keep roads and supply lines open, hoping the rebellion would collapse from internal conflict, characteristic of inter-Kurdish politics. Such a strategy was, of course, manpower-intensive, and eventually three-quarters of the Iraqi Army was in Kurdistan.[58]

Unfortunately for the Iraqi Army, its operations were characteristically indiscriminate, and Iraqi soldiers frequently killed civilians and looted Kurdish villages. Predictably, this practice had the effect of encouraging support for Barzani, even from his enemies, and reduced the likelihood of the rebellion falling apart. The Iraqi Army's defensive posture also gave the Kurds the opportunity to regroup and establish external sources of supply from Kurds in Iran and Turkey, as well as the Shah of Iran, whom Qasim needlessly alienated.[59] As Pollack observes, "Thus by taking control of the major roads at night and using secondary routes that the army did not patrol during the day, the Kurds had plenty of access to the supplies they needed. Meanwhile, the systematic destruction of Kurdish villages by Iraqi air and ground forces ensured a steady flow of new recruits and Kurdish deserters into Barzani's camp."[60]

In 1963, frustrated with Qasim's passive strategy, elements of the army initiated a coup that brought Abd al-Salam Arif and Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr to power. Even though Arif was not a member, it brought

57. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 157.
58. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 158.
59. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 158–159.
60. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 92; Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 159.

the Baath Party to power as well.[61] Under the Baath regime, the newly empowered Iraqi Army conducted a series of offensives against the Kurds, none of which were successful. The failure of the first offensive was largely due to tactical reasons. The Iraqi Army characteristically stuck to the roads and conducted frontal assaults against Kurdish positions with little reconnaissance, maneuver, or flank protection. Unfortunately for the Kurds, all they could do was conduct ambushes, and thus they were not able to effectively capitalize on their successes or the Iraqi Army's weaknesses. As a result, this first offensive ended in stalemate, due in no small part to the Kurds' ability to get supplies from Turkish Kurds and Iran.[62]

When the Iraqi Army undertook its second offensive in the spring of 1965, it had effectively removed the Kurds' external support by getting the Turks to conduct an offensive against their own Kurdish rebels and Iran to agree to stop supplying the Iraqi Kurds as well as block peshmerga who might try to cross the border. But the Iraqi Army's tactics did not change, and the Kurds again defeated the army. It tried again the next spring but, despite some tactical success, lost again. The final defeat came when Kurds attacked a large Iraqi Army formation that had established a camp in a valley but was not defending the surrounding heights. The Kurds descended and killed more than 2,000 Iraqi soldiers before they fled, leaving much of their heavy equipment behind. The Iraqis tried again in March 1970 with little success. So,

61. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 92–93; Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 159.

62. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 160–161.

in March 1970, Baghdad granted autonomy and other concessions to the Kurds.[63]

The resulting peace, however, did not last. After four years of Baghdad's inconsistent implementation of the 1970 agreement, coupled with Barzani's belief that Iran and the United States would support him, the Kurds went on the offensive.[64] In the intervening four years, in addition to making deals with Iran, the United States, and Israel for support, he had built up the peshmerga to approximately 50,000–60,000 regulars and another 50,000 irregulars. The large number of troops convinced Barzani that he could adopt conventional military operations and avoid the stalemates of the past by taking the Iraqi Army head-on. But Baghdad had also built up its strength during the same time and had 90,000 troops, 1,200 tanks and armored personnel carriers, and 200 combat aircraft arrayed against the Kurds. Moreover, it had learned some tactical lessons from its earlier failures against the Kurds and Israelis.[65]

Though the Iraqis by this point had acquired equipment and some advisers from the Soviet Union, they never fully embraced Soviet military doctrine. In fact, after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Iraqis had abandoned most of what they had learned from the Russians and sent all but a few technical advisers home. In their place they welded Soviet and British practices and introduced a few innovations of their own. First, they resolved many of the logistics issues that had allowed the Kurds' starvation strategy to work. Second, and perhaps more importantly, they abandoned frontal assaults and instead adopted a

63. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 162–164.
64. McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 327–338.
65. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 176–177.

doctrine of "overwhelming firepower." As Pollack describes it, "[r]ather than charging a position as had been their previous practice, Iraqi forces were trained not to assault a well-defended objective at all, but to dig in immediately and then call in massive firepower from tanks, artillery, mortars, multiple rocket launchers, and close support aircraft to obliterate the source of resistance."[66]

The implementation of these tactics, as Pollack observes, was not elegant, "but with the cooperation of the peshmerga, they got the job done."[67] Instead of retreating back into the mountains as they had done in the past, the peshmerga tried to take the Iraqis head-on. The result was disastrous for the Kurds. Had it not been for Iranian intervention, which included heavy weapons and, later, troops, they would have been defeated. Saddam Hussein, who was then vice president, broke the stalemate in 1975 by negotiating a deal with the Iranians which included a number of Iraqi territorial concessions codified in the Algiers Agreement of 1975 in exchange for their withdrawal of support for the Kurds. Without that support, the Kurds were quickly defeated.[68]

THE BAATH PARTY

After the Baath Party reclaimed power in 1968, it made a number of deliberate moves to prevent the history that had enabled its return from repeating itself. That history consisted of three elements: infiltrating the armed forces; using the armed forces to bring the party to power; and then asserting control over the armed forces once in power. So that would not happen

66. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 177–178.
67. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 179.
68. McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 338.

again, the Baath Party first placed the military under the control of the Revolutionary Command Council, which would become the ultimate decision-making body in Iraq and which served to control and eliminate opposition within the government, the military, and society at-large. This move was significant. Before, the Iraqi Army essentially had veto power over the government and over any matter it considered within its or the state's interest. Now, that veto belonged to civilians, guaranteeing their unchecked domination of the political process.[69]

Second, the Baath Party immediately expelled or executed a number of officers who were not members of the party. It took special interest in purging members of the Iraqi Communist Party, which at the time was the only other secular party that could put together a cross-sectarian opposition to the Baathists. They continued over the next two years to "rotate, expel, or retire" any officers they deemed a threat to party control. Some 2,000 officers were purged during this time. To further control the officer corps, they prohibited any political activity not endorsed by the Baath Party under penalty of death.

Third, by the end of 1970, the party had replaced the expelled officers with 3,000 Baathists, at various ranks, effectively—and intentionally—providing the party with an alternative chain of command that reported to party headquarters rather than the formal military chain of command.[70] Essentially, the party politicized the military in order to keep it out of politics.[71]

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69. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 110–112.

70. Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, 112–113.

71. Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 56–57. These authors note that in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War with Israel in 1967, the Baath Party did try to pay some

In the years between the Baath Party takeover and the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, Iraq undertook a major military expansion and reform overseen by Saddam Hussein, who was vice president for most of this time. First, he established a 150,000-man popular army to handle domestic security functions, providing a check on the military as well as freeing it for other missions. Second, and in part because of the army's poor performance in the 1973 war, he expanded and modernized the Iraqi military, doubling its size from 6 to 12 divisions, and purchased 1,600 modern T-72s and BMP-1s as well as over 200 fighters and fighter-bombers from the Soviet Union.[72] Meanwhile, he continued to purge senior leadership and promoted those loyal to him in their place, regardless of their competence. Further, he frequently rotated those he appointed to prevent them from building loyalty among their men.[73] This well-equipped but poorly led army would be the one with which Saddam would go to war with Iran.

FIGHTING AGAINST THE IRANIANS

After the fall of the Shah in 1979, militant Kurds, who managed to flee into Iran despite the border closure, took advantage of the chaos and crossed

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attention to professionalizing the military; however, ensuring political loyalty took priority.

72. Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 59–60; Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 182. Murray and Woods make the point that new equipment did not translate into new capabilities. Two years after receiving four squadrons of MiG-23s, only two were operational due to pilot and maintenance-crew shortages.

73. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 182. Pollack provides the following numbers: Iraq—2,750 tanks, 1,040 artillery pieces, and 330 fighter bombers; and Iran—approximately 500 operational tanks, 300 functional artillery pieces, and less than 100 operable aircraft.

back into Iraqi Kurdistan. At the same time, the revolutionary government of Ayatollah Khomeini called for the spread of the revolution to the Shia of Iraq. These dual provocations, coupled with Saddam's perception of a weakened Iranian military due to purges by the new regime, presented Saddam with an opportunity to reverse the concessions made in 1975. At first, he tried an indirect approach and sought to destabilize Khomeini's government through support to its opposition. When this effort failed to get the desired results, he decided to take matters into his own hands and, on September 23, ordered the Iraqi Army to invade Iran.[74]

The offensive did not go well for long as the army tried to defeat the Iranians with the same overwhelming-firepower tactics that worked with the Kurds. Despite the fact they heavily outnumbered the Iranian forces by a ratio of one-to-five in tanks and a ratio of one-to-three in artillery and aircraft, Iraqi forces would halt at the first sign of resistance (no matter how small), dig in, and blast the objective. The main reason for this state of affairs, of course, was leadership: Saddam's politicization of the army, which included putting family members and loyalists with no military experience into senior positions, meant that "virtually none of Iraq's senior generals . . . had the experience and understanding to command large forces."[75] There were no attempts to take advantage of the Iraqi forces' superior numbers and mobility to outmaneuver the Iranian forces.

Moreover, there were few attempts to conduct tactical intelligence and reconnaissance operations

74. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 181–182; Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 97.

75. Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 62.

to locate the Iranian units so they *could* be outmaneuvered. While Iraqi logistics performed well and soldiers again "showed tenacity, courage, and endurance in combat," they did not get far.[76] After two months of fighting, the Iraqis had only advanced about 65 kilometers.[77] As a result, it did not take long for Iran to take those kilometers back during offensives conducted in the spring of 1982.[78]

In July 1982, the Iranians decided to invade Iraqi territory and attempted to seize Basra while inspiring a Shia uprising against Saddam Hussein.[79] But invading Iraq was very different than defending Iran. Iraqis were now fighting on Iraqi soil. In addition to increasing the determination of the average Iraqi soldier, it afforded the Iraqi Army better lines of communication, which it amplified with fortifications in depth. Moreover, Saddam had replaced 200–300 loyal but incompetent senior leaders with those who were at least competent.[80] Taking these factors together, the Iraqis were able to stall four Iranian offensives around Basra undertaken from 1982 to 1986. Furthermore, Khomeini's hoped-for revolt never happened, demonstrating that even under Saddam, a sense of Arab, if not Iraqi, nationality superseded religious affiliation in determining individual loyalty.[81] While the Iranians' limitations in mobility and supply accounted for their failure in part, much of the credit goes to Saddam's newly professionalized General

76. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 192–193.
77. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 187–190.
78. Anthony Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder, CO: The Westview Press, 1990), 138–140.
79. Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 192.
80. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 206–209.
81. Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 169.

Staff, who were able to concentrate forces and rapidly respond to Iranian attacks.[82] Pollack notes, however, that the "dog that did not bark" was "Iraqi tactical effectiveness." He observes the following:

> Despite Herculean labors of Iraq's general staff to improve their army, there was no discernable enhancement in tactical competence. Iraqi units continued to perform well when sitting behind their impressive fortifications and blasting away at the Iranians, but—as the failure of both of their operational-level counteroffensives demonstrated—they remained hapless at basically all other operations. Iraqi tactical commanders had displayed all of the recurrent problems of passivity, inflexibility, dogmatism, poor combined-arms integration, unwillingness to maneuver, and mismanagement of information.[83]

To lift the siege against Basra, Iraqi forces had to go on the offensive, a task of which the army was not capable. To build that capability, beginning in 1982, Saddam's generals expanded the Republican Guard and began to promote on merit. They filled vacant slots with drafted college students and soldiers from other units who had demonstrated capability.[84] By the beginning of 1988, the Republican Guard had expanded from 7 brigades to 28, with a total of 100,000 troops who were given the best weapons, including Iraq's newly acquired Soviet T-72s as well as modern European and South African artillery and advanced Soviet air defense weapons. The Iraqis also made improvements in naval infantry, chemical weapons, and even tactical intelligence, including the use of

82. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 224.
83. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 224.
84. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 219.

night-vision devices, radio intercept and electronic warfare, as well as tactical counter-battery radar.[85]

Despite being overwhelmingly Sunni, however, the expansion of the Republican Guard and emphasis on merit over loyalty played on Saddam's paranoia. As a result, he created the Special Republican Guard to handle the mission of protecting the regime.[86] This is just one example of the kind of layering Saddam imposed on the various security services to ensure no one service grew powerful enough to challenge his government.[87] As Cordesman observes, "Many Iraqi combat elements were better at watching each other, and at suppressing the Iraqi people, than at fighting a foreign opponent."[88]

The signature innovation, however, was to provide detailed scripting of military operations. Since previous attempts to encourage initiative, creativity, and aggressiveness had failed, the General Staff decided to plan operations in minute detail. As a result, they wrote the elements typically missing from Iraqi operations—coordination, maneuver, and innovation—into the "scripts," which the assigned forces would then rehearse until "they could perform each task from memory."[89] The General Staff kept the duration of these operations short and the objectives of these operations limited to "keep unforeseen events to a minimum."[90]

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85. Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 354–357; Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 218–220.

86. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 220.

87. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 234–235. *See also* Ibrahim al-Marashi, "The Family, Clan, and Tribal Dynamics of Saddam's Security and Intelligence Network," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 16, no. 2 (April 2003), 202–211.

88. Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 16–17.

89. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 220–221.

90. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 230.

The plan worked. The first offensive to retake the al-Faw peninsula caught the Iranians off guard and "in thirty-five hours, the Iraqis had secured the peninsula and captured much of the Iranian equipment intact."[91] In the end, five Iraqi offensives destroyed Iran's ground forces and forced the Iranians to accept a ceasefire. Though the Iraqis never fully overcame the issues that kept them from defeating the Iranians inside Iran, they did figure out a way to adapt to those shortcomings and get the most out of the forces they had. With detailed planning combined with improved intelligence, some of which was provided by the United States, the Iraqi Army was able to push back the Iranians, who had no choice but to accept a cease-fire.[92]

According to an unclassified Defense Intelligence Agency assessment, the Iraqi Army at the end of the Iran-Iraq War was a "battle-hardened force capable of conducting effective offensive and defensive operations. The Iraqi Army polished its offensive capability, achieving good results during final operations against the Iranians."[93] What that assessment ignored was the important role chemical weapons played in breaking up the Iranian Basra offensive as well in the Iraqi Army's final push to drive the Iranians out of Iraq.[94] So, though the army's subsequent performance against the United States in 1991 suggests that assessment was somewhat optimistic, Pollack does observe it had a "reasonably good ability to perform set-piece offensives and static

91. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 225.

92. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 225–230.

93. Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, *AIA-DS-1-90: Identifying the Iraqi Threat and How They Fight* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, September 1990), 2.

94. Murray and Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 228, 294, and 339.

defensive operations" as well as good, especially by regional standards, logistic and combat engineering capabilities. But it remained, as it had since its founding, "almost entirely incapable of fighting fluid, maneuver battles."[95]

FIGHTING AGAINST THE AMERICANS

In many ways, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was necessitated by the outcome of the Iran-Iraq War. Though Saddam claimed victory, the Iraqi economy was under a great deal of stress from almost a decade at war and, moreover, Saddam's army had expanded to approximately one million men, with commensurate growth in sophisticated—and expensive—equipment.[96] At the same time, Iraq was also saddled with sizeable foreign debt, the repayment of which amounted to over 50 percent of oil revenues in 1990. Austerity measures, such as downsizing the government, especially the military, simply exacerbated unemployment and further stressed the economy, thus threatening the patronage networks Saddam relied on to maintain power.[97] At first, Saddam turned to his gulf neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to help him out of this economic mess by backing oil price increases, forgiving the debt Iraq owed them, and giving to Iraq's economic reconstruction. When they refused, Saddam invaded Kuwait.[98]

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95. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 264.

96. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 283–284.

97. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 251.

98. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 251–252.

As is well-known, the initial invasion of Kuwait went well for the Iraqi Army. Essentially driving down the Basra-Jahra highway, the army brushed aside Kuwaiti defenses at the Mutla Ridge and seized Kuwait City in less than 24 hours. It employed the same formula that led to success in the Iran-Iraq War: elite units, acting on well-rehearsed and detailed plans, were able to achieve success before unforeseen events could disrupt the script.[99] But as is also well-known, the resulting Iraqi defense of Kuwait did not go so well.

The reasons for that failure begin with bad strategic assumptions. First, the Iraqi military believed the "brief, sharp clashes" that characterized its way of war would be sufficient to defend against a casualty-averse US military and it would be able to survive whatever damage the coalition air campaign inflicted.[100] It also underestimated the coalition's logistic and maneuver capabilities, which enabled the "left hook" that caught Iraqi forces by surprise.[101] Exacerbating that surprise were the high numbers of casualties it suffered as a result of the coalition air campaign. The campaign, which started January 17, 1991, caused the loss of approximately 150,000 troops, many of whom deserted, and 20–30 percent of the Iraqi Army's armored forces by the time the ground war began on February 24. Had the Iraqi Army been able to collect tactical intelligence and maneuver in response to it, it may have still been able to put up a successful defense. But those were not capabilities the Iraqis ever really possessed and, as a result, the whole thing was over in about 100 hours.[102]

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99. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 236.
100. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 237, 257.
101. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 239.
102. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 246–248.

The real challenge for Saddam came after the war when Shia and Kurdish provinces revolted.[103] The rebellion in the south started shortly after the ceasefire, on March 1, when a retreating Iraqi soldier fired a tank round at a picture of Saddam. The revolt quickly spread and, by March 8, it controlled most of the provincial towns south of Baghdad. The rebellion in the north began shortly after the one in the south. On March 4, sparked by the shooting of a deserter in the town of Ranya, another rebellion rapidly spread, though this one was much better organized, thanks to the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.[104]

Just as quickly as they had spread, both rebellions were crushed. The response in the south was especially brutal, with probably more than 100,000 civilian deaths and extensive damage to homes and infrastructure. The response was similarly brutal in the north and caused a massive refugee problem, with up to two million displaced. The growing humanitarian crisis forced the international community to take action and impose the northern and southern no-fly zones as well as create a safe haven in the north, defended in part by US forces. At the same time, the peshmerga, who were better organized and equipped than the rebels in the south, were able to drive the Iraqi Army from major cities in northern Iraq, including Dahuk, Zakho, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya, encouraging the return of the refugees. Likely because he did not want a renewed insurgency in Kurdistan, Saddam agreed to pull back to a defensive line, effectively establishing an

103. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, GEN (USMC Retired), *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2006), 55.

104. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 228–230.

autonomous Kurdish zone.[105] Thus by the time the Iraqi Army had to think about facing the Americans again in 2003, it had returned to its focus on controlling civil unrest, an effort that was led by loyal but incompetent officers who subordinated their professional judgment to Saddam's whims.

To defeat the invading coalition in 2003, Saddam's generals proposed a "Russian-style defense in depth" where the tribes would function like Russian partisans, bleeding the invading forces as they crossed a bleak desert, which they compared to the Russian snows that defeated Napoleon and Hitler. If the Americans got to Baghdad, the Republican Guard would then finish them off, employing the same kind of in-depth fortifications they had had against the Iranians. Though such a strategy may have worked, Saddam, ironically, thought its reliance on insurgency was "foreign."[106]

Additionally, he was concerned that arming the same population that had rebelled against him in the 1990s would encourage further revolt. The Fedayeen Saddam, which he formed in 1994, were supposed to take on restive populations. They were given small arms and the mission to protect Baath Party headquarters and other critical sites. Their intent was to control (or at least contain) any uprising until the Republican Guard could get there to crush it. In fact, the Fedayeen were organized as a counterinsurgent force.[107] Thus, "[w]hile the army languished, development of militia and paramilitary forces for internal security took on great importance."[108]

105. Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 232–233.
106. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 58–59.
107. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 58–62.
108. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 61.

Saddam eventually tried to create a one-million man popular army that would make each Iraqi city its own "fortress," hampering, if not stopping, an invading force before it could reach Baghdad. This army never materialized and, in the end, the insurgence part of the strategy consisted of Fedayeen raids on coalition lines of communication.[109]

As far as Iraq's conventional forces went, when the invasion started the Iraqi Army remained deployed in its peacetime positions, which were focused mainly eastward, toward Iran and Kurdistan. For those units that were oriented south, desertions and US air strikes prohibited them from mounting an effective defense. When Saddam tried to reinforce them with Republican Guards, coalition air assets ground their movement to a halt. Thus, the Iraqi defense quickly lost coherence and, despite some successful engagements, mostly near Nasiriyah, it was not able to stop the US drive toward Baghdad and prevent the fall of the regime.[110] Cordesman sums up the Iraqi failure well:

> Iraq never succeeded in exploiting its water barriers with any meaningful success. It left major gaps in its defenses of the Karbala Gap, and southwestern approaches to Baghdad. It could not improvise an effective defense of the road from al Kut to Baghdad in the east. And it continued to commit its Republican Guard piecemeal to the defenses of the approaches to Baghdad against both the 5th Corps and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in a manner that largely destroyed them and deprived the regime of the ability to create a cohesive defense of the city.[111]

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109. Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 17.
110. Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 17–20.
111. Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 19.

REBUILDING UNDER THE AMERICANS

Not since the British mandate has the Iraqi Army had such a close relationship with a foreign military. Given one of the first acts of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was to disband the Iraqi military, the Americans were in some ways in the same position the British were in 1921: starting from scratch to build a small force (though it was intended to be bigger than the original British version) capable of maintaining internal stability and defending Iraq's borders against external threats.[112]

Just as the British tried to build the first Iraqi Army with former Ottoman officers, the CPA tried to build the new Iraqi Army with officers from the army they had just disbanded. But they conditioned that participation by making it explicit returning officers and soldiers would not necessarily return at their previous rank; instead, they would be placed based on their assessed competence. In many ways this made sense. Developing a professional army along the lines of the American model required that position, rank, and promotion be based on merit, which includes dimensions of practical and moral competence. After all, if professionalism depends on expertise, then it is the experts who should be in charge of the profession. As a result, many officers either did not return or were not allowed to join and were thus left vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent and sectarian forces.[113] Many who did return were later ousted in a highly politicized de-Baathification process that enabled the

112. Patricia Brasier, LTCOL (USMC, Retired), *But Ma'am, the Security: The Manning of the New Iraqi Army* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2008), 1.

113. Brasier, *But Ma'am*, 12.

removal of competent officers in service to sectarian political ends.[114]

Moreover, the comparison with the British was not lost on the Iraqis. Like the British effort in 1921, many Iraqis viewed the US effort as one of an occupying power trying to build a military that suited its interests over those of the Iraqi state. As a result, when the new Iraqi Army came into being, there was a "trust deficit" among both senior civilian leaders and the Iraqi people.

When Iraq regained sovereignty in June 2004, the new Iraqi political leadership regarded the military much the same way their predecessors did: as a force to keep Iraq's various factions in line and as a potential threat to the government as well as to their own leadership positions. Thus, loyalty again became as important as, if not more important than, competence when selecting personnel for key senior positions.

The difference this time, however, was there was no strongman who could centrally disperse positions, roles, and salaries that encouraged loyalty to a single, central government. Rather, Iraqi ministry formation, especially for the security ministries, was a sectarian free-for-all among Sunni, Shia, and Kurds, as well as various parties within each of those factions.[115] The result was severe internal competition over roles and positions at the expense of institution building.

The collapse of the police after Saddam's fall increased pressure on the CPA, and later the Iraqi government, to speed the development of the army and transition internal security roles and

114. Author observation while serving with the Coalition Police Assistance Training Team, 2005–2006.

115. Tony Pfaff, *Development and Reform of the Iraqi Police Forces* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 17–19.

responsibilities to it. Thus, the CPA was forced to abandon its original plan to rebuild the Iraqi military from the ground up—units first, then the ministry—and instead accelerate establishment of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), which would suffer from the rush.[116]

To facilitate reestablishing the military, the CPA established the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team to man, train, and equip the Iraqi Army. The initial intent was to raise nine battalions by 2004 which would serve as a cadre for expansion.[117] Originally, that expansion was to create a 3-division corps, with each division containing about 12,000, which could then grow as needed.[118] In an effort to learn lessons from the past, the Coalition and Military Assistance Training Team established demographic requirements for every 1,000 recruits sent to the Kirkush Military Training Base: 40 percent Arab Shia, 30 percent Arab Sunni, and 30 percent Kurds, with no specification as to what percentage of Kurds had to be Shia or Sunni.[119] Though the demographic requirements seemed to be a reasonable effort to build an inclusive military, these sectarian quotas would later impede unit cohesiveness.

As a result, rebuilding Iraq's military got off to a rocky start. In 2005, a RAND study noted a number of concerns, including the infiltration of army and police forces by sectarian militias and insurgents, tension between long-term institution building and short-term needs associated with fielding the ISF, limited Iraqi ownership of the institution development process,

116. Andrew Rathmell et al., *Developing Iraq's Security Sector: The Coalition Provisional Authority's Experience* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 14, 28–31.

117. Brasier, *But Ma'am*, 1.

118. Rathmell et al., *Developing Iraq's Security Sector*, 33.

119. Brasier, *But Ma'am*, 3.

and a fragmentation of authority.[120] When coupled with low pay and inadequate facilities and training, many soldiers decided to desert in the early years.[121] As one Iraqi told an advisor in 2006 regarding the motivation of the Iraqi soldiers, "Their country is at war, their families are in constant danger, and they are not paid much, they live in Al Anbar, their works sucks, everyone is corrupt, they don't get a chance to see their families often, their relatives and friends are dying every day, and there is no real incentive to even be alive."[122]

Two years later, *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq* (the Jones Report) raised similar concerns. The report noted though the Iraqi Army's capability was slowly improving, the army was still hampered by poor leadership, absenteeism, a lack of discipline, as well as poor logistics, maintenance, tactical intelligence, and combined arms capabilities, such as close air and fire support.[123] A US Government Accountability Office report delivered that same year added disunity and sectarian influences to that list.[124]

120. Rathmell et al., *Developing Iraq's Security Sector*, xvi–xix.

121. Brasier, *But Ma'am*, 152.

122. Wesley R. Gray, *Embedded* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 188.

123. James L. Jones, GEN (USMC, Retired), *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, September 6, 2007), 13–14.

