

# THE LONG HAUL

**Rebooting U.S. Security  
Cooperation in Iraq**



**MICHAEL KNIGHTS**



POLICY FOCUS 137

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Photo: A Kurdish fighter keeps guard while overlooking positions of Islamic State militants near Mosul, northern Iraq, August 2014. (REUTERS/Youssef Boudlal)

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Finally I want to dedicate the study to the Iraqi servicemen and civilians—Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Yezidis, Shabak—who are still fighting, and the Americans and other international partners involved in continuing Iraq's quest for peace, stability, and fairness.

*Michael Knights*  
*January 2015*

## ACRONYMS

APKWS	Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System
CSDI	Colombia Strategic Development Initiative
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DBE	Department of Border Enforcement
DDR	Demobilization, Disarmament, And Reintegration
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DT	Dizha Tiror
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
GS-COM	General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers
HCC	Higher Coordinating Committee
IED-D	IED Defeat
IGFC	Iraqi Ground Forces Command
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INP	Iraqi National Police
IRAMs	Improvised Rocket-Assisted Mortars
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRGC-QF	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (also known as ISIL)
ISOF	Iraqi Special Operations Forces
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
ITDC	Iraqi Training and Doctrine Command
ITEF	Iraq Train and Equip Fund
JCC	Joint Coordination Committee
JIEDDO	Joint IED Defeat Organization
JOC	Joint Operations Center
JTAC	Joint Terminal Attack Controller
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior

MRL	Multiple Rocket Launcher
MRO	Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul
NIIA	National Information and Investigation Agency
OCINC	Office of the Commander-in-Chief
OSC-I	Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RGB	Regional Guard Brigade
SFA	Strategic Framework Agreement
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
YPG	People’s Defense Units

## Executive Summary

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THE BATTLE TO “degrade and ultimately destroy” the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS or ISIL) will be long and challenging. In Iraq we can expect most or all of 2015 to be consumed in the effort to regain control of key cities such as Mosul, Tikrit, and Fallujah. In 2016 and subsequent years Iraq will need significant assistance from the United States and others to extend its control into rural hinterlands along the Syrian border as well as other remote areas. At the same time a slow-burning counterterrorism campaign will be needed to secure the cities from terrorist cells, with political accords playing an equally important role as kinetic “kill or capture” operations. The rebuilding of Iraq’s military will take at least three years of intensive mentoring, according to the senior U.S. general in Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside this war against ISIS, we face a far more dangerous midterm prospect. A parallel struggle is being fought for Iraq’s future and it will probably prove far more consequential than the war against the self-styled Islamic State. This is the struggle by Iran and her Iraqi proxies to take over Iraq’s government and security sector.

U.S. and Iraqi government threat perceptions have been diverging since 2011 due to the Arab Spring, Syrian civil war, and Sunni protests in Iraq, all of which accelerated the Iraqi government’s drift toward Iran as a security partner. The current conflict has boosted the profile and influence of Iranian-backed Shia militias to previously unforeseen levels. The Ministry of Interior is once again under the control of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization, as it was in the year before Iraq’s sectarian meltdown in 2006.

A parallel security structure is thus emerging that could lead to the “Hezbollahization” of Iraq’s security structure. If Iran can repeat the trick it achieved with the growth of Hezbollah in Lebanon, in Iraq it will achieve substantive control of a state containing 36 million people (not Lebanon’s

four million) and an oil power that intends to build the capacity to export oil on the same scale as Saudi Arabia within a decade.

The Hezbollahization of Iraq would not just affect Iraq; in an echo of Iraqi Shia militia support to the Assad regime since 2011, greatly strengthened Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would probably redeploy in force into Syria in 2016 to back the Assad regime. U.S. ability to contain or shape the conflict in Syria would be decisively undermined, in full view of U.S. allies in the Gulf and elsewhere. The much-narrated fear of a “Shia Crescent” stretching from Iran to the Mediterranean coasts of Syria and Lebanon would become a real prospect. If the United States loses Iraq in the process of defeating ISIS, it will have achieved a Pyrrhic victory on a monumental scale.

## FUTURE U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION WITH IRAQ

One way to reduce the possibility for such a disastrous setback is to outperform the Iranians as a military partner, albeit in ways that are commensurate to the significant U.S. strategic interests in Iraq. A good start has been made. The United States is the linchpin of the international coalition at work in Iraq. U.S. airpower, planning, and intelligence support has proven decisive in a number of battles. Significant U.S. “train and equip” programs are beginning to flow to federal Iraqi and Kurdish security forces.

These emergency efforts to defeat ISIS must now be woven into a longer-term tapestry of U.S.-Iraq security cooperation that can function as an effective counterweight to Iranian influence in Iraq’s security sector. The more the United States does, the more influence it may generate, and consequently the more Washington might be able to ask the Iraqis to do in pursuit of U.S. interests. For instance, only by committing to a substantial and long-term security cooperation relationship can we credibly ask Iraq to place limits on the security cooperation it receives from Iran or to restrict Iranian-backed militias in their operations within Iraq and Syria.

This paper draws on the lessons of successful U.S. security cooperation in the post-Cold War era to advocate a broad, well-resourced, and sustained security cooperation effort by the United States and other allied nations in Iraq. This effort needs to look beyond the war against ISIS, which may ultimately become a means to an end: defeating ISIS is essential, but the greater strategic fruit may be reengagement of Iraq as a vital ally.

The U.S. military has returned to Iraq with great reluctance, and this only happened because such significant U.S. equities were at risk. Even if

ISIS is defeated, Iraq might still collapse into ethnic and factional cantons. The United States should try to shape any such process toward functioning federalism, not warring statelets. Ceding Iran unchallenged dominance of the Iraqi security sector is not an acceptable outcome of U.S. policy.

What is needed to stabilize Iraq, ensure U.S. interests, and counter Iranian influence is an expansive vision for a long-term security partnership that far exceeds the security facets of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement. Though it may seem tempting to narrow U.S.-Iraq cooperation to certain missions (counterterrorism against ISIS) or certain geographies (the U.S.-friendly Kurds), these efforts cannot secure U.S. interests in Iraq.

U.S. security cooperation with Iraq must plan to build the absorptive capacity of both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in a decades-spanning program. Relationship building at the ministerial and armed service levels needs to be at least as important as capacity building at the unit level. From 2003 to 2011 the United States built up Iraq's war machine, left the keys in the ignition, and walked away. This time we must plan to stay engaged.

## ISIS AS ICEBREAKER IN U.S.-IRAQ RELATIONS

Every long journey must begin with a first step and ISIS has created an unforeseen opening for reengagement after a remarkably short reset period for both sides. If the United States is to build its new security relationship with Iraq on the basis of shared interests and mutual concerns, the defeat of ISIS is the only place to start.

