DAVID M. WITTY

IRAQ'S POST-2014 COUNTER TERRORISM SERVICE

IRAQ'S POST-2014

COUNTER TERRORISM SERVICE

DAVID M. WITTY

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
www.washingtoninstitute.org

The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

Policy Focus 157
First publication: October 2018

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
1111 19th Street NW, Suite 500
Washington DC 20036
www.washingtoninstitute.org

Design: 1000colors.org
Cover photo: Iraqi CTF (Warzer Jaff).

THIS STUDY is dedicated to the members of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service and their Coalition advisors and trainers. The world truly owes them a debt of gratitude.

CONTENTS

Author's Note vii

Acknowledgments ix

ONE Introduction 1

TWO Changes During the Islamic State Campaign 4

THREE The CTS as an Institution 19

FOUR Training, Recruitment, and Casualties 45

FIVE The Present and Future CTS 62

SIX Analysis and Recommendations 69

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIG. 1 CTS Structure 20

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS STUDY, a wholly original treatment of Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), takes into account dramatic battlefield events that have occurred from 2014 up to the present day. It draws as well from research that eventually found form in a March 2015 Brookings Institution study, but this earlier work mainly covered the period prior to the Islamic State takeover of Mosul in 2014. For those primarily interested in a detailed history of Iraqi Special Operations Forces and the CTS from 2003 through 2014, please refer to the original Brookings report.†

† David Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WANT TO THANK the Washington Institute for inviting me to publish this study. Special thanks to Michael Knights; without his support, invaluable comments, detailed suggestions, and previous work on the Iraqi Security Forces, this project would have been impossible. Michael Einsenstadt provided detailed line-by-line comments and suggestions on the draft. Patrick Clawson, research director, gave the final approval for the pursuit of the study. Jason Warshof did the yeoman's work of editing my writing and correctly formatting my citations. The excellent presentation of the study is due to the extraordinary efforts of publications director Mary Kalbach Horan with organization, editorial oversight, and graphic design.

Mike Giglio of *BuzzFeed* and Mitch Utterback, freelance journalist, helped in the pursuit of a cover photo for the study. Warzer Jaff took the photo used on the cover.

I want to especially thank the numerous former Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service advisors whom I interviewed for this study. The time they spent with me is greatly appreciated and provided the clearest understanding of the situation.

Inclosing, special thanks to my wife, Heidi, for enduring the hours I spent in research and writing.

David M. Witty
October 2018

1.

INTRODUCTION

ON DECEMBER 9, 2017, Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi announced that his country had been fully liberated from the Islamic State (IS). This announcement came after the Iraqi security forces (ISF) took back the last strip of IS-controlled land along the border with Syria,[1] although remnants and cells from the jihadist group held out in remote areas. Above all others, one small Iraqi force of about ten thousand men served as the tip of the spear in the conventional defeat of IS—namely, the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), a security agency independent of the Iraqi Ministries of Interior and Defense and falling directly under the Office of the Prime Minister. In fact, the CTS had been created by the United States in the years after its 2003 invasion of Iraq, and U.S. officials still consider it Iraq's best fighting force, leading most operations in the war against IS.[2] In turn, the CTS has always had a close relationship with the United States and credits the U.S.-led coalition's support for much of its success.[3]

As its name implies, the CTS was established to conduct, coordinate, and lead all Iraqi counterterrorism efforts. However, the war against the Islamic State forced the service to quickly adapt to a new role for which it was neither trained nor equipped. The experience of the CTS since 2014 has demonstrated:

- the ability of a highly trained force to rapidly alter its fundamental mission orientation;
- the swiftness with which perceptions of a U.S.-created force can rise when it performs well;

- the critical role of international support in enabling the success of such a force;
- the ability of an elite force to sustain significant casualties but continue to function;
- how dramatic changes can occur in the perception and support of a force by the nation's other security forces; and
- how partner forces can be rapidly transformed during combat—with lessons for other units in the ISF and other partner militaries in the region.

The CTS stands as validation of the U.S. "by, with, and through" concept of using local forces to conduct ground combat,[4] albeit requiring extensive U.S. coalition assistance, especially air support. As compared to other ISF units, the CTS represents a significant return on U.S. investment, while also serving as a means to leverage U.S. influence in Iraq and counter Iranian penetration. Yet the service is endangered. Its use as a conventional fighting force cost Iraq many of its hardest-to-replace elite fighters. Those forces now need to be reconstituted, a goal that can be achieved through a combination of Iraqi and U.S. funding.

The CTS can once again become the highly cost-effective investment it was before, but only if the United States acts quickly and works to keep the service small and focused on counterterrorism. Indeed, the Islamic State grew in 2013–14 when the CTS was starved of resources and forced to expand too quickly. And today, an IS deprived of its territorial hub can probably transition back to covert terrorism faster than the CTS can rediscover its core mission of counterterrorism.

With this background in mind, chapter 2 of this study discusses changes to the CTS during the 2014–17 struggle against the Islamic State, when it controlled Iraqi cities. Chapter 3 describes the CTS as an institution, including its structure and support sources, its leadership, and its relations with other ISF entities. Chapter 4 looks at CTS training, recruitment, casualties, and efforts to maintain quality. Chapter 5 examines the CTS today and in the future. And chapter 6 analyzes CTS strengths and weaknesses, assesses whether CTS effectiveness might be replicated on a larger scale, and concludes with recommendations.

NOTES

1. Maher Chmaytelli and Ahmed Aboulenein, "Iraq Declares Victory over Islamic State," Reuters, Dec. 9, 2018, https://reut.rs/2Le9B1I.
2. Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year (FY) 2018: Justification for FY 2018 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), Counter–Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF)*, May 2017, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO; Matthew L. Schehl, "These High-Speed Iraqi Commandos Are Leading the Charge into Fallujah," *Marine Corps Times*, May 24, 2016, http://bit.ly/2nTvhaa; and Michael Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces* (Baghdad: Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, March 2016), p. 26, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD.
3. Talib Shaghati al-Kenani, "Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab: La Yujad fi al-Jihaz 'Anasir Muntamin lil-Ahzab" [Counter Terrorism Service: There are no members of the service belonging to political parties], interview, AliraqNet.net, July 22, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MFkuP1.
4. Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans and Efforts to Train, Advise, Assist, and Equip the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service and the Iraqi Special Operations Forces*, DODIG-2017-074 (Alexandria, VA: DOD IG, 2017), p. 4, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

2.

CHANGES DURING THE ISLAMIC STATE CAMPAIGN

DURING ITS FIGHT against the Islamic State, the Counter Terrorism Service experienced a fundamental change in its role, reverberating on a number of levels.

BRIGHTENED REPUTATION

Beginning in 2014, with the rise of IS, the CTS experienced one of its most remarkable shifts in the sphere of reputation. In a relatively short period, it went from being feared by many segments of the Iraqi public to being the most respected formation in the ISF.

The earlier fear of the CTS derived in part from its publicity-shyness, secretive operations, and forbidding appearance, which made the group hard to distinguish from U.S. Special Forces (USSF), or Green Berets, in the years prior to 2011. Television stations broadcast negative stories on the CTS, and false rumors and exaggerations circulated on the Iraqi street. Rival ISF elements also worked to impede the CTS, and the service had enemies in the Iraqi parliament.[1] Due to its close relationship with the United States, many Iraqis perceived the CTS as a U.S. instrument.[2]

Most damagingly, the CTS—which today remains directly tied to the prime minister's office—was viewed as the personal Praetorian Guard of then prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, who sometimes used it to attack political opponents. Iraqis began referring to the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF), controlled by the CTS, as "*al-firqa al-qadhira*" (roughly, the dirty division).[3] Some Western press picked up on this dynamic and labeled the ISOF Maliki's "death squad."[4] Even though the United States had created the

CTS, some U.S. officials mistrusted it because of its ties to Maliki.[5] To avoid opprobrium, CTS members denied that they were in the organization and pretended instead to be in the Iraqi army.[6] In short, prior to 2014, the CTS felt isolated, misunderstood, and underappreciated by all parties except those who had direct experience with it.[7]

In January 2014, IS took Fallujah and, in June, Mosul, Iraq's second largest city.[8] It also spread into Salah al-Din and Babil provinces and approached Baghdad,[9] eventually taking nearly one-third of Iraq's territory.[10] Most ISF units were unable to hold back the IS onslaught,[11] and a third of Iraqi army and Federal Police brigades collapsed.[12] In contrast, the CTS remained cohesive, continued to function, and was at first practically the only element of the formal ISF[13] to serve Iraq as an effective fighting force.[14] Iraqis will no doubt always remember the role played by the CTS after the fall of Mosul,[15] when the service held ground and became a source of national pride.[16] In summer 2014, a small CTS unit dug in at the Bayji oil refinery against the jihadist group while outnumbered five to one and repeatedly rejected IS offers of safe passage in exchange for handing over the refinery.[17] When Maliki stepped down in August 2014, it put to rest the charges of CTS complicity with the prime minister's office, and general fears of a CTS political role subsided.[18]

Thereafter, the CTS spearheaded nearly every major operation to retake cities from IS, while other ISF entities played supporting roles.[19] As a result, the CTS today is popular and has the full faith of the Iraqi population.[20] During the post-2014 IS war, the CTS and ISOF were lauded in songs and poems, college students wore T-shirts with their logos, and social media sites displayed their images.[21] Likewise, CTS leaders used social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and even a smartphone app to further promote their organization, fully shedding the early secrecy that had enshrouded it.[22] Further, the CTS has been a cross-sectarian and multiethnic force since it was created, enjoying acceptance by both Sunnis and Shia.[23] The service gave Iraqis confidence in their country's unity, and without it, some believe Iraq would today be a failed state.[24] All in all, the CTS is now widely regarded as loyal to Iraq and not to any one person.[25]

ALTERED MISSION

Before 2014, the CTS conducted large-scale counterterrorism activities and maintained an operational pace at least as great as any other nation's

counterterrorism force.[26] The service's highly refined targeting process, developed in conjunction with U.S. advisors, contained a series of checks and balances to reduce the possibility of targeting that could be perceived as political or sectarian in nature. Although the CTS had arrest powers, it could not pursue terrorists without warrants from independent civilian judges.[27] The CTS cyclically developed intelligence, conducted operations, and used intelligence gained from targets to drive future operations.[28] Most CTS missions were performed at night, sometimes supported by helicopters from Iraqi army aviation, but generally CTS troops were transported to their targets using U.S.-supplied Humvees. Almost all operations were conducted at the company level and below, and battalion-level operations were extremely rare.[29] Before the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, USSF operational units conducted partnered combat operations with the CTS, and afterward the CTS operated alone.[30] During the hundreds of missions the CTS performed before the IS war, it suffered very few casualties, numbering only in the hundreds.[31]

More than a hundred U.S. advisors were embedded in all levels of the CTS before the American withdrawal in 2011,[32] and they instilled a sense of professionalism, ethics, and proficiency in the service uncommon in Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the region.[33] After the U.S. withdrawal, a handful of U.S. advisors and trainers remained with the CTS,[34] but the reduced numbers resulted in lowered standards and a decline in the quality of CTS training.[35] The years 2011–14 also saw widespread misuse of the CTS, since it was viewed as Iraq's most capable force and thus became the answer to all problems. Among the expanded roles, CTS personnel were used to man checkpoints, escort convoys, guard prisons, and secure voting centers.[36]

But whereas al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups had focused on carrying out terrorist attacks, the Islamic State operated like a regular army, capturing and holding territory.[37] IS fighters were flexible and quickly adopted semiconventional military tactics and weaponry that the ISF struggled to counter.[38] As one of Iraq's few effective fighting forces, the CTS was compelled to quickly adapt to conventional combat. Yet the service had no experience in this type of warfare, particularly in the urban combat needed to dislodge IS from cities. Out of necessity, the CTS mostly abandoned its counterterrorism mission,[39] and the targeting process and warrant system were used only in noncombat zones.[40] The CTS's new charge became the liberation of cities and the repelling of IS counterattacks,[41] missions

normally performed by conventional militaries, not SOF, and especially not by elite counterterrorism forces.[42] Although able to adapt to the new tactics, the CTS suffered high casualties and lost most of its original soldiers trained by USSF starting from 2003.[43] In mid-2016, a high-level U.S. advisor estimated total CTS casualties (killed and wounded) from 2014 to mid-2016 at 3,700–4,000, a large number given the size of the CTS.[44]

The CTS was the main assault force against IS and led nearly every major urban operation up to the beginning of the battle for west Mosul in February 2017.[45] The service would continue to be heavily involved in operations until all IS-controlled territory was liberated.[46] In April 2015, the CTS led the battle to retake Tikrit after other ISF and Popular Mobilization Forces failed.[47] The only true battlefield reversal suffered by the service occurred at Ramadi in May 2015, when CTS troops were struck with multiple armored car bombs in a coordinated IS offensive and withdrew from the city, throwing other ISF units into chaos.[48] The CTS later claimed it was forced to retreat to avoid being cut off and destroyed.[49] Whatever the circumstances, the CTS had carried out the defense of the city unassisted for nearly sixteen months, so its eventual retreat in the face of a powerful, well-planned ISIS attack is perhaps unsurprising. The incident, moreover, showed that the CTS was ill-suited to static defense and that it needed proper support to be effective on the battlefield.

The CTS was soon back on the offensive. Iraqi officials credited the service with doing most of the fighting to retake Ramadi in December 2015, following its earlier setback in the city, with only limited help from other ISF units, which were deployed in large numbers but remained on the city's outskirts.[50] The CTS was the first force to penetrate Fallujah, liberated in June 2016,[51] and also the first to breach the defenses of Mosul in November 2016. In east Mosul, the CTS fought IS virtually unsupported by any other force for almost six weeks and sustained significant casualties, estimated then as 50 percent injured and killed of involved units.[52] In the first half of the battle for west Mosul, the CTS played a less prominent role,[53] but it became a key frontline force in the battle's final months.[54] The CTS next fought at Tal Afar in August 2017,[55] Hawija in September and October of that year,[56] in the seizure of Kirkuk from the Kurdistan Regional Government in October,[57] and in west Anbar from October to December 2017.[58] In sum, the CTS played an outsize role in operations given its small numbers.[59]

CONVENTIONALIZATION AND OVERUSE

The CTS, taking on the Islamic State as a motorized infantry force,[60] fought battalion- and brigade-scale offensives, conducting combined arms operations that required artillery, close air support, and coordination with other ISF units.[61] It massed as many as fourteen battalions at a time for a single battle, about 60 percent of its total organizational structure, as in the case of west Mosul,[62] an arrangement that would have been unimaginable only a few years before.

The CTS initially tried to fight on the outskirts of cities to avoid civilian casualties,[63] but this became impossible when IS concentrated deep in urban areas.[64] In urban combat, the CTS mainly fought from armored Humvees and on foot in narrow streets. Often supported by Iraqi army tanks, it divided urban neighborhoods into grids, and cleared one grid at a time, using armored bulldozers to seal off streets to prevent car bomb attacks before soldiers dismounted from their vehicles to clear each building.[65] In Mosul, the CTS was noted for its backward-sweep method of securing neighborhoods. CTS forces would quickly penetrate to secure the far edges of neighborhoods—their daily objective—and then sweep back to the start lines in a detailed clearing of buildings, an approach judged effective since it gave IS multiple problems to confront simultaneously.[66]

The CTS's proficiency in basic urban infantry tactics varied greatly from unit to unit. Some of the older units first established by USSF demonstrated strong abilities in fighting both from vehicles and on foot, while some of the more recently created units were not as proficient.[67] More particularly, certain units showed they could provide proper covering fire while advancing with good on-foot movement techniques, while other units clearly were not as proficient in these areas. Effective use of body armor, helmets, and combat kits, or even the wearing of such apparel, was poorly reinforced in some units, a major shortcoming in urban warfare. Weapons were sometimes randomly fired, reflecting a lack of effective marksmanship. Some CTS units also, as already intimated, emphasized fighting from vehicles rather than on foot, which explains the high vehicle-loss rates encountered.[68] Numerous videos available on social media platforms showcase both these CTS strengths and weaknesses in urban combat.[69] The weaknesses are partially explained by reduced training standards (to be detailed later), combat attrition, and overuse of the force for years on end.

From the perspective of liberated communities, the CTS proved to be one of Iraq's most humane and trustworthy units, taking special care

when dealing with civilians in urban areas. The service described itself as fighting with one hand, while caring for civilians with the other,[70] and soldiers shared limited food and water and provided medical attention to wounded civilians.[71] During the Mosul fight, the CTS in many instances suffered higher casualties due to efforts to protect civilians.[72] Sometimes civilians moved out of the sectors of other advancing ISF units and into CTS sectors because they expected the latter to be more discriminate in the use of force.[73]

When faced with heavy IS resistance in cities, however, the CTS did make extensive use of coalition close air support. The CTS was sometimes authorized to directly request U.S. airstrikes, a very rare privilege for foreign forces supported by the United States.[74] In certain cases, this reliance on coalition airpower had devastating consequences:

- In Ramadi in late 2015 and early 2016, the CTS relied heavily on close air support, with more than six hundred airstrikes over a six-month period. During this battle, the city was very badly damaged.[75]
- In west Mosul, the CTS used close air support to reduce its casualty rates and was involved in the most high-profile example of unintentional civilian casualties.[76] Thus, in March 2017, the CTS called in a U.S. airstrike on a building that resulted in the death of more than one hundred civilians whom IS had packed into the building as human shields. A subsequent U.S. investigation found that the airstrike had ignited explosives hidden by the jihadist group in the building and that all CTS and coalition actions were conducted in accordance with the coalition's rules of engagement.[77]
- Altogether, an estimated 9,000–11,000 civilians were killed in the battle for Mosul, about one-third of them by coalition or Iraqi airstrikes and Federal Police and army artillery bombardments.[78] Parts of west Mosul were completely destroyed.[79]

The CTS also faced allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated against captured IS fighters. Videos and pictures have appeared on social media of CTS soldiers torturing and executing suspected IS fighters, cases the Iraqi government said it was investigating.[80] No investigation results were ever released, though. Allegations were particularly prevalent during the final stages of the battle for Mosul, when international observers reported possible CTS executions of suspected IS affiliates.[81] It is safe to assume the

CTS was involved in some such human rights abuses during intense urban-clearance operations.