124. Government Accountability Office, *Stabilizing Iraq: Factors Impeding the Development of Capable Iraqi Security Forces* (Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office, March 13, 2007), 2.

DA'ESH ATTACKS

Despite these difficulties, in 2014 the almost 200,000 Iraqi Army soldiers—not to mention the 44,000 Federal Police—should have been able to stop the 3,000–5,000 Da'esh fighters who participated in attacks on Mosul, Ramadi, and Fallujah.[125] According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *The Military Balance 2014,* the Iraqi Army was comprised of 193,400 personnel who comprised 14 divisions, including 1 armored and 5 mechanized infantry divisions. These numbers do not include the two counterterrorism service (CTS) brigades, which fell under the prime minister's direct control. They also do not include the more than 500,000 Ministry of the Interior (MOI) forces personnel who were also in a position to confront the Da'esh threat.[126]

Moreover, these security forces had resisted al-Qaeda and Da'esh attacks on fixed positions in

125. W. Andrew Terrill, "Understanding the Strength and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," *Parameters* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2014), 16. *See also* "Why Iraq's Army Crumbled; The Forces in Iraq," *Economist* 411, no. 8892 (June 21, 2014), *https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2014/06/19/why-iraqs-army-crumbled*. According to this report, the number of Da'esh fighters who attacked Mosul was under 1,000.

126. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2014: The annual assessment of global military capabilities and defence economics* (London, UK: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014), 322–323. The MOI forces consisted of approximately 531,000 personnel, including 302,000 in the Iraqi Police Service, 44,000 in the Iraqi Federal Police, 60,000 in the Department of Border Enforcement, 95,000 in the Facilities Protection Service, and 30,000 in the Oil Police Service. Of course, not all of these forces were in a position to directly confront Da'esh forces. It is also worth keeping in mind that the bulk of the Iraqi Police Service are deployed in small, local groups that are easily overmatched by even small concentrations of Da'esh forces.

the past. Prior to the 2014 offensive, there were several complex attacks on police stations in western Iraq involving a combination of suicide vehicles to breach any defenses followed by assault teams that attempted to take over these stations.[127] Perhaps more impressively, the security forces successfully provided security for the largely nonviolent April 30, 2014, parliamentarian elections. This success was no small feat. The ISF secured 8,000 polling places where more than 21 million Iraqis voted with levels of violence much lower than in 2010.[128] Thus, in June 2014 it would not have seemed unreasonable to expect the ISF to effectively battle an outnumbered and ill-equipped opponent. Instead, the ISF dropped weapons, equipment, and uniforms and fled.

The causes of the Iraqi Army's failure begin with extremely poor civil-military relations and an almost complete lack of trust in the army where Da'esh operated. The security situation deteriorated over extreme feelings of political, economic, and social marginalization that arose in an isolated Sunni population that saw few alternatives besides protests, and later violence, to settle its disputes with a central government it perceived as being unresponsive or having inappropriate responses. Demands varied

127. During the author's time as the defense attaché in Baghdad from 2012–2013, the Iraqi press reported multiple such attacks in Fallujah, Rawa, and Anah in western Iraq.

128. Matt Bradley and Ali A. Nabhan, "World News: Iraqis Turn out to Vote under Tight Security—Authorities Report Strong Turnout and Relatively Low Violence; Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki Seeks Third Term," *Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2014, *http://search.proquest.com/docview/15082893?accountid=14741*. *See also* "Interview: Election was 'Entirely Iraqi-Owned Process,'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 7, 2014, *https://www.rferl.org/a/iraq-elections-interview-mladenov/25376175.html*.

depending on which Sunni leader made them, but they for the most part included better representation of Sunnis in state institutions, reintegration of army officers allegedly dismissed for sectarian reasons, the end of arrests on unsubstantiated terrorism charges, and the withdrawal of the government's security forces from Sunni-dominated areas.[129] It was the Iraqi government's sectarian response to these demands that did more to set the conditions for the increase in violence than any military failure of the ISF. Though Sunnis in general were alarmed when Nouri al-Maliki ordered the arrest of Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi almost immediately after the departure of US forces in 2011, these concerns turned to protest when Maliki later attempted to arrest Minister of Finance Rafi al-Issawi, as well as members of his security detail, on terrorism charges in December 2012. In response, Sunnis in Ramadi and Fallujah established protest camps and temporarily blocked the road leading from Baghdad into Ramadi. Over a few months, these protests spread beyond Anbar, especially into Ninevah and Diyala.[130] It was this constant message of marginalization in part that allowed Da'esh to portray itself as the defender of the Sunni people against a hostile and foreign government.

Of course, Da'esh attacks against the larger Shia population prompted it to support the harsh measures Maliki and the ISF took against the Sunni population. The continued drumbeat of attacks in Shia-dominated areas increased popular frustration with the security

129. International Crisis Group, *Iraq: Fallujah's Faustian Bargain*, Middle East Report No. 150 (Brussels, Belgium: April 28, 2014), 5.

130. Dexter Filkins, "What We Left Behind," *New Yorker*, April 28, 2014, *https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/28/what-we-left-behind*.

situation and, consequently, the government. Shia militants, often dressed in uniforms indistinguishable from those of the ISF, attempted to fill that vacuum and began a campaign to drive Sunnis out of some mixed areas.[131] By the end of 2013, many Iraqis were worried about a return to levels of violence seen in 2007, when sectarian strife had reached its peak.[132]

In December 2013, Maliki ordered the ISF to break down protest camps and surround the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah. At the same time, he ordered the arrest of Sunni parliamentarian Ahmed al-Alwani on charges of terrorism. Shortly afterward, Da'esh fighters poured into those cities, effectively taking control.[133] Though these political decisions were instrumental in giving Islamist terrorists a platform from which to build support, the ISF—the army, in particular—often conducted operations in a way that both was ineffective against terrorist targets and reinforced Iraqi Sunnis' perception that the government was marginalizing them. The reasons for this conduct are complex.

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131. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2006), 47–48. During the period of 2012 to 2013, numerous contacts expressed concern to the author regarding ethnic cleansing, especially in Baghdad. Furthermore, the kind of cleansing described was also reported in newly liberated areas in 2017. *See also* Amnesty International, *Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye: The Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units* (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2017), 16.

132. Matt Bradley, "Iraqi Officer Takes a Dark Turn to Al Qaeda; Alliance against Maliki Government Develops after Armed Militants Overtook Fallujah," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2014, *https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-officer-takes-dark-turn-to-al-qaeda-1395022540*.

133. Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak, eds., *The US Army in the Iraq War: Volume 2, Surge and Withdrawal, 2007–2011* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2018), 592–593.

Prior to the Iraqi Army and CTS's rapid retreat from Sunni-dominated areas, their performance had been a confusing and inconsistent mix of courage and cowardice; effective precision raids and large, ineffective "sweeps"; and significant restraint and indiscriminate attacks. The CTS, which maintained constant partnership with US advisors even after the withdrawal, conducted a number of effective raids against Da'esh-related targets. But the CTS, which was not designed to hold ground, would quickly depart the areas where it conducted operations, allowing the terrorists to return. Unfortunately, the Iraqi Army, which should have provided a more sustained presence, was not up to the task. When it conducted operations, it would typically mitigate risk by operating from secure bases and moving in large formations that often gave Da'esh elements sufficient warning to evacuate personnel and equipment.[134]

Foreshadowing the Da'esh takeover of Fallujah, hundreds of al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters entered the western towns of Rawa and Anah in late September 2013, attacking the mayor, his house, and other government facilities and blowing up the bridges that led into town to prevent reinforcements. One interlocutor describing the events stated that though the residents were not happy about the Islamist presence, few were upset by the raid since al-Qaeda in Iraq attacked only government officials and facilities that were not popular in the province. The interlocutor quoted one resident as saying that unlike the ISF, the al-Qaeda in Iraq forces conducting the raid did not harass the population, but focused on government of Iraq officials and facilities. As if to underscore that point, the next day the ISF reportedly arrested more

134. Rayburn and Sobchak, *The US Army*, 591.

than 300 Sunnis, though all were reportedly later released by Iraqi judges due to insufficient evidence.[135] As the summer went on, Da'esh increased its presence in Iraqi towns and along Iraqi highways, where the ISF had previously been able to move unchallenged.

Back in Anbar, especially Fallujah, the tribes found themselves in an uncomfortable position. Local police had abandoned their posts, and many fled or were otherwise keeping a low profile.[136] Desperate to keep the ISF from entering the city—for fear of a repeat of the events at Hawija—these local tribal leaders found themselves relying on Da'esh for protection while at the same time trying to broker its departure. This desperation increased as ISF artillery pounded the city, forcing thousands to flee. As an International Crisis Group report noted, Fallujah found itself in a "vicious circle." The more the army shelled the town, the more the town needed Da'esh to defend it. The more Da'esh defended it, however, the more likely the army was to increase military force, often indiscriminately.[137]

After the fall of Fallujah to Da'esh in January 2014, the Iraqi Army further mitigated risk by employing indirect fire, even in crowded urban areas,[138] rather than assaulting and seizing the territory. These tactics, which were reminiscent of the overwhelming-firepower approach the Iraqi Army used against the

135. Sunni tribal leader, interview by the author, September 26, 2013.

136. International Crisis Group, *Iraq*, 1.

137. International Crisis Group, *Iraq*, 15.

138. Loveday Morris, "Iraqi Army Faces Death, Desertions as It Struggles with Anbar Offensive," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2014, *http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqi-army-faces-death-and-desertions-as-it-struggles-with-anbar-offensive/2014/05/08/83720f79-6cd2-4c7c-883b-dfe181ce7a5b_story.html*. Multiple press reports have described ISF use of artillery in urban areas. *See also* International Crisis Group, *Iraq*, 7.

Kurds in the 1960s, further alienated the population and largely failed to disrupt insurgent operations.

Meanwhile, despite an additional 42,000 personnel being deployed to Anbar by May 2014, the Iraqi Army was frequently outgunned and outmaneuvered. As a result, its operations became bogged down, forcing it to rely more on standoff weapons, such as artillery and air-attack, including, reportedly "barrel bombing," which entailed dropping large, air-fueled, explosive containers indiscriminately in neighborhoods were Da'esh had a foothold.[139] During these operations, the Iraqi Army suffered mass desertions, especially from those units that were transferred into the area from more peaceful parts of Iraq.

This dynamic placed the ISF in another vicious circle where risk aversion stemming from poor conditions drove indiscriminate practices that alienated the population and empowered its adversaries, which, in turn, encouraged greater risk aversion because there was little incentive to take risks on behalf of leaders responsible for these conditions and little reason for Iraqi soldiers to take risks on behalf of a population that resented them. If the hallmark of professionalism is trust, the Iraqi Army of 2014 did not have it: the people did not trust it and its members did not trust each other.

IRAQ FIGHTS BACK

Just as it did when Iranian forces threatened Iraq's territorial integrity, the Iraqi Army rallied to fight back.

139. Mark Lattimer, Miriam Puttick, and Mays Al-Jaboori, *Civilian protection in the battle for Mosul: Critical priorities* (London, UK: Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and Minority Rights Group International, October 2016), 4. *See also* Morris, "Iraqi Army Faces Death."

The difference this time was, rather than relatively covert and limited support from benefactors such as the United States, Great Britain, and France, the Iraqi Army had the robust backing of a United States-led coalition, which included several of the gulf Arab states. This coalition provided advisors; weapons; equipment; as well as intelligence, indirect fire, and close air support. The other difference this time was the creation of the Shia PMF, which rapidly mobilized more than 100,000 Iraqi citizens and brought Iraq's militias, especially those backed by Iran, into the fight on the side of the government. For the first time in Iraq's history, almost all of its neighbors as well as international partners were fighting with it.[140]

The counteroffensive got off to a rough start when, in June 2014, an assault on Tikrit stalled.[141] By August, however, the ISF had its first significant success. With the help of US airstrikes against Da'esh vehicles and supply routes, a combined force of Iraqi Army, Kurdish peshmerga, and Shia militias lifted the Da'esh siege of Amerli, effectively stopping Da'esh's southward advance.[142] This would establish a successful pattern of US-Iraqi military cooperation where the more precise coalition strikes would enable the Iraqi Army and CTS to assault Da'esh positions while the PMF and other units would secure the area and prevent Da'esh retreat or counterattack.

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140. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 4.

141. Heather L. Pickerell and Ahmed Ali, *Iraq Situation Report June 28, 2014* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, June 2014), *http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/2014-06-28%20Situation%20Report_6.pdf*.

142. Ahmed Ali and Lauren Squires, *Iraq Situation Report: August 29-31, 2014* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, August 2014), *http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/2014-08-29-31%20Situation%20Report.pdf*.