As a partner in the battle against ISIS the U.S. military has some key advantages over Iran. Tehran has undoubtedly proven itself a useful security partner to the Iraqi government but this appeal may wear thin in the next phases of the war against ISIS. Iran's militia proxies are strong in the cross-sectarian areas with significant Shia populations, particularly around Baghdad. As the fights move further north and west, the role of the predominantly Shia militia fighters is likely to diminish significantly, though not disappear. The United States needs to escalate its commitment of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in 2015 and 2016, and to deploy combat advisors and air strike controllers at the brigade level and below. As well as bringing about the demise of ISIS, this kind of commitment will demonstrate to Iraqi leaders the raw power of the United States as a strategic partner.

The United States also offers a far richer security relationship than Iran, particularly in meeting Iraqi needs in later phases of the war against ISIS. Iranian-backed militias have proven effective at battling through ISIS defensive zones and pummeling Sunni villages. But proficiency in this slow-moving attritional warfare along Iraq's main populated river valleys has little relevance to the battles that will follow in Iraq's ungoverned spaces and along the Syrian border. As importantly, only the United States and other Western partners have the wide-area surveillance capabilities and air mobility to advise, assist, train, and equip Iraq to control these vast expanses. In future years the United States and other Western partners can provide critical support as Iraq develops an integrated border security program, including surveillance technologies, aerial quick-reaction forces, and credible border defenses with functioning logistics. U.S. platforms like the F-16IQ and Apache could be critical to meeting these requirements and everything possible should be done to meet any reasonable request from Baghdad to expedite the transfer of such systems.

Finally, the sectarian peace building and "functioning federalism" backed by Washington offers a way to end the war against ISIS and other Sunni Arab rejectionists. Iran can probably prop up Iraq as it fights a never-ending war of attrition against its Sunnis but its model offers no hope to the country. The holistic counterterrorism approaches endorsed by the United States and its Western partners may be difficult to implement but such efforts at least strive to end the conflict and return Iraq to full peace and stability within a meaningful timeframe. The National Guard model, for instance, offers an "off ramp" so that Iraqi forces do not need to look forward to years, or decades, of garrison duty in the Sunni Arab badlands.

## SECURITY COOPERATION AFTER ISIS

Looking beyond ISIS, the United States can help moderate and technocratic leaders in Iraq to strengthen the strategic independence of the Iraqi state. The real foundation of national independence is the resilience of Iraq's defense and security institutions, which are themselves anchored in the nature of the body politic and civil-military relations. Iraq's future strategic independence requires the advancement of political and military leaders who see the drawbacks of overreliance on Tehran as Iraq's closest patron and ally.

A Chinese proverb says “the fish rots from the head,” and similarly the Iraqi political and security system can only be fixed from the head down. If all is well at the level of top decisionmakers, many positive results will flow down through the system. The United States needs to commit to sustained development of ministerial capacity in the Iraqi security sector. The United States needs to strongly support Iraqi procurement of U.S. equipment and training, and to rapidly implement the planned twelve-brigade train and equip program. The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs needs strong U.S. support and mentoring to grow professionalized administrative, logistical, and command and control capabilities.

It is vital not to overlook the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI), as this institution and its forces have never represented as large a slice of available military manpower as they do today. Any U.S. effort to prevent the Hezbollahization of Iraq needs to consider how the United States can shape the evolution of the Iraqi MOI. The United States needs to box cleverly: Washington may find Iraqi allies in any effort to professionalize the ministry, particularly if the United States can use its unique insights into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to build alliances with political and bureaucratic factions in the ministry. Significant power blocs within the Shia leadership do not want the Iranian-backed militias to eclipse their own power.

Alongside security cooperation efforts the United States should continue with its broad-based engagement under the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). Influence can be rebuilt one meeting at a time. Persistence pays in Iraq, and the United States has a lot to offer a country where every sector of the economy lacks technocratic capacity, and where U.S. prowess is still fresh in the memory of many officials. Iraq is arguably ripe for reenergized relations, initiatives, exchanges, and scholarships through the SFA. The United States should press forward energetically with these committees, seeking to hold SFA joint committee meetings much more regularly. The United States also has a bevy of opportunities for high-impact projects such as Iraq’s north-south strategic oil and gas pipeline system and facilitation of export spurs to Jordan and Turkey.

## NOTES

1. Douglas Ernst, “Top U.S. General: Training Iraqis Will Take ‘Three Years Minimum,’” *Washington Times*, December 18, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/18/gen-james-terry-training-iraqis-islamic-state-figh/>.

# THE LONG HAUL



## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

THE UNITED STATES has played a pivotal role in reshaping Iraq's military since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Washington chose to disestablish the Saddam-era security forces. For six years the United States poured extensive blood and treasure into the training and equipping of a bewildering number of new security forces. For a further two years the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State (DOS) continued to intensively mentor the fledgling Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) during the drawdown of U.S. military forces from Iraq.

### U.S. VITAL INTERESTS AND IRAQ'S SECURITY SECTOR

After the U.S. military presence ended in December 2011, the level of U.S.-Iraq security cooperation declined significantly. The program of ongoing security cooperation activities intended in the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) was only partially implemented due to shortfalls in U.S. funding and force protection concerns. But as importantly, neither Baghdad nor Washington seemed ready to jump straight into a continuation of their intimate security relationship following the end of U.S. occupation and the withdrawal.

Now the need to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS or ISIL) has drawn the U.S. military back to Iraq, and not only because of ISIS's potential threat to the U.S. homeland or due to the humanitarian disasters unleashed by the group. Prior to June 2014 ISIS controlled key terrain on Syria's civil war battlefields but U.S. military involvement was not forthcoming. Yet the level of U.S. involvement was immediately intensified once ISIS achieved dominance in significant swaths of Iraq.

This is precisely because of Iraq's strategic significance to the United States, the Middle East region, and the world. Though a humanitarian

calamity first and foremost, ISIS's takeover of northwestern Iraq is also a timely reminder that vital U.S. interests are at stake in Iraq—strategic interests that were temporarily submerged in the clamor to put the Iraq War behind us.

The first vital U.S. interest in Iraq is the country's linchpin role in the state system in the Middle East. Many great edifices have a keystone, a foundation that holds the structure together. In the Middle East Iraq is one of the keystones that hold the system of states and borders in place.

Iraq touches on a huge range of vulnerable and strategically vital states.

- The Kurdish north of Iraq borders Kurdish parts of Syria, Turkey, and Iran, all clamoring for greater autonomy, if not independence.
- To the east there is Iran, with ambitions to become a regional hegemon over a crescent of Shia-led communities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and eastern Saudi Arabia.
- To the south are the relatively young monarchies of the Arab Gulf States, vital to the smooth functioning of global energy markets but deeply nervous about changes threatened in Iraq by both Iranian-backed and ISIS militants.
- The Levantine states of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon complete the ring, each threatened by the rise of ISIS and the concomitant risks of state fragmentation, ungoverned spaces, and sectarian conflict in Iraq. A failure to maintain stability and state borders in Iraq could have dire consequences across the region and more broadly.