The U.S.-led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Iraq provided U.S. and other coalition SOF advisors who often accompanied the CTS in combat, but advisors generally remained out of fighting range due to coalition restrictions on how close they could get to the enemy, and in urban fighting they were usually positioned out of the direct line of fire in fortified strongholds. These advisors assisted the CTS with planning and the coordination of close air support and artillery, provided advice, coordinated CTS advances with the coalition advisors of other ISF units, and sometimes deconflicted accidental fire exchanges between the CTS and other Iraqi units. U.S. and Iraqi forces did not undertake partnered combat operations, such as happened before the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. Almost no combat advising was provided by USSF but instead by other U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) such as Navy SEALs and U.S. Marine Corps SOF. Sometimes even non-USSOF units, such as the 101st Airborne Division, provided advice and support to the CTS during combat operations. Australian SOF also played a prominent role in offering combat advice to the CTS.[82]

While successful, the CTS was engaging in missions outside the purpose for which it was originally intended. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi admitted this fact, adding that the changes owed to the confidence of the Iraqi government and people in the service.[83] The CTS was thus overused to compensate for the weaknesses of other ISF units.[84] Furthermore, before 2014, the CTS operational cycle for its units was seven days of operations, seven days of training, and seven days of leave. During the IS war, this changed to no training, two weeks of operations, and one week of leave, although the intensity of fighting meant leave was not always available. Many CTS members served extended periods of continuous combat,[85] and CTS personnel had little rest between major battles.[86]

A U.S. Inspector General report covering late 2015 described the CTS situation: "The high operational tempo imposed by the exigencies of battle on Iraq's most elite units [CTS] over the past few years has taken a toll on the troops and their equipment."[87] After the CTS led the recapture of Ramadi, Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), a ranking member of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed his concern that the service risked being overused.[88] In December 2016, a senior U.S. Defense Department official said that if CTS losses in Mosul continued at the current rate, the service "could become combat ineffective in a little over a month, and perhaps even sooner."[89] Dur-

ing the Mosul fight, reflecting such views, U.S. officials generally believed the CTS could not continue to function at the same pace it had over the past year.[90] In less than twelve months, the CTS had served as the spearhead force in three major urban battles, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul. Indeed, the CTS came close to combat ineffectiveness in Mosul due to casualties and the previous pace of its operations in the IS war.[9]

COUNTERTERRORISM DURING THE IS WAR

Although CTS counterterrorism capabilities atrophied during the war against the Islamic State, a few units remained focused on this mission.[92] In particular, two CTS Special Tactics Unit battalions continued to conduct counterterrorism operations and used the service's targeting procedures and legal warrants while making arrests. These two units were maintained at a high state of readiness with constant training, while being manned and equipped at full strength. Their activities, however, were mainly restricted to the Baghdad area, where they also served as an emergency reserve for the prime minister.[93]

The CTS also maintained some core counterterrorism functions at its headquarters, including a team of experts in religion, Islamic history, and psychology to counter IS on social media. In the beginning, this team tried to block terrorist sites, but with the proliferation of jihadist content on social media, the goal switched to countering IS claims. When the group claimed responsibility for an attack, the CTS would respond with messages that IS had committed crimes against civilians and that its actions were distortions of Islam. If IS made false claims of control over an area, the CTS would counter by providing current video footage of Iraqi troops in the area. The CTS also provided information on ISF weapons to show superiority over IS.[94]

NOTES

1. Muharrir al-Qism al-Amni, "Kaif sakun hal al-Iraq lau fiih Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [What condition would Iraq be in if there were no Counter Terrorism Service), IraqToday.com, Mar. 1, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.
2. Joseph Krauss, "Baghdad's Finest: A Look at Iraq's Vaunted Special Forces," Associated Press, Oct. 20, 2016, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW.
3. The 1st ISOF Brigade, which existed on its own until a second brigade was created in 2009, was referred to in the Iraqi press as a *firqa* (technically "division") but was in reality a brigade-size formation. In English, the term was translated as either divi-

sion or brigade. See "Min al-Firqa al-Qadhira ili al-Muqatilin al-Dhahabiin: Qissa Quwa Musallaha Qadit al-Nasr ala Dash" [From dirty division to golden warriors: The story of an armed force that led the victory over ISIS], *Alghad Press*, July 27, 2016, http://bit.ly/2nRqA0x; Mark Perry, "How Iraq's Army Could Defeat ISIS in Mosul—but Lose Control of the Country," *Politico*, Dec. 15, 2016, https://politi.co/2OOfRzu; and Krauss, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW.

4. Campbell MacDiarmid, "The Battle to Retake Mosul Is Stalemated," *Foreign Policy*, Dec. 22, 2016, http://bit.ly/2PmN1r3.

5. David Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), p. 19, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

6. Florian Neuhof, "Iraq's Battle-Hardened Golden Division Seek Their Greatest Victory in Mosul," *National*, Nov. 14, 2016, http://bit.ly/2ORt0rp.

7. Loveday Morris, "The Force Leading the Iraq Army's Fight Against ISIS Went from "Dirty Division" to Golden Boys," *Washington Post*, July 26, 2016, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

8. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 1, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

9. al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.

10. Tamer El-Ghobashy and Mustafa Salim, "Iraqi Military Reclaims City of Tal Afar after Rapid Islamic State Collapse," *Washington Post*, Aug. 27, 2017, https://wapo.st/2nUdeRk.

11. Matt Bradley and Ali A. Nabhan, "In Ramadi, Small Force Carried a Big Burden," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 8, 2016, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb.

12. Michael Knights and Alex Mello, "The Best Thing America Built in Iraq: Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service and the Long War Against Militancy," *War on the Rocks*, July 19, 2017, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Ayman Oghanna, "Thousands Who Run, Few Who Fight: A Journalist on Ramadi's Fall," interview by Scott Simon, National Public Radio, May 30, 2015, https://n.pr/2MsbVYm.

13. It must be noted that other ISF actors also made significant contributions. The Iraqi Army 7th Division and tribal forces played a key role in holding Haditha and the al-Asad Air Base in Anbar province after Mosul's fall in 2014, and tribal forces greatly contributed to the defense of Ramadi before it finally fell to the Islamic State in May 2015. Iraqis also remember the role played by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) during summer of 2014. As the ISF melted away, Baghdad was forced to rely on the PMF—created in June 2014—and these forces helped create a hold line from which the ISF did not retreat. While successful, the largely Shia PMF were involved in human rights abuses and were semiautonomous. Moreover, while they claimed to be under the prime minister's command, they were in fact controlled to varying degrees by Iran. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, pp. 26, 32–33, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD; Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; Jeremy Bender, "Iraq's Incompetent Military Is in Even Worse Shape than It Appears," *Business Insider*, June 1, 2015, https://read.bi/2nRIT5J; and Tamer El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle to Regroup after Bloody Fight for Mosul," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2017, https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h.

14. Oghanna, https://n.pr/2MsbVYm.

15. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 26, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD.
16. Krauss, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW.
17. Hannah Allam and Mitchell Prothero, "Islamists Have Cornered Commandos Defending Iraq's Largest Refinery," McClatchy, July 9, 2014, http://bit.ly/2MsDn8J.
18. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; Krauss, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 36, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
19. Kirk H. Sowell, "Mosul and the Limits of State Capacity," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Mar. 30, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
20. Perry, https://politi.co/2OOfRzu; Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h.
21. "A Focus on Counterterrorism," *Unipath*, Jan. 30, 2015, http://unipath-magazine.com/a-focus-on-counterterrorism/.
22. See, e.g., the "Icts" Facebook page, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/ICTS.11/; al-Firqa al-Dhahabiya al-Amaliyat al-Khassa (Golden Division, Special Operations) Facebook page, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/isofaliraqe/; al-Quwat al-Khassa al-Iraqiya (Iraqi Special Forces) Facebook page, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/IS.GOLD.OF/; Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab, al-Amaliyat al-Khassa, al-Firqa al-Dhahabiya (Counter Terrorism Service, Special Operations, Golden Division) smartphone app, accessed June 20, 2018, http://www.isof-iq.com/; I.S.O.F./2 Twitter page, accessed June 20, 2018, https://twitter.com/iraqi_special2; and Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab (Counter Terrorism Service) Twitter page, accessed June 20, 2018, https://twitter.com/iraqicts.
23. "Leading the Golden Brigade," *Unipath*, Oct. 6, 2015, http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/.
24. Al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.
25. Prime Minister Abadi's early decision to abolish Maliki's Office of Commander in Chief, which had direct control of the CTS and pursued Maliki's agenda, also did much to advance this trend. Michael Knights, *The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq* (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2015), p. 17, http://washin.st/1DGcqSf; and "Al-Abadi: Hunak Mahamm Adifit li-Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Akthar min al-Gharad Alladhi Taassas li-Ajluh" [There were missions added to the Counter Terrorism Service that go beyond the purpose for which it was established], *al-Sumaria*, June 16, 2015, http://www.alsumaria.tv/mobile/news/137363/.
26. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
27. The CTS was, however, implicated in some cases of political and sectarian targeting, especially in 2008–10. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 15–18, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
28. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.
29. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 9, 20, 28, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

30. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 14, 29, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
31. Mike Giglio, "The ISIS Killers," BuzzFeed, June 3, 2017, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
32. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 24, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
33. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
34. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 24, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
35. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
36. Krauss, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW; Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 28, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
37. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 1, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.
38. "Beyond the Call of Duty," *Unipath*, Oct. 6, 2015, http://unipath-magazine.com/beyond-the-call-of-duty/.
39. Maj. Gen. Falah Hasan Kadhim al-Mohamedawi, "Iraqi Special Operations Academy," *Unipath*, Oct. 6, 2015, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd; and al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.
40. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on Jan. 13, 2017, Jan. 20, 2017, and Aug. 25, 2017.
41. Neuhof, http://bit.ly/2ORt0rp.
42. "Beyond the Call of Duty," http://unipath-magazine.com/beyond-the-call-of-duty/.
43. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 36, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; "Beyond the Call of Duty," http://unipath-magazine.com/beyond-the-call-of-duty/; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.
44. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
45. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; and Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464.
46. Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations (LIGOCO), *Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Pacific Eagles–Philippines*, report to the U.S. Congress, Oct. 1–Dec. 31, 2017, p. 18, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt.
47. Richard Sisk, "Concerns about Fatigue Mount as Iraqi Troops Prepare to Retake Mosul," Military.com, Jan. 26, 2016, http://bit.ly/2ONGCEi.
48. Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ; Hemin Lihony, "The Stunning Story of the Fall of Ramadi," Rudaw, May 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/2MAGNFs; Loveday Morris and Mustafa Salim, "Chaos in Iraqi Forces Contributed to Islamic State's Biggest Win This Year," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2015, https://wapo.st/2L74aBD; Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; and Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb.
49. Then U.S. defense secretary Ash Carter famously remarked after Ramadi fell that the ISF had "no will to fight." The CTS, for its part, complained about a lack of U.S. air support in Ramadi. Oghanna, https://n.pr/2MsbVYm; Joanna Paraszczuk, "Iraqi

Soldier Says Ramadi Retreat in Face of IS Attack Prevented 'Massacre,'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 26, 2015, http://bit.ly/2wftQqu; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

50. Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb; and Susannah George, "Iraq Forces Struggling Despite U.S. Military Training," *Military Times*, Jan. 27, 2016, http://bit.ly/2OMRHW2.

51. "Freedom for Fallujah," *Unipath*, Jan. 12, 2017, http://unipath-magazine.com/freedom-for-fallujah/; and Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

52. Hevidar Ahmed and Rebwar Qasim, "Iraq's Golden Division May Liberate Mosul, but at What Cost?" *Rudaw*, Dec. 24, 2016, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016.

53. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; Abidi al-Dalimi, "Al-Quwat al-Iraqiya Tashra fi bina Quwat Jadida bi-Shakl Sari li-Zajjaha fi al-Mosul ba'd Ibada al-Quwat al-Khassa" [Iraqi forces begin to build a new force quickly to throw into Mosul after the annihilation of the Special Forces], *al-Quds al-Arabi*, Dec. 7, 2016, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=641184; Shawn Snow, "Iraq's Elite Counter-Terrorism Force Looks to Rebuild after Mosul," *Military Times*, Aug. 11, 2017, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.

54. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI; Michael R. Gordon, "Iraqi Forces Open a Front in West Mosul, Trying to Squeeze ISIS," *New York Times*, May 4, 2017, https://nyti.ms/2wiHj0y; and Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Mustafa Salim, "The Islamic State's Last Stand in Mosul Will Test the Best of Iraqi Forces," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2017, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm.

55. "Jabha Tal Afar...al-Asadi Qaidan li-Mukafaha al-Irhab wa 4 talimat lil-Muqatilin" [Tal Afar front, al-Asadi commander of Counter Terrorism Axis and 4 instructions for combatants], *Shafaq News*, Aug. 20, 2017, http://bit.ly/2wnadNp; and El-Ghobashy and Salim, "Iraqi Military Reclaims City of Tal Afar," https://wapo.st/2nUdeRk.

56. "Al-Abadi Tulin Intilaq Amaliya Tahrir al-Hawija" [Abadi announces the start of operation to liberate Hawija], Alhurra, Sept. 21, 2017, https://arbne.ws/2vYzyxA; and "Intiha Wajib al-Quwat al-Mushtarika fi ihda Mahawir Amaliyat al-Hawija bi-Tahrir 98 Qarya" [Joint Forces end operations in Hawija in one of the axes and liberate 98 villages], *Alghad Press*, Oct. 4, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BudUq4.

57. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt.

58. Ibid., p. 18.

59. Mitchell Prothero, "Islamic State Offensives Stretch Iraq's Elite Troops Thin," McClatchy, Apr. 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/2L6ppni.

60. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, pp. 4–5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO; and Gibbons-Neff and Salim, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm.

61. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 4, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

62. Paul McLeary, "Iraqi Army Ahead of Schedule in Fight for West Mosul, U.S. Officials Say," *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 23, 2017, http://bit.ly/2nPnwCa.

63. "Leading the Golden Brigade," http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/.

64. al-Kenani, "CTS: There are no members" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2MFkuP1.

65. Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ; and Gibbons-Neff and Salim, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm.

66. The backward sweep also led to the announcement of neighborhoods being liberated only for them to subsequently experience heavy fighting. MacDiarmid, "The Battle to Retake Mosul," http://bit.ly/2PmN1r3; and "Jinral Amirki yakshif an istikhdam al-Quwat al-Iraqiyah 'Uslub al-Mash al-Tarjui' fi al-Mosul" [American general reveals Iraqi forces use "backward sweep" method in Mosul], *Hatha al-Youm*, Feb. 27, 2017, https://hathalyoum.net/articles/1240008.

67. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on May 27, 2017, Aug. 25, 2017, and May 19, 2018.

68. For example, more than two hundred CTS Humvees were destroyed in the battle to liberate Ramadi between August and November 2015. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* report to the U.S. Congress, Mar. 31, 2016, p. 32, http://bit.ly/2BtdmAR.

69. See, e.g., "Iraqi Special Forces And Popular Mobilization Forces Retake Ramadi After Heavy Clashes And Urban Fighting," YouTube video, 8:30, posted by "WarLeaks–Military Archive," Dec. 29, 2015, http://bit.ly/2wa3Lc8; "Exclusive: Iraq's 'Golden Division' troops in the battle for Mosul," YouTube video, 6:10, posted by "FRANCE 24 English," Dec. 8, 2016, http://bit.ly/2wdNFyw; "Exclusive: Embedded with Iraqi special forces in Mosul," YouTube video, 25:23, posted by "FRANCE 24 English," Dec. 26, 2016, http://bit.ly/2N13Ypr; "Iraq: alongside Iraqi special forces fighting Islamic State Group militants in Mosul," YouTube video, 1:55, posted by "FRANCE 24 English," Jan. 5, 2017, http://bit.ly/2LaFGr9; and "Icts," Facebook post, July 5, 2018, 4:29 p.m., accessed July 8, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/iraqicts/.

70. Talib Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar ma'a Rais Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab al-Fariq al-Rukn Talib Shaghati" [Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service, Staff Gen. Talib Shaghati], interview by Ali al-Hiwar, al-Rasheed Media, 47:58, Nov. 29, 2017, http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

71. "Beyond the Call of Duty," http://unipath-magazine.com/beyond-the-call-of-duty/.

72. Talib Shaghati al-Kenani, "Al-Muqabila al-Kamila lil-Fariq Awwal al-Rukn al-Doktor Talib Shaghati al-Kenani Rais Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [The complete interview with Gen. Dr. Talib Shaghati al-Kenani, director of the Counter Terrorism Service], Facebook video, 14:07, posted by "Icts," Sept. 25, 2017, http://bit.ly/2wda7rr.

73. Mustafa Salim and Loveday Morris, "In Mosul, Iraqi Forces Struggle to Hang On to Government Compound after Taking It," *Washington Post*, Mar. 10, 2017, https://wapo.st/2OU0VA3.

74. Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.

75. Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb; and George, http://bit.ly/2OMRHW2.

76. Gibbons-Neff and Salim, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm.

77. Voice of America, "U.S.: Coalition Forces Launched Airstrike on Mosul," Mar. 25, 2017, http://bit.ly/2N3Djbx; Gibbons-Neff and Salim, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm; Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, report to the U.S. Congress, Apr. 1–June 30, 2017, pp. 20–21, http://bit.ly/2wgUcbx.

78. Susannah George et al., "Mosul Is a Graveyard: Final IS Battle Kills 9,000 Civilians," Associated Press, Dec. 21, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MqOfDV.

79. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Apr.–June 2017, p. 35, http://bit.ly/2wgUcbx.

80. James Gordon Meek et al., "'Dirty Brigades': U.S.-Trained Iraqi Forces Investigated for War Crimes," ABC News, Mar. 11, 2015, https://abcn.ws/2wfxyQW.

81. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Execution Site Near Mosul's Old City," July 19, 2017, http://bit.ly/2PoaXdu.

82. Author interviews with former CTS advisors, Jan. 13, 2017, May 27, 2017, and May 19, 2018; Michael R. Gordon, "On the Mosul Front, a Brutal Battle Against ISIS and Time," *New York Times*, Apr. 26, 2017, https://nyti.ms/2N17jVv; Gibbons-Neff and Salim, https://wapo.st/2Mne5sm; *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans* p. 5, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; Perry, https://politi.co/2OOfRzu; and Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016.

83. "There were missions added" (in Arabic), http://www.alsumaria.tv/mobile/news/137363.

84. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

85. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

86. McLeary, http://bit.ly/2nPnwCa.

87. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, report to the U.S. Congress, Oct. 1–Dec. 31, 2015, pp. 34–35, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog.

88. Sisk, http://bit.ly/2ONGCEi.

89. Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016.

90. McLeary, http://bit.ly/2nPnwCa.

91. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.

92. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO.

93. The STUs were deployed in small teams in Baghdad during special events such as religious holidays. CTS units not fighting the Islamic State also performed duties such as examining the names of travelers in the Baghdad airport to prevent travel by Iraqi officials accused of corruption, exemplifying how the service performed duties better handled by others. Iraq Press Agency, "Al-Firqa al-Dhahabiya fi Matar Baghdad li-man ba'd al-Masulin min Safr" [The Golden Division is in the Baghdad airport to prevent some officials from traveling], Aug. 13, 2015, https://www.iraqpressagency.com/?p=153497; "Intishar Quwa min Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab fi Baghdad dimn

Khitta al-Eid" [Force from the Counter Terrorism Service deploys in Baghdad in the feast plan], Wikala Knooz Media, n.d., http://bit.ly/2weihQg; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

94. For example, the CTS announced the arrival of U.S.-provided equipment such as Abrams tanks, Apache helicopters, and drones. Haider S. al-Kenani, "Iraq Battles Da'ish Online," *Unipath*, Aug. 20, 2015, http://unipath-magazine.com/iraq-battles-daish-online/.

3.

THE CTS AS AN INSTITUTION

THE FOLLOWING sections explore the inner workings of the Counter Terrorism Service, from its organizational structure to its identity and the passage of the CTS law in August 2016. It concludes with a discussion of budget and leadership.

ORGANIZATION

At its numerical apex in 2013, the CTS had a total strength of 13,000.[1] Its structure included a CTS headquarters, a Counter Terrorism Command (CTC), and three ISOF brigades. The CTS headquarters was intended to be a strategy, policy, and resourcing arm that provided oversight of combat operations, a means of liaison with the Iraqi government, and control over the CTS budget.[2]

The CTC was the operational-level headquarters, which in theory directly controlled the three ISOF brigades (see figure 1).[3] In reality, the operational control function over the ISOF brigades has been disputed between the CTS headquarters and the CTC. Here, the CTS headquarters normally maintained direct control over the brigades, marginalizing the role of the CTC, which in turn sometimes operated semi-independently of the CTS.[4] The ISOF brigades were located at Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra and presided over their subordinate ISOF commando battalions, which were assigned to fifteen of Iraq's eighteen provinces, with the three exclusions being those in the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.[5] The ISOF battalions were initially intended to operate within their assigned provinces, but this seldom occurred during the IS war.