The ISF, including the PMF, renewed its efforts to take Tikrit in March 2015 when it initiated an offensive that would fully liberate the city by early April.[143] The offensive began as an uncoordinated attack on the part of the Iran-backed PMF—reportedly ordered by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani—which quickly got bogged down.[144] The Iraqi government reinforced the PMF with the CTS and the Iraqi Army as well as requested US close air support, which the United States provided contingent on the removal of the PMF,[145] which had already developed a reputation for brutality among Sunni populations.[146] Though the move caused some friction between the Baghdad- and Iran-backed militias, Tikrit was liberated.[147]

As the fight went on, other patterns were established. First was the prime role of the CTS in almost every major engagement as well as the contrasting limited role of the Iraqi Army and PMF. During the liberation of Fallujah, for example, the Iraqi Army 10th Division ended up doing not much more than providing logistics to the CTS, despite being ordered to play a major role in the operation.

143. Sinan Adnan, *Iraq Situation Report: February 28–March 3, 2015* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 2015), *http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20SITREP%202015-2-28-3-1_V5.pdf*.

144. Jessa Rose Dury-Agri, Omer Kassim, and Patrick Martin, *Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Order of Battle* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, December 2017), 31.

145. Dan De Luce and Henry Johnson, "Can the U.S. Control Iran's Militias in the Fight for Fallujah," *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2016, *https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/09/can-the-u-s-control-irans-militias-in-the-fight-for-fallujah-shiite-iraq-isis/*.

146. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 4.

147. Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 31.

Moreover, the PMF performed equally dismally, having failed in almost every operation in which it was involved.[148] Even Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi reportedly remarked on the PMF's insubordination, noting that despite it being ordered to recapture areas surrounding Tal Afar to cut Da'esh supply lines to Syria, it had not even tried.[149]

The situation for the Iraqi Army, however, had improved by the Mosul campaign. The army had displayed a degree of endurance and adaptability reminiscent of the days when it drove Iranian forces from Iraqi soil. It had also made improvements to equipment—such as mounting Kornet missile launchers onto United States-provided high mobility, multipurpose wheeled vehicles—and collected actionable intelligence. As Middle East expert Norman Ricklefs observed, "This represents considerable progress from the static, defensive 'checkpoint force' that characterized much of the regular army at time of the IS blitzkrieg."[150] As a result, the 9th Armored Division, which advanced up the eastern bank of the Tigris, and the 15th Infantry Division, which advanced up the western bank, made a more substantial contribution to Mosul's liberation than the Iraqi Army 10th Division did in Tikrit.[151]

Moreover, the CTS, at least, had developed a good relationship with civilians in Mosul. In conducting operations, it limited collateral harm and even took

148. Norm Ricklefs, "The Iraqi Military, the US-Led Coalition and the Mosul Operation: The Risk of Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory," Small Wars Journal, December 22, 2016, *http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-iraqi-military-the-us-led-coalition-and-the-mosul-operation-the-risk-of-snatching-defea.*

149. Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 31.

150. Ricklefs, "The Iraqi Military."

151. IHS Markit, *Iraq*, 88–89.

extra measures to protect civilians.[152] As Ricklefs noted, one good news story that emerged from Mosul was the "well documented positive reception CTS has had in cleared neighborhoods, with many residents expressing the wish that Iraqi forces will stay on."[153] Amnesty International noted that civilians praised the ISF in general, and the CTS in particular, because they attempted to spare them from violence during the heat of battle and showed "kindness and respect" to civilians in areas they had recently taken from Da'esh.[154] In fact, a February 2017 survey by the National Democratic Institute observed that the Iraqi Army (which included the CTS) had emerged as a potent symbol of cross-sectarian pride.[155]

These CTS operations, which prioritized the protection of civilians, came at a high cost. In east Mosul, air strikes tended to be against preselected targets as opposed to calls from troops in contact. Moreover, the CTS was expected to fight without air support in the densely populated neighborhoods that Da'esh held and where they forced civilians to remain to use them as human shields. As an Amnesty International study observed, "The CTS paid a heavy price for this tactic; estimates of CTS casualties, including deaths and injuries, in east Mosul range from 4,000 to 6,000 of a total fighting force of 8,000

152. Amnesty International, *At Any Cost: The Civilian Catastrophe in West Mosul, Iraq* (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2017), 25–26.

153. Ricklefs, "The Iraqi Military."

154. Amnesty International, *At Any Cost*, 26.

155. National Democratic Institute, *A Fragile Unity: After Military Gains, Iraqis Look to Leaders for a Better Future*, February 2017, *https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Iraq_FocusGroupPublication_FullReport2.pdf*.

troops, meaning the CTS was depleted by between 50% and 75%."[156]

As a result, while the CTS still fought in west Mosul, it was joined in greater force by the MOI's Federal Police and Emergency Response Divisions as well as elements of the Iraqi Army. These forces were not as well-trained as the CTS and were arguably more risk-averse. Moreover, as an Amnesty International report notes, the fighting was harder since the PMF had effectively cut off Da'esh escape routes, forcing its fighters to take a stronger stand than they had in east Mosul. As a result, this operation saw a greater reliance on less-precise weapons, such as artillery, mortars, and improvised rocket assisted munitions, which caused greater civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure.[157] Arguably, in some cases, the battle for west Mosul probably looked more like the operations the Iraqi Army had conducted in its 1974–1975 confrontation with the Kurds, where any resistance was met, as discussed previously, by overwhelming firepower.

By the end of the conflict, the Iraqi Army had performed substantially better than it had in the past and had achieved a number of victories. The Iraqi Army, in general, performed substantially better than it had in the past, and has a number of victories it can claim. The army, in conjunction with Federal Police and Sunni tribal groups, successfully defended the dam, power, and refining facilities in Haditha as well as at Dhuluiya, where they held out six months before they were relieved. Moreover, beginning in 2015, the Iraqi Army successfully led a number of offensives

156. Amnesty International, *At Any Cost*, 11.
157. Amnesty International, *At Any Cost*, 11–13.

that finally wrested control of Iraqi territory from Da'esh.[158]

With the end of Da'esh control over Iraqi territory, the Iraqi Army finds itself in a unique moment in its history. In addition to being successful against a determined foe, it fought in a way that strengthened its legitimacy among multiple Iraqi sects.[159] But if the past is any indication, the Iraqi Army will not likely sustain this momentum without continuous engagement by the United States and like-minded allies. As Cordesman observes of the ISF in general following the US withdrawal in 2011, "The ISF often found it easier to revert to the past than accept US military models, particularly when Iraq's political leadership insisted on repeating Saddam Hussein's efforts to micromanage every aspect of security operations, enforce political control, bypass the formal chain of command, and limit initiative at every level."[160]

The ISF's initial poor performance was largely due to long-standing issues including overlapping chains of command; poor administration; sectarian influences; and limited logistic, command and control, and intelligence capabilities. Moreover, corrupt legacy practices made it difficult to reform because they diverted resources away from the fight and created

158. Michael Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces* (Baghdad, Iraq: Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, March 2016), 26.

159. National Democratic Institute, *A Fragile Unity*. *See also* Munqith Dagher, "Iraqi Public Opinion Shows a New Bridge of Hope and a New Valley of Concerns," The Washington Institute, June 7, 2017, *https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/iraqi-public-opinion-shows-a-new-bridge-of-hope-and-an-old-valley-of-concer*.

160. Anthony Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 12, 2014), 19.

poor conditions for soldiers and police as funds for food, housing, fuel, and maintenance were drained. These practices limited the resources available to Iraqi forces and undermined the kind of trust necessary for reform. As a result, absent positive external influences, the Iraqi Army will likely revert to the disunified, ineffective, corrupt, and risk-averse organization it has been for much of its history.

Table 1. Iraqi Army Historical Strengths and Weaknesses

ERA	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	NOTES
PRE-ISLAMIC (Pre 7th-Century)	Courage; stealth; cleverness; agility	Large operations; defense against better-organized opponents	Raid culture; blood feuds cause for most violence
ISLAMIC (Ottoman) (late 18th-early 20th Centuries)	Modern, well-equipped; large-scale operations	Personnel; leadership	Divided loyalties, nationalism lowered morale; recruited soldiers from lower, uneducated classes
MANDATE (1921-1933)	Internal stability operations	Counter insurgency operations	Successful against small groups (Assyrians, tribes); British support enabled limited success against Kurds; Nationalizing force in tension with sectarian loyalties caused identity crisis
ISRAEL WARS (1948, 1973)	Modern, well-equipped; logistics; cohesion	Combined arms operations; maneuver; intelligence; tactics; initiative	Modernized with Russian equipment; poorest tactical performer among Arab armies

Table 1 *(continued)*

ERA	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	NOTES
FIGHTING KURDS (1961-1970; 1974-1975)	Improved logistics; improved strategic choices	Tactics; initiative	Success result of isolating Kurds and choice of Kurds to fight Iraqi Army conventionally; overwhelming firepower
IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-1988)	Defense; combat engineering; small, limited, well-rehearsed operations; logistics; cohesion	Combined arms operations; maneuver; intelligence; maintenance; politicization	Poor offensive operations in Iran due to overwhelming-firepower tactics; in Iraq, increased cohesion and merit promotions
GULF WAR (1991)	Small, limited, well-rehearsed operations	Combined arms operations; maneuver; intelligence; communications; cohesion; politicization	Poor strategic assumptions regarding coalition plans and resilience
US INVASION (2003)	Guerrilla operations	Combined arms operations; maneuver; intelligence; cohesion; communications; politicization	Poor conventional defense; ex-military contributed to success of multiple insurgent groups
AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ/ DA'ESH (2011-2014)	Fixed-site defense	Morale; intelligence; tactics; initiative; logistics and maintenance; cohesion; politicization	Low morale due to corrupt practices, hostility of population
DA'ESH (2014-2018)	Air-ground integration; improved intelligence; improved counterinsurgency operations; cohesion	Local security operations; logistics and maintenance	Uncoordinated operations, especially where PMF was involved; poor ability to establish security for local populations

THE FUTURE IRAQI ARMY

If the Iraqi Army's history is an indicator of future performance, at its best the Iraqi Army is characterized by courageous soldiers fighting in cohesive units led by tactically incompetent and often highly politicized officers who have competing loyalties arising from multiple, competing patronage networks. It should be no surprise, then, that the Iraqi Army has had difficulty developing a way of war that works. The raw materials are there, but the ability to generate and disseminate expert knowledge over any jurisdiction associated with landpower simply does not yet exist.

This historically optimized Iraqi Army should be able to handle significant logistics and engineering challenges as long as corruption and competition from other services do not prevent it from doing so. But it is challenged to provide other kinds of combat support, such as communications and intelligence. Senior Iraqi leadership can, in times of crisis, improvise with the limited resources they have to achieve limited strategic military objectives; however, their tendency toward politicization—driven by the army's historic association with coups—undermines their ability to hold on to the improvements they have made.

Unlike in the 1930s, when Arab and Kurdish Iraqis rallied around the army's victory against the lightly armed Assyrians, a majority of Iraqis, many from different sects and ethnicities, have placed a newfound faith in the Iraqi Army after its role in the victory against a well-organized, well-equipped, and determined enemy that was a threat to all Iraqis. Where the former victory established the Iraqi Army as an enforcer, the latter has established it as a liberator. Of course, that identity is currently at risk given the

army's role in suppressing anti-government and anti-Iran protests; however, it is too soon to see how Iraqi public perception will evolve.[161]

So, to the extent it can also establish itself as inclusive, it can play a positive role in bridging Iraq's sectarian divides. Moreover, this inclusivity does not have to express itself in terms of demographic balance, which tends to undermine trust in individual units, as the Coalition and Military Assistance Training Team experienced. Rather, the army's ability to coordinate its operations in Anbar with those of the Sunni tribal militia and Shia-dominated Federal Police suggests it can play an accepted, neutral role in establishing security throughout Iraq.

There will, of course, be plenty of opportunities to play a positive role in the foreseeable future. As the glow of liberation fades, the Iraqi Army, in conjunction with the other security services, will need to focus on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and consolidation operations as it works with Iraqi law enforcement organizations to set conditions for local security. To conduct those missions effectively, the Iraqi Army will have to address the enduring weaknesses and vulnerabilities to which their history has given rise. Fortunately, that history also indicates which critical areas the Iraqi Army, along with its partners, should emphasize.

These weaknesses and vulnerabilities are critical not only because they reoccur throughout Iraq's military history. In addition, they overlap to the degree that improvements in one are necessary for improvements

161. Richard Gonzales, "Iraqi Security Forces Killed 149 People in Recent Protests, Inquiry Concludes," National Public Radio, October 22, 2019, *https://www.npr.org/2019/10/22/772443972/iraqi-security-forces-killed-149-people-in-recent-protests-inquiry-concludes*.

in the other and, moreover, failure to improve at least somewhat in all will likely undermine any benefit from improving in just one. In this way, disunity creates space for corruption, which in turn inhibits the Iraqi Army's ability to establish the communications, logistics, and intelligence infrastructure necessary for a modern army and undermines the administrative accountability necessary to effectively recruit, train, and equip soldiers. The result is a high rate of absenteeism as well as risk aversion among those soldiers who remain. In this next section, I will discuss each of these critical areas for engagement in more detail.