Oil exports provide a second set of compelling U.S. strategic interests in Iraq. Iraq is projected to be the fastest-growing source of new oil production in the world in the next decade. Iraq exported 2.46 million barrels of oil a day in October 2014 and the KRG a further 259,000 barrels per day (bpd).<sup>2</sup> By 2019 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Iraqi exports to rise to 4.6 million bpd, while the KRG is aiming to achieve exports of around a million barrels per day by that point.<sup>3</sup> Significant long-term disruption in Iraq—particularly in oil-rich Basra—threatens the future growth of the U.S. economy.

A final strategic interest for the United States relates to the sectarian politics of the crisis in Iraq. In addition to sending sectarian shockwaves around the region, exacerbating tensions in Bahrain, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, the crisis in Iraq is a test of resolve. For Amer-

ica's allies in the region, the survival of Iraq as an independent state is a way of gauging Washington's commitment to its interests and partners in the Middle East and to the entire regional order. If Iraq is allowed to disintegrate, with sectarian cantons falling fully under the sway of ISIS or Iran, the Gulf States and other moderate Arab allies will justifiably question U.S. resolve and capacity.

## THE STRATEGIC CONTEST FOR IRAQ'S FUTURE

Countering Iranian influence in Iraq is particularly important because of long-running competition over the country's future. Iraq has long drawn security cooperation from two directions—the United States and Iran. During Saddam Hussein's rule the Iranian government cultivated large numbers of militant proxies among the Iraqi Shia community and the Iraqi Kurds, even deploying them in divisional strength to fight Iraq's own armed forces during the Iran-Iraq War.

When the Baathist regime fell in 2003 the United States threatened to snatch the prize away from Iran despite the Islamic Republic's patient and wide-ranging investment in building Iraqi Shia proxy forces. Yet while the United States occupied Iraq and poured massive resources into the country, the Iranians were able to capitalize on their superior knowledge of Iraq to subvert the U.S. effort by guile. Under the nose of the U.S.-led coalition, Iranian proxies like the Badr Corps filled out the leadership cadre of the new military and police forces.

During the "surge" of 2007–2009 the United States again out-powered the Iranians and restored a degree of independence and professionalism to the security forces. But this moment passed quickly and Iranian proxies were able to exploit the drawdown of U.S. financing and troop presence from 2009 onward. The 2011 Arab Spring protests, rising domestic opposition in Iraq, and the Syrian civil war pushed Iran and the Maliki government closer together. By mid-2013 Iranian-backed militia proxies such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hezbollah were once again able to operate openly alongside the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

While it is clear that the United States and Iran have been running simultaneous competitive security cooperation programs in Iraq constantly since 2003, the strategic risks posed by the competition have never been as pronounced as they are today. This is because the United States and its Western partners are proposing a radically different mech-

anism for defeating ISIS than the methods advocated by Iran and its Iraqi proxies.

The U.S./Western approach stresses discriminating use of firepower, the Sunni-led liberation of lost areas, and ethnosectarian power sharing through a process of “functioning federalism.”<sup>4</sup> Though beset by difficulties and contingent upon mutual compromises by key actors, this path at least offers a means of effectively managing and hopefully ending the conflict.

The approach driven by Iran and its proxies stresses the blunt-force application of firepower and sectarian cleansing, the dominance of Shia militia actors in government offensives, and a continuation of the Maliki-era policy of collective punishment and disarmament of Iraq’s Sunnis. When such forces capture an ISIS-held area they often seek to prevent Sunni families from returning to the area, destroying their habitation and carrying out sporadic murders against Sunni Arab military-age males and harassing Sunni families. Iran’s proxies are carrying out the war with utmost savagery, threatening to greatly intensify the destructive wake of the fight to defeat ISIS.<sup>5</sup>

These two models of counterinsurgency have uneasily coexisted during the first months since the fall of Mosul but this situation is unlikely to last. The territorial bifurcation of security cooperation along ethnosectarian lines—with the United States leading in Sunni and Kurdish areas, while Iran dominates the battle of Baghdad and strong Shia districts—is already giving way to competing efforts to support Iraq’s key security institutions and its efforts to retake ISIS redoubts in Beyji, Tikrit, Fallujah, Tall Afar, and Mosul.

This is ultimately a contest to determine the shape of the Iraqi government and probably its relationship with the Sunnis and the Kurds. ISIS is likely to be largely driven back into the ungoverned spaces of Iraq within the next year but the nature of the struggle to degrade the movement may be almost as important as the outcome. The tactics used to fight ISIS may dictate both the length and ethnosectarian after-effects of the conflict. Like Lebanese Hezbollah, the Shia militias in Iraq may use their battlefield successes as a springboard into political campaigns, and this could dramatically change the political landscape in Iraq, for the worse. Indeed the greatest impact caused by ISIS may be how the campaign to destroy it comes to shape the future of Iraq and the broader sectarian crisis in the region.

## NOTES

1. John Lee, “Oil Exports Bring in \$6.2bn in October,” *Iraq Business News*, November 4, 2014.
2. Martin Dokoupil, “Iraq Economy to Shrink 2.7% in 2014: IMF,” Reuters, October 24, 2014.
3. “Functioning federalism” has been framed by the U.S. government as “an emerging political-military approach that might begin to address the root causes of the current crisis” and “a longer-term strategy to deny space for ISIS.” See Brett McGurk, “Statement for the Record: Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk,” Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing: Iraq at a Crossroads: Options for U.S. Policy, July 24, 2014, pp. 10–11, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McGurk%20Testimony%20072414-Final%20Version%20REVISED.pdf>.
4. For an example of one of the many open source reports on this, see “Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq,” Amnesty International, October 2014, [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute\\_impunity\\_iraq\\_report.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute_impunity_iraq_report.pdf).

## CHAPTER 2

# Federal Government Security Forces in Iraq

THE UNITED STATES HAS INVESTED far more than any other country, Iraq included, in the success of the post-Saddam Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In the course of 2003–2011 the U.S. taxpayer spent over \$26 billion to develop the ISF, which reached its peak efficiency in 2009.<sup>6</sup> Alongside treasure the United States paid a crushing price in the blood of its young men and women, with a significant proportion of the 4,493 American fatalities in Iraq suffered during operations in support to the ISF.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, it is not surprising that any new effort to bolster the ISF should meet with groans of dissent in the United States.

Due to the vital U.S. strategic interests at stake, however, the permanent collapse of the ISF is clearly not a desirable option. Under the circumstances, selective security cooperation with the ISF is the cheapest and least risky course of action the United States can undertake in Iraq. A security-cooperation-led approach keeps the ISF in the lead, with the United States and its allies providing support and encouragement. And such cooperation is largely welcomed by the decisionmaking core within the Iraqi government.

### THE STATE OF THE ISF TODAY

Two popular misconceptions surround the catastrophe suffered by the ISF in 2014: that the security forces were largely intact the day before ISIS took Mosul, and that the ISF was almost entirely destroyed in the weeks afterward. In fact the deterioration of the ISF was a half-decade in the making, with unit cohesion and strength atrophying almost as soon as U.S. funding and mentoring began to ebb in 2009.