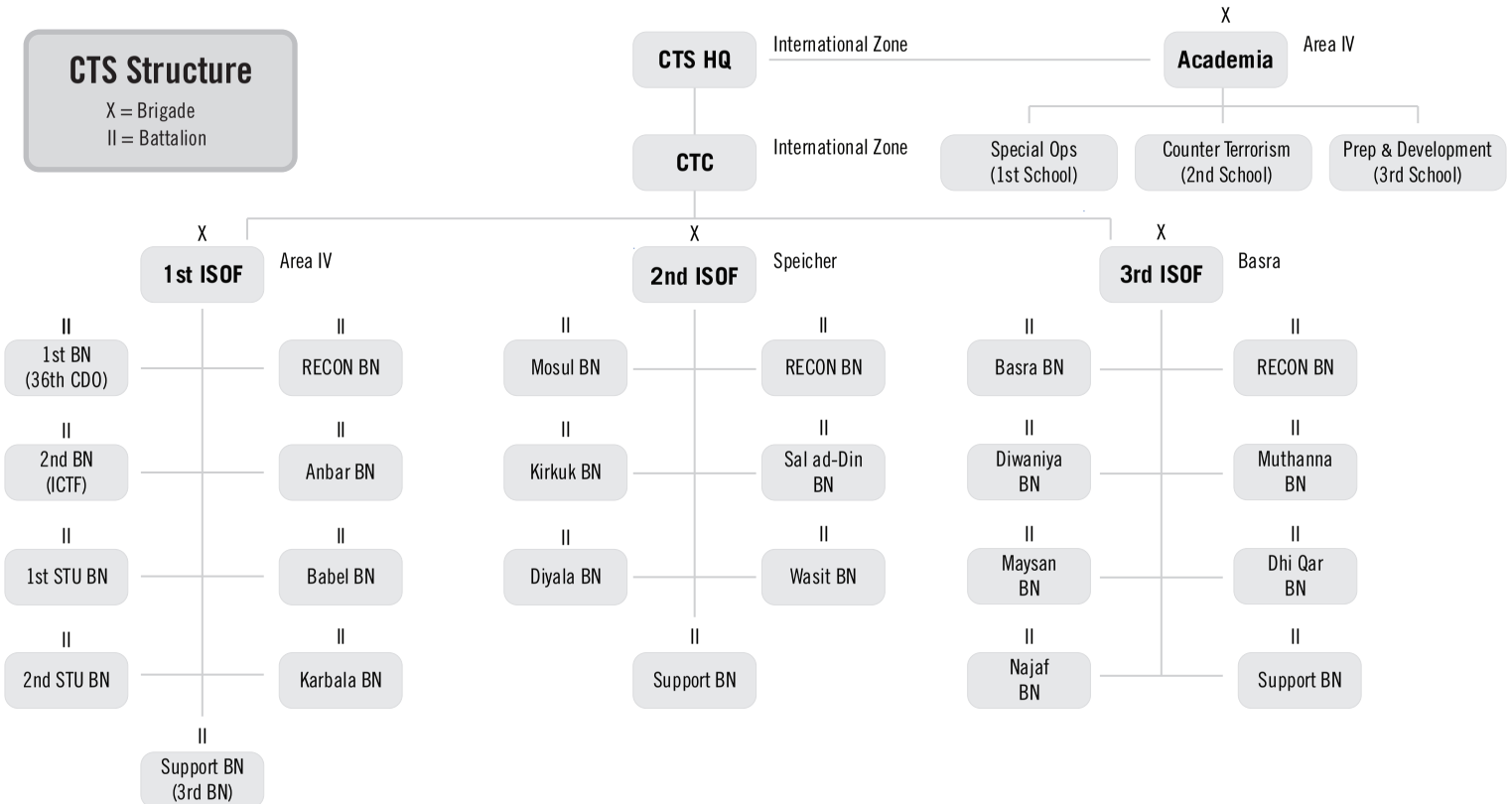


FIGURE 1. CTS Structure

The CTS also maintained a Baghdad-based national strike force composed of the 1st Battalion, aka the 36th Commando Battalion, according to its original designation when created by USSF; the 2nd Battalion, aka the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force (ICTF); and a Special Tactics Unit (STU) battalion. All three units operated as countrywide forces not focused on a particular province. For their part, the ICTF and STU conducted high-end counterterrorism missions such as hostage rescue.[6] (In an additional change, a second STU was created in summer 2015 to provide extra counterterrorism capabilities in the Iraqi capital.[7])

Until August 2016, when the Iraqi parliament passed a law formalizing the CTS (discussed at length later), the service's structure did not have parliamentary approval, and it existed based on executive orders issued by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki.[8] The CTS law initially abolished the CTC, since it was viewed as redundant, but in early March 2018 the Iraqi parliament amended the CTS law to reincorporate the CTC, probably due to the popularity of the CTC commander, Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul Ghani al-Asadi, and his strong political support.[9] Until the time of this writing, a debate has persisted over whether the CTS and CTC perform redundant roles, and whether each needs a full set of headquarters directorates (e.g., G-2 for intelligence, G-3 for operations).[10]

The CTS headquarters, located in Baghdad's International Zone, is led by CTS director Staff Gen. Talib Shaghati al-Kenani and contains numerous staffing divisions, such as operations, intelligence, training, strategic planning, logistics, and technical affairs, the last of which conducts the Internet activities previously described. In addition to coordinating with the Iraqi government for all counterterrorism-related activities, the CTS headquarters coordinates on counterterrorism with international organizations such as the European Union, United Nations, and Arab League. The CTS headquarters can monitor phone calls but must first have a court order from a judge.[11] The CTC, also located in Baghdad's International Zone, has a staffing organization resembling that of the CTS headquarters.[12] The three ISOF brigades, meanwhile, have these components:

- 1st ISOF Brigade. Based at Area IV—a former regime compound near Baghdad International Airport established by USSF as a training area in 2003—it consists of the 1st Battalion (36th Commando Battalion), 2nd Battalion (ICTF), 1st and 2nd STU battalions, a support battalion (sometimes referred to as the 3rd Battalion), a reconnaissance battalion, and regional battalions in Anbar, Babil, and Karbala provinces.[13]

- 2nd ISOF Brigade. It was originally located in Mosul at the Ghazlani military base along with the Mosul Battalion, but upon the city's fall to the Islamic State, Maliki ordered the two entities out of the city after other Iraqi forces fled. Both relocated to the Tikrit air base (Camp Speicher) in Salah al-Din Province.[14] The 2nd ISOF Brigade also contains a reconnaissance battalion, a support battalion, and the Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Wasit Battalions.[15]
- 3rd ISOF Brigade. Based at the Basra airport, it contains the Basra, Diwaniyah, Maysan, al-Muthanna, Dhi Qar, and Najaf Battalions, a reconnaissance battalion, and a support battalion.[16]

Altogether, at the time of this writing, ISOF contains sixteen commando battalions, two STU battalions, three reconnaissance battalions, and three support battalions, amounting to total CTS strength far below that of a U.S. division.[17] The three ISOF brigades of the CTS are colloquially referred to as the "Golden Division."[18]

The ISOF brigades are commanded by two-star generals.[19] In the Iraqi press, the brigades' three respective headquarters are often referred to as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd ISOF Commands, but when it comes to their operation, thinking of them as brigades makes more sense.[20] During the IS war, the brigades and battalions seldom operated in their assigned provinces but were instead committed across Iraq. The STU battalions normally remained in Baghdad but did participate in a few of the major battles.[21] And the reconnaissance battalions originally conducted close reconnaissance missions against targets using civilian vehicles,[22] but this capability deteriorated during the war, even as they continued to conduct basic battlefield reconnaissance.[23]

Total numbers of CTS personnel fluctuated greatly during the war. By January 2015, the CTS's 2013 strength of 13,000 was down to approximately 6,500 due to casualties. This was according to estimates of CTS frontline strength by Michael Knights plus the author's estimate of headquarters and administrative personnel.[24] By January 2016, this number was back up to around 10,500, again based on estimates by Knights and the author.[25] In October 2016, the CTS started the battle for Mosul with a strength of around 11,000, according to a former U.S. CTS advisor.[26] Another former advisor stated that the CTS strength in December 2017 was about 10,000,[27] but it must be kept in mind that the number will increase as new soldiers are added to the ranks upon completion of training.[28]

IDENTITY, COMPOSITION, AND CULTURE

Central elements of the CTS identity are its independence from politics and nonsectarianism, with all Iraqis represented, including Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds, along with Turkmens and other minorities.[29] CTS leaders say that the service forbids sectarian expressions of any kind and that those who express them are expelled.[30] Also, by law CTS members are not allowed to belong to political parties.[31] Yet whatever the aspirations, CTS demographics have changed over time. At one point, the 1st ISOF Brigade was around 30 percent Kurdish, but by late 2016 that figure had plummeted to some 5 percent, because many Kurds had left to join the Peshmerga.[32] A coalition goal in 2015 was to increase the number of Sunnis in the CTS, but there were no later indications of success in this.[33]

Like Iraq writ large, CTS units are majority Shia, and this sometimes shows. Former advisors have reported the display of Shia banners during religious holidays at Area IV, and Shia flags were flown from CTS vehicles during the battle for Mosul.[34] Also in Mosul, Shia slogans were spray-painted onto buildings where the CTS had fought. A spokesman for the service said he did not know if its soldiers were writing these messages, but he added that they were expressions of happiness at having defeated the Islamic State.[35] At another level, steps have reportedly been taken to prevent Shia militia penetration of the CTS, which is banned by the service's director and for which new recruits are vetted.[36] All in all, U.S. officials tend to see the CTS as nonsectarian and politically neutral, while regarding other ISF entities as more sectarian in their orientation.[37] Iraqi analysts, too, believe CTS cross-sectarianism and loyalty to the nation remain unmatched by any other Iraqi forces.[38]

The CTS has its own esprit de corps, and junior officers take initiative in combat operations.[39] One of the reasons the service could successfully adapt from counterterrorism to conventional fighting involved its operational flexibility. Historically, Iraqi generals have allowed field commanders little initiative, but the CTS permitted its field commanders to control operations at their level since they were familiar with local conditions. This innovation in Iraqi doctrine appears to have improved morale. Even as plans were submitted to higher headquarters for approval, field commanders were empowered.[40] It is hard to stress how unusual this is among ISF units.

In matters of administration, though, the CTS structure remains rigid, and many of the most basic decisions regarding personnel and equipment are reserved for the highest levels. The service is also characterized by a tendency to hoard ammunition and equipment for a rainy day rather than using it in

current combat operations or training.[41] Further affecting decisions within the CTS are outside political dynamics, such as the inability of the CTS headquarters to abolish the CTC given the commander's political support.[42]

The CTS has superior discipline and professionalism compared to other ISF entities and has suffered from less corruption, which is endemic in Iraq.[43] While petty corruption does exist in the CTS, generally officers obtain positions through competition rather than the political ties that often determine positions in the Iraqi army.[44] CTS leaders say that nepotism is not practiced in the service, although cases of it have surfaced in the past.[45] The overt military culture of the CTS, meanwhile, often mirrors that of its original USSF advisors, with members adopting the mannerisms of their advisors, wearing baseball caps and large watches, and arranging their field kits in the USSF style.[46] Notably, the CTS has the start of a strong noncommissioned officers corps, a rarity among Arab forces. It also has equipment almost identical to that of the USSF.[47] Originally, CTS soldiers wore black uniforms since most of their missions occurred at night, but by the time of the Mosul battle they donned a mix of black uniforms and desert camouflage.[48] The ISOF battalions are noted for their black vehicles.[49]

PASSAGE OF THE CTS LAW

From an institutional standpoint, the most significant event to impact the CTS was the Iraqi parliament's passage of the CTS law in August 2016.[50] The draft CTS law was first submitted to parliament back in September 2008, but it was opposed because members believed it concentrated too much power in Maliki's hands.[51] They likewise believed the CTS should not be given independent status but instead be placed under the authority of the Ministry of Interior or Defense.[52] Absence of such a law, however, meant the CTS suffered from insufficient funding and resources due to its questionable legal status. In theory, the Defense Ministry was to provide the CTS with resources and administrative support until the law was passed, but proper support was always lacking.[53] A full two years elapsed after Maliki stepped down before the law cleared parliament, and there is no doubt that the CTS's new popularity enabled this occurrence. The passage of the law boosted CTS morale by protecting the rights of its members and granting them clear much-needed legal status.[54]

The law formalized the CTS structure and eliminated the CTC, but only temporarily, as it turned out, with parliament later reinstating the command. Placing the CTS directly under the prime minister's authority as a

security and intelligence agency,[55] the law designated the CTS director as a special minister with powers similar to the defense minister, as a member of the ministerial council for national security, and as a chief advisor to the prime minister on counterterrorism. One of the most important aspects of the law was its stipulation that CTS funding be designated in the annual national budget and that the CTS director propose the CTS annual budget.[56] The CTS remains tied to the Defense Ministry for certain administrative functions such as payment of salaries, management of promotions, and supply of ammunition and some weapons, which the ministry covers through its budget.[57]

According to the law, the CTS is charged with coordinating and directing all counterterrorism efforts in Iraq in a law enforcement manner, bringing the organization back to its roots. Thus, the CTS is responsible for drawing up counterterrorism policy and planning and developing a national counterterrorism strategy applicable to all Iraqi agencies. In this, the CTS conducts the coordination and exchange of information with other entities such as Iraq's Foreign, Defense, and Interior Ministries, as well as its National Security Service, central bank, and the security agencies of other countries.[58] If approved by the ministerial council for national security, the CTS can take any other actions related to counterterrorism as well. Although the law is intended to return the CTS to its original mission of law-enforcement-style counterterrorism, the service can still conduct conventional military operations when approved by the ministerial council.[59]

The CTS develops prioritized target lists of individuals and networks to be approved by the ministerial council. It develops intelligence on terrorism in all forms and arrests terrorists based on legal warrants issued by special judges. Those detained are investigated according to Iraqi law under the supervision of a judge. The CTS also monitors communications, social media sites, and other electronic sites based on legal orders, and can organize media campaigns to act against terrorist agents. The CTS can likewise request freezes of bank accounts, subject again to ministerial council approval.[60]

IMPROVED BUDGET, IN THEORY

Formerly, due to its lack of legal status, the CTS drew from a hodgepodge of financial sources, mainly prime ministerial discretionary funds. But, as already suggested, none of this worked well. From 2008 to 2010, the CTS received

around $225 million per year from the Iraqi budget and an additional $55 million per year from the United States, bringing the annual average to about $280 million, a substantial sum albeit one well below CTS budget requests, which averaged around $412 million during the same period.[61]

More recently, the CTS has fared better in allocated budget funding. In 2017, the Iraqi national budget included its first line for the CTS, at $672 million, with $420 million going to current expenses (mainly salaries) and $252 million to investment spending.[62] In 2018, the overall figure was decreased to $606 million, with $451 million allocated to operational expenses and $155 million to investment spending.[63]

The CTS also receives in-kind support from the Defense Ministry, which furnishes administrative functions such as managing promotions and supplying some medical support, provisions, spare parts, ammunition, and weapons.[64] The current Iraqi defense minister, Irfan al-Hayali, is a former CTS member, which has helped overcome administrative niggling between the organizations such as existed in prior years. In 2017, Hayali agreed that the Defense Ministry would support the CTS for two years, at which point it would presumably be capable of administrative independence.[65] Another 2017 agreement, signed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Iraqi defense minister Hayali, and CTS director Talib Shaghati al-Kenani, ensures Iraqi army aviation support for CTS training and operations through the 15th Aviation Squadron.[66]

The CTS would naturally like to be independent of the Defense Ministry, but it will likely face difficulties on this front owing to an inability to source capital investment. In September 2017 and then again in late November, Kenani remarked that the CTS investment budget was insufficient due to falling Iraqi oil revenues and that the service had only about 30 percent of its authorized equipment.[67] One indicator of insufficient investment funding for the CTS can be found in ministerial council meetings at which specific amounts of emergency funding allocated to the service for equipping, arming, and training are discussed. The ministerial council also approves CTS recruitment drives to add new authorized manpower.[68]

Here, the problem is not allocated investment budget, but rather actual obligation and spending of the budget. While the 2018 Iraqi budget gives the CTS $155 million in investment spending for procurement and restocking (down from $252 million the prior year), a former advisor stated that the service only plans to execute $85 million. Likewise, only $50 million of the service's $252 million in investment funding from 2017 was executed. While

U.S. advisors have little insight into the CTS budget process, the investment budget clearly has not been executed at the levels allocated. These CTS struggles derive from a lack of expertise in budget execution and the absence of an overall budget strategy or long-range plans. In this dynamic, simple repairs to CTS facilities are often left to the coalition.[69] This suggests one area—well away from the battlefield—where the United States and other coalition partners could help boost CTS performance with exponential impact.

U.S. FUNDING TO CTS

The shortage of CTS recapitalization within Iraq's budget makes U.S. funding all the more important. The service receives some U.S. support from the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process, managed by the Office of Security Cooperation in the U.S. embassy in Iraq.[70] Examples of this FMS support include small arms and heavy weapons, night-vision goggles, vehicle maintenance support, spare parts, and training.[71] In the last few years, however, FMS support to the CTS has been limited due to competition with other ISF entities and is mainly paid for with Iraqi national funds, rather than from the U.S. Foreign Military Financing program, which gives grants to recipient countries.[72]

The Iraqi funding shortfall for the CTS has led the U.S. government to fill the gap, as was the case before 2011. Most of this U.S. support comes from a program known as the Counter–Islamic State in Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), formerly the Iraqi Train and Equip Fund (ITEF). CTEF is used to train, advise, assist, and equip most ISF units, including the CTS. Much quicker than the FMS process, CTEF—in effect in Iraq since December 2014—provides funding for immediate equipment requests.[73] U.S. advisors help the ISOF brigades with submitting equipment requests for CTEF funding.[74]

By U.S. law, before recipients are granted assistance, they must be vetted through databases to verify no association with terrorist groups or Iran, and no significant history of human rights abuses. As contrasted with other elements of the ISF, for which vetting has presented difficulties, CTS vetting has always been easier and more effective thanks to the biographical data held by U.S. advisors on CTS leaders.[75] Equipment provided to the CTS through CTEF has included night-vision goggles, machine guns, body armor, AT-4 antitank rockets, Humvees, armored bulldozers, mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles, and ammunition, and this U.S. equipment is

subject to greater accountability and visibility than that provided to other ISF units.[76] A CTS request for TOW antitank missiles from the United States was denied, and these were instead supplied to regime opposition groups in Syria.[77] In March 2017, the Defense Department requested additional CTEF funding to help the CTS replace equipment, especially Humvees, lost in the battle for east Mosul and to train new personnel to remedy battlefield losses.[78]

In the U.S. 2018 CTEF budget request, the CTS was specifically given a fixed funding amount of almost $194 million—a robust increase from $27 million in 2017—to help the service recover from Mosul losses and expand its size.[79] The request stated that the funding, set to be used for light and medium weapons as well as Humvees, was necessary since the CTS was still not receiving its full portion of Iraq's national budget.[80] When added to $155 million of allocated Iraqi funding, the $194 million gives the CTS an unprecedented planned investment budget of $349 million for 2018. Thus, alongside an operational budget of $451 million, the total CTS budget comes to $800 million for 2018.[81] But the problems, as already discussed, will almost certainly emerge in the execution phase, especially for the Iraqi portion. (The 2019 U.S. CTEF budget request was less specific but did include $15 million for CTS training-site improvements.[82])

LEADERSHIP

In Iraq, CTS leaders are influential, and they figured centrally in the struggle against the Islamic State. They were celebrities, their pictures everywhere on social media.[83] CTS leaders are likewise uniformly pro-U.S., and they frequently sought American advice on how best to employ the organization in the IS war.[84]

STAFF GEN. TALIB SHAGHATI AL-KENANI

Kenani has been director of the CTS since its creation in 2007.[85] Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, he had earned the rank of major general in the former regime. In his early career, he was an artillery officer but later became an air-defense officer.[86] In 2005, he was appointed as the Iraqi prime

minister's military advisor.[87] Since becoming CTS director in 2007, Kenani has surrounded himself with a set of mostly former air-defense officers who have served in various positions at CTS headquarters.[88] Kenani is noted for his strong sense of nonsectarianism and his pro-U.S. stance. Although many coalition nations have assisted the CTS and provided it with equipment, Kenani has a strong preference for U.S. training, technical assistance, air support, and equipment, which he considers the best.[89] In the future, he wants the CTS to use exclusively U.S. equipment.[90]

After the fall of Mosul in 2014, Kenani was one of the principal figures relied on by Prime Minister Abadi.[91] That year, in addition to serving as CTS director, he was appointed commander of the Iraqi Joint Operations Command (IJOC), which in theory was tasked with coordinating all actions in the war against the Islamic State.[92] In 2017, Kenani was replaced as IJOC commander by Staff Lt. Abdul-Amir Yarallah, the overall commander of the battle for Mosul.[93] This change came in part because of intense competition and rivalries with other ISF commanders who targeted Kenani.[94] Although the CTS law granted ministerial status to Kenani, the parliament never officially bestowed this for various reasons, among them resistance from other ISF personnel and bitterness from certain parliament members over Kenani's earlier lobbying methods aimed at passing the law.[95]

STAFF LT. GEN. ABDUL GHANI AL-ASADI

A former armor officer under the previous regime, Asadi has served as CTC commander since the command was formed in 2007.[96] During the Islamic State war, Asadi was well known to the public, availing himself for many interviews and other press appearances. After passage of the CTS law, Asadi kept the temporarily dormant CTC intact until parliament amended the law in March 2018 to reincorporate it. He succeeded in this effort through his considerable influence in the Iraqi parliament and close relations with Abadi and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), volunteer fighting units created after the fall of Mosul. The continued existence of the CTC was an element of the internal power struggle between Asadi and Kenani, although one that fortunately did not appear to affect combat operations.[97]

STAFF LT. GEN. ABDUL-WAHAB AL-SAADI

As CTC deputy commander, Saadi is probably the most famous CTS leader. One of the few CTS generals to have served as a special forces officer in the former regime, Saadi was later the field commander for CTS forces in nearly every major operation against the Islamic State. He led Iraqi forces participating in battles such as Bayji, Tikrit, Ramadi, and Fallujah. His reputation peaked during the 2016–17 battle to liberate Mosul, where he again served as CTS field commander.[98] During this battle, Saadi was so intensely covered by the media that rival ISF commanders applied pressure aimed at preventing him from leading the CTS in the upcoming battle for Tal Afar. Saadi ultimately played a smaller role at Tal Afar, for which another CTS general, Staff Lt. Gen. Sami al-Ardi (discussed shortly), served as field commander.[99]

After Tal Afar, Saadi remained active in the service, although with a significantly lower profile. His public appearances have included attending celebrations following Abadi's December 2017 announcement of the defeat of IS and press interviews.[100] Immensely popular within the CTS ranks, Saadi is referred to as "the incorruptible" due to his honesty in a culture where petty corruption is frequently overlooked and to his willingness to endure the same hardships as those experienced by his men.[101]

MAJ. GEN. FADHIL BARWARI†

Commander of the 1st ISOF Brigade, Barwari had been a member of ISOF since 2003. Before the Islamic State war, he was the most widely known and public of all CTS figures, often mistaken in the press for the CTS director. A former member of the Peshmerga, he was the most prominent CTS

† Editor' note: Barwari died of a heart attack while this study was in press.