UNITY OF COMMAND

One of the enduring problems associated with the ISF in general is a lack of unity. Given the authoritarian nature of Iraqi governance, this concern might seem counterintuitive. It arises, however, out of a combination of culture and politics. As De Atkine observes, Arab armies in general are plagued by a "lack of cooperation" resulting from cultural difficulties with extending trust outside close circles typically identified by family, tribe, and sect.[162] This cultural norm is amplified, especially in totalitarian states, by a general distrust of the military which arises from its historic role in coups. As noted above, this distrust drives the creation of competing military and intelligence organizations that further undermine unity of command.

162. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," 7. De Atkine notes that elite units, which have the mission to protect the regime, rather than the country, are an exception to this pattern.

In the Iraqi context, this disunity is as much a function of the army's historic mission of being a balance to the government and other armed forces as it is a function of the current, competitive political situation. To underscore the enduring nature of this problem, it is worth pointing out that Iraqi leaders since Saddam have tried to create alternate chains of command within the armed forces. For example, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki created the Office of Commander in Chief in 2006, which reported directly to him and included the CTS, to which he added the Iraqi Special Operations brigades. The Office of Commander in Chief also controlled the 56th Brigade (the "Baghdad Brigade") and the 57th Brigade, which he assigned in 2013 to guard the Green Zone's outer ring. The office exerted influence through Baghdad Operations Command, which in turn was able to influence the other provincial operations commands. Though its control over the provincial operational commands was less direct, it still served as a node through which Maliki could control security operations throughout the country outside the view of the National Operations Center. Though Prime Minister Abadi dissolved the office shortly after he took power, some of those relationships still endure, such as the CTS reporting directly to the prime minister.[163]

Achieving unity can be further complicated by the top-heavy nature of the Iraqi Army. In the battle for Ramadi, for example, 5 3-star or 2-star generals controlled areas of operations with as few as 2,000 troops. Over those five, there were two main headquarters: the Combined Joint Operations Centre, which compensated for the partial collapse of Anbar

163. Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 10.

Operations Command, and Baghdad Operations Command. The result of this was conflicting orders, gaps in troop coverage, and eventual, if temporary, defeat.[164]

Exacerbating this concern is, of course, the PMF, which the passage of the popular mobilization law in 2016 established as an independent part of the ISF and provided with $1.5 billion from the Iraqi budget.[165] Like the CTS, these forces also report directly to the prime minister; however, their precise role has not yet been established.[166] Though the PMF could play a complementary role to the Iraqi Army, its leadership has expressed the intent to transform the organization into an Iraqi equivalent of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which itself competes with the regular Iranian armed forces for jurisdiction and resources, to the latter's detriment.[167] There is no reason to believe the same will not happen in Iraq.

Moreover, having a force under the prime minister as large as the PMF—perhaps as much as 141,000 personnel[168]—facilitates alternate chains of command that make effective coordination of security operations difficult, if not impossible. The PMF's attack on Tikrit suggests the organization did not coordinate the attack with the other Iraqi services and launched the attack on the orders of Iran. Furthermore, as Abadi's complaint suggests, this incident was not isolated, but rather one more example of divided loyalties. It is worth pointing out both the deputy chairman of the PMF and the commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, as well as Badr Corps Secretary

164. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 41–42.
165. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 9.
166. Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 28.
167. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 11.
168. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 9.

General Hadi al-Amiri have also acknowledged the PMF's dependence for guidance and resources on Iran rather than the government of Iraq.[169] Perhaps even more important is the role these militias are currently playing in violently attacking protestors on the order and direction of Iran.[170] Thus, a permanent PMF organized along the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps model will, in addition to creating competition with the other services, serve as another avenue of Iranian influence that will further undermine the unity of Iraq's armed forces.[171]

CORRUPTION

The greatest weakness of the Iraqi Army is its tendency toward corrupt activities that undermine its readiness and capabilities. Though no military is free from corruption at some level—consider the recent "Fat Leonard" scandal the US Navy experienced—the nature and scale of corruption in the Iraqi Army renders many of its units ineffective. This corruption takes a number of forms, the most malicious of which is the purchasing of command and other senior positions. One anonymous Iraqi officer explained the following in 2014 after Da'esh seized Mosul.

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169. Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 32.

170. Ali Mamouri, "Chaos spreads in Iraq as PM office remains vacant," Al-Monitor, December 6, 2019, *https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/12/iraq-protests-najaf-prime-minister.html#ixzz67MpDZwnu*; and Renad Mansour, Thanassis Cambanis, and Michael Wahid Hanna, "These Iraqi militias are attacking protestors and getting away with it. Here's why," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2019, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/11/18/these-iraqi-militias-are-attacking-protesters-getting-away-with-it-heres-why/*.

171. Amnesty International, *Iraq*, 27. *See also* Dury-Agri et al., *Iraqi Security Forces*, 28.

> Okay. I will explain the corruption to you. If I am the battalion commander—they are selling the positions of leadership in the Iraqi Army. I pay you $50,000 US and I can be a battalion commander right now. If I get this command position, I can control more than $100 [*sic*] Million dinar each month and get a very good benefit—it's a business—not an Army. Going down from the battalion commander—the S2 can blackmail officers in the unit as well. If I don't pay the S2 he can report people to the intelligence in Baghdad. The battalion commander will pay the S2 to make him shut his mouth. You will see the intelligence guy with the battalion commander—they are the best of friends. Because the BC gives money to the S2 so both of them get benefited, so the unit's screwed up, so the IA is screwed up, so ISIS will win.[172]

These positions can come at a high price, but as the above testimony suggests, the price is worth it. There are reports a brigade command can be bought for as high as USD $500,000 and a division command can go for as much as $2 million.[173] Though US advisors observed this practice prior to the departure of US forces in 2011,[174] its effects were more apparent after US forces left. As a 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies report noted, "[m]ilitary leadership positions are opportunities for senior personnel to solidify power bases and dispense patronage in the form of military supplies, including ammunition, food, water, and vehicle repair parts. As a result senior commanders hoard supplies in order to maintain their power and influence, and

172. Chris Mercado, "Voices from the Front: An Iraqi Army Officer's Account of the Battle Against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)," Foreign Intrigue, September 1, 2014.

173. Peter Van Buren, "You Too Can Command an Iraqi Division for Only $2 Million," Reuters, December 10, 2014, *http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2014/12/10/you-too-can-com-mand-an-iraqi-army-division-for-only-2-million/*.

174. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 10.

military sustainment is held hostage to bureaucratic infighting."[175]

By using their operating budget and supplies to build patronage and power bases—thus justifying their large investment to obtain the position—commanders ultimately have to cut back on expenditures for food, housing, spare parts, and fuel. The result is a force that is poorly housed, poorly fed, and poorly equipped. As one Iraqi soldier put it, "we have no pay, no new clothes, no new uniforms, no food, we get shot at every day. How can we continue this way of life?"[176] It should not be surprising, then, that units where these practices are limited or nonexistent, like the CTS, perform better than those where they are more widespread, even when both units have received similar support from the United States and its allies.

Corruption of this sort is, of course, endemic and pervasive in Iraqi society and certainly not exclusive to the security ministries. As noted earlier, the dominance of external patronage relationships—like family, tribe, and sect—always ensured complex and competing loyalties for the individual Iraqi and a level of patronage within the armed forces that undermined meritocracy. Saddam, of course, managed those networks to ensure this patronage worked toward his goals, often at the expense of Iraqi Army capability.

But UN sanctions imposed in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War reduced the resources available across the Iraqi economy and stimulated the growth of a shadow economy that relied more on family, clan, tribal, and other ties to generate the kind of trust needed to make an economy work. More specifically, in the austere years of the 1990s, the central

175. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 11.
176. Gray, *Embedded*, 86.

government in Baghdad was forced to outsource the funding of many of its security and economic functions because it lacked the resources to do it itself. In order to preserve control, the Baath Party began to function as more of an umbrella organization for tribes that then served these functions. According to Robert Looney, "[b]y 1996, officially sanctioned 'tribes' were not only responsible for the maintenance of local law and order, but also collected taxes on behalf of the government, were appointed judicial powers, and applied customary tribal law within their territory."[177]

The effect was to strengthen tribal hold on the distribution of goods, services, and, perhaps more importantly, jobs. As Phil Williams states, "In sum, Iraq under Saddam Hussein resembled an extended mafia family with Saddam as the 'godfather,' presiding over extensive criminal entrepreneurship, some under the direction of the regime, some under the tacit blessing of the regime, and some clearly outside its purview and control."[178] When Saddam fell, these networks became available for co-option by a host of new actors who struggled for control of Iraq's government, including Shia militias, Sunni insurgents, and transnational jihadists who made it "sometimes impossible to differentiate political or military agendas from the purely criminal pursuit of profit."[179]

Perhaps more importantly for the security ministries, the political parties, most of which had an association with Shia militias, employed similar methods to expand their networks in the ministries. As

177. Robert E. Looney, "Reconstruction and Peacebuilding Under Extreme Adversity: The Problem of Pervasive Corruption in Iraq, *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 3 (June 2008), 435.

178. Phil Williams, "Organized Crime and Corruption in Iraq," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no.1 (February 2009), 118.

179. Williams, "Organized Crime and Corruption," 118.

discussed before, under Saddam loyalty was probably the most important qualifier for senior positions in the Iraqi government. After Saddam, the importance of that qualifier did not change; however, the number of persons or institutions to which one could or should owe loyalty proliferated to the extent that it undermined the possibility of trust at every level. As Looney further observed, "In short, government ministries are being staffed with party cronies and their budgets are being used as sources of power for political parties."[180] Moreover, as Major David Voorhies, an advisor to the Iraqi Army in 2006, noted, "Tribal loyalties; religious alliances; and the aspects of prestige, influence, power, money, and revenge played heavily on the motives of those I advised."[181] There is no reason to think those competing loyalties and motives are not still present in the Iraqi Army today.

As a result, there is little of the trust in the Iraqi Army necessary for it to truly professionalize. This point is not to say that trust is entirely absent. What is missing is the kind of trust large organizations need to function. As Looney states, there are generally three kinds of trust relationships: ascribed, process-based, and extended. In the first, trust is based on identity. To the extent one is a member of a particular family, tribe, or ethnic group, one is trusted. There is plenty of this kind of trust in the Iraqi government, especially where parties and sects have consolidated power. In the second, trust is based on personal knowledge about another person, but independent of that person's

180. Looney, "Reconstruction and Peacebuilding," 428.

181. Major David Voorhies, "Making MITT Work: Insights into Advising the Iraqi Army," *Infantry* 96, no. 3 (May/June 2007), 31.

identity. In the Iraqi context, it is difficult for this kind of trust to supersede the first kind. As a result, units that are relatively integrated are likely to have a harder time establishing trust internally, though externally they may serve as a model for others. In the third, persons are willing to enter into trust relationships based on limited information about specific attributes of another person. These kinds of relationships are essential for the efficient functioning of, for example, large economies where persons who are relatively anonymous are nevertheless willing to extend the kind of trust necessary to make loans, buy on credit, and wait for goods and services to be delivered after payment is given.[182] That kind of trust does not exist on any meaningful scale anywhere in Iraq.

This last kind of relationship is, however, essential to the running of any large, diverse, professional organization in which members need to trust individuals with whom the only thing they have in common is their professional identity. Trust has a strong correlation with loyalty and as long as the individual's loyalty is divided, the organization will suffer. This is not to say that one cannot be loyal to more than one person or organization in more than one context. It is just that loyalty has to be ordered so the organization is not divided. One can certainly be a loyal US soldier while still being a loyal spouse, parent, child, or church member. The issue arises when one is forced to choose. In the Iraqi context, such choices often entail employing or promoting a relative over the more competent other. Doing so may promote trust on the small scale, but it discourages it on the larger scale. The task, then, for the Iraqi Army is

182. Looney, "Reconstruction and Peacebuilding," 431.

to institutionalize ways to prevent such choices from arising.

POOR COMBAT SUPPORT CAPABILITIES: COMMUNICATIONS, LOGISTICS, AND INTELLIGENCE

It can be said of most Middle Eastern militaries that their communications, logistics, and intelligence—especially technical—capabilities are typically their least developed.[183] There are, of course, a number of reasons for this situation, and I will not go into all of them here. But in working security cooperation with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, the most frequent request from military and defense leaders is assistance in developing these three areas. In this regard, the Iraqi military shares the same organizational shortcomings, except the current conditions under which they operate place these already weak systems under considerable stress.[184]

Communications

In addition to the lack of unity described above, the Iraqi Army also suffers from poor communications infrastructure and practices. It is important to note, however, that things are not as bad as they were in 2007, when the Government Accountability Office reported the ISF had to rely on the United States for much of its communications architecture. As Marisa Sullivan noted, the Iraqis had improved their capabilities even prior to 2014, to the extent that the operations commands were "quite successful at planning and executing security operations,

183. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 6–11.
184. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 53.

coordinating the efforts of military and police forces in a given area, [and] improving communication across the chain of command."[185] But even in the battle for Mosul, which likely represented a high point of Iraqi Army capability, coalition advisors reported that the ISF had some difficulty because of problems with "sporadic" partner position location information, making it difficult to get a common operating picture during this battle.[186]

Some of the difficulties may be due to cultural factors. As De Atkine also observes, "Arabs husband information and hold it especially tightly," adding that Arab soldiers understand their value to the organization in terms of the unique skills and knowledge they possess. Transmitting those skills and knowledge to others undermines the soldiers' personal value.[187] It is important, however, not to overstate this dynamic. Though it accounts for an observed reluctance by members of different organizations within the security services to share expertise and specialized knowledge, it does not follow that there is a lack of willingness to give and take orders from higher levels of command. In fact, as Pollack noted, the greater problem for the Iraqi Army has been an unwillingness to do anything absent such orders, as when the Iraqi Army failed to pursue weaker Israeli forces in 1973.[188] This point suggests what is lacking

185. Marisa Sullivan, *Maliki's Authoritarian Regime* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2013), *http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Malikis-Authoritarian-Regime-Web.pdf*.