By the start of 2013 the ISF had already suffered years of chronic absenteeism and the effects of politicized command reappointments. Throughout the year the ISF redeployed larger and larger increments of the southern-based Iraqi Army divisions into Anbar and Ninawa provinces to offset

the weakness of individual units. In April 2013 the ISF suffered a significant localized collapse in Kirkuk and northern Salah al-Din following a Sunni insurgent uprising that followed the killing of over fifty protestors by security forces.

During 2013 Shia militias also played an increasingly open role in security arrangements within Baghdad and Samarra, deploying fighters withdrawn from Syria by Iranian-backed militias. These trends accelerated following the fall of Fallujah to ISIS in late December 2013. A government-tolerated Shia militia presence swamped cross-sectarian areas near Baghdad and in southern Salah al-Din and the Diyala River Valley.

When Mosul collapsed in June 2014, the resultant panic witnessed the collapse of around a quarter of the remaining active ISF strength. Prior to the fall of Mosul, the ISF still operated 100 understrength brigades of Iraqi Army, Federal Police, and border and special forces, with each brigade often operating with as few as 2,000 troops due to absenteeism. This underlines that the collapse of the ISF was a multiyear process, with most of the damage done before Mosul fell. (See table 1.)

In June 2014 the weakened ISF finally cracked: nineteen Iraqi Army brigades<sup>8</sup> and six Federal Police brigades<sup>9</sup> disintegrated, a quarter of Iraq's security forces. These losses comprised all of the Ninawa-based 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army divisions; the entire Mosul-based 3rd Federal Police division; most of the Salah al-Din-based 4th Iraqi Army division; all of the Kirkuk-based 12th Iraqi Army division; plus at least five southern Iraqi Army brigades that had previously been redeployed to the Syrian border.

Yet despite these grievous losses the core of the ISF—comprising thirty-six Iraqi Army brigades and twenty-four Federal Police brigades—did, in fact, survive the fall of Mosul.<sup>10</sup> This is because the bulk of the Iraqi military was not located in the predominantly Sunni areas that ISIS overran and thus were not subjected to the same shock effect and immediate pursuit by insurgent elements. Though damaged, all of the following Iraqi Army brigades survived the summer and continue to fight at the time of writing—with the U.S. military visiting an unidentified subset of twenty-six of these brigades during June and July 2014.

- 14th Iraqi Army division<sup>11</sup> (Eastern Anbar): Brigades 1, 2, 3, 8, 50, 53.
- 5th Iraqi Army division (Diyala River Valley): Brigades 4, 18, 19, 20, 21.

Type	Nov 2009	Jan 2015	Frontline Strength Nov 2009	Frontline Strength Jan 2015
Iraqi Army	55	40	210,000	48,000
Federal Police	30	24	120,000	36,000
Counterterrorism Service	3	3	10,500	6,000
Praetorian bodyguard units	5	5	10,000	10,000
Department of Border Enforcement	15	9	30,000	9,000
<b>Total ISF</b>			<b>380,500</b>	<b>109,000</b>
Popular mobilization (Hashd)	0	10–20 brigade equiv.	0	100,000–120,000
<b>Total ISF + Hashd</b>				<b>209,000–229,000</b>
KRG security forces (comparison)	47	54	80,000	113,000

**TABLE 1. Effective Combat Manpower of Iraqi Security Forces.**

- 6th Iraqi Army division (West/Northwest Baghdad, International Zone): Brigades 22, 23, 24, 55, 56, 57, 60.
- 7th Iraqi Army division (Western Anbar): Brigades 27, 28, 29.
- 8th/17th Iraqi Army divisions (South Baghdad): Brigades 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 55.
- 9th Iraqi Army armored division (dispatched to numerous fronts as detachments): Brigades 34, 35, 36, 37.
- 11th Iraqi Army division (North/East Baghdad): Brigades 42, 43, 44, 45, 59.

All eleven Federal Police brigades in the Baghdad-based 1st, 2nd, and 4th Federal Police divisions also survived the summer as operational units, as did thirteen smaller provincial Federal Police brigades spread across central and southern Iraq.

The Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF, also known as the Golden Division) operates at least three brigades, including two ISOF brigades and one Ministry of Interior Emergency Response Brigade. Almost all of Iraq's 130-strong helicopter and counterinsurgency fleet also survived the summer and both fleets have grown significantly in strength during this

year with the addition of a dozen Su-25 strike aircraft and just over twenty Russian-made attack helicopters.<sup>12</sup> At the end of September 2014 the Iraqi Army Aviation Command reported that it had undertaken 2,116 sorties during the month.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of the collapse of northern forces in June 2014, Iraq was also still operating a large militarized Department of Border Enforcement (DBE), including seven paramilitary brigades based in southern Iraq that survived the summer and another five brigades based largely on the Syrian border that disbanded.

## THE ROLE OF SHIA POPULAR MOBILIZATION

The survival of the above units does not minimize the catastrophe suffered by the ISF in June 2014. The ISF lost many of the experienced, if worn-out, northern units that had carried the main weight of the counterinsurgency effort for the best part of ten years. Though high-quality units remain—particularly ISOF, air forces, and armored troops—these forces are now greatly overworked.

Surviving brigades were, in many cases, reduced to the strength of large battalions (i.e., around 1,200 troops) by further losses and desertion. Taking into account attrition suffered since the summer, it is probable that the active land combat manpower of the ISF dropped from approximately 400,000 at the zenith of U.S.-developed readiness and overmanning in 2009 to as few as 85,000 now. Much of this loss occurred well before the summer of 2014 but such distinctions are irrelevant: the key issue is a lack of available military forces with sufficient morale to defend tenaciously and to counterattack into hotly defended ISIS areas.

In the panic of mid-June the Iraqi government and the Shia clerical establishment simultaneously issued a call-to-arms for all able-bodied men to join the military effort to defeat ISIS. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani's June 10 call for defensive jihad resulted in the widespread fielding of "popular mobilization" forces, known al-Hashd al-Shaabi or Hashd for short.<sup>14</sup>

The Hashd seems to provide legal cover for many different types of Shia militant volunteers, some of whom may have taken leave from their roles in the regular security forces to fight in the Hashd. Within around 100,000–120,000 active Hashd forces, at least half seem to be preexisting militias associated with Hadi al-Ameri's Badr Organization, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis's Kataib Hezbollah,<sup>15</sup> Qais Khazali's Asaib Ahl al-Haqq,