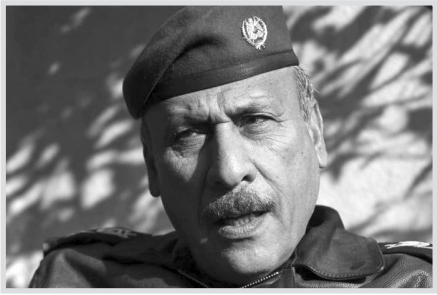
leader in crossing ethnosectarian boundaries, due to his Kurdish ethnicity.[102] He was largely scapegoated for the May 2015 IS capture of Ramadi, where he commanded CTS forces.[103] Prime Minister Abadi stated that the withdrawal of forces from the city was not authorized, but the results of an investigation were never publicly disclosed.[104] Barwari remained active in the CTS after Ramadi's fall and participated in the major CTS battles.[105]

STAFF MAJ. GEN. MAAN AL-SAADI

Commander of the 2nd ISOF Brigade,[106] Saadi is noted for the defense of Camp Speicher and his involvement in the liberation of Salah al-Din province and Fallujah.[107] In Mosul, his brigade called in the U.S. airstrike that unintentionally killed more than one hundred civilians.[108] After Iraqi forces pushed into Kirkuk province in October 2017, he assumed overall duties for coordinating security for the province.[109]

STAFF LT. GEN. SAMI AL-ARIDI

Aridi, the 3rd ISOF Brigade commander, participated in the battles to liberate Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul.[110] He served as CTS field commander during the battle for Tal Afar and is highly regarded by CTS members.[111]



AMONG FORMER CTS members prominent in the Iraqi defense apparatus is Maj. Gen. Irfan al-Hayali, who was appointed defense minister in January 2017. Another, Maj. Gen. Jalil al-Rubaie, had served in numerous positions at CTS headquarters since its creation before being appointed commander of the Baghdad Operations Center in July 2016. Since May 2015, an original 2007 CTS member and former ISOF brigade commander, Maj. Gen. Karim

al-Tamimi, has overseen security for Baghdad's international zone, where Iraqi government offices and foreign embassies are located.[112]

RELATIONS WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, INTERIOR MINISTRY, AND PMF

The Ministry of Defense[113] controls Iraq's fourteen army divisions, each of which is comparable in size to the entire CTS, at least on paper. Although the current defense minister is a former CTS member, the forces' high profile has fueled resentment among lower-ranking ministry officers, and MoD support has sometimes been poor.[114] This siutation, however, has recently improved greatly,[115] and today the CTS wants to emphasize its independence from the Defense Ministry.[116]

The Ministry of Interior controls five motorized infantry divisions of the Iraqi Federal Police along with the Emergency Response Division (ERD), a special operations unit that was also trained by the U.S.-led coalition.[117] The Iraqi interior minister, Qasim al-Araji, is currently a member of the Badr Organization, one of the PMF militias backed by Iran.[118] The ERD also contains members of the Badr Organization and committed human rights abuses during the Mosul battle, which were acknowledged by Prime Minister Abadi.[119]

The PMF, established after the fall of Mosul when Iraqi religious and political leaders called for the creation of a volunteer force, is composed of more than 110,000 fighters. Of the many PMF formations, most are Shia, some of these heavily influenced by Iran, but others have a Sunni orientation.[120] During PMF operations, as many reports suggest, the fighters committed human rights abuses against Sunnis.[121]

Top CTS leaders claim to have had good cooperation with the Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry, and PMF during the war against the Islamic State, but beneath the surface, rivalries have been intense and bitter. One area of dissent involves the underperformance of the army and Federal Police, which has rankled many in the CTS.[122] Initially, the Iraqi army, Federal Police, and tribal forces were not even able to hold terrain the CTS had taken, compelling the service to leave hold forces in place as it advanced. Often, the CTS allowed gaps during these advances and was unable to search and secure all buildings during urban combat because it lacked sufficient forces and adequate support from other ISF fighters. Sometimes CTS forces were shifted from one battle to another to recapture areas they had taken

months earlier but that other ISF units subsequently lost. The CTS thus went from being an elite force supporting the ISF to the only force, largely carrying the rest of the Iraqi military during the Islamic State war.[123]

The PMF did win grudging respect from the CTS ranks for its ability to hold terrain and secure CTS flanks during assaults.[124] The CTS conducted operations with the PMF, and the CTC commander, Asadi, regularly appeared in meetings with PMF leaders and made press statements alongside them.[125] At higher levels, the relationship has remained competitive. CTS director Kenani is known for his dislike of Iran-backed groups and is committed to barring individuals associated with the PMF from joining the CTS.[126] Likewise, PMF leaders saw the CTS as a potential competitor in post-IS Iraq and feared its strong U.S. leanings.[127]

INADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR CTS IN MOSUL

During the war, the CTS's popularity and overwhelmingly positive press coverage sparked resentment from other ISF elements, sometimes resulting in noncooperation. Moreover, Iraq lacks a true unified command structure, because its security forces work for a variety of entities and ministries, which often act like fiefdoms in a struggle for resources, power, influence, and prestige.[128] In theory, as noted, the IJOC was to coordinate all actions in the war against the Islamic State. But in practice, its role centered more on selecting forces for specific operations and making press statements, while a field commander was appointed to lead each specific operation.[129] Militarily, this approach does not lend itself to efficiency.

Mosul is a good example. The battle for the city lasted nearly nine months, from October 17, 2016, to July 10, 2017,[130] and was the world's largest military operation since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Enlisted were about 100,000 Iraqi fighters,[131] including the Iraqi army, Federal Police, ERD, CTS, PMF, and Peshmerga, which played an important role as the ISF approached the city.[132] Less than three weeks after the start of the campaign, on November 4, 2016, the CTS breached the defenses of east Mosul. Thereafter, the service would fight in the city virtually alone, with twelve battalions, until late December 2016 while other ISF fighters lagged on the periphery.[133] The Islamic State was thus able to focus all its strength on the CTS, which took significant losses, estimated at the time at 50 percent (deaths and injuries).[134] In observing these losses, U.S. advisors tried to get other ISF units to open new fronts, but without effect.[135] Allegations arose that ISF ele-

ments deliberately stayed out of the city, against orders, to avoid the scale of losses endured by the CTS but also to tarnish the service's image, glowing as it was from press coverage.[136]

In early December 2016, to take pressure off the CTS, the Iraqi army's 9th Armored Division, equipped with tanks and armored personnel carriers, advanced into east Mosul but did not clear buildings along the routes as it traveled. When about a hundred of its soldiers reached the al-Salam Hospital, its initial objective, the Islamic State surrounded the building and ambushed reinforcing units. The CTS was called to lead the recovery efforts, and about twenty-four hours later reached the hospital, which was subsequently abandoned to IS.[137] Thus, the CTS, which was equipped with Humvees, had to relieve Iraq's most heavily armored unit. It would not be until December 29, 2016, that the Iraqi army and Federal Police would join the CTS in fighting in east Mosul.[138] Quicker progress ensued now that IS could no longer focus solely on the CTS,[139] and the service's loss rates fell.[140] Iraqi leaders had predicted that the battle for east Mosul would last only sixteen days,[141] and Prime Minister Abadi had expected that all Mosul would be liberated before the end of 2016.[142] But, as it happened, east Mosul alone would not be declared liberated until January 24, 2017.[143]

For west Mosul, the Federal Police and ERD played a larger role initially and were assigned to the most difficult part of the city, Old Mosul, with the CTS in a supporting role on the left flank of the Federal Police in light of the heavy casualties the former had recently sustained.[144] Bitter about the CTS's lead role and press coverage from east Mosul, the Federal Police and ERD treated west Mosul as a competition to prove they could liberate as many neighborhoods as possible. In doing so, they used reckless methods and initiated haphazard long-range artillery, mortar, and rocket bombardments into neighborhoods to facilitate their advance, inflicting unnecessary civilian casualties. These were area-fire artillery capabilities the CTS did not possess, and Mosul residents moved away from zones in Federal Police advance routes and into CTS areas.[145] Iraqi activists called for the removal of the Federal Police from the battle after video clips of the bombardments appeared, and tensions between the Federal Police and CTS grew visible.[146]

The Iraqi army divisions did not enter west Mosul until the final phase of the battle, when the CTS again played a much larger role. Former advisors describe the CTS as doing the majority of fighting in this final phase, while its flanks were always exposed. The Iraqi army divisions, for their part, could seize urban areas but were often unable to hold them,[147] and the CTS ulti-

mately took the most terrain in west Mosul.[148] The service fought within Old Mosul and was fifty meters from the al-Nuri Mosque—where Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had announced the creation of the caliphate in July 2014—when the jihadist group blew it up in an effort to kill relieving troops. The CTS went on to destroy the last remaining IS pocket in the city, along the Tigris River.[149]

NOTES

1. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
2. Ibid., p. 11
3. Ibid., pp. 10, 12.
4. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
5. Battalions were located in Iraqi provinces due to an insufficient number of helicopters to transport them from Baghdad to other areas in Iraq. The ISOF battalion assigned to Kirkuk province remained in Baghdad because of tensions with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 9, 25, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; "Al-Fariq al-Rukn Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi: Al-Tansiq ma'a al-Hashd al-Shabi Wasal ila auj Athamatuh" [Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi: Coordination with the Popular Mobilization Forces has reached its high point]. Anwar al-Qisi, interview by *al-Mustaqbal al-Iraqi*, Oct. 3, 2016, http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
6. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 8, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
7. Rudaw, "Tashkil Quwa Amniya Jadida li-Mukafaha Irhab fi Baghdad" [Forming a new security force to fight terrorism in Baghdad], July 5, 2015, http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/0507201514; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
8. Iraqi Parliament, "Qanun Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irab" [The Counter Terrorism Service law], Aug. 13, 2016, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 10–11, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
9. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; "*Al-Sumaria News* Tansur Nass al-Tadil al-Awwal li-Qanun Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [*al-Sumaria News* published the text of the first amendment of the Counter Terrorism Service law], *al-Sumaria*, Mar. 5, 2018, https://www.alsumaria.tv/mobile/news/230991/iraq-news; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
10. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.
11. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.
12. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 10, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

13. al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 25, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

14. The Mosul Battalion would later fight at Bayji, Tikrit, Ramadi, and Mosul. "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; and Sarra bin Hida, "Fauj al-Mosul Ya'ud ila al-Marika li-Istiada Sharafuhu al-Askari: Al-Maliki Amarana bi-al-Insihab" [The Mosul Battalion returns to the battle to reclaim its military honor: Maliki ordered us to withdraw], *Yalla Iraq*, Nov. 1, 2016, http://bit.ly/2L9QCW5.

15. al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 25, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

16. Ibid.

17. The regional battalions originally had authorized strengths of 440 soldiers apiece, while the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st ISOF Brigade were authorized to have 600 each since they were at first intended to operate throughout Iraq rather than in specific provinces. All battalions now have authorized strengths of around 415, except for the STUs, which are at around 300 due to their specialized functions. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 12, 32, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 27, 2017; LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2015, p. 34, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2019: Justification for FY 2019 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Counter–Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF)*, Feb. 2018, p. 8, http://bit.ly/2ORbROB.

18. Originally, only the 1st ISOF Brigade was referred to as the "Golden Brigade" or Division, but the term now applies to all three brigades. "Leading the Golden Brigade," http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/; Perry, https://politi.co/2OOfRzu; Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ; al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/; and Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464.

19. The 3rd ISOF Brigade commander was promoted to three stars in January 2017, during the battle for Mosul. "Bi-al-Wathiqa...Tarqiya al-Liwa al-Rukn Sami al-Ardi Qaid al-Quwa al-Khassa al-Thalitha fi Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab ila Rutba Fariq Rukn" [In the document...promotion of Staff Maj. Gen. Sami al-Ardi, commander of 3rd Special Operations Force, to rank of staff lieutenant general], *Iraqyoon Press*, Jan. 19, 2017, http://bit.ly/2Pr0DBQ; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 27, 2017.

20. al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.

21. Ibid.; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

22. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 7, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

23. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 27, 2017.

24. Michael Knights estimated CTS frontline strength at 4,500 in January 2015. This

figure does not include the CTS headquarters and CTC staff, which, while authorized to have a combined strength of 2,473, were frequently undermanned. As a planning assumption, 2,000 was used as the combined headquarters staff size. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 23, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 10, 26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

25. Michael Knights estimated CTS frontline strength at 8,500 in January 2016; with the addition of headquarters personnel, total strength would be 10,500. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 23, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 10, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

26. Most journalistic sources placed CTS strength at around 10,000 at the start of the Mosul battle, although a former CTS advisor cited 11,000. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 13, 2017; Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; and Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016.

27. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Mar. 17, 2018; and Peter Bergen, "It Wasn't Trump but This General's Elite Soldiers Who Defeated ISIS," CNN, Dec. 16, 2017, https://cnn.it/2L98aBV.

28. A U.S. budget request document, however, gave the CTS an estimated strength of around 13,000 in February 2018. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget* 2019, p. 8, http://bit.ly/2ORbROB.

29. al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 16, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.

30. al-Kenani, "CTS: There are no members" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2MFkuP1; and "Leading the Golden Brigade," http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/.

31. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.

32. Fazil Barwari, "'Urban War Is Not Easy,' Commander of Iraq's Elite Golden Division Force," interview by Hevidar Ahmed, Rudaw, Dec. 21, 2016, http://www.rudaw.net/mobile/english/interview/20122016.

33. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* Oct.–Dec. 2015, p. 41, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog.

34. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on Jan. 13, 2017, May 27, 2017, and May 19, 2018.

35. "Al-Jaish al-Iraqi Yubarrit Tudawil al-Shiarat al-Taifiya fi al-Mosul" [The Iraqi army justifies the circulation of Shia slogans in Mosul], Irakna News Portal, Dec. 4, 2016, http://bit.ly/2nU68fO.

36. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

37. Joshua Brownlee, "Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service Successes on Ground and in Recruiting," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, May 17, 2017, http://bit.ly/2wa8YRe; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2015, p. 47, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog.

38. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.

39. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.

40. "Beyond the Call of Duty," http://unipath-magazine.com/beyond-the-call-of-duty/.

41. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 13–14, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, March 17, 2018.
42. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
43. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
44. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and Lawrence Katzenstein, "Can Ramadi Be Rebuilt?" *Global Risk Insights*, Jan. 9, 2016, http://bit.ly/2wejuag.
45. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 16, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
46. Katzenstein, http://bit.ly/2wejuag; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 9, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
47. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
48. Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb; al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.
49. Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb.
50. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.
51. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 11, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
52. "Al-Khilafat Tasif bi-Qanun 'Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab' wa Turkanuh ala al-Raff" [Differences blow away the "Counter Terrorism Service law" and it is parked on the shelf], *al-Sabah al-Jadid*, Mar. 1, 2015, http://newsabah.com/newspaper/39721; and al-Amni, http://bit.ly/2MBaA0F.
53. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 19–20, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
54. Muhannad al-Ghazi, "Iraqi Special Forces Stand to Gain Stature with a Victory over IS," *Searching 4 Dinar*, Feb. 21, 2017, http://bit.ly/2nU9PSE.
55. With the passage of the CTS law, the United States began referring to the CTS as a ministry, although the law did not describe it as such. Neither do Iraqi official documents or the Iraqi press refer to it as a ministry. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, pp. 5–6, http://bit.ly/2we76XO; former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018; and Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.
56. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.
57. "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; al-Kenani, "The complete interview" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wda7rr; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
58. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.
59. When the CTS conducts purely military operations, it follows the same procedures as those in effect for the Ministry of Defense. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.
60. Ibid.
61. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 19–20, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

62. Iraqi Ministry of Justice, "Qanun al-Muwazana al-Amma al-Ittihadiya li-Jumhuriya al-Iraq lil-Sanna al-Maliya/2017" [Law of the general budget for the federal republic of Iraq for fiscal year 2017], Jan. 9, 2017, p. 39, https://moj.gov.iq/wqam/4430.pdf; Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 19–20, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

63. Iraqi Ministry of Justice, "Qanun al-Muwazana al-Amma al-Ittihadiya li-Jumhuriya al-Iraq lil-Sanna al-Maliya 2018" [Law of the general budget for the federal republic of Iraq for fiscal year 2018], Apr. 2, 2018, p. 52, https://www.moj.gov.iq/view.3758/.

64. "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; al-Kenani, "The complete interview" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wda7rr; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

65. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

66. Ibid.

67. al-Kenani, "The complete interview" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wda7rr; Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 19, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheed-media.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

68. "Al-Hakuma tuwafiq ala Tayin alf Judi wa 250 Tabit ala Malak Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [The government agrees on assigning one thousand soldiers and 250 officers to the table of organization of the Counter Terrorism Service], *Title Press 24*, Mar. 14, 2017, https://titlepress24.com/archives/27600; Sputnik Arabic, "Al-Iraq Sata'aqad ma'a Sharika Faransiya li-Tadrib Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [Iraq will contract with a French company to train the Counter Terrorism Service], Oct. 10, 2017, http://bit.ly/2nQJjcL; "Al-Majlis al-Wizari lil-Amn al-Watani Yabhath Uqud al-Taslih" [Ministerial Council for National Security discusses armament contracts], *Akhbar al-Iraq*, Nov. 13, 2017, http://bit.ly/2wf3Knn; "160 Milyon Dolar li-Taslih 'al-Hashd al-Shabi' wa 'Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab' bi-al-Iraq" [$160 million for arming the "Popular Mobilization Forces" and "Counter Terrorism Service" in Iraq], *Mubashir*, Dec. 4, 2017, http://bit.ly/2N33grO; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

69. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, July 11, 2018.