186. Mosul Study Group, *What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2017), 11.

187. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," 3.

188. Author observation. On more than one occasion, the author was asked by one element of the ISF to obtain information,

is the kind of lateral communication necessary for better situational awareness and combined arms operations.[189]

A larger contributor to communications problems is poor infrastructure. The civilian backbone through which the operations centers communicate with subordinate units as well as the National Operations Center suffer frequent power outages as well as theft of equipment.[190] Moreover, this system is not very secure. A lot of operational information is provided over email, which also uses the civilian infrastructure. Fortunately, Da'esh does not appear to have sufficient capability to fully exploit such vulnerabilities, so it does not seem that secure communications issues significantly impair ISF operations, though this vulnerability would significantly impact ISF operations against a more capable foe.

Logistics and Maintenance

The 2007 Jones Report described logistics as the "Achilles heel of the Iraqi ground forces."[191] As one senior Iraqi officer stated, Iraqi commanders "lack basic knowledge of military logistics," which leaves "many enlistees to scrounge for themselves or go hungry."[192] Food is not the only commodity Iraqis have

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such as maps, from other elements.

189. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," 5.

190. IHS Markit, *Iraq*, 58–59.

191. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 69.

192. Matthew Bradley and Ali A. Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military is Outmatched on Battlefield," *Wall Street Journal*, updated May 1, 2014, *https://www.wsj.com/articles/fledgling-iraqi-military-is-outmatched-on-battlefield-1398652250*. *See also* "Alas, It May Make Little Difference; Iraq's Elections," *Economist*, May 3, 2014, *https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2014/05/03/alas-it-may-make-little-difference*.

difficulty supplying.[193] The same system that moves food also moves fuel and spare parts. As a result, though supplies at Iraqi bases are often adequate, the Iraqis have extreme difficulties supplying troops on the move. This deficiency forces the army to operate from large bases, which significantly reduces their range of operations. Additionally, the corrupt practices of officers husbanding unit resources for their own personal aggrandizement further limit what is available for the fight. Thus, when it does move, the Iraqi Army often finds itself outgunned and with limited ammunition compared to Da'esh fighters.[194]

Widespread corruption and the competing desire to eliminate it result in a cumbersome, highly centralized bureaucracy that makes supplying and maintaining the force prohibitively difficult. These difficulties arise because this centralization relieves the individual soldiers and junior officers of the responsibility to ensure equipment works and soldiers have sufficient food, fuel, and ammunition to operate. As Michael Knights observed in 2016, "it can take the signatures of three three-star generals and the minister of defence [sic] to release a shipment of Humvee tires from Taji to a military unit."[195]

As a result, spare parts and ammunition remain on shelves, forcing soldiers to cannibalize captured weapons and sometimes their own systems to remain in the fight. It is no wonder that Iraq's M1A1 fleet is at 40-percent readiness. It is also no wonder that rather than repairing them, it was easier for the Iraqis, whatever their actual reasons were, to buy T-90s from

193. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military."
194. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military."
195. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 50.

Russia to make up for this shortfall.[196] In fact, from the Iraqi perspective, there is a strategic utility in having multiple security partners, especially those with UN Security Council veto power. Though Russia may not be a preferred partner from the United States' point of view, from the Iraqi point of view, having Russia as a potential supplier diversifies sources of equipment and expertise and makes the Iraqi government less vulnerable to external political pressure.

Intelligence

Iraqi Security Force (ISF) intelligence operations, including those of the Iraqi Army, improved after 2014. The ISF improved both its ability to act on intelligence quickly, as in an Iraqi helicopter attack on a Da'esh convoy in Fallujah, and its collection and dissemination of real-time intelligence from civilians during the battle for Mosul.[197] But enduring problems remain, and the chances of backsliding are high. As the Jones Report noted in 2007, "information sharing and cooperation between the Iraqi intelligence community and the Iraqi Security Forces is not satisfactory—a problem exacerbated by bureaucratic competition and distrust among duplicative intelligence organizations."[198] Though anecdotally things arguably improved during the Da'esh fight, the army's—as well as Federal Police's—reliance on less discriminate

196. "Iraq Receives First Batch of Russian T-90 Battle Tanks," Middle East Monitor, February 16, 2018, *https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180216-iraq-receives-first-batch-of-russian-t-90-battle-tanks/*.

197. Christian Triebert, "An Open Source Analysis of the Fallujah 'Convoy Massacre'(s)," Bellingcat, July 6, 2016, *https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/07/06/an-open-source-analysis-of-the-fallujah-convoy-massacres/*.

198. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 52.

weapons suggests an inability to locate and maneuver against enemy positions without first making contact. Better use of tactical intelligence would alleviate this concern to some degree.

There are, as discussed, cultural and political trends that could undermine improvements made in this area. In addition to being predisposed to restricting information flow, intelligence organizations could slide back into their traditional role of acting as a check on the other organizations, which would only worsen trust issues and make information sharing more difficult. A lot will depend on how the new government decides to manage and control the military. If it creates and relies on informal, alternate networks, then, very likely, intelligence sharing and capability development will stagnate and eventually degrade.

If this happens, then Iraqi Army operations will begin to look more like they did in the past when the army targeted based solely on human intelligence, some of which is uncorroborated and has been used to settle personal scores rather than larger military objectives. Though doing so was sometimes effective, the ability of Da'esh to escape before Iraqi troops reached their targets often enabled them to determine who the source was. As a result of these operations, the Iraqi Army often lost sources. This vicious cycle will likely again lead to a significant degradation of the army's ability to target terrorists and their facilities. Furthermore, the resulting imprecision would further encourage mass arrests and detentions, which may have the effect of temporarily disrupting some terrorist operations, but may also anger the population, driving them into the opposition's camp.

ABSENTEEISM, ADMINISTRATION, AND RISK AVERSION

Absenteeism has long been documented as endemic in the Iraqi Army. Despite the fact that the Jones Report observed the Iraqi Army possessed "an adequate supply of willing and able manpower," it also noted that all of the services and ministries had difficulty with the administrative tasks associated with accountability for personnel.[199] Underscoring that last point, the 2007 Government Accountability Office report cited high absenteeism as well as near-complete administrative inability to account for personnel as significant impediments to ISF development and operations.[200] The problem, of course, runs deeper than simple absenteeism or poor administrative capacities, and there is little reason to think it has changed significantly, even after the success against Da'esh.

The first of these practices is using "ghost soldiers," where commanders place additional soldiers on the rolls in order to collect the pay those soldiers are owed. In some cases, these soldiers exist; however, commanders permit them to remain home for extended periods, returning once a month to collect part of their salaries, while the commander keeps the rest. In other cases, these soldiers do not exist, as commanders simply add names to their rolls (or do not report desertions) to increase the amount of money the unit receives to pay its soldiers.[201] This

199. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 9.

200. Government Accountability Office, *Stabilizing Iraq*, 11.

201. Morris, "Iraqi Army Faces Death." *See also* Michael Knights, "Bringing Iraq's Ghost Soldiers Back to Life," The Washington Institute, December 10, 2014, *https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bringing-iraqs-ghost-forces-back-to-life*. *See also* Gray, *Embedded*, 95.

creates a perception of favoritism and increases the workload of the soldiers who remain.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the practice is wide enough to have a significant impact. Prime Minister Abadi publicly announced in December 2014 that there were 50,000 ghost soldiers in the military.[202] Other estimates suggest 30–40 percent of any given unit may be ghosts.[203] This practice, combined with poor living and working conditions, creates soldiers who are mistrustful of their leadership and who take their frustrations out on a population they perceive as hostile. For example, when the Iraqi Army responded to Da'esh forces in Qere Tepe, they also turned on the Sunni population. As one account noted, "[i] nstead of chasing the gunmen, the soldiers turned on the residents of the Sunni-majority village . . . troops raided the homes the militants had used for cover and arrested a dozen people, including two elderly men."[204]

More to the point, where these conditions are present, trust is absent. In addition to there being very little reason for Iraqi soldiers to trust their leadership, when soldiers take their frustration out on the local citizenry, there is little reason for that citizenry to trust them. When fighting renewed in late 2012, there were mass desertions. Though it is difficult to get accurate numbers, frequent references in the Iraqi press suggest that the problem is significant.[205] In fact, in August 2013, Maliki issued an amnesty for deserters in hopes of getting the soldiers to return.[206] Given that this

202. Knights, "Bringing Iraq's Ghost Soldiers."
203. Rayburn and Sobchak, *The US Army*, 589–590.
204. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military."
205. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military."
206. Morris, "Iraqi Army Faces Death." *See also* Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military." According to Bradley, "Desertion is a persistent and growing problem, particularly for

amnesty was offered prior to Da'esh seizure of Mosul and Anbar and the subsequent increase in fighting, it suggests that the desertions were motivated, in part at least, by the conditions under which the soldiers served more so than the threats they faced.

All of these conditions, of course, have a profound impact on discipline—or the lack thereof. One adviser reported in 2007 that discipline in the new Iraqi Army was characterized by a lack of respect for officers not seen in the old army. Moreover, there is evidence that the officers, at least at the time, did not care. The Jones Report also cited ineffective implementation of the Iraqi Code of Military Discipline as a significant point of concern.[207] As the advisor described it:

> Sadly, the Iraqi Army is set up so that soldiers have no service obligation and face no legal punishments. If a jundi [soldier] decides the Iraqi army sucks and wants to quit, he can. Likewise, if he wants to tell a superior officer to rot in hell, he can. In the Iraqi army it is nearly impossible for officers to maintain military rule that is necessary to execute combat operations. A formal legal system simply does not exist. The only way for officers to punish the jundi is to take away pay or leave, but when they implement this punishment, the jundi just quit.[208]

To the extent that the Iraqi Army has not made improvements in enforcing its disciplinary code, it will very likely backslide into the ineffective force of 2014.

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troops deployed in Anbar and other areas in the north where ISIS is active."

207. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 55.

208. Gray, *Embedded*, 108.

SECTARIANISM AND MILITIA INFLUENCE

As suggested above, sectarian and militia influences will continue to plague the Iraqi Army, much as they did prior to 2007 when Iraq nearly fell into civil war, though the nature of that influence has changed. At one level, sectarian influence in the Iraqi Army is structural. As noted above, when the United States reformed the Iraqi Army in 2004, it deliberately set demographic quotas for the newly formed units. Though there were some anecdotes of cross-sectarian cooperation,[209] for the most part, these demographic divides undermined organizational trust and created barriers to effective communication, coordination, and cooperation within organizations.

For example, in May 2013, the Kurdish commander of the 16th Brigade of the 4th Division refused orders to rotate his unit out of the disputed internal boundaries and defected with the rest of the Kurdish soldiers and their equipment to the peshmerga, in a way reminiscent of how Kurds in the Iraqi Army defected in the sixties and seventies.[210] Though this defection did not significantly impact Baghdad's fight against the Islamists, it did illustrate the point that until Iraq resolves its sectarian political issues, the sectarian

209. Brasier, *But Ma'am*, 24. Brasier relates that sectarian boundaries seemed to drop when a Kurdish officer saved the life of a Shia officer after a traffic accident.

210. Ben Van Heuvelen and Patrick Osgood, "Amid Rising Ethnic Tension, Kurdish Brigade Soldiers Stop Taking Orders from Baghdad," *Washington Post*, June 11, 2013, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/amid-rising-ethnic-tension-kurdish-brigade-soldiers-stop-taking-orders-from-baghdad/2013/06/10/e3faa8d4-d1f7-11e2-9f1a-1a7cdee20287_story.html?utm_term=.89923bce00b1*.

identities of its leaders and forces will continue to negatively impact its operational capabilities.