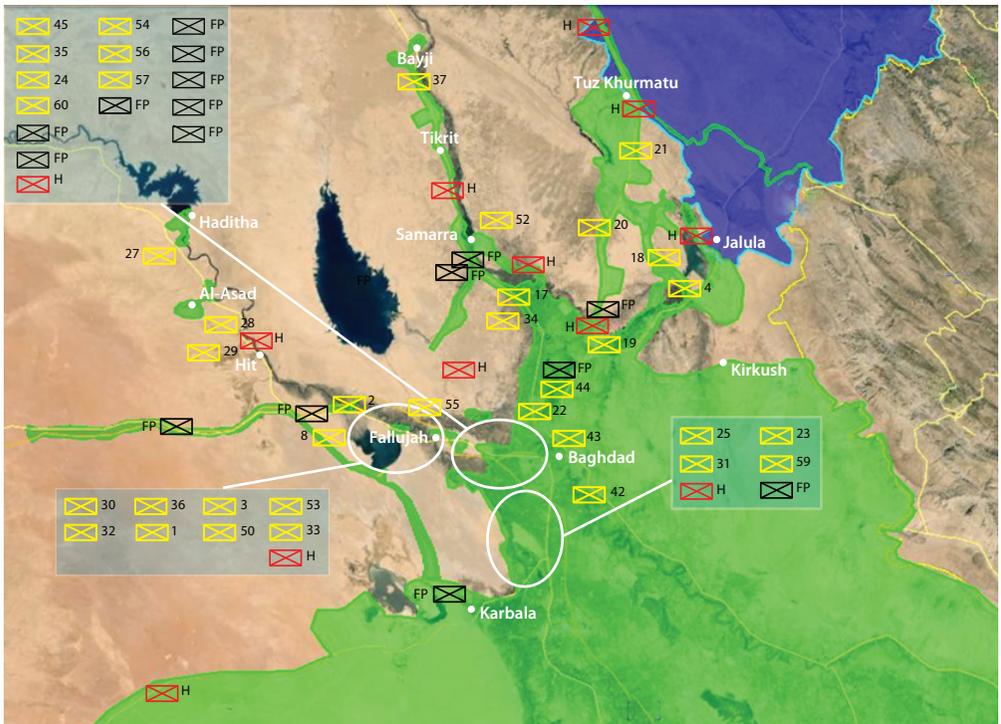


FIG. 1 ISF Brigade Order of Battle, January 2015

Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army,<sup>16</sup> the ISCI-affiliated Sayyed al-Shuhada, and a range of other Shia political blocs.<sup>17</sup>

In most areas the Hashd—whose members have been promised government salaries and benefits—perform relatively static ground-holding missions in cross-sectarian areas south of Samarra. Their “rear area” operations have frequently involved blatant sectarian cleansing activities, involving the execution of Sunni civilians and the destruction of their villages to prevent resettlement.

A subset of the Hashd forces has joined ISOF and Iraqi armored units as the main strike forces of today’s ISF. According to Phillip Smyth, a specialist on Shia militia movements, a core of around 20,000 veteran fighters from preexisting militias does most of the offensive fighting undertaken by Hashd forces. These forces have drawn on their connections to senior Shia political leaders to dominate the command and control arrangements in many of the ISF’s attempts to recapture major objectives—most notably at Amerli and Jurf al-Sakhar.

The Hashd forces have also been able to capitalize on close ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force (IRGC-QF) to gain access to intelligence, planning support, heavy weapons, and a stable supply of ammunition—all factors that combine with their offensive spirit to earn them a key place at the table in ISF command posts, and often direct operational control of key forces.<sup>18</sup>

Providing the equivalent of at least ten brigades' worth of offensive troops and many more brigades' equivalent of ground-holding forces, the Hashd may be a part of the landscape in Iraq's security sector as long as the ISIS threat remains, or at least until some means is found to channel them into the formal security sector and partially demobilize them. Their leaders and their Iranian allies can be expected to resist credible demobilization and integration efforts, or to corrupt them until they become a means to subvert full control of the ISF. (See figure 1.)

## THE NATIONAL GUARD AND SUNNI MOBILIZATION AGAINST ISIS

Sunni popular mobilization against ISIS has proven far more problematic for the Iraqi Shia and Kurdish leaderships to accept. In their view, Sunnis in the security forces deserted en masse in the summer, while Sunni civilians sometimes welcomed ISIS and even turned on their non-Sunni or non-Arab neighbors. The mass equipment losses to ISIS seem to stand as a warning against a new scheme to arm the Sunnis. These views are colored by distrust and self-interest but they are partially true. That being said, other factors could make the arming of Iraqi Sunnis highly attractive to the federal Iraqi government and the Kurds. Shia and Kurds do not necessarily want to die to liberate Sunni towns. As new Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi said on September 24, Sunnis, “not Shia men from the south,” should liberate Sunni areas.<sup>19</sup> Nor would Shia and Kurds be welcome in Sunni areas: they might be resisted initially by some Sunnis who otherwise care little for ISIS, and they would quickly wear out their welcome in Sunni-majority areas.

The United States has consistently pushed the devolution of security powers and security forces as a solution to the above dichotomy. Throughout 2012 and 2013 the U.S. government tried to guide the Maliki government toward adopting a holistic counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy that included reintegration of Sunnis into the security forces.

The National Guard concept outlined by U.S. and Iraqi officials in July 2014 sought to “dramatically restructure [Iraq’s] security services, with units recruited locally to secure local areas, while the national army provides overwatch support.” In the U.S. government’s view the core concepts for “functioning federalism” in post-Mosul Iraq include provisions that “local citizens must be in the lead in securing local areas” and “local citizens defending their communities must be provided state benefits and resources.” Under such a scheme, “the Iraqi Army will rarely deploy inside cities, but will remain outside in an overwatch posture and to carry out federal functions (such as protecting borders).”

An important difference between the National Guard model and the prior Sons of Iraq model is that the National Guard provides government employment with job security and pensions.<sup>20</sup> Though the cabinet has introduced a draft National Guard law,<sup>21</sup> the law has not yet been ratified by parliament and faces opposition from many Shia and Kurdish politicians.<sup>22</sup>

Nearly six months after the fall of Mosul, the range of Sunni actors willing to risk a confrontation with ISIS is growing.<sup>23</sup> Federal and Kurdish security forces are undertaking offensive operations against ISIS in a number of Sunni-dominated districts—Tikrit, Beyji, the outskirts of Mosul, rural Kirkuk, the Hamrin area, and the Western Euphrates River Valley. Often reacting to massacres undertaken against them by ISIS, Sunni tribes are increasingly willing to accept direct combat assistance and logistical support from all comers: the United States, the federal military, the Kurds, and even from Hashd forces.<sup>24</sup> Though Iraq’s government and the U.S. military are working to support such tribes with stopgap security assistance, the Sunni opponents of ISIS need to believe that Baghdad has made a long-term commitment to their security and inclusion in the ISF. Given Baghdad’s abandonment of U.S.-supported Sons of Iraq, the Iraqi government needs to work especially hard to build trust in its dealings with the Sunni tribes.

## FOREIGN SECURITY COOPERATION IN 2014

Foreign security assistance to the Iraqi government has arrived from two camps—one camp being the Iranian-led “Axis of Resistance” (Iran, Assad’s Syria, and Lebanese Hezbollah) and Russia, and the other camp being the U.S. and Western governments.