70. The FMS process is often criticized as being overly complex, lengthy, and bureaucratic; it can take years from the time an item is requested until it is delivered. But this process is designed to prevent abuse, corruption, fraud, and bribery by creating a formal record of all transactions requiring various levels of U.S. government approval. James Olden, "'Nothing Is Normal Here': The Challenges of U.S. Security Assistance in Iraq, 2013–2014," *International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (Winter 2014): p. 27; and *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 7, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

71. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

72. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

73. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 2, 7, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; "Iraq Train and Equip Fund," *Security Assistance Monitor*, n.d., http://bit.ly/2BthxN1; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* report to the U.S. Congress, Apr. 1–June 30, 2015, p. 21, http://bit.ly/2nTOCrM.

74. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

75. Ibid., pp. 7–10.

76. Ibid., p. 9; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

77. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

78. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017: Request for Additional FY 2017 Appropriations: Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), Counter–Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Train and Equip Fund (CTEF)*, Mar. 2017, p. 8, http://bit.ly/2wf4yIV.

79. In a report from December 2017, the U.S. Defense Department stated it had allocated $221 million for the CTS in 2017 and 2018, breaking down to around $27 million in 2017 and almost $194 million in 2018, as discussed in the main text. Of the $221 million total, $92 million had been obligated. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, pp. 10, http://bit.ly/2we76XO.

80. Among the items to be provided to the CTS were more than 400 Humvees, 6,000 M4 rifles, 450 heavy machine guns, 400 Mark (Mk) 19 heavy grenade launchers, 700 light machine guns, 3,000 pairs of night-vision goggles, 3,000 9-mm pistols, 5,000 sets of body armor, 5,000 helmets, and 3,000 individual first aid kits. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, pp. 6, 9–10, http://bit.ly/2we76XO.

81. "Law of the general budget for Iraq, 2018" (in Arabic), https://www.moj.gov.iq/view.3758/.

82. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2019*, p. 12, http://bit.ly/2ORbROB.

83. "Leading the Golden Brigade," http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/; Ghazi, http://bit.ly/2nU9PSE; Krauss, http://bit.ly/2LbgEYW; and Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

84. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2015, p. 47, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

85. "Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Aqwa Jihaz fi al-Sharq al-Awsat wa al-Watan al-Arabi" [The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest service in the Middle East and the Arab World], YouTube video, 3:14, posted by "NRT," Mar. 21, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf.

86. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf; "A Focus on Counterterrorism," http://unipath-magazine.com/a-focus-on-counterterrorism/; and Ahmad Habib al-Samawi, "Rais Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab, al-Fariq Awwal Rukn Talib Shaghati, Wisam Jauqa al-Sharaf al-Faransi" [Counter Terrorism Service director Staff Gen. Talib Shaghati receives the French Legion of Honor], al-Markiz al-Urubbi (European think tank), Oct. 30, 2017.

87. al-Samawi, "Counter Terrorism Service director" (in Arabic).

88. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

89. al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/; and "A Focus on Counterterrorism," http://unipath-magazine.com/a-focus-on-counterterrorism/.

90. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 26, 2018.

91. Hashim al-Hashimi, "Al-Dhikra al-Thalitha li-Ihtilal al-Mosul" [The third anniversary of the occupation of Mosul], AliraqNet.net, June 12, 2017, http://bit.ly/2L9DG2s.

92. al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/; "The Liberation of Ramadi," *Unipath*, Apr. 14, 2016, http://unipath-magazine.com/the-liberation-of-ramadi/; al-Samawi, "Counter Terrorism Service director" (in Arabic); al-Hashimi, http://bit.ly/2L9DG2s; and "A Focus on Counterterrorism," http://unipath-magazine.com/a-focus-on-counterterrorism/.

93. "Yarallah Raisan li-Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab badalan min Shighati [Yarallah director of the Counter Terrorism Service instead of Shaghati], *Shafaq News*, Mar. 23, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MmeQ4Z.

94. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

95. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

96. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf.

97. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017.

98. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf; "'Rommel al-Iraq' Mamnu min Tahrir Tal'afar" [The Rommel of Iraq is forbidden from liberating Tal Afar], *al-Journal*, Aug. 13, 2017, http://bit.ly/2vYeyXC; Bergen, https://cnn.it/2L98aBV; "Freedom for Fallujah," http://unipath-magazine.com/freedom-for-fallujah/; Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

99. "The Rommel of Iraq" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2vYeyXC; and "Tal Afar front" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wnadNp.

100. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 19, 2018; and Bergen, https://cnn.it/2L98aBV.

101. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

102. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf; "Leading the Golden Brigade," http://unipath-magazine.com/leading-the-golden-brigade/; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 22, 26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.

103. Lihony, http://bit.ly/2MAGNFs.

104. In November 2017, two U.S. former defense contractors testified in a U.S. federal court that Barwari had paid them hundreds of thousands of dollars to set up a corrupt deal to rent land that Barwari owned near Baghdad International Airport at a greatly inflated price as part of a U.S. defense contract. Rachel Weiner, "Iraqi General Helped Cheat U.S. Government Contractors Involved in Scheme Say...," *Stars and Stripes*, Nov. 28, 2017, http://bit.ly/2Movb97; LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; "Al-Abadi Yulin Intiha Tahqiq Suqut al-Ramadi wa Yuakkid: Al-Insihab lam Yakun Mukkawwalan" [Abadi announces end of investigation of fall of Ramadi and confirms: The withdrawal was not authorized], *al-Sumaria*, June 27, 2015, http://bit.ly/2vVNp7O; "Al-Abadi Yusadiq ala Tahqiq Suqut al-Ramadi wa Yuhil

Dubbat ila Mahakim al-Askariya" [Abadi approves investigation into the fall of Ramadi and sends officers to military courts], *Ain*, Aug. 16, 2015, http://bit.ly/2MnUJmV; and Mawazin News Agency, "Maqar al-Barlaman: Al-Hukuma Tabannit Tahqiq Suqut al-Ramadi wa lam Taballaghna al-Nataij Lighaya al-An" [Seat of Parliament: The government adopted the result of the investigation into the fall of Ramadi and has not informed us of the results until now], Dec. 3, 2015.

105. Barwari, http://www.rudaw.net/mobile/english/interview/20122016.

106. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf.

107. "Wa Rumuz Qad Ghayyabo an al-Ilam Lakin Saufa Yakhlud al-Tarikh li-Butulathum min Hamm" [And symbols already concealed from the media, but the history of their heroism will remain important], Radio Sobel al-Salam, June 26, 2016, http://www.sobelalsalam.com/er/news-9614.html.

108. Voice of America, http://bit.ly/2N3Djbx.

109. "Mukafaha al-Irhab: L'tiqal Akbar Isaba li-Sayyara fi Kirkuk" [Counter Terrorism: Arrest of the biggest car burglary ring in Kirkuk], *Alghad Press*, Dec. 13, 2017, http://bit.ly/2LcTOjP.

110. "Al-Ardi lil-*Mirbad*: Quwat Mukafaha al-Irhab Sataqtahim al-Falluja min Jami al-Mahawir" [Al-Ardi to *al-Mirbad*: The Counter Terrorism Force will storm Fallujah from all axes], *al-Mirbad*, May 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/2BuP3CK; "Sami al-Ardi li-'Huna Baghdad': Tathir Akthar min 80% min Mintaqah al-Ramadi Hata al-Ana" [Sami al-Ardi to *Here Is Baghdad*: Clearing more than 80% of the Ramadi region until now], *Ashnona*, Jan. 5, 2016, http://www.ashnona.net/iraq/23978.html; Associated Press, "Iraqi Commanders Say IS Families Have Joined Mosul Fight," Ynetnews.com, July 6, 2017, http://bit.ly/2ONsLxN; "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf; and "Tal Afar front" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wnadNp.

111. "The Counter Terrorism Service is the strongest" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BtQ3Hf; "Tal Afar front" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wnadNp; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

112. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; Ghazi, http://bit.ly/2nU9PSE; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

113. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 19, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD.

114. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

115. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 23, 2018; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

116. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

117. The U.S. Defense Department later clarified that U.S. forces had not trained the ERD but that the Italian Carabinieri, also part of the coalition, had done so. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, pp. 23–24, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, July 1–Sept. 30, 2017, p. 16, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL; and Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights, "Mini-Hizballahs, Revolutionary Guard Knock-Offs, and the Future of Iran's Militant Proxies in Iraq," *War on the Rocks*, May 9, 2017, http://bit.ly/2nRPnSb.

118. Eisenstadt and Knights, http://bit.ly/2nRPnSb.

119. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* July–Sept. 2017, p. 17, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL.

120. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 29, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD; Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; Eisenstadt and Knights, http://bit.ly/2nRPnSb; and Mustafa Salim and Missy Ryan, "Iraq Gives Militias Official Status Despite Abuse Claims," *Washington Post*, Nov. 26, 2017, https://wapo.st/2N3RJZd.

121. Bender, https://read.bi/2nRIT5J; Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 32, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* report to the U.S. Congress, Apr. 1–June 30, 2016, p. 4, http://bit.ly/2nUaN0U.

122. "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

123. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; Prothero, http://bit.ly/2L6ppni; and Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb.

124. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

125. "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

126. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

127. Ghazi, http://bit.ly/2nU9PSE.

128. David Kenner and Campbell MacDiarmid, "Goodbye, Islamic State. Hello, Anarchy," *Foreign Policy*, Mar. 24, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MZ8Nj0.

129. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

130. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* July–Sept. 2017, p. 14, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL.

131. Gareth Browne, "Attack on Mosul: World's Biggest Military Operation Runs into Trouble," *Middle East Eye*, Jan. 2, 2017, http://bit.ly/2Pr8FL0; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.

132. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* report to the U.S. Congress, Oct. 1–Dec. 31, 2016, p. 4, http://bit.ly/2wh5k8j; and Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464.

133. Neuhof, http://bit.ly/2ORt0rp; Barwari, http://www.rudaw.net/mobile/english/interview/20122016; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2016, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2wh5k8j.

134. Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016; Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; Browne, http://bit.ly/2Pr8FL0; and Joel Wing, "Reviewing the Battle of Mosul, Interview with Ret. Col. David M. Witty," *Musings on Iraq*, July 10, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BvOIj6.

135. Perry, https://politi.co/2OOfRzu.

136. al-Dalimi, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=641184; "Reviewing the Battle of Mosul," http://bit.ly/2BvOIj6; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

137. Browne, http://bit.ly/2Pr8FL0.

138. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* Oct.–Dec. 2016, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2wh5k8j.

139. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464.

140. Loveday Morris and Mustafa Salim, "After a Slow and Bloody Fight Against ISIS, Iraqi Forces Pick Up the Pace in Mosul," *Washington Post*, Jan. 14, 2017, https://wapo.st/2ON6qjR.

141. "Bi-Sabab al-Khasair...al-Jaish wa Mukafaha al-Irhab Yusta'inan bi-al-Milishiyat fi Maarik Sharq al-Mosul" [Because of losses, the Army and Counter Terrorism Force ask for militias in battles for east Mosul], *Baghdad Post*, Nov. 19, 2016, http://bit.ly/2w5WSK3.

142. Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016.

143. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* report to the U.S. Congress, Jan. 1–March 31, 2017, p. 38, http://bit.ly/2MGIwZV.

144. Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464.

145. Salim and Morris, "In Mosul, Iraqi Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2OU0VA3; and "Reviewing the Battle of Mosul," http://bit.ly/2BvOIj6.

146. "Bi-al-Fidiyo…Istikhdam Asliha Thaqila bi-al-Mosul Yuthir Ghadab Iraqiyin" [In video, use of heavy weapons in Mosul stirs the anger of Iraqis], *Erem News*, June 15, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BFaSj9; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 19, 2018.

147. Ibid.; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

148. Gordon, "Iraqi Forces Open a Front," https://nyti.ms/2wiHj0y; former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 19, 2018.

149. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.

4.

TRAINING, RECRUITMENT, AND CASUALTIES

THE IRAQI COUNTER TERRORISM SERVICE has a strong tradition of training enlistees, as well as ambitious plans for the future. But attrition and injuries pose challenges, as explored in the following sections.

INITIAL CHANGES TO TRAINING DURING THE IS WAR

When the Islamic State took parts of Anbar province in early 2014, the CTS was confronted for the first time with conventional combat and instituted changes to its training regimen in response. After the fall of Mosul in June 2014 and the increased role of the U.S.-led coalition, training was further modified with the help of small numbers of U.S. Special Forces advisors, aided by recommendations from CTS officers returning from Anbar. Training was now focused to address the CTS's new elite infantry role.[1] The loss of Ramadi to IS in May 2015 marked another major turning point, leading to greater changes.[2]

The original CTS training model, as designed by USSF advisors, began with CTS candidates receiving a background screening to prove they had no sectarian or political ties. Then candidates attended a three-week assessment and selection course, which provided some initial military training and was principally designed to eliminate those judged incapable of completing subsequent, more advanced training. After completion of the assessment phase, trainees went to the forty-seven-day basic commando course, which qualified soldiers to be assigned to ISOF battalions.[3] The more elite CTS units,

such as the ICTF, received advanced training on high-level counterterrorism operations such as hostage rescue.[4] All training standards were designed to resemble those of the USSF.[5]

After IS took parts of Anbar, the commando course was expanded to two months, to include training in urban warfare, medical care, disarming improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and new weapons such as mortars.[6] Training also included methods to protect civilians in urban environments, with an emphasis on respecting international laws and human rights.[7] All training occurred at the Academia, the CTS training center in Area IV. Collective, or unit-level, training also took place at the Academia. In 2014, each ISOF battalion rotated through the Academia for refresher courses focused largely on urban combat.[8] Later, concentrated training was aimed at preparing ISOF battalions for specific battles such as Ramadi.[9]

CURRENT TRAINING

In late 2015 and early 2016, the Academia was organized into three schools: the Special Operations School, referred to as the "first school" by the coalition; the Counterterrorism School, or "second school"; and the Preparation and Development School, or "third school."[10] Almost all training still occurs at Area IV. Specifically, the Special Operations School conducts basic military training, the assessment and selection course, and the basic commando course. The Counterterrorism School focuses on targeted training for the jobs CTS soldiers will perform in their battalions and includes many new specialty courses.[11] The Preparation and Development School trains in advanced skills, mostly for those who have already completed requirements to become CTS soldiers.

The two sections within the Academia to produce trained CTS soldiers are the Special Operations and Counterterrorism Schools, and after completion of training in these schools, graduates are assigned to ISOF battalions.[12] CTS training for new soldiers, as noted in the previous chapter, is similar to that used for USSOF and USSF.[13] The process begins at the Special Operations School with the arrival of volunteers from recruiting centers after they have been selected as CTS candidates.[14] Those chosen may have prior military service or come directly from civilian life with no prior military training. Upon arrival at the Academia, they receive a medical examination, a background screening, and a physical fitness test. The Academia vets all candidates to determine if they are loyal to Iraq and have no political or sectarian

affiliations.[15] U.S. advisors then do a biometric vetting using U.S. databases. Any candidates with ties to the Popular Mobilization Forces, even moderate units, are not allowed to continue.[16]

Candidates who pass the screening and have not previously attended basic military training then take part in the Academia's new forty-five-day basic training course. After that, candidates attend the assessment and selection course, which remains three weeks long. Five hundred candidates enter the assessment and selection course at a time. Prior to the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, pass rates in the assessment and selection course generally ranged from 50 to 60 percent, but now the overwhelming majority pass.[17] Those who do are no longer considered candidates for entry into the CTS but rather trainees. They next proceed to the two-month basic commando course.[18]

The next stop is the Counterterrorism School, which trains them on the specific jobs they will perform. These include the following specialties: officer training (aka officer leadership course), counterterrorism specialist (operator training course), urban warfare specialist (operator readiness course), sniper, sapper, mortarman, heavy weapons operator (for machine guns and antitank rockets), Humvee driver, communications operator, and medic.[19] The new specialty courses were first conducted in late 2015 and early 2016.

Some of the specialty courses are eight weeks long and some less. As the shorter courses are completed, trainees conduct cross-training in the various specialties for basic familiarization, stretching all training to a total of eight weeks. All, therefore, complete their specialty courses at the same time.[20] More specifically: The operator training course focuses on high-end counterterrorism skills such as precision shooting, hostage rescue, and countering suicide bombers. The operator readiness course focuses on urban combat and includes an emphasis on protecting civilians.[21] The sapper course focuses on countering IEDs and destroying unexploded ordnance.[22]

Officer training is unique in many respects. Prior to training at the Academia, officers must have already completed two years of training at a military academy or six months at officer candidate school, both conducted by the Defense Ministry.[23] The officer leadership course at the Academia provides training in counterterrorism leadership, intelligence gathering, command and control, and analysis of terrorist targets.[24] It was designed to last eight weeks but has not been offered recently after a failed experiment to hold all officer training separate from enlisted soldiers, including separate selection and commando courses. The very lack of integration between

officers and enlistees was cited as the cause of the failure.[25] A new training model for officers dictates that they go through the selection and commando courses with the enlisted soldiers, then attend eight weeks of officer training, and finally reintegrate with the enlistees after they have completed their eight weeks of specialty training. Officer training at the Academia occurs after each class graduates from Defense Ministry officer training.[26]

After the eight-week training period, all trainees are brought together to form tactical units for four weeks, after which they conduct a final practical exercise over a single week. This exercise, an attack on a simulated Islamic State–controlled town, includes role players representing IS fighters and civilians.[27] Thereafter, graduates are assigned to ISOF battalions, with a lottery system used to avoid any perceptions of patronage or influence as factors affecting assignments.[28] During the IS war, graduates were often sent directly into combat.[29]

The training courses are not necessarily back-to-back, but they are generally spread out over an eight-month period,[30] and it takes eight months to a year to produce a soldier.[31] To be sure, a great deal of change occurs at any given time, and proposals have been made to add more specialty courses, such as vehicle maintenance, chemical defense, and operation of night-vision goggles. Other proposals have suggested further increasing the length of the specialty courses and the commando course, as well as officer training.[32]

LIMITATIONS ON FORCE GENERATION

The new training model is both instructor and resource intensive, and it has produced fewer new soldiers in the course of a year.[33] In March 2018, according to a U.S. estimate, the Academia could produce about 1,500 new soldiers a year,[34] while in 2015, before the new training model was implemented, the CTS said it produced 4,500 a year.[35] A current proposal would mean conducting training cycles three times a year with class sizes of 500 (as noted earlier), thereby yielding, before any attrition, only 1,500 soldiers in a year.[36] But during the IS war, the United States believed the CTS could sustain itself, and service strength does appear to have broadly stabilized at about 10,000 personnel by the end of 2017.[37]

CTS leaders say that overall attrition, from the start to finish of training, can be as high as 45–50 percent, but that the rise of the Islamic State has driven increased success rates based on enthusiasm for joining the service.[38] When the CTS suffered heavy casualties and faced manpower shortages during the war,

its leaders considered reducing training times to produce soldiers more quickly, but ultimately the timeframe remained unchanged, owing to efforts by advisors to preserve high training standards.[39] Still, during these high-attrition periods, such as the battles for Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul, maintaining such standards was not easy for the Academia, in the view of U.S. officials, and the need to replace soldiers resulted in high pass rates for trainees.[40]

ADVANCED TRAINING

For those who have already completed initial CTS training, the Preparation and Development School, which resembles USSOF models,[41] teaches advanced courses and skills and supports specific training for the ISOF battalions.[42] It offers deep reconnaissance courses for members of the ISOF reconnaissance battalions,[43] desert training,[44] and advanced training on air mobility to move equipment, vehicles, and personnel supported by the Iraqi air force and Iraqi army aviation.[45] There is also occasional training on chemical defense and, for CTS staff officers, courses on advanced intelligence.[46] The school has begun a basic airborne course, honoring a desire by CTS leaders to create this capability. Although U.S. advisors view this as unnecessary, CTS leaders have insisted on it, since the service is the only Arab SOF without the ability to parachute from aircraft. Initial training was conducted at a civilian parachute club in Baghdad to qualify Academia instructors.[47]