Moreover, political parties, especially Shia ones, took advantage of these quotas to ensure personnel, especially those in leadership positions, were loyal to their party. But rather than cooperatively pooling their resources to develop effective forces, these parties—even ones which shared a sectarian identity—competed for positions within the new forces. Thus, the struggle was better described in political, not sectarian, terms. But since these parties aligned with particular sects, this political struggle naturally became sectarian in nature.[211] As a result, it was often the case that members of some sects, especially Sunnis, were displaced both because they were not trusted and to make room for personnel associated with other competing parties. Whatever the source, these sectarian influences "eroded the dependability of many Iraqi units,"[212] rendering them "incapable of providing security to the Iraqi public."[213]

Further, militia relationships with the ISF worked both ways, as soldiers would often moonlight for militia organizations when they were on leave. As one Iraqi officer put it, "You are a young military man, strong, trained, and so forth. How can you not join a militia when you get home? Your family and tribe would be ashamed if you did not help the local militia."[214]

Additionally, as *The Military Balance 2014* observed, Maliki installed *dimaj* [integration] officers in the ISF to contain possible Baathist resurgence following the

211. Pfaff, *Development and Reform*, 9–16.
212. Government Accountability Office, *Stabilizing Iraq*, 11.
213. Jones, *Report of the Independent Commission*, 9.
214. Gray, *Embedded*, 189.

reintegration of officers who served under Saddam.[215] For the most part, these integration officers had no military experience and were simply a vector for political influence, further contributing to the politicization of the ISF. It is not clear to what extent, if any, they play a role in the current security services.

Unlike in 2007, when parties and militias battled over control of the ministries and their resources, these same sectarian entities now often compete and cooperate with these ministries to ensure their prominent and public role in improving the security situation. In some cases, they coopt ISF units, including uniforms, vehicles, and identification, to ensure freedom of movement as they ethnically cleanse Sunni neighborhoods. For example, in the town of Buhriz, near Baqubah, Shia militia members associated with Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq reportedly entered the town at the ISF's request to assist in responding to Da'esh's killing of an ISF officer. While in the town, they detained a number of Sunni males and otherwise disrupted civil life. As a press report noted, "[b]y the following day, 28 villagers had been killed and several houses torched, local officials said."[216] In other cases, they conduct their own, independent operations to secure Shia populations in mixed areas.

Additionally, to support their operations, these same militias are known to extort funds through kidnapping and other forms of organized crime, in addition to more conventional, and legal, forms of fundraising.[217] As a result, in their zeal to contribute

215. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2014*, 322. *Dimaj* is Arabic for "integration."

216. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military." *See also* "Alas, It May Make Little Difference."

217. Anthony J. Schwarz, "Iraq's Militias: The True Threat to Coalition Success in Iraq," *Parameters* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2007),

to Iraq's security, they undermine the government's monopoly on force, which is a cornerstone of national stability.[218] This problem is especially acute where militias associated with the PMF have stepped in to fill the security vacuum. In these areas, militias often extort money from locals by charging them for protection or for simply using the roads, on which they have established numerous checkpoints.

So though it would be wrong to say the ISF has overcome its sectarian past, how that sectarianism manifests itself continues to evolve as each faction attempts to both carve out its own space and respond to others' attempts to do so. As former Office of Security Cooperation—Iraq Chief Lieutenant General Robert Caslen stated in 2013, "the Iraqis preserved ethnic and sectarian diversity in the military's upper ranks, as instructed by the Americans. But the nation's divisions permeated even that arrangement. Officers routinely bypassed the chain of command to deal with soldiers from similar backgrounds. . . . There is a lot of distrust in the organization."[219]

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

The current moment affords the United States and its partners a unique opportunity to advance the capabilities—and, to some degree, the professionalism—of the Iraqi Army. Taking advantage of this opportunity, however, will come with significant challenges. At the time of this writing, the results of the May 2018 elections have placed a mix of pro-Iran, pro-Muqtada al-Sadr, and pro-United States

55–71.

218. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1964), 156.

219. Bradley and Nabhan, "Fledgling Iraqi Military."

politicians in positions of power.[220] Moreover, the PMF has established itself as a security force practically, if not constitutionally, separate from the MOD and MOI. This division will ensure competition for funds and resources and complicate the provision of US support, requiring additional oversight to ensure militia organizations do not benefit. Further complicating the picture is the ISF's role in killing and injuring protestors who have been demonstrating against Iranian influence and poor governance.[221] In doing so, it threatens the popular legitimacy and support it gained in the fight against Da'esh.

Still, the United States has a number of comparative advantages over Iraq's other security partners, especially Iran, that, if used properly, can set conditions for a more professional army, improve the Iraqi Army's ability to partner with coalition forces in the continued fight against Da'esh, and enable the army to conduct unilateral operations that serve the mutual interests of Iraq and the United States. Those comparative advantages do not just include superior weapons, equipment, and maintenance support. They also include superior intelligence and logistics support as well as, when appropriate, access to coalition air and indirect fire assets. Though the Iranians have made much in Iraqi media regarding their contribution in the fight against Da'esh, most senior Iraqi leaders

220. Jessa Rose Dury-Agri and Patrick Hamon, "Breaking Down Iraq's Election Results," Institute for the Study of War, May 24, 2018, *http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/breaking-down-iraqs-election-results*.

221. C. Anthony Pfaff, "Iraq Protests: How Should the Government and US Respond?" The Atlantic Council, October 3, 2019, *https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/iraq-protests-how-should-iraq-and-the-us-respond/*.

would acknowledge the decisive contribution the United States-led coalition made to the outcome.[222]

Additionally, partnership with the United States can facilitate greater connectivity to the international community, which will increase the resources available for development and which can, over time, bolster the country's legitimacy as a responsible, international actor. Though there is not necessarily a correlation between positive international engagement and an increasingly trusted and competent Iraqi Army, the benefits of such status and scrutiny do serve as incentives for the Iraqis to make at least some of the necessary reforms.

Despite the current Iraqi government's inconsistently positive relations with Iran, it is still very likely Iraq will still seek some level cooperation with the United States and its partners. After the experience of fighting Da'esh with US assistance, it will be difficult for Iraqi leaders to turn down the quality of equipment, support, and expertise the United States-led coalition can offer. In fact, Iraqi leaders closely associated with Iran, such as Hadi al-Amiri and Interior Minister Qasim al-Araji, have expressed interest in continued security cooperation with the United States as well as the presence of some US troops.[223] Moreover, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi is known as a relatively moderate member of the pro-Iranian Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq who

222. Matt Bradley, "Victory over Islamic State in Iraqi Town Has Some Cheering Iran," *Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 2015, *https://www.wsj.com/articles/victory-over-islamic-state-in-iraqi-town-has-some-cheering-iran-1446240997*.

223. Margaret Coker, "The US Takes a Risk: Old Iraqi Enemies Are Now Allies," *New York Times*, May 11, 2018, *https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/11/world/middleeast/iraq-iran-election-enemies.html*.

lived in exile in France until the fall of Saddam. Thus, future cooperation seems likely.[224]

Good relationships with a variety of Iraqi actors will be critical to the success of US security cooperation efforts. Mara E. Karlin, in *Building Militaries in Fragile States,* argues that deep US involvement in a partner's "sensitive military affairs" and a diminishing role of actors antagonistic to US involvement are critical elements to successful security cooperation aimed at assisting the ability of partners to provide for internal defense.[225] This point suggests US security cooperators, advisors, and senior leaders should work to develop sufficiently close relationships that Iraqi military leaders accept advice and suggestions regarding measures that will facilitate the Iraqi Army's development and reform. Failure to establish such relationships should be considered a constraint on the effectiveness of security cooperation efforts.

Unity of Command

Much of the Iraqi Army's problems boil down to one thing: leadership. Michael Knights, who authored *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces* on behalf of the Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, an Iraqi think tank, argues Iraq needs a "powerful Chief of Defense (CHOD)" who would serve as the "one paramount military deputy to the prime minister." This CHOD should be nonsectarian; militarily competent; and willing to improve discipline, punish incompetence and corruption, and stand-up to the

224. "Iraq: Adel Abdul Mahdi named prime minister," Al Jazeera, October 3, 2018, *https://www.aljazeera.com /news/middleeast/2018/10/iraq-adel-abdul-mahdi-named-prime -minister-181003053509104.html*.

225. Karlin, *Building Militaries*, 19.

militias. Additionally, he argues for a "broadening of capable junior leaders" who respond through the chain of command to the "clearly recognized leadership" of the CHOD.[226] Knights is right about the ISF needing such leadership; however, Iraq's past suggests obtaining it is unlikely, at least in the short term, until the political and social dynamics that divide Iraq's loyalties are resolved and the army is trusted by the government to work for it rather than serve as a potential check against it. Thus, in the short term at least, divided leadership will be a constraint on the kind of capability development the Iraqi Army can accomplish, even with US help.

- Having said that, the Iraqi Army could make a great deal of progress with a leader who is broadly trusted and able to reach across sectarian lines. US leadership can quietly identify such leaders and encourage the Iraqi government to appoint them.
- At the same time, US security advisors should identify alternative chains of command and continue to discourage their use by reinforcing the formal chain. To facilitate this effort, US advisors should reinforce ties between the MOD, the National Operations Center, and the chief of the army.

US security cooperators should also identify overlapping areas of responsibility within the army and within the other services and PMF and seek ways to make competing roles and responsibilities more complementary. For example, Knights observes the PMF was good at defensive operations in Shia-dominated areas; however, it was largely incompetent at offensive operations in Da'esh-held

226. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 40–43.

areas.[227] It is worth pointing out that complementary roles do not have to be entirely exclusive. There will always be the potential for some overlap, especially as counterterrorism and counterinsurgence efforts involve the full range of security services. As noted earlier, some jurisdictional competition is healthy, so to the extent any overlap does exist, it can promote the effectiveness of the profession.

Corruption

As noted above, corruption is endemic and entrenched in the Iraqi government, not just the security services. Though it is unlikely it will be eliminated, units like the CTS have demonstrated it can be reduced to a level such that it is not a barrier to effective and professional leadership. But, as with unity of command, any meaningful solution will require strong and determined Iraqi leadership. The United States should continue to encourage senior Iraqi leadership to remove corrupt and incompetent leaders at every level.

- To encourage that leadership, US security cooperators should make US support, including training and equipment, contingent on units adopting accountability practices, in the same way the United States does end-service monitoring. The idea is to set up a dynamic where a relationship with the US Army brings sufficient benefit—tangible and intangible—such that abandoning corrupt practices will be worthwhile.
- To support anti-corruption efforts, US security cooperators should leverage support to get the

227. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 31.

Iraqis to adopt procedures to reduce the opportunities for corruption. For example, rather than providing funds directly to units to pay soldiers, the Iraqi Army should establish individual accounts at local banks. Soldiers would have to physically go to the bank and provide adequate identification to receive their pay. While not a foolproof system, it would make it more difficult to employ ghost soldiers.

- To the extent technology can reinforce corruption-resistant procedures, US security cooperators should leverage support to get the Iraqis to adopt it, consistent with their ability to use it effectively.
- Conditioning US support on meaningful corruption reduction measures will likely limit the units, organizations, and leaders with which the United States can effectively cooperate, at least in the short term. This point suggests the United States should be prepared to provide more direct support, including direct action, to prevent a Da'esh resurgence. Thus, security cooperation efforts should emphasize interoperability, including joint training, to exercise the US ability to effectively support Iraqi Army operations.
- Encourage senior Iraqi leadership to develop and promulgate a professional ethic compatible with Iraqi culture which establishes an Iraqi Army identity, encouraging commitment to humanitarian ideals, competence, and effective stewardship of the profession.

Poor Combat Support: Communications, Intelligence, and Logistics

Improving unity of command and reducing corruption, will, of course, go a long way in improving Iraq's combat support capabilities. But divided and corrupt leadership is not the only barrier the current Iraqi Army has to developing these capabilities. There are a number of technological and procedural hurdles the Iraqis will have to overcome as well.

- Currently, a great deal of communication among Iraqi Army units occurs over civilian infrastructure that is extremely unreliable and unsecure. Moreover, Iraqis tend to prefer to use their personal cell phones to communicate, even when military means of communication are available. This point suggests that advisory engagement, as well as Title X exchanges, aimed at encouraging the use and maintenance of military communications should be a part of any comprehensive security cooperation plan.
- In the years after the withdrawal of US forces and before the fall of Mosul to Da'esh, US military intelligence cooperation was extremely limited, despite numerous Iraqi requests for assistance. Since poor intelligence has been a frequent contributor to Iraq's military disasters, US security cooperators should emphasize intelligence cooperation and interoperability as key elements of the security cooperation plan. While Iraq's relationship to Iran will likely limit what intelligence the United States can share, US advisors need to ensure authorities, permissions, and procedures are in place to share

intelligence regarding Da'esh resurgence before it metastasizes.

- US advisors should strongly discourage the use of military intelligence units to secure the Iraqi government against other security services. Though it makes sense for each service to have effective counterintelligence and criminal investigation units, the services need to be independent of the chain of command and strictly focused on threats internal to the respective organizations. US advisors are likely going to be limited in their ability to monitor such relationships, so where they are present, they should be seen as a constraint on cooperation.
- Regarding logistics and maintenance, Knights reports Iraqis "remain fearful of trusting electronic systems, feeling they can minimize theft and loss if they stick to paper and sign-offs they are more familiar with."[228] Unfortunately, the reality has been the opposite. Much of these difficulties have been the result of degradation of the Iraqi military following the 1991 Gulf War, the subsequent sanctions that reduced Iraq to a survival economy that relied on corrupt practices, and the disbanding of the army in 2003 and the unfamiliar systems US advisors imposed when trying to rebuild it. These points suggest the following three measures for stimulating reform and building resiliency.
    - Encourage the Iraqis to develop technical solutions that are compatible with their capabilities and comfort level but that can provide independent accounting for supplies, spare parts, and maintenance

228. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 50.

activities. Fixing Iraq's combat support systems requires—to the extent possible—an independent source of relevant information that illuminates corrupt and inefficient practices in a way all parties, regardless of sectarian affiliation, can trust. Technology is one way to provide that.