## IRANIAN SECURITY OPERATIONS IN IRAQ

Due to the decades-spanning support given to many of today's Iraqi Shia leadership, the IRGC-QF is not considered an alien or foreign entity by many Iraqi securocrats. IRGC-QF commander Qasem Soleimani and its senior Iraqi member Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis are able to operate in plain sight—even to ostentatiously flaunt their access to top Iraqi leaders. Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri, a long-term lieutenant to al-Muhandis, has commanded a range of divisional-scale ISF offensives despite holding no rank within the security forces.

At the operational level Iran benefited from its long experience supporting Shia militias in Lebanon, Iraq, and most recently Syria, what one Iranian general termed Iran's "successful experiments in popular all-around defense" that included "mobilizing masses of all ethnic groups."<sup>25</sup> In fact, Iran got a running start due to the redeployment of its militias to Iraq from December 2013 onward.

The IRGC-QF established coordination cells within Iraqi headquarters in June 2014. These cells provided drone surveillance, intelligence, and planning support, and coordinated delivery of Iranian-supplied ammunition to Hashd forces. With Iranian backing, Lebanese Hezbollah also deployed 250 Arabic-speaking technical advisors and intelligence analysts to Baghdad.<sup>26</sup>

Select Hashd forces are also directly armed with heavy weapons by Iran. Iranian rocket systems are particularly widespread, ranging from HM-21 122mm multiple rocket launchers (MRLs) to jeep-based HM-14 107mm MRLs to improvised rocket-assisted mortars (IRAMs).<sup>27</sup> Hashd forces near Tuz Khurmatu and Baquba have also fielded Kornet-E antitank guided missiles against ISIS vehicles.<sup>28</sup>

Iran played a key role in rapidly bolstering Iraq's available airpower. By July 1, Iran delivered seven IRGC Air Force Su-25 ground attack aircraft directly to Baghdad, complete with ordnance and support packages plus "hybrid Iranian/Iraqi air and ground crews previously trained in Iran." These aircraft undergo periodic maintenance runs to the Pars Aviation Aircraft Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) center in Tehran.<sup>29</sup>

Iran also provided Mohajer-4 drones and IRGC pilots to act as forward air controllers for the Su-25 fleet.<sup>30</sup> From late June onward, Iran "established a special control center at Al-Rasheed Airbase in Baghdad and was flying a 'small fleet' of Ababil drones over Iraq."<sup>31</sup> Iran also provided a "sig-

nals intelligence unit at the airfield to intercept electronic communications between ISIS fighters and commanders.”<sup>32</sup>

Russia bolstered Iraq’s firepower with its own quick-turnaround deliveries of five Su-25s, along with fifteen Mi-35M, and six Mi-28NE attack helicopters plus TOS-1A thermobaric MRLs.<sup>33</sup> All these systems have been used extensively in combat, often within days of being deployed to Iraq. Eventually Iraq is scheduled to receive a total of twenty-eight Mi-35M and fifteen Mi-28NE attack helicopters (plus 42 to 50 mobile SA-22 Pantsir low-level air defense systems) in a \$4.2–5 billion deal.<sup>34</sup>

### U.S.-IRAQ SECURITY COOPERATION TODAY

In contrast U.S. and Western security cooperation unfolded at a deliberately gradual pace. Washington had sought to maintain an air defense, counterterrorism, and intelligence-sharing relationship after the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq in 2011. Initially this effort faltered due to Iraqi hesitation to commit to a longer-term security partnership; later, in early 2014, the United States rebuffed Iraqi requests for direct U.S. airstrikes but accelerated weapons transfers. After the fall of Mosul the U.S. government tied an increase in U.S. military assistance to a change in leadership and approach, specifically the removal of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and commitment to a holistic counterterrorism strategy and inclusive government.

With these conditions met to an acceptable degree, U.S. military support to the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has gradually escalated.<sup>35</sup> First Washington set up a Joint Operations Center in Baghdad and Erbil, assisting in coordination between the two government centers.<sup>36</sup> Eight U.S. Apache gunships were deployed to Baghdad International Airport to protect key Baghdad facilities from June 2014 onward, eventually providing direct close air support to Iraqi units up to 150 miles to the west.<sup>37</sup>

U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets that could be spared from supporting the withdrawal from Afghanistan were surged to Iraq. Highly selective U.S. and allied airstrikes on ISIS followed, focused on a small number of approved battlefields such as Mosul Dam, Sinjar, and Amerli, and later broadening to include any areas where available airpower could be matched to positively identified ISIS targets. Novel arrangements were made to allow unpartnered strikes without the presence of U.S. Joint Terminal Attack Controllers on the battleground.<sup>38</sup> Though this has constrained the number of strikes in Iraq, U.S. airpower has nonetheless played a key role in checking ISIS’s momentum.<sup>39</sup>

President Obama ordered U.S. forces to begin operations against ISIS on August 7, 2014. In the first four and a half months of campaigning, the coalition has flown more than 5,000 strike sorties (employing over 4,000 weapons); 1,700 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) sorties; more than 22,000 air refueling sorties; and more than 1,300 airlift sorties delivering 6,000-plus tons of humanitarian and military aid.

Now the United States is expanding its training support to land warfare operations. U.S. forces in Iraq increased to around 2,200 by the end of 2014. The U.S. military will expand its Joint Operations Center in Baghdad and collocate it with Iraqi Ground Forces Command in the same city. It will also establish two expeditionary advise-and-assist operations centers outside Baghdad to provide support for the Iraqis at the brigade headquarters level and above.<sup>40</sup> The U.S. 82nd Airborne Division headquarters and over a thousand troops from the division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team will deploy to Iraq in early 2015 to oversee the training.<sup>41</sup> There is limited U.S. government willingness to deploy U.S. troops to support Iraqi forces in combat at lower than the brigade level.

Up to 1,500 U.S. military personnel and \$1.61 billion are being allocated to establish sites to train nine Iraqi and three KRG brigades in time for spring offensives in early 2015 to liberate Mosul and other key ISIS strongholds.<sup>42</sup> Though the \$1.61 billion funds are available for use until September 2017, they are intended to be quickly obligated to facilitate a major anti-ISIS offensive around Mosul in 2015. The Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF)<sup>43</sup> includes a commitment to fund three train-and-equip programs:

- **Nine Iraqi army brigades.** The U.S. government will invest \$1.23 billion to “train, equip, and build” nine Iraqi Army brigades. Equipment transfers outlined in the appropriation suggest that 45,000 Iraqi Army soldiers will be fully equipped with everything from new personal protective equipment to sufficient 120mm mortars to equip three divisional artillery units. The appropriation includes 3,496 tactical vehicles (Hummers, trucks, fuel tankers, and engineering vehicles). It would appear that Iraq is reconstituting its destroyed Iraqi Army divisions anew, drawing on rallied survivors of collapsed Iraqi Army units.<sup>44</sup>
- **Three KRG brigades.** At a cost of \$353.8 million the U.S. military will, for the first time, also “address the equipment requirements” of three

Kurdish brigades with exactly the same scale of equipment as the Iraqi Army. Equipment transfers outlined in the appropriation suggest that 15,000 Kurdish soldiers will be fully equipped with everything from new personal protective equipment to sufficient 120mm mortars to equip one divisional artillery brigade. The appropriation includes 720 tactical vehicles (Hummers, trucks, fuel tankers, and engineering vehicles). It appears that the appropriation will equip existing Pesh-merga brigades.