Training in more-advanced skills is intended for the future at the Preparation and Development School, which is still in its infancy. These skills include the diving and maritime realm, advanced airborne operations, and instruction for specific environments such as desert or mountain areas.[48] Plans are also in the works to conduct K-9 training for explosive detection and assaults.[49] Still other proposals have centered on specific courses for officers as they are promoted in rank and for noncommissioned officers.[50]

Different expertise is imparted in the Iraqi forward air controllers (IFAC) course, which technically falls under the Preparation and Development School but is largely taught by the Counterterrorism School.[51] Those who attend must know English. Even so, while in some cases ISOF personnel have been given authority to call in coalition airstrikes during combat unaccompanied by on-the-ground U.S. joint tactical air controllers,[52] generally CTS controllers are only allowed to call in Iraqi aircraft. The IFAC course lasts twelve weeks and is considered the most instructor intensive of Academia offerings.[53]

Yet another responsibility of the Academia is reequipping CTS units returning from combat, a process known as refitting. This includes replacing personnel losses in combat, repairing or replacing equipment, and providing refresher training.[54] This reequipping was designed to be done one company at a time at the Academia, but sometimes experiments were undertaken wherein battalions conducted their own refitting, as with the 2nd ISOF Brigade after the Mosul battle.[55] The 1st ISOF Brigade was refitted at the Academia, according to the original plan, in fall 2017.[56]

In seeking to improve combat performance, the Academy also studies after-action reviews and conducts specialized training for battalions based on lessons learned.[57] After the Fallujah and Mosul battles, detailed reviews were conducted of ISOF's performance and the Islamic State's techniques and tactics, and lessons learned were incorporated into existing and new courses. Based on IS's use of drones in Mosul to conduct reconnaissance against ISOF and to drop small bombs on areas of assembly, lessons were incorporated into training on how to counter drones. The same was done regarding the jihadist group's use of snipers, car bombs, roadside bombs, and its emplacement of explosives in homes.[58]

Finally, the CTS has also trained Defense Ministry forces. In September 2017, the Academia conducted a three-month course for instructors from the ministry's training centers, which included material on urban combat and laws of armed conflict.[59] Plans are under way for additional such training.[60]

COALITION TRAINING ADVISORS, INSTRUCTORS, AND ASSISTANCE AT THE ACADEMIA

Increased U.S. training of CTS personnel at the Academia recommenced in December 2014, funded mainly by CTEF, after having been at greatly reduced levels following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011.[61] But rather than being trained almost exclusively by USSF, as was the case prior to the U.S. withdrawal, the more than five thousand CTS soldiers were trained by a variety of forces from coalition nations and USSOF from 2015 through September 2017.[62]

The Academia receives training and advice from two organizations, the Special Operations Training Command–Iraq (SOTC-I) and the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq (OSC-I). SOTC-I, which is subordinate to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Iraq (CJSOTF-I), develops instructional programs, generally supports training, and coordinates coalition training for the Academia.[63] SOTC-I is not led by USSF but by other

USSOF and consists of coalition SOF from many nations, including Australia, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Spain.[64] In developing most of the current instructional programs at the Academia, SOTC-I has relied on U.S. doctrine and USSOF standards, and Iraqi leaders credit this training with engendering the battlefield success of the CTS.[65]

OSC-I, which is part of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, conducts security cooperation and assistance for the CTS along with other Iraqi forces.[66] During the war against the Islamic State, OSC-I provided the CTS at Area IV with two USSF Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs, or "A-Teams"), which oversaw all training and supervised the design and maintenance of the instructional programs, such as the new specialty courses, in conjunction with SOTC-I.[67] The number has since been reduced to one ODA, with the second having been reassigned to assist the Iraqi army's new ranger units.[68] In addition, a U.S.-embassy-based USSOF colonel advises the CTS headquarters.[69] During the IS war, about a hundred coalition personnel, divided between SOTC-I and OSC-I, were working with the Academia.[70]

Most coalition training at the Academia is not conducted by USSOF but by the other nationalities that are part of SOTC-I. In particular, France has provided medical training, deep reconnaissance courses, and desert training,[71] while Belgian instructors have taught the officer course and Polish forces were involved in training Defense Ministry members.[72] The U.S. Marine Corps has furnished chemical defense training.[73] With the conventional defeat of IS now completed, fewer coalition actors are training CTS personnel at the Academia, but their presence nevertheless remains.[74]

Today, Iraqis have taken over much of the instruction at the Academia, even as the United States maintains strong quality-control oversight and helps with refinements.[75] On the particulars, Iraqis constitute almost all the instructors at the Special Operations School,[76] while teaching some specialty courses at the Counterterrorism School.[77] Owing to costs and safety concerns, U.S. and coalition advisors have no role in the airborne course, leaving this fully to Iraqi personnel.[78] U.S. advisors, finally, have used CTEF funds to make improvements to training facilities at Area IV, such as repairs to firing ranges.[79]

TRAINING PROBLEMS

The Academia, as already established, strives to achieve training standards similar to those of the USSOF.[80] But one post-2011 criticism holds that the CTS has maintained its strength at the expense of training standards.[81]

While CTS leaders tout the high attrition rates in training, suggesting that only the best, brightest, and strongest graduate, in reality a constant struggle hovers over the quality versus quantity of soldiers produced.[82] Certainly, the introductory screening of potential candidates is tough. Of the almost two thousand volunteers brought to the Academia in one cohort in 2017, more than eight hundred failed the initial fitness test and were sent home.[83]

Another weakness involves the lag between new recruits' passage through the screening process and the start of training. For instance, a drive resulted in a thousand recruits in May 2017, but they did not begin basic training until that fall.[84] This is largely because the CTS director personally approves every individual selected for training based on his own discretion.[85]

A shortage of Iraqi instructors has likewise strained the system. In early 2017, the Special Operations School had only 50 percent of its assigned instructors,[86] while that summer the Counterterrorism School had only 30 percent of its instructors.[87] Although CTS leaders say Academia faculty are selected from among the most experienced CTS soldiers,[88] the reality is that new graduates are often given this role because the battalions do not want to give up their experienced hands. For their part, some graduates use personal connections to become instructors to avoid frontline duty.[89] But the Academia also wisely uses experienced soldiers who have been wounded in combat as instructors.[90]

Some have alleged that new graduates of the Academia, once at their battalions, are not used in the specialties in which they were trained, and instead are assigned to perform other duties. In truth, some of the specialty courses are simply inadequate. For example, the sapper course does not sufficiently prepare its graduates for disarming sophisticated IEDs in combat.[91]

Other problems are the aforementioned lack of funding and resources, alongside cultural and bureaucratic factors. Iraqi funding for CTS training is always short,[92] and CTS director Kenani stated that even after passage of the CTS law, budget shortfalls still affect training and limit the number of courses offered.[93] Often, instructors cannot get equipment and supplies to support training because the CTS headquarters staff directly controls supplies at Area IV and the CTS director is tasked with approving certain items. Warehouses at Area IV contain large amounts of ammunition, body armor, and weapons-cleaning kits that are needed for training but unavailable in time to support it.[94] The lack of access to weapons-cleaning supplies has contributed to improper weapons maintenance. Moreover, the CTS tends to hoard equipment for later rather than using it to support current training.[95]

Infrastructure problems at Area IV and a shortage of space present separate challenges.[96] The area, even after coalition-led repairs in 2016, had twenty-one shooting ranges—but eight were not operational.[97] In 2017, a lack of training areas led to insufficient instruction on certain types of antitank rockets, with weapons usually not fired until actual combat.[98] Training areas also suffered from post-rain flooding due to inadequate drainage systems.[99]

A final weakness involves a certain disjointedness that comes with the involvement of so many different coalition nations at the Academia, as compared to when the CTS was trained exclusively by USSF. Each coalition nation has its own distinct tactics, techniques, procedures, military doctrine, and language, which inevitably creates confusion. At one point, a French mechanized infantry force, not French SOF, conducted training at the Academia, drawing resentment from CTS personnel.[100] One future desire of the CTS is to be trained exclusively by U.S. and Australian SOF, with the latter included because it has capabilities similar to USSF.[101]

CTS RECRUITING AND ATTRITION

As one of the most popular organizations in Iraq, the CTS has attracted much interest from potential members.[102] Those serving in the service enjoy better pay, equipment, and living accommodations than members of other ISF entities.[103] For its part, while the CTS sends delegations to Defense Ministry training centers to seek volunteers with military experience,[104] it prefers civilian recruits since it has its own unique standards.[105]

The CTS uses online platforms such as Facebook and YouTube as well as television channels for recruitment proposes, and when the service announces a recruitment campaign, centers across Iraq quickly fill up.[106] Because of this high interest level, the CTS can select the best possible candidates.[107] For instance, in response to its May 2017 online recruitment campaign for those without prior military service, more than 300,000 applicants (5,000 of them with college degrees) applied for the 1,000 positions available within three days.[108] Yet because of financial constraints faced by the CTS and the overall Iraqi budget, the prime minister's cabinet must directly authorize and approve efforts to replenish CTS manpower.[109]

Attrition is a more sensitive issue. The CTS is secretive regarding numbers, especially those involving casualties,[110] and did not disclose casualty figures at any stage of the IS war.[111] As previously mentioned, before 2014 the

CTS took very few casualties, and took none at all some months. In fact, more CTS men were killed in combat accidents than by the enemy during this period.[112] Rising casualty rates can be traced through the various operations since 2014:

- Defense of Fallujah and Ramadi, early 2014. The CTS began to suffer significant casualties in Anbar province, when IS took Fallujah in early 2014. Entire ISOF assault teams were killed by IS pressure plate mines. Many of the original soldiers trained by the United States starting in 2003 were killed in 2014 in the province, and former advisors describe ISOF as being decimated there.[113]
- Recapture of Ramadi, 2015. The CTS lost many soldiers in retaking Ramadi, where IS members fought to the death.[114] The coalition asserted after Ramadi that the CTS had taken significant losses during the IS war until that point,[115] and that while about 10,000 ISF troops were active at Ramadi, the "CTS was by far the most heavily engaged."[116] More than two hundred CTS Humvees were destroyed in Ramadi between August and November 2015,[117] a number that would serve almost five battalions. Destruction of a Humvee does not necessarily mean its crew members were all killed or injured, but it does point to the intensity of the fighting.
- Liberation of Fallujah, 2016. The CTS also described the battle for Fallujah, where it again carried the fighting,[118] as very difficult.[119] As previously mentioned, in June 2016, after the city's liberation, a senior U.S. advisor estimated total CTS casualties from 2014 to that point at 3,700–4,000, with about 400 of those killed.[120]
- Mosul, 2016–17. The CTS took its greatest losses in Mosul. An official U.S. statement in December 2016 put Iraqi losses in east Mosul at 500 troops killed and 3,000 wounded, with the majority of these likely CTS.[121] In May 2017, during battle for west Mosul, the Defense Department stated that the CTS had suffered 40 percent losses (killed and injured) in Mosul to date,[122] and a former U.S. CTS advisor during the battle reported total CTS losses in Mosul at the end of the battle at 60 percent.[123]

The CTS provided medical care for its wounded and set up casualty collection points near fighting areas to provide immediate treatment, while the Iraqi army provided initial treatment in other cases.[124] The seriously

wounded were evacuated to Area IV in Baghdad, where the CTS operates a clinic; the service also has a medical services directorate and a small hospital at the CTS headquarters in Baghdad's International Zone.[125] Initially, CTS members had little faith in either their own or Iraqi army surgeons,[126] and later a U.S. combat-support hospital provided treatment for CTS casualties at Area IV.[127]

The CTS is committed to caring for its injured and has embraced this mission as part of its culture.[128] The CTS law stipulated that the service provide for injured personnel and develop programs to assist families of those killed or injured.[129] As noted, wounded members are sometimes employed as instructors until they have been rehabilitated, and the more seriously injured can become permanent instructors.[130] In the area of care for the long-term wounded, the service sent some members to Lebanon to be fitted with prosthetics, and has plans to create its own prosthetics center. The Defense Ministry already has an excellent prosthetics center, but it has halted long-term medical care for CTS personnel. The service is also establishing a veterans' affairs branch to provide long-term care for those who can no longer serve, as well as to supervise stipend payments to those retired for medical reasons or to surviving family members.[131]

NOTES

1. Maj. Timothy Chavis, "Iraqi Counterterrorism Units Fights Da'ish," *Unipath*, Aug. 20, 2015, http://bit.ly/2Lb75JQ; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 13, 2017.
2. Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.
3. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 8, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
4. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 8, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
5. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 7–8, 13, 26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
6. Chavis, http://bit.ly/2Lb75JQ.
7. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.
8. Chavis, http://bit.ly/2Lb75JQ.
9. "Counter Terrorism from the Front Lines," *Unipath*, Oct. 3, 2016, http://bit.ly/2Pqx6YH.
10. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; and "Akadimiya al-Abtal—Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [The academy of heroes—the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service], YouTube video, 32:06, posted by al-Iraqiya channel, June 4, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.

11. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 3, 17, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u. Also, author interviews with former CTS advisors on Nov. 4, 2017, Jan. 20, 2017, May 27, 2017, and Aug. 25, 2017; and "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.
12. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
13. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.
14. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.
15. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 13, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
16. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
17. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 8, 13, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017.
18. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.
19. The occupational specialties assigned to trainees are based on their performance in the basic commando course. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 17, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; author interviews with former CTS advisors on Nov. 4, 2017, Jan. 20, 2017, May 27, 2017, and Aug. 25, 2017. And see Rudaw, "Washington: Khasair Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Wasalit ila 40%" [Washington: The losses of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service have reached 40%], Aug. 18, 2017, http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/180820171; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Dec. 13, 2017.
20. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.
21. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.
22. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.
23. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Dec. 13, 2017.
24. "Washington: The losses" (in Arabic), http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/180820171.
25. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on Nov. 4, 2017, Aug. 25, 2017, and May 27, 2017.
26. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Dec. 13, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.
27. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; author interviews with former CTS advisors on May 27, 2017, Aug. 25, 2017, and Jan. 6, 2018.
28. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

29. Ahmed and Qasim, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/24122016; Morris and Salim, "After a Slow and Bloody Fight," https://wapo.st/2ON6qjR.

30. Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR), "Coalition Drops Hammer on CTS Range Improvements," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, Apr. 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/2PpTT6V; "Washington: The losses" (in Arabic), http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/180820171; and "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.

31. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.

32. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

33. CJTF–OIR, http://bit.ly/2PpTT6V.

34. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Pacific Eagles–Philippines*, report to the U.S. Congress, Jan. 1–Mar. 31, 2018, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9.

35. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.

36. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

37. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Mar. 17, 2018.

38. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; and al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.

39. El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

40. El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h.

41. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

42. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 3, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

43. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 3, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

44. "Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Yatalaqqa Tadribat Sirriya ala Yad Quwat Faransiya fi Sahra al-Imarat" [The Counter Terrorism Service receives secret training from French forces in the Emirates desert], *Hatha al-Youm*, Jan. 4, 2016, http://bit.ly/2LadLYC; and "Iraq will contract" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2nQJjcL.

45. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and Iraqi Ministry of Defense, "Qiyada al-Quwa al-Jawwiya wa Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Yunaffidhan Tamrinan Ta'bowiyan Mushtarikan" [Air Force and Counter Terrorism Service conduct joint tactical training], *Kitabat*, May 2, 2017, http://www.kitabat.info/subject.php?id=93176.

46. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Mar. 17, 2018; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

47. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017.

48. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; "Washington: The losses" (in Arabic), http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/180820171; and au-

thor interviews with former CTS advisors on Aug. 25, 2017; May 27, 2017, and Dec. 13, 2017.

49. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

50. The CTS sends small numbers of its members for training abroad in Jordan, the United States, Australia, France, and every other country involved in the coalition in Iraq. Asadi, "Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Ghani al-Asadi" (in Arabic), http://almustakbalpaper.net/content.php?id=23048; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

51. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Mar. 17, 2018.

52. Knights, *The Long Haul*, p. 14, http://washin.st/1DGcqSf; and Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.

53. The IFAC course is supported by Iraqi Air Force F-16s at the Bismayah training site, forty kilometers southeast of Baghdad. Iraqi Air Force, "Al-Sirb al-Tasi bi-Muqatilat F-16 Yusharik bi-Tamrin Ta'bowi ma'a Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab" [The 9th F-16 Fighter Squadron participates in tactical training with the Counter Terrorism Service], YouTube video, 5:10, posted by "Iraqi Air Force," Aug. 30, 2017, http://bit.ly/2MFOn1F; former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017.

54. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 3, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.

55. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

56. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.

57. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 3, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

58. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.

59. The U.S. Department of State requested that the CTS train Kurdish Peshmerga forces, but the CTS judged this to be infeasible. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and Iraqi Ministry of Defense, "Academia Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Takhruj al-Daura al-Awwali li-Dubbat wa Dubbat Saff al-Muallimin li-Marakiz Wizara al-Difa al-Tadribiya" [The academy of the Counter Terrorism Service graduates the first course for instructor officers and noncommissioned officers for Ministry of Defense training centers], Sept. 28, 2017, http://bit.ly/2PlOuOx.

60. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

61. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Apr.–June 2015, p. 21, http://bit.ly/2nTOCrM.

62. In December 2017, this figure was revised upward to approximately 14,800 trained since January 2015, due to a new method the coalition was using that included all types of training. This revised figure likely encompassed training for CTS members who were already assigned to their battalions and beyond their initial entry training at the Academia. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 22, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt, and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, July–Sept. 2017, p. 16, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL.

63. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

64. Brownlee, http://bit.ly/2wa8YRe; and author interviews with former CTS advisors on Nov. 4, 2017, Jan. 20, 2017, and Jan. 6, 2018.

65. The U.S. Army's *Ranger Handbook* is used as a basis for the development of most CTS training; see Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Ranger Handbook: TC 3-21.76*, April 2017, https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/tc3-21-76.pdf. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018. In April 2017, the Academia had seventeen SOCT-I-developed programs of instruction. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 3, 17, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

66. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

67. In addition, a team of U.S. contractors is stationed at Area IV to perform logistical support for Academia training. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on May 27, 2017, Jan. 20, 2017, Jan. 13, 2017, and Jan. 6, 2018; and *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, p. 16, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.

68. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

69. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

70. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.

71. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; "The Counter Terrorism Service receives secret training" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2LadLYC; and Sputnik Arabic, http://bit.ly/2nQJjcL.

72. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

73. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

74. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

75. El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h; and Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.

76. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

77. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 6, 2018.

78. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017.

79. CJTF–OIR, http://bit.ly/2PpTT6V.

80. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.

81. Knights, *The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 23, https://washin.st/2Mo6nhD.

82. Since the conventional defeat of IS in December 2017, attrition rates in training have started to increase. For example, two recent operator-training courses that began with forty trainees each yielded only twelve graduates from both courses combined. Author interviews with former CTS advisors on June 26, 2018, Jan. 20, 2017, and Nov. 4, 2017.

83. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

84. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, July–Sept. 2017, pp. 16–17, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL; and Jack Detsch, "U.S. Elite Troop Training in Iraq Lags after Mosul," Al-Monitor, Dec. 8, 2017, available at http://bit.ly/2MFXfnK.

85. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Oct. 6, 2017; and coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017.

86. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.

87. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
88. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH.
89. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
90. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
91. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Nov. 4, 2017.
92. CJTF–OIR, http://bit.ly/2PpTT6V.
93. al-Kenani, "The complete interview" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2wda7rr.
94. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 13–14, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.
95. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Mar. 17, 2018.
96. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
97. CJTF–OIR, http://bit.ly/2PpTT6V.
98. *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans*, pp. 23, 27, http://bit.ly/2BttL8u.
99. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, July 11, 2018.
100. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
101. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 2, 2018.
102. Brownlee, http://bit.ly/2wa8YRe; and Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.
103. Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.
104. "Academy of heroes" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2BttRwH; and Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 13, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
105. al-Kenani, "The complete interview" (in Arabic) http://bit.ly/2wda7rr.
106. al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.
107. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.
108. Brownlee, http://bit.ly/2wa8YRe; El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h; "The government agrees" (in Arabic), https://titlepress24.com/archives/27600; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
109. "The government agrees" (in Arabic), https://titlepress24.com/archives/27600; Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
110. Coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017.
111. MacDiarmid, "The Battle to Retake Mosul," http://bit.ly/2PmN1r3; and Browne, http://bit.ly/2Pr8FL0.
112. Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ.
113. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 13, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Jan. 20, 2017.
114. Barwari, http://www.rudaw.net/mobile/english/interview/20122016.
115. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2015, p. 34, http://bit.ly/2vVZRog.

116. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Mar. 2016, p. 32, http://bit.ly/2BtdmAR.

117. Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017: Justification for FY 2017 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), Iraq Train & Equip Fund (ITEF)*, Feb. 2016, p. 1, http://bit.ly/2MAZusC.

118. al-Shaghati, http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.

119. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw.

120. One below-strength ISOF battalion, with just 240 men in December 2013, was down to 190 post-Fallujah even after receiving replacements. Morris, https://wapo.st/2L9uATw; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

121. Informal conversations suggest the CTS did indeed suffer grievous losses in Mosul. A former advisor reported that the CTS endured around a thousand casualties in the first two weeks of east Mosul fighting. In mid-December, the 1st ISOF Brigade commander said he had started the Mosul battle with a hundred Humvees but was down to fifty by mid-December. The streets of east Mosul were full of damaged Humvees, all from the CTS, the only force then fighting to liberate the city. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017; Barwari, http://www.rudaw.net/mobile/english/interview/20122016; Browne, http://bit.ly/2Pr8FL0; and McLeary, http://bit.ly/2nPnwCa.

122. In March 2017, during the battle for west Mosul, a prime ministerial council meeting approved a recruitment campaign to bring 1,000 enlistees and 250 officers into the CTS ranks to compensate for Mosul losses. In April 2017, the battalion commander of one of the CTS's most elite units, the ICTF, was killed by a sniper in west Mosul. "The government agrees" (in Arabic), https://titlepress24.com/archives/27600; Giglio, https://bzfd.it/2L98yQQ; Sowell, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68464; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO.

123. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 19, 2018.

124. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

125. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017; and Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.

126. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

127. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

128. Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI.

129. Iraqi Parliament, http://bit.ly/2wfqvHQ.

130. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.

131. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

5.

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE CTS

IN THE CURRENT situation, in which the Islamic State no longer openly controls territory, the Counter Terrorism Service has sought to return to its roots as a counterterrorism force. But many questions remain, including whether the group can or should maintain an elite infantry role and to what extent major expansion can occur concomitant with high training standards.

CURRENT DISPOSITION

The post-Mosul period has seen a few false starts in the CTS's transition back to a specialized counterterrorism force. Kenani, the CTS director, stated that during this post-liberation phase, the service would indeed return to this mission as defined in the CTS law, based on targeting and warrant systems.[1] But after Mosul, the CTS ended up participating in the battles for Tal Afar, Hawija, and west Anbar, clearing out IS-controlled pockets. After Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of IS in December 2017, the service reaffirmed its intention to return to its counterterrorism focus, with an emphasis on intelligence operations and preparing a strategy for post-IS Iraq.[2] Once again, however, this declaration proved premature, and most ISOF battalions were not yet able to return to their provinces.[3]

Yet another struggle in which the CTS became involved was between Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, after the independence referendum held by the latter in September 2017. In the central government's push to take control of Kirkuk province and other disputed areas,[4] the CTS employed eight battalions and briefly clashed with the Peshmerga, which largely with-

drew in response.[5] By December, the service remained embroiled in this dispute, with large numbers of its personnel scattered across northern Iraq.[6] The 2nd ISOF Brigade assumed overall security responsibilities for Kirkuk province and even controlled local police.[7] As of mid-August 2018, the brigade has remained involved in arresting criminal gangs, detaining Kurds for flying the Kurdish flag, and providing security in the wake of protests following Iraqi parliamentary elections in May.[8] Parts of the 3rd ISOF Brigade were also helping secure Kirkuk and other parts of northern Iraq.[9] Altogether, on Abadi's orders, about seven CTS regional battalions are committed to a holding mission in northern Iraq.[10] Some 3rd ISOF battalions were also deployed in the Baghdad security belt.[11] In July 2018, at least parts of the 3rd ISOF Brigade returned to southern Iraq and Basra province, where they were held as a strategic reserve after popular protests broke out over government corruption and poor services.[12]

The 1st ISOF Brigade returned to Baghdad in December 2017, and its battalions have been refitted and are retraining to focus on counterterrorism.[13] Its regional battalions returned to the provinces, where they have resumed their pre-2014 counterterrorism mission using warrants. But notably, this was only the case for the 1st ISOF Brigade,[14] and later even parts of the 1st ISOF deployed out of their sectors to the southern provinces to secure infrastructure during protests.[15] Most of the CTS, consisting of at least parts of the 1st ISOF Brigade and both the 2nd and 3rd ISOF Brigades, remains too involved in holding operations, or other security duties, to refocus on counterterrorism. CTS leaders say this is likely to remain true until after Iraqi local elections in December 2018.[16]

Meanwhile, terrorism-related violence in Iraq is at late 2010/early 2011 levels.[17] This has been driven largely by a new IS insurgency, which is part of a long-term strategy to revive its caliphate and overt control of territory.[18] In mid-January 2018, more than a hundred people were killed in twin suicide bombings in central Baghdad,[19] and the IS insurgency is likewise brewing in Diyala, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, and Nineveh provinces, punctuated by near-daily terrorist attacks.[20] In March 2018, the CTS clarified that the prime minister's earlier victory announcement did not mean IS had ceased to exist but rather that it could no longer control territory.[21]

CTS FUTURE PLANS

In recent years, plans for the CTS have typically included a doubling in size to 20,000 by 2020, with part of the group being refocused as a counterter-

rorism and counterinsurgency force, while a second maintains its efforts in elite infantry operations.[22] Current CTS expansion plans include the addition of four new commando battalions and a Special Tactics Unit, with each brigade organized in the model of the 1st ISOF Brigade—with 1st and 2nd battalions focused on no particular province, a STU for each brigade, and enhanced engineering and maintenance capabilities. This would increase the number of commando battalions from sixteen to twenty and the number of STU battalions from two to three. Seeking to expand its reach even further, the CTS wants ultimately to grow to a strength of 38,240, which would mean incorporating many extra battalions.[23] This would represent almost a fourfold growth from the current size, and give the service a corps rather than a divisional structure.

The United States has indicated that it shares this goal of major expansion and will help the CTS achieve it,[24] although signaling that the service must first regain lost skills and responsibly replace casualties.[25] U.S. officials fear that the heavy losses will compel the CTS to supplant them too rapidly,[26] potentially leading to a further erosion in training standards. In addition, the Academia (as discussed in the previous chapter) can currently only produce 1,500 soldiers a year, and plans for a major increase in force size will strain the institution's resources and capabilities.[27]

These caveats aside, the United States still sees the CTS as Iraq's best force, and U.S. officials assessed it capable of operating independently of coalition backing after its push into Kirkuk, where it provided its own logistics and other support. Yet the United States also assesses that the service's counterterrorism skills have deteriorated and has drafted plans to help redirect it back to its original mission.[28] Hampering these efforts, however, are the CTS's continued role as a hold force in northern Iraq and outside the Baghdad security belt and its service as a reserve against protests, along with disagreements about how it should be used.

The United States assesses that the CTS will not be able to refocus on counterterrorism while it remains involved in other operations. The CTS model is for the entire force to be focused on counterterrorism, with a dedicated battalion assigned to each province for this task. With only some of the battalions doing this now, the chance of terrorist hotspots emerging is always likely, requiring the CTS to again be used as a fire brigade, rushing to the next outbreak. A U.S. Inspector General report from March 2018 warned in particular that "a failure to ensure that the CTS can engage in counterterrorism operations could lead to a continued functional gap in

Iraq's ability to ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS." The U.S.-led coalition also ponders such questions as how the CTS will execute more advanced tasks such as cyber counterterrorism, whether one battalion per province is sufficient for some of the larger, more restive provinces like Anbar, and whether the coalition should only support the portion of the CTS that is focused on counterterrorism if the service does seek to maintain an infantry role.[29] As elucidated throughout this paper, the evidence shows that an infantry role for the CTS will almost absolutely diminish its effectiveness in the counterterrorism field. As a result, the United States should unmistakably oppose such a development.

Overall, the CTS remains open to international advice and support. In particular, the service endeavors to establish greater counterterrorism cooperation with neighboring countries and participate in international exercises.[30] To this end, it wants to create an international SOF training center in Iraq akin to Jordan's King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center where regional countries can visit for training. The CTS believes it has the expertise and experience to entice international forces for this purpose. Correspondingly, CTS leadership wants a regional capability, envisioning the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st ISOF Brigade deploying outside Iraq as a U.S. partner force in regional hotspots. In Iraq, battalions would be specialized based on the province to which they are assigned. The Basra battalion would have a maritime specialization aimed at countering piracy, while the Anbar battalion would specialize in desert operations. Other battalions might have mountain warfare skills or specialize in urban fighting.[31]

During the Islamic State war, the CTS's success led the Interior and Defense Ministries to begin creating their own commando and ranger units, or *quwat khasah* (special forces).[32] The Interior Ministry has plans to assign these commando units to each of Iraq's provinces, mirroring the CTS model.[33] Current discussions also center on creating an Iraqi Joint Special Operations Command containing CTS, ERD, and the army's new ranger units.[34]

U.S. leaders see the development of Defense Ministry ranger units as closely linked to the CTS and have requested funds to support the training and equipping of an Iraqi army ranger brigade with three battalions.[35] The United States views the ranger units as a means to give the Iraqi army a quick-reaction force that can counter IS at a tactical level and take over some duties currently performed by the CTS, enabling the service to return to its national-level role in using warrants to target specific insurgent and

terrorist groups.[36] This is also an outgrowth of the Iraqi army's need for a quick-reaction and elite infantry force, a task previously filled in large part by the CTS. In the future, this development could enable the CTS to focus strictly on high-tier terrorist targets while leaving lower-level targets to the new ranger units and other ISF entities. Prior to 2014, the CTS targeting process assigned a tier level to terrorist targets and the CTS attempted to only conduct operations against upper-tier targets, while passing the lower-level jobs to other ISF units.[37] The CTS has committed to help train the new ranger units,[38] and one of the USSF ODAs previously training the CTS has been assigned to assist in this task as well.[39]

NOTES

1. "Ba'd Tahrir al-Mosul, Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab Ya'od li-Mahammuh al-Asasiya" [After liberating Mosul, Counter Terrorism Service to return to its primary missions], Radio Sawa, July 14, 2017, https://arbne.ws/2wj8ZCw; and al-Shaghati, "Ali al-Hiwar with the director of the Counter Terrorism Service" (in Arabic), http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/2017/11/29/88851/.
2. "Mukafaha al-Irhab wa al-Hashd al-Shabi Yakshifan abr al-Mirbad Mahammaha ba'd I'lan al-Nasr" [Counter Terrorism and Popular Mobilization Forces reveal through *al-Mirbad* their missions after victory announcement], *al-Mirbad*, Dec. 12, 2017, http://bit.ly/2LcUCoS.
3. Tamer El-Ghobashy, Mustafa Salim, and Louisa Loveluck, "Islamic State's 'Caliphate' Has Been Toppled in Iraq and Syria. Why Isn't Anyone Celebrating?" *Washington Post*, Dec. 5, 2017, https://wapo.st/2N3lKIH.
4. Campbell MacDiarmid, "Iraqi Federal Forces Seize Oil-Rich Kirkuk in Shock Blow for Kurds," *Telegraph*, Oct. 16, 2017, http://bit.ly/2BqPqOH.
5. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; and "Mukafaha al-Irhab: Madkhal Kubri-Erbil Taht Saitaritna" [Counter Terrorism: The entrance to the bridge to Erbil is under our control], Iraq News Network, Oct. 22, 2017, http://bit.ly/2Pj88ut.
6. El-Ghobashy, Salim, and Loveluck, https://wapo.st/2N3lKIH.
7. "Shurta Kirkuk: Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab al-Masul an Amn al-Muhafiza" [Kirkuk Police: The Counter Terrorism Service is responsible for security of the province], *Akhbar al-Iraq*, Nov. 16, 2017.
8. "Counter Terrorism: Arrest of the biggest car burglary ring" (in Arabic), http://bit.ly/2LcTOjP; "Al-Qabd ala Thalatha Ashkhas min Kurud li-Rafa'hum Alam Kurdistan fi Kirkuk" [The arrest of three Kurds for raising the Kurdish flag in Kirkuk], *Hatha al-Youm*, Mar. 12, 2018, http://bit.ly/2LhqlVS; "Wuqu Isaba Bain Adad min al-Mutazahirin al-Turkuman fi Wasat Kirkuk" [A number of Turkmen protestors injured in the middle of Kirkuk], *al-Noor*, May 15, 2018, http://bit.ly/2Bub5pb; "Al-Saadi: Al-Wada fi Kirkuk taht al-Saidara" [Al-Saadi: The situation in Kirkuk is under control], *al-Journal*, July 1, 2018, http://bit.ly/2wfYGzi; and I.S.O.F/2, "Wa

mudhu sabah yaum al-jum'a yutafaqqad al-sharit al-hududu li-madina #Kirkuk" [Since Friday morning, inspecting the Kirkuk city border stripe], Twitter post, Aug. 17, 2018, 1:42 a.m., http://bit.ly/2LeUBRh.

9. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 2, 2018.
10. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* Jan.–Mar. 2018, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9.
11. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.
12. Buratha News Agency, "Qa'id al-Amaliyat al-Thalitha fi Jihaz Mukafaha al-Irhab: Li-Ta'ziz al-Basra, wa Lam Nukallif bi-Wajab Haula al-Tazahirat" [Commander of 3rd Special Operations in the Counter Terrorism Service: Reinforcements for Basra, and we have not been assigned duties regarding the protests], July 19, 2018, http://burathanews.com/arabic/news/335193.
13. Coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017.
14. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.
15. "Quwa min Mukafaha al-Irhab Tahmil Awamir Itaqalat Tasil ila Muthanna" [A force from Counter Terrorism Service carrying arrest orders arrives in al-Muthanna], *Baghdad Post*, July 18, 2018, http://bit.ly/2wkuH9w; and"Haider al-Abadi Yuharrik Quwat min al-Radd al-Sari' wa Mukafaha al-Irhab li-Qam al-Tazahirat fi Basra bi-Hujja Himaya al-Munshaat min Mutazahirin" [Haider al-Abadi moves forces from Emergency Response and Counter Terrorism to quell protests in Basra on the pretense of protecting establishments from protestors], *Arus al-Ahwar*, July 14, 2018, http://bit.ly/2Mtlsic.
16. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.
17. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* Jan.–Mar. 2018, p. 16, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9.
18. Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, Mar. 6, 2018, p. 9, http://bit.ly/2N5QWHo.
19. Agence France-Presse, "26 Killed, 90 Injured in Baghdad Twin Suicide Blasts," *Times of Israel*, Jan. 15, 2018, http://bit.ly/2MpA69Z.
20. Seth J. Frantzman, "ISIS's New Insurgency in Kirkuk and Hawija in Iraq," *Jerusalem Post*, Mar. 13, 2018, http://bit.ly/2ORT1am.
21. "Mukafaha al-Irhab: Khitab al-Nasr Lam Yushir ila al-Qada al-Nihai ala Daesh wa Khilayah Maujuda [Counter Terrorism: The victory speech did not indicate the final extermination of IS and its cells are present], *Wikala Watan News*, Mar. 3, 2018, http://wataniq.com/news?ID=26137.
22. A former U.S. advisor stated that current CTS plans are to grow to 27,000 over the next few years. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, pp. 5–6, http://bit.ly/2we76XO; LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve,* Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; Jack Detsch, "Iraq Backs Off Plans to Double Number of U.S.-Trained Counterterrorism Forces," Al-Monitor, Jan. 16, 2018; Snow, http://bit.ly/2OOblkI; and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2017*, p. 8, http://bit.ly/2wf4yIV.
23. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.

24. El-Ghobashy, "Iraq's Elite Special Forces Struggle," https://wapo.st/2Mn7H4h; and LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, July–Sept. 2017, p. 22, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL.
25. Coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017; and Detsch, "Iraq Backs Off Plans to Double Number."
26. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, July–Sept. 2017, p. 22, http://bit.ly/2LcCifL.
27. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Jan.–Mar. 2018, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9.
28. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Oct.–Dec. 2017, p. 23, http://bit.ly/2vY03Dt; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2018*, p. 5, http://bit.ly/2we76XO.
29. Coalition military planner in Iraq, interview by author, Dec. 21, 2017; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.
30. "Counter Terrorism from the Front Lines," http://bit.ly/2Pqx6YH; and al-Mohamedawi, http://bit.ly/2wdmzYd.
31. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, May 27, 2017.
32. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Jan.–Mar. 2018, p. 21, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9.
33. al-Dalimi, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=641184; "Al-Dakhiliya Tulin L'dadha li-Tashkil Quwat Khassa li-ha fi Kull Muhafitha fi al-Iraq" [The Ministry of Interior announces its preparations to form Special Forces for each province in Iraq], *Khabaar.net*, Sept. 28, 2017, http://bit.ly/2we67Hi; and former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
34. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
35. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2019*, p. 8, http://bit.ly/2ORbROB.
36. LIGOCO, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, Jan.–Mar. 2018, p. 21, http://bit.ly/2wdoqw9; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Budget 2019*, p. 6, http://bit.ly/2ORbROB.
37. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 15, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
38. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Aug. 25, 2017.
39. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, June 26, 2018.

6.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE RISE of the Islamic State engendered a broad expansion in the role of Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service, as this paper has shown. But now that the caliphate has fallen, the CTS must refocus its role to its real mission. The high respect the service enjoys from U.S. officials and the Iraqi people will likely continue to buoy it, even as it faces an array of strategic, tactical, and organizational challenges.

SUCCESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF CTS

The CTS succeeded in the war against the Islamic State, although this was partly due to the intense coalition assistance it received. Indeed, coalition air support for CTS operations was one of the major factors in the conventional defeat of IS, and the service also depended heavily on coalition nations for assistance with training, equipment, and combat advisors. It is doubtful that the service would have been successful without this support, a reality with important implications for future U.S. backing to Iraq's security forces and the CTS in particular.

For the United States, the CTS's performance signals the success of its "by, with, and through" strategy of turning to surrogate forces, allies, and partner nations during wartime, a strategy based on minimizing direct U.S. involvement in ground operations. Yet while limiting U.S. and other coalition nations' casualties, the CTS—which along with other ISF entities provided the boots on the ground—nearly became combat ineffective, or even destroyed, during the IS war. On the flip side, this scenario highlights one of the most remarkable triumphs of the CTS: its ability to continue func-

tioning even in the face of devastating losses. While military analysts have no consensus on how many casualties a unit can endure before it becomes combat ineffective, estimates usually range between 25 and 35 percent.[1] The CTS sustained casualties far beyond this level, with losses in Mosul reaching at least the 50–60 percent range. But the service kept functioning nonetheless. The CTS is unique not only in the Iraqi context, but quite exceptional when compared to other forces worldwide as well. This is a tribute to the CTS-administered Academia, which was able to replenish severely depleted ranks—notwithstanding a drop in quality—and a tribute to CTS personnel in general, who believed that a collapse of the service would mean the collapse of Iraq.[2]

Iraqis, for their part, came to love the CTS for its professionalism and for the successes this professionalism facilitated. At the same time, CTS preeminence stirred envy among other Iraqi services, creating an unhealthy aura of competition and sometimes actual hindrances to operations. This is a danger that must be considered if the United States ever again tries to develop a similar force, inside or outside Iraq. U.S. officials cannot establish a force so alien to a nation's basic military culture that it will not survive. This is not to say the United States cannot develop an elite force, only that a certain degree of internal competition, given this elite status, must be accounted for and addressed.