- Decentralize logistics and maintenance operations to make the system more responsive.
- As with intelligence, Iraqi capabilities will take a long time to develop and may not be adequately capable by the time Da'esh has been revived. This point suggests US security cooperators should emphasize logistic interoperability so US logistics capabilities can assist the Iraqis quickly in times of crisis.

Absenteeism, Administration, and Risk Aversion

As suggested above, all of these critical vulnerabilities of the Iraqi Army are closely linked to each other. Improving unity, reducing corruption, and improving accountability will go a long way toward reducing absenteeism and risk aversion, and improving administrative capabilities will be critical to all of these efforts. The goal here is to establish a "virtuous cycle" where improving administrative capabilities reduces corruption, leads to better quality of life for soldiers, and thus increases trust in their leadership. Such trust should reduce risk aversion as well as incentivize improvements in combat and combat support capabilities.

- Creating such a virtuous cycle requires improving the quality of Iraqi soldiers. As noted above, in 2007 most Iraqi soldiers saw the military as

a job—and a miserable one at that. By 2018, the Iraqi Army had partially restored the pride Iraqis once took in the military; however, to sustain that, the Iraqi Army must draw on more educated and capable elements of its society. Doing so suggests the following measures.

- Just as it did at its founding—and again during the Iran-Iraq War—the Iraqi Army needs to recruit capable individuals, particularly those in technical fields, to assume roles as junior officers.[229] Given the current divisiveness of Iraqi politics, the government should not resort to conscription, as this would likely be viewed as a means to marginalizing certain populations, just as it was in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, the government should capitalize on the current public trust and provide strong incentives for college students and graduates to join.
- As the Iraqi Army's historic ideal suggests, it can be very proficient at heavily scripted, short-duration operations with very specific objectives. But it will be some time before it is capable of more complex operations without considerable external support. Thus, US advisors should emphasize individual and small-unit skills with the aim to build a competent base of skilled soldiers and junior leaders and to set the conditions for developing capabilities for larger unit operations.
- As noted earlier, the establishment of professional military educational institutions was critical to establishing the army as a profession. Thus, US security cooperators

229. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 44.

should emphasize relationships with Iraq's professional military education schools. These relationships should emphasize both tactical and operational skills and the standards associated with establishing and maintaining a profession. Additionally, the United States should attempt to reinvigorate Iraq's Defense Language Institute English language programs, as doing so would facilitate interoperability with US forces and the larger coalition.[230]

Sectarianism

While it is worth noting that Iraq's Shia population are largely responsible for the protests directed at Iran and the Shia-dominated Iraqi government, it may be too soon to say that Iraq may finally be getting past the sectarianism that has divided it since the US invasion as the forces that tore it apart are still, potentially at least, in play.[231] Iranian influence, especially when manifested by the brutal practices of the PMF, continues to drive fear into the Sunni population, which creates space for Da'esh or any other group that claims to defend Sunnis' interests.[232] Any such resurgence would simply validate again a willingness among the Shia majority to sanction harsh measures against Sunni actors, resulting in the same

230. When the author toured the English language lab at the Iraq Military Academy Rustamiyah in 2013, it appeared to be largely unused.

231. "Fifteen Years after America's Invasion, Iraq is Getting back on its Feet," *Economist*, March 31, 2018, *https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/03/31/fifteen-years-after-americas-invasion-iraq-is-getting-back-on-its-feet*.

232. See Amnesty International, *Iraq*, for a fuller account.

dynamics seen in 2014. The aftermath of the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017 has both made independence more remote and exacerbated divisions among Iraq's parties. So, in many ways, Iraq's sects are even more divided now than they have been in the past. How those divisions manifest themselves depends to a large extent on the actions of the new government, the formation of which at the time of this writing is incomplete. Playing a role in resolving these tensions suggests the following measures.

- Do not let the presence of Iranian influence prevent relationship development with Iraqi units, including the PMF. Given Iran's location and history with Iraq, it naturally has a strong security interest in how the ISF develops. Thus, it would be naïve to expect it not to try to influence the ISF's evolution and futile to try to stop it from doing so completely. Zero tolerance of Iranian influence, a past US policy, simply will not serve any purpose in post-Da'esh Iraq. Though certain kinds of Iranian influence should limit cooperation, not having any relations simply cedes that space to them. Moreover, it reinforces the perception that Iran is dominant in Iraq, which both stokes fear among Sunnis and divides the various Shia groups, not all of whom want to have such close ties to Iran. The key to such relationships is to rely on US advantages the Iranians cannot replicate and to make any support contingent on taking the steps required to build an Iraqi Army which is, among other things, nonsectarian.
- Discourage the Iraqi government from indulging in the urge to create new security institutions and encourage it to place all security

organizations under the direct operational control of either the MOD or MOI, as appropriate. As the recent establishment of the PMF as yet another force that directly reports to the prime minister has shown, new organizations are often just another means for some actor to engage in malign influence.[233]

- Maintain a relationship with and support for Kurdish Regional Guard Brigades, which are peshmerga units that have agreed to respond to Iraqi government control. After the events in Kirkuk in 2017, when Iraqi Army units occupied territory in the disputed areas, the relationship between peshmerga and the Iraqi military is tenuous at best, with the likelihood they will be adversaries or allies an even split. The United States should play a role in building up the Regional Guard Brigades, but in a way that builds, or at least does not undermine, ties with Baghdad. In the zero-sum game of Iraqi politics, supporting the Kurds could be seen by Baghdad as a threat and result in restrictions on its cooperation with the United States. Alienating Baghdad risks ceding more space to the Iranians, as good relations with Baghdad are necessary for contesting malign Iranian influence.
- When engaging a wide variety of potential Iraqi partners, it is important to remember the United States represents to some factions the same kind of sectarian concerns Iran does.[234] For that

233. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, 37.

234. Gray, *Embedded*, 65. Gray reports multiple interactions where Iraqis compared US forces to the British mandate. The author had similar experiences in 2012–2013 and 2005–2006 when serving in the Civilian Police Assistance Transition Team.

reason, the United States should continue to encourage a wide variety of like-minded partners to develop security cooperation activities with the Iraqis, much like the Italian *Carabinieri's* cooperation with the Iraqi Federal Police. More international cooperation will both increase the resources available to the Iraqi Army and legitimate the US presence in ways the Iranians will not be able to replicate.

- To contain the growing influence of the PMF as well as avoid the mistakes regarding ISF integration made in the past, the United States could encourage a local role for the various militias similar to the model the British employed during the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman. In that country, the British convinced the Omani sultan to establish *Firqat*, which were platoon-to-company-sized organizations of tribal fighters who came from the same tribes that were rebelling. They were employed locally, had a few British Special Air Service advisors, and served as scouts, guides, and home guards that were able to consolidate regular Omani force gains.[235]
- The US should also actively release information regarding PMF and Iranian malign activities, especially violence conducted against Iraqis, in order to undermine support for Iran and its proxies both with the Iraqi public as well as the international community.

235. Walter C. Ludwig III, "Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no. 1 (March 2008), 73.

Table 2. Focus Areas for Iraqi and US Engagement

FOCUS AREA	IRAQI ACTION	US ACTION	OUTCOME
UNITY OF COMMAND	Empowered CHOD, ground force commander; align CTS, PMF under MOD or MOI; eliminate alternate/ overlapping chains of command and roles; improve quality of junior officers	Title X activities should emphasize communications, use of issued radios, communications gear; actively discourage alternate chains of command	Empowered CHOD and subordinate commanders who effectively address corruption and incompetence, build trust; adequate communications infrastructure to securely coordinate operations across multiple operations commands; clear and complementary roles among services
CORRUPTION	Eliminate purchasing commands, ghost soldiers; fire corrupt, ineffective officers; pay soldiers through individual bank accounts; improve professional standards to create extended trust	Identify and advocate for trusted leaders in critical positions; leverage support to encourage adoption of anti-corruption measures	Resource loss due to corruption does not affect readiness; widespread perception that corrupt practices will be punished and good practices rewarded; improved trust
COMBAT SUPPORT (Communications, Logistics and Maintenance, Intelligence,)	Improve communications infrastructure; automate accountability to extent possible; decentralize responsibility; improve tactical intelligence collection/ dissemination	Title X activities should emphasize interoperability and exhibit good practices; encourage like-minded partners to engage in these areas; decentralize responsibility	The United States and coalition partners can effectively integrate their communications, logistics, and intelligence capabilities to support Iraqi operations; Iraqi capabilities gradually improve

Table 2 *(continued)*

FOCUS AREA	IRAQI ACTION	US ACTION	OUTCOME
PERSONNEL (Absenteeism; Administration; Risk Aversion)	Adopt appropriate technological accounting and management solutions; better enforce disciplinary code; increase recruitment of college-educated persons	Encourage appropriate technological solutions to accountability and management issues; Title X activities should emphasize small-unit tactics and individual soldier skills	Administrative backbone capable of accounting for personnel and equipment, identifying corrupt activities; Iraqi soldiers and units confident in ability to conduct limited, short-duration operations
SECTARIANISM	Align PMF under MOD/MOI or establish complementary roles; avoid creating additional security institutions; eliminate demographic quotas; adopt Dhofar model for militia integration—militias integrated as groups and which play local security role under control of the ISF	Consider establishing relations with select PMF units and support those willing to play constructive, nonsectarian roles; support the Regional Guard Brigades, but work toward better integration with MOD; encourage like-minded partner engagement, especially with units with which the United States may not be able to establish a relationship	PMF plays complementary, defensive roles and does not provoke sectarian tensions; Iraqi-Kurd cooperation/interoperability sufficient to avoid misunderstanding; local militias play constructive, local security role and are responsive to central government

CONCLUSION

With Da'esh no longer in control of Iraqi territory, the rationale for US direct action, large numbers of advisors, and robust intelligence and logistics support will disappear. This point is true from the perspectives of both Iraq and the United States. For the Iraqis' part, they will likely accept—and the Iranians will likely tolerate—only limited forms of US cooperation against Da'esh and any other militant groups that again threaten Iraqi sovereignty. For the United States' part, limited resources and growing global security challenges will likely divert its attention—and, with it, security cooperation resources—elsewhere. These points suggest whatever bilateral US cooperation survives in post-Da'esh Iraq will be inadequate to the task of wholly professionalizing the Iraqi Army, much less the other defense and security institutions.

Despite this bleak assessment, all is not necessarily lost. If, as de Toqueville observed, unwarranted optimism is a condition of the American culture,[236] it is inevitable that the United States will try yet again. The good news this time is the US military has a lot more experience with what works and what does not, as well as what is achievable.

It should be clear from this analysis that no external party, neither the United States nor Iran, will ever be in a position to entirely address the political, social, cultural, and economic factors that impede the Iraqi Army's ability to professionalize. But by directing attention to the conditions that facilitate the

236. Jared Keller, "What Makes Americans So Optimistic," *Atlantic*, March 25, 2015, *https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/03/the-american-ethic-and-the-spirit-of-optimism/388538/*.

growth of a professional officer and noncommissioned officer corps, one can help develop institutions that communicate and expand expert knowledge as well as the factors that undermine trust. In this way, external actors can influence the Iraqi Army to make the reforms necessary for it to become an effective fighting force.

Moreover, the current moment in Iraq's military history gives it rare momentum to reform. The catalyst for this reform is both the expected, long-term demand to confront Da'esh and the benefits Iraq stands to gain by playing a constructive security role as an accepted member of the broader international community. Thus, the long-term goal of US security cooperation with Iraq should be to establish its military as a valuable security partner capable of participating in regional security arrangements, much in the same way Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and even Oman do. Of course, getting to that point depends on political developments the United States has limited ability to influence, much less control. As such, failure to reconcile and accommodate Iraq's multiple competing factions would reinforce alternate chains of command and undermine the unity essential to reducing corruption and sectarian influence. Unless these factors are addressed by a forward-looking US military assistance program, the Iraqi Army will remain one of the least effective fighting forces in the Arab world, despite the courage of its individual soldiers. The shortcomings of the Iraqi Army and other security services identified in this paper should both inform and constrain the kinds and scope of security cooperation undertaken by the United States.

Having said that, continued, steady engagement emphasizing the critical areas discussed above should

serve to set conditions for meaningful improvement when political and social conditions permit. Of course, no one measure is going to improve the Iraqi Army. But, taken together, these recommendations represent a good chance for US security cooperation efforts to achieve a tipping point that enables the kind of reform that can allow the Iraqi Army to move beyond its historic limitations. As US security cooperators attempt to set those conditions on what will likely be a shoestring budget, getting to that tipping point will require implementing measures aimed at building trust within the Iraqi Army and with the other security services and the civilian government. Building that trust will allow the Iraqi Army to better harness the resources it has, establish the kinds of institutions that can sustain its current momentum toward meaningful reform, and establish itself as a professional, effective military force in a region in desperate need of stability.

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ISBN 1-58487-819-3
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