- **One Tribal Security Force brigade.** At a cost of \$13.5 million, 5,000 sets of personal protective equipment, light arms, and other equipment will be provided to this Anbari tribal force, which will be recruited and paid using the same popular mobilization dispensations as the Hashd forces. The United States deployed a fifty-man special forces training team to support the arming of Sunni tribal volunteer forces at al-Asad, a model that may be mirrored elsewhere.

U.S. forces will undertake training at Tikrit airbase (Camp Speicher), Taji logistics base north of Baghdad, Kirkush Military Training Base in Diyala, Habbaniya base in eastern Anbar, al-Asad airbase in the Western Euphrates River Valley, and at sites within the KRG.<sup>45</sup> In Iraqi Kurdistan the formation of at least two federally commanded brigades seems to be planned, utilizing Arab troops and policemen who retreated into Kurdish territory.<sup>46</sup> These forces, which appear likely to be gathered under the new Iraqi Army 18th and 19th divisions, may be launched into the Mosul offensive from Kurdish areas east of Mosul city.

Some reports also point to the creation of a range of new Iraqi Army units in parallel to the U.S.-led rebuild of destroyed units. New under-strength Iraqi Army brigades with numeric identifiers between 64 and 76 are emerging. Brigade 64 was identified forming at Basra from cadre forces made up of the division's commando battalion, local recruits, and, seemingly, survivors from Basra-based units who had been redeployed to the north in the months before Mosul fell. Brigades 75 and 76 graduated from Nasiriyah Military College in late November, with one brigade deployed in each Dhi Qar and Basra provinces. (A new Iraqi Army 16th division seems to be standing up in Basra to command forces there, with a new 15th division likely earmarked for Dhi Qar and Maysan, replacing the old 10th division.) Brigade 73 has likewise been identified at the Kirkush Military Training Base in Diyala.

U.S. equipment transfers remain an important part of security cooperation with Iraq. Throughout 2014 the United States has ramped up its provision of ammunition, missiles, and spare parts for the mass of U.S. equipment used by the Iraqi military. Since June 2014 the U.S. government has continued to process large-scale logistical support contracts for the ISF to offset its operational losses in vehicles and artillery pieces.<sup>47</sup> Iraq is receiving expedited approval to receive new smart weapons such as the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS), an inexpensive kit to convert Iraq's U.S.-provided Hydra 2.75-inch unguided helicopter rockets into laser-guided munitions capable of destroying ISIS's light armored vehicles.<sup>48</sup> In 2014, Iraq requested and was approved to receive over 5,000 U.S. Hellfire missiles.<sup>49</sup>

Other deals need to vault logistical or security hurdles in order to move forward. The U.S. government approved Iraq's January 27, 2014, \$4.8 billion request for 24 AH-64E Apaches (including six leased for expedited delivery) and a comprehensive training program was approved by the U.S. government but the option was never picked up by the Iraqis.<sup>50</sup> Iraq's first F-16IQ multirole aircraft<sup>51</sup> are ready for delivery from the United States, with Iraqi pilots training on them in Texas. But fielding the first Iraqi F-16 squadron will require the establishment of highly specialized facilities and secure housing for U.S. support staff. These facilities were being built in Balad, a location where ISIS remains highly active on the outskirts of the airbase.<sup>52</sup>

## SECURITY SECTOR LEADERSHIP AND REFORMS UNDER ABADI

The higher-level direction of Iraq's security forces has also seen changes since the summer of 2014. At the uppermost level Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the commander-in-chief of Iraq's armed forces, left office. His replacement, Haider al-Abadi, is cut from different cloth than Maliki when it comes to security matters. Whereas Maliki spent much of his time on military and security issues, taking a personal interest in low-level developments, Abadi is no securocrat. His earliest decisions as premier were to abolish the Maliki-era Office of the Commander-in-Chief (OCINC), an appendage to the Prime Minister's Office that had become a micromanagement center for the ISF with direct operational control over the special forces of the Counterterrorism Service (CTS).<sup>53</sup> Abadi later ordered subor-

dinates to stop using a Maliki-era military honorific to describe the prime minister and guided military commanders to remove pictures of the premier from their headquarters.<sup>54</sup>

Abadi appears determined to normalize security decisionmaking within a more conventional institutional framework of a National Security Council–type security committee of the cabinet. The first step to achieving this was the parliamentary approval of security ministers, a step that Maliki never took in his second term, when he personally held the defense and interior portfolios for four years. Indeed Abadi's first two candidates—Jabir al-Jabiri as defense minister and Riyadh Gharib for interior minister—were rejected by parliament. MPs are pursuing investigations into both the collapse of federal security forces in Mosul and subsequent debacles in Anbar.<sup>55</sup>

With pressure from the U.S. government, the fledgling premier Abadi took a courageous stand by refusing to nominate Hadi al-Ameri for either the defense or interior portfolio. The Ministry of Defense, Ameri's main objective, went to Khalid al-Ubeidi, a Sunni Arab from Mosul who was formerly a military engineer and later an advisor to Ninawa governor Atheel Nujaifi and his brother, former parliamentary speaker Osama Nujaifi. Ubeidi has outlined his priorities as the defeat of ISIS, the rebuilding of the Iraqi Army, and anticorruption—the latter two objectives going hand-in-hand as corruption was a major factor in the progressive weakening of the ISF over the last five years.<sup>56</sup>

The Abadi government has also moved quickly to remove many of the worst military cronies appointed by the Maliki government. First Abadi sacked the key villains in the debacle at Mosul—Iraqi Ground Forces Command (IGFC) commander General Ali Ghaidan and Iraqi Army chief of operations General About Kanbar.

The replacements brought in to shake up the army leadership resemble a list of the top performing Iraqi fighting generals active during the U.S. campaign to stabilize Iraq. Lt. Gen. Khurshid Salim Hassan, the capable Kurdish former commander of the 3rd Iraqi Army division, is slated to replace his fellow Kurd Iraqi Army chief of staff Gen. Babakir Zebari when he retires.<sup>57</sup> Zebari's new deputy is Lt. Othman al-Ghanimi, the impressive former commander of the 8th Iraqi Army division and later the commander of the Middle Euphrates Operations Command. The new head of IGFC and the Mosul Liberation Command is Lieutenant General Riyadh Tawfiq, the former head of the Ninawa Operations Command at the height of U.S. operations in Mosul in 2008.