Another important future task will be changing the perception of the CTS as a U.S. surrogate. Whatever the reality, the creation of an elite force must be perceived as a largely indigenous effort. Toward this end, the force's leadership should not stress its close ties to the United States, and likewise U.S. officials should not advertise their close links with the force. Nor should the force credit its success to U.S. efforts. Also, contrary to the outward presentation of the CTS, with its unique weapons and uniforms, the force must resemble other forces within a nation's security structure. More important still, the creation of such a force must be fully enshrined through legislation, a status the Iraqi service lacked until the 2016 passage of the CTS law.

The unhealthy competition between the CTS and other ISF entities was also fueled by Iraq's flawed command system, wherein various ISF entities worked for different ministries, supervisory bodies, and fiefdoms. This dynamic also worsened CTS losses, as exemplified in the allegations that other forces deliberately delayed entry into the east Mosul battle, both to avoid their own serious losses and to take the CTS down a notch. Any analysis of Iraq's command structure, however, requires a deeper review of the country's history. Since gaining independence in 1932, Iraq has suffered six

military coups and countercoups as well as seven attempted coups, three of them during the Saddam era.[3] In the years since the 2003 U.S. invasion, Iraqi leaders have sought to insulate the country against coup attempts by distributing competing security forces under various entities to deny any particular one the ability to seize control of the government.[4] The placement of the CTS outside Defense and Interior Ministry authority fits within this reasoning, although this move has had the positive side benefit of reducing CTS exposure to the high levels of corruption, nepotism, and politicization that plagued the two ministries and led to the security debacle of 2014.

A development indicating both CTS strengths and limits was its quick adaptation from its counterterrorism mission to conventional combat. The service's culture of combat flexibility figured massively in this, and indicated that a highly trained SOF unit can rapidly switch roles to conventional operations. Yet while successfully transitioning to conventional warfare, the CTS suffered heavy casualties and, as noted, was dependent on coalition support, especially from the air. This willingness to accept casualties and rely on close air support masked shortcomings such as a lack of proficiency in the infantry tactics needed in urban environments. For example, CTS units preferred to fight from their vehicles in urban terrain, and did so except when narrow streets and alleys prevented it. Rather than advancing as dismounted infantry, with their vehicles serving as weapons platforms in covered positions at a distance, the CTS tended to advance with its infantry in the vehicles, leading to heavy vehicle losses and a limited ability to first neutralize IEDs and anti-vehicle weapons. Further, however agile the CTS was in switching from counterterrorism to conventional combat, the return to purely counterterrorism missions will require a high level of proficiency in skills such as marksmanship for precision shooting, discriminant explosive breaching of buildings to allow entry while avoiding civilian casualties, and the freeing of hostages.

The general Iraqi overdependence on the CTS, however, almost led to the service's destruction. As this paper has made clear, the use of the service went well beyond the purposes for which it was created. For many familiar with the organization, it was unimaginable that it would ever engage in large-scale urban fighting, which should have been the role of the Iraqi army. The CTS was improperly used in the war against the Islamic State; its employment in Mosul, where it fought alone for almost six weeks, was virtually criminal and a sign of major shortcomings in the Iraqi military and political leadership. Still, the CTS's performance demonstrated how a small, elite force could

serve as the spearhead for a nation in a major ground war. Without the CTS, as poorly as it was used, the situation in Iraq today might be far bleaker.

The CTS is not a perfect organization. While flexible in combat, the service's command structure is institutionally rigid, with much power concentrated at the highest levels rather than delegated. Moreover, an internal power struggle surfaced in the attempt in the CTS law to abolish the CTC, only to have the latter reinstated due to its commander's ties with Iraqi leaders. These internal tensions probably represent the greatest danger to the CTS's future. The petty corruption that occurs, by comparison, is to be expected given the endemic corruption in Iraqi culture. Still another challenge can be found, though, in the force's emphasis on size over quality, which could pose a significant obstacle as it refocuses on counterterrorism.

PROSPECTS FOR REPLICATING CTS SUCCESS ON A LARGER SCALE

It is sobering to think that the two most successful forces during the Islamic State war—the CTS and PMF—were not produced by Iraq's Defense and Interior Ministries. Between 2003 and 2011, the United States spent more than $26 billion on developing the Iraqi security forces, almost all of it through those two ministries.[5] Yet even after the expenditure of these billions of dollars, the ISF proved largely ineffective during a good portion of the IS war. In contrast, the CTS represents a significant return on U.S. investments in training and equipping, in large part because a military culture of competence and professionalism was transfused through committed U.S. advisors and trainers. This begs the question of whether other parts of the ISF or an enlarged CTS can benefit from the same formula.

The failure of the broader ISF is a cautionary tale with regard to conventional mass-training programs. Starting in 2005–6, the United States relied primarily on Military Transition Teams (MTTs) for training and advising the ISF. These MTTs were ad hoc groups created at Fort Riley, Kansas, composed of individual volunteers from any given military specialty. The teams received sixty days of training in the United States, a theater orientation in Kuwait, and counterinsurgency and hands-on training in Iraq before being assigned to Iraqi units. In 2008, there were 183 of these teams embedded in Iraqi army units, from the battalion to division level.[6] The MTTs were modeled on USSF teams, issuing from the core USSF function to train foreign militaries.[7]

Looking closer, though, the similarities to USSF training fall away. The

MTTs were temporary and designed to hand off security responsibilities as soon as possible to the Iraqi units in which they were embedded so that Iraqi forces could operate without U.S. assistance.[8] Moreover, the teams were only used for onetime tours. Following the completion of a tour, the same team would never again be reconvened, thus preventing experiences gained and personal relationships built from being reinforced through future cooperation.

At a larger scale, the partnering of U.S. brigades with Iraqi divisions was also temporary and required a significant U.S. force presence, which became more difficult as U.S. units began withdrawals in preparations for the 2011 departure.[9] The Iraqi army, for its part, was arguably too large to be solidly built in the time available. By 2007, 14,000 men were being inducted into the army every five weeks. In a mere six years, the Iraqi army increased in strength by a multiple of four, ultimately including nearly 200,000 members. Most Iraqi soldiers received U.S. training, but it typically lasted only three to five weeks and was very basic.[10]

The U.S. approach to training and advising the CTS and ISOF was completely different from the approach applied to other ISF entities. Before the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, the CTS received more U.S. attention than any other unit in Iraq, and again received intense U.S. attention during the Islamic State war. As discussed throughout this piece, the heavy emphasis on training gave the CTS a professionalism and capabilities not replicated in other ISF elements. The CTS was also small compared to other Iraqi security forces, which facilitated advising and partnering, and the United States was heavily involved in its creation, the shaping of its doctrine, and its culture. But even more important was the quality of the CTS advisors and trainers, USSF.

Here, it is important to examine the U.S. approach to ISOF, the tactical units that composed the CTS. The USSF teams that created ISOF and embedded within it were not temporary, ad hoc creations, but permanent groups that conducted repeated, multiple tours in Iraq with the same ISOF units. They were embedded within ISOF down to the company level, conducted near-daily partnered combat operations with ISOF, and selected ISOF tactical leaders.[11] One of the primary functions of USSF was training and advising foreign militaries, and USSF had significant expertise in this area.

As reflected in their repeated tours, the USSF teams did not see their work as primarily transitional or temporary. Most U.S. military leaders never expected that U.S. forces would withdraw from Iraq at the levels they did

in 2011. They instead expected a Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government that would allow legal immunity for a continued presence of up to 10,000 troops, a portion of which would engage in continued training and advising of the CTS and ISOF.[12] USSF leaders in particular had envisioned a permanent presence with ISOF and the CTS, with at least one USSF battalion remaining in Iraq to advise the CTS after most U.S. troops had withdrawn.[13]

Of course, this permanent presence did not come about. But the persistence of USSF teams within the CTS and their long-term view of their mission gave them a different perspective on training and advising Iraqis relative to other U.S. efforts, which positioned trainers to work themselves out of a job as soon as possible. Throughout USSF's work with the CTS, officials in the former realized that a long-term U.S. presence was required for the CTS to succeed. Thus, even as USSF teams completed six-month tours with the CTS in Iraq, they knew they would be returning in another six months, so they valued their task of creating a professional force.

Because of how the CTS and ISOF were formed, advised, trained, and partnered with in combat operations, these entities ultimately far transcended the capabilities of other Iraqi security forces. It is hard to imagine the Iraqi army ever gaining similar capabilities as a general force. While theoretically it might be possible to create a larger Iraqi force with the same talents, this would require a major U.S. and coalition commitment to a massive assistance program. Similarly, the United States might be able to create other forces on a much larger scale than the CTS and with the same professionalism, but enduring the associated costs and commitments would likely be prohibitive. Such efforts would demand repeated tours by the same U.S. advisors and trainers with the same Iraqi units, and large, sustained partnering with U.S. units. Practically, U.S. conventional forces just do not have the ability to send the same brigade to Iraq to partner with the same Iraqi unit for multiple tours. The creation of the U.S. Army's new Security Forces Assistance Brigades (SFABs), with one brigade first deployed to Afghanistan in 2018, is a step in the right direction.[14] But unless SFAB teams are repeatedly embedded with the same foreign force for multiple tours, coupled with other U.S. units also partnering with the same foreign force, the SFAB will not lead to significant, greater achievements. In short, the CTS was an unmistakable success story, but its small size and unique U.S. training focus made this possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CTS FORCE SIZE

The CTS should not expand beyond its present strength to become a new Republican Guard force with multiple divisions, as indicated by current plans.[15] Instead, it should focus on its original mission, as articulated in the CTS law. Indeed, the Iraqi service is already larger than the U.S. Army's 75th Ranger Regiment and the elite high-end U.S. counterterrorism units combined. Expansion will lead to a degradation of training standards, mirroring the experience of original expansion efforts following the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. Moreover, the Islamic State war claimed the lives of CTS members with years of experience, and these personnel cannot be quickly replaced. Speedy replacement, along with rapid growth of the organization, will only lead to further deterioration in training standards, as happened when the CTS created a new brigade in 2012–13.[16] If the CTS tries to be both an elite conventional infantry force and a counterterrorism force, it will likely be neither. Another probably consequence would be an unhealthy competition within the CTS itself as to which wing is preeminent.

In refocusing the CTS on its core mission, the service's most experienced soldiers should be made instructors to pass along their knowledge instead of remaining in their battalions. Relatedly, the United States should unambiguously inform the Iraqi government that it does not support CTS expansion, and it should be ready to condition continued backing on such terms. Maintenance of expansion plans by CTS leaders, therefore, should draw an initial U.S. tightening of support as a clear signal. The importance of maintaining high CTS standards is especially vital to Iraq's future as it faces a new IS insurgency.

In addition, keeping the current CTS structure along with a very specific mission will avert the pressure that would emerge from Iraqi ministries if it seeks to expand and permanently assume roles traditionally performed by the army and Federal Police. The CTS needs to focus on top-tier terrorist targets, using its targeting methodology from the pre-2014 period, and leave lower-level targets to others. This will enable the service to deconflict its targets with other new entities such as Defense Ministry ranger units and Interior Ministry commandos. The CTS cannot be the answer to every problem in Iraq, a presumption that led to its performance of missions well beyond its original intended scope. To allow the CTS to stay within its limited functions, however, the Iraqi army needs to be reformed into an effective

and trusted force, and early indications suggest the Iraqi leadership is planning to conduct major reforms of this type and has genuine intentions to counter corruption. The invariable difficulties in reforming the army should not divert leaders from embarking on this necessary path. Still, U.S. leaders must recognize that the Iraqi army will never develop into a force with the same professionalism as the CTS, and that even modest improvements will be useful.

If the CTS agrees to curb its expansion plans, the United States should increase its presence and aid to the service, with a promise of full support. The greater presence of U.S. advisors can assist in maintaining high training standards and reducing petty corruption. Moreover, the United States should be the primary nation advising and training the CTS, versus an ad hoc approach including many nations, which has led to disjointed efforts and confusion. A continued or greater presence by U.S. advisors can reinforce the culture of adaptability, flexibility, and low-level decisionmaking in combat operations that was previously absent in Iraqi military culture. Specifically, USSF should again provide the majority of U.S. trainers and advisors to the CTS and ISOF, and a USSF battalion should continuously be partnered with these Iraqi forces. This battalion can avoid direct combat but should assist the ISOF brigades with planning, staff coordination, and sustainment training for ISOF soldiers.

CTS director Talib Shaghati al-Kenani has stated that while the CTS has received assistance from many nations, he values U.S. assistance the most. Greater U.S. involvement will therefore be welcomed. This is not to say that other nations cannot help create new CTS capabilities. Both the United States and its coalition partners should continue to provide the CTS with enablers such as intelligence sharing and close air support. The United States should also continue to provide funding to CTS until it is sufficiently financed by the Iraqi government.

The Iraqi government should commit to fully funding and supporting the CTS, and the United States must make clear to Iraq that it backs this commitment and is prepared to condition other aid based on it. In particular, Iraq must commit to providing the CTS with its capital investment budget if the service can show itself capable of spending the money effectively, perhaps with U.S. support. Conditioning broader security cooperation would be a drastic step, but given the role the CTS played in saving Iraq from the Islamic State and the necessity of its sufficient funding amid renewed threats from the jihadist group, it is a risk worth taking.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERSERVICE COORDINATION

Reducing the competition among the Iraqi ministries and agencies, where a great deal of effort is spent in just securing basic resources, is also needed. Joined with the "coup-proofing" philosophy embraced by Iraqi leaders, easing the competition among ISF elements will lead to greater effectiveness even if they continue to work for different entities. U.S. leaders must always take Iraq's coup-proof command structure into account when making recommendations. To create goodwill, the CTS should continue to train Defense Ministry instructors and fully assist in the training of new commando and ranger units from the Defense and Interior Ministries, respectively. An exchange of cadres between the CTS and these new units, as well as the Interior Ministry's existing Emergency Response Division (ERD), will also be very helpful in fostering goodwill, reducing tensions among the security agencies, increasing proficiency, and promoting the U.S. strategy of enabling the new Defense Ministry units to take over some of the roles currently performed by the CTS.[17] Meanwhile, rather than the Academia conducting its own basic military training course at Area IV, new CTS recruits should attend Defense Ministry basic training before coming to the Academia's assessment and selection course. Broadly, the CTS needs to tend its brotherly relationship with the Defense Ministry or else it may find the ministry ceasing to provide it with recruits, instead feeding high-quality recruits exclusively into its own new ranger units.

Closer relations with the Defense Ministry will enable the CTS to better focus on counterterrorism training, as well as bring about improved operational harmony. In practical terms, the Defense Ministry should continue providing the CTS with basic administrative and logistics support, taking advantage of the ministry's established logistics and administrative infrastructure. Again, this will allow the CTS to focus on logistics and equipment needs unique to counterterrorism, similar to how the U.S. services, such as the army, provide support to USSOF while the U.S. Special Operations Command provides specialized support to USSOF. This will again enhance Defense Ministry–CTS relations. Memorandums of understanding for these proposed initiatives should be signed between all considered parties along with the Iraqi prime minister.

Although the CTS has never maintained its own aviation assets, the service was routinely supported by Iraqi army aviation before the Islamic State war.

But this relationship diminished during the conventional fighting. Today, the 15th Squadron of Iraqi army aviation has been recommitted to a focus on supporting the CTS. U.S. officials should reinforce this relationship, based on dedicated backing to the CTS, but with aviation assets remaining under the Defense Ministry's administrative control. The creation by the CTS of its own aviation arm would mark a difficult and costly overreach.

Some have argued that the Interior Ministry's ERD should be absorbed into the CTS since the former was also created by the United States and has similar capabilities. This should not happen. As pointed out, the ERD contains members of the Iran-backed Badr Organization, a group that committed abuses against civilians in Mosul. Relatedly, the idea of creating an Iraqi Joint Special Operations Command appears excellent from a U.S. perspective, but in Iraq this will likely only stoke tensions among the ministries and security agencies as yet another new security structure appears on the scene. It would also add yet another leg to the Iraqi coup-proofing body, which is already a major impediment to effective military operations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In Iraq, the CTS can serve as a paradigm for a nonsectarian force that is both professional and capable. The service can further exemplify the success of an Iraqi security apparatus free from Iranian penetration. And it can stand as an enduring nexus in the U.S.-Iraq military relationship, granting the United States clout in the country against a rising Iranian presence.

As this paper has elaborated, the CTS succeeded in large part because it was a small force outside the traditional military structure and was not prone to the levels of corruption and bureaucracy plaguing the Defense Ministry. This model of a small, elite force apart from such bureaucratic ministries could be used by other regional countries facing terrorism challenges. But in potentially applying this model, they must ensure that the new force does not become a second military that assumes the roles of traditional security ministries in need of reform.

To reduce internal tensions within the CTS and ease institutional rigidity, a new generation of leaders should now step into the most senior ranks and lead the service into its next phase, as a dedicated counterterrorism force not focused on liberating cities but on preventing that need from arising. The current top CTS leaders have been in place since 2007. They have done more than their share of the mission, and they can now honorably step aside

and allow fresh perspectives to emerge. The hard part will be ensuring that these rising officers are committed to reducing the aforementioned administrative rigidity. They can do this by encouraging decentralized decisionmaking by their subordinates at the lowest possible levels while still maintaining oversight functions to avoid subordinate malfeasance.

In the same way that Iraq should be grateful for U.S. support, the United States should fully comprehend that no nation killed more Islamic State fighters at a greater cost to itself than Iraq, and this victory should not be squandered by either country. The Islamic State is again spreading in Iraq, as are powerful militias. U.S. leaders must therefore use strong measures to enable the CTS to fully give up its conventional role, retrain, and refocus on what its name implies, counterterrorism. CTS leaders have said it will take decades to counter the ideology that led to the Islamic State. They should start right away with this next—and perhaps most crucial—phase in the war against the jihadist enemy.

NOTES

1. Leonard Wainstein, *The Relationship of Battle Damage to Unit Combat Performance*, IDA Paper P-1903 (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analysis, 1986), pp. 6–7, available at http://bit.ly/2weUwYd.
2. Bradley and Nabhan, https://on.wsj.com/2Msr8cb.
3. Florence Gaub, *An Unhappy Marriage: Civil-Military Relations in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Washington DC: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2016), http://ceip.org/2N25ac4.
4. Ibid.; and Erica De Bruin, "Coup-Proofing for Dummies: The Benefits of Following the Maliki Playbook," *Foreign Affairs*, July 27, 2014, https://fam.ag/2ONi1zps.
5. Knights, *The Long Haul*, p. 6, http://washin.st/1DGcqSf.
6. Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, Apr. 2, 2009), pp. 18, and 90-91, available at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL34387.pdf.
7. Bill Roggio, "The Military Transition Teams and the Development of the Iraqi Army," *Long War Journal*, Dec. 19, 2006, http://bit.ly/2OLMptO.
8. Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, p. 87, www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA500337.
9. Ibid., pp. 19 and 92–93.
10. Gaub, *An Unhappy Marriage*, http://ceip.org/2N25ac4.
11. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, p. 7, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
12. Ibid., p. 22.
13. Former CTS advisor, interview by author, Apr. 29, 2014.
14. Meghann Myers, "The 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade Has Been in Afghani-

stan Almost 100 Days. This Is What They've Been Up To," *Army Times*, June 13, 2018, http://bit.ly/2wfFIZs.

15. Parts of this section are adapted from an earlier article. See David M. Witty, "The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service: From the War on ISIS to the Future," *Iraq in Context*, Jan. 23, 2018, http://bit.ly/2MpAsxl.
16. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, pp. 25–26, https://brook.gs/2N3dgkL.
17. These exchanges were first proposed in Knights and Mello, http://bit.ly/2N2eSeG.

THE AUTHOR

DAVID M. WITTY is a retired U.S. Army Special Forces colonel and Foreign Area Officer with more than twelve years' experience working and living in the Middle East. He is currently with North Carolina's Advanced Computer Learning Company (ACLC), which provides federal and DoD customers with training, education, mission support, and technology integration services. In addition, he is an adjunct professor at Norwich University's Online Security Studies Program.

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
www.washingtoninstitute.org