At the same time, Abadi also retired a range of corps-level and divisional commanders, replacing them by temporary executive order<sup>58</sup> with impressive general officers. Corps-level “operations commands” in Baghdad, Basra, Anbar, and Samarra were restaffed in early November 2014. In the Anbar Operations Command the underperforming Lt. Gen. Rashid Flaih was replaced at the request of the Anbar provincial government with Maj. Gen. Qasim al-Mohammed, the leader of the Anbar-based 7th Iraqi Army division. The Samarra Operations Command chief Lt. Gen. Sabah al-Fatlawi was similarly replaced by the capable former commander of the 11th Iraqi Army division, Maj. Gen. Imad Zuhairi, an officer removed from his division in 2013 to make way for a Maliki loyalist.<sup>59</sup>

Against these promising developments there remains considerable uncertainty over how professional military officers, the Shia political leadership, and the Hashd militias will collaborate in the future.<sup>60</sup> Despite holding no rank within the Iraqi civilian or military leaderships, Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri has an Iraqi Army Aviation Command scout helicopter at his disposal to constantly shuffle between battlefields, taking local operational control of forces in key fights like Amerli, Jurf al-Sakhar, and Saadiya.<sup>61</sup>

In some areas the ISF has been left with inept Maliki-era corps commanders like Lt. Gen. Abdul-Amir al-Zaydi (at the Tigris Operations Command) or Maliki generals have been removed but not replaced, creating space for Hashd forces to operate freely in the absence of a functional military chain of command (for instance, in Basra and Baghdad). Senior Hashd leaders like Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis—a U.S.-designated terrorist<sup>62</sup>—make high-profile tours of the frontline alongside Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, sending a strong message that their influence goes right to the top.

If the future balance of power in the Ministry of Defense is unclear, even less is known about the goings-on within the Ministry of Interior. This is now led by a Badr minister, Mohammad Salem al-Ghabban, creating the potential for a colonization of the ministry and its subordinate local police services, Federal Police and the FBI-style National Information and Investigation Agency (NIIA)—a process that already happened once before in 2005–2006. No major U.S. or Western assessments or training schemes have covered the Federal Police or NIIA for nearly five years; they are a black hole. This is particularly concerning because Ministry of Interior forces will need to perform key intelligence, community liaison, and judicial roles in subsequent phases of the counterterrorism campaign to destroy ISIS.

## NOTES

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2. Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. Casualty Status, Fatalities as of January 8, 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/NEWS/casualty.pdf>.
3. The following Iraqi Army brigades were based in the overrun areas and have not been mentioned in any media as active since June 9, 2014: Brigades 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 38, 39, 40, 41, 46, 47, 48, 49, and 51.
4. All six Federal Police brigades in 3rd Federal Police division were based in the overrun areas and have not been mentioned in any media as active since June 9, 2014.
5. Since then, at least four new brigades have been added, see below.
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7. Awad Mustafa, “IISS Report: Iraq’s Latest Su-25s Come from Iran,” *Defense News*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140702/DEFREG04/307020018/>.
8. According to the Iraqi MOD, in September, Iraqi Army Aviation achieved 2,116 combat missions. See “Army Command Air carried more than 2,116 sorties during the month of September,” September 30, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvvT8Ir-iEk&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvvT8Ir-iEk&feature=player_embedded).
9. “Abadi Travels Abroad for Domestic Ends,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, Issue No. 95, p. 2..
10. Kataib Hezbollah front organizations including Saraya al-Dafa al-Shabi, Saraya Talia al-Khurasani, and Kataib al-Fatah al-Mubin. See “Abadi Travels Abroad for Domestic Ends,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, Issue No. 95, p. 2; also “Baghdad Launches Diplomatic Blitz to Cool Tensions,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, Issue No. 96, p. 4.
11. Now called Saraya al-Salam or “Peace Battalions.”
12. Examples include Saraya Ansar al-Aqeeda under Sheikh Jalal al-Din al-Saghir; and Saraya Ashura, associated with Ammar al-Hakim of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). Even the Dawa Party, traditionally lacking in strong militia forces, has begun to develop Hashd offshoots. See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “Kataib al-Ghadab: An Armed Wing of the Islamic Dawah Party (Tanzim al-Dakhil),” *Iraq Insurgent Profiles* (aymennjawad.org), November 1, 2014, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/15576/kataib-al-ghadab-an-armed-wing-of-the-islamic>.
13. “Provincial Focus Diyala: Militias Push for More Professional Organization,” *Inside Iraqi Politics*, Issue No. 94, p. 4.

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15. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Brett McGurk, *Hearing: Terrorist March in Iraq: The U.S. Response before the House Foreign Affairs Committee*, July 23, 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20140723/102485/HHRG-113-FA00-Transcript-20140723.pdf>.
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17. "Abadi Just Getting Started on Defense Policy," *Inside Iraqi Politics*, Issue No. 93, p. 6. Abadi's cabinet decided at its first meeting September 9, 2014, to draft a law creating the National Guard within two weeks. See also "Mosul Prepares Secret List of Officers for Its National Guard as Tikrit Requests Helicopters for New Volunteer Army," *al-Mada*, September 23, 2014; and "Five Provinces Begin to Form National Guard Forces with Local Fighters," *al-Mada*, October 1, 2014.
18. Though no tribal structure is a unitary actor, component parts of each of the largest confederations in the country have rebelled against ISIS rule since June 2014. In Anbar the Dulaimi confederation's tribes have backed the federal government forces since ISIS attacked Ramadi in December 2013. In Dhuluiya, between Baghdad and Samarra, Sunni tribesmen of the Jabbouri confederation have resisted ISIS since June in collaboration with both Iraqi Army forces and, stunningly, Iranian-backed Shia militiamen from the Kataib Hezbollah movement. In early October the Shammar tribal confederation's leaders gave their backing to a Kurdish Peshmerga offensive through their lands to cut ISIS's access to the Rabiya border crossing with Syria. Near Kirkuk, the Obeidi confederation, another conglomeration of Sunni tribes, is starting to cooperate with Shia Turkmen tribes and Kurdish security forces against ISIS. Anti-ISIS Sunnis from Mosul are being trained in Kurdish-controlled parts of eastern Ninawa to take part in the liberation of Mosul. Albu Nimr tribesmen from Anbar have gathered at Al-Assad airbase to receive U.S. and Iraqi government training and weapons to fight back against ISIS elements near Hit. See Michael Knights, "Why the Islamic State Is Losing," *Politico*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/why-islamic-state-is-losing-111872.html#ixzz3NJyaQKoY>.
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20. Iranian brigadier-general Massoud Jazayeri stated that Iran could best help Iraq by providing it direction on its "successful experiments in popular all-around defense" that included "mobilizing masses of all ethnic groups." See "Iraq Crisis: Iran Pledges Military Help Against ISIS as Battle for Tikrit

- Escalates,” *Daily Telegraph*, June 22, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10933934/Iraq-crisis-Iran-pledges-military-help-against-Isis-as-battle-for-Tikrit-escalates.html>.
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  25. *Ibid.*
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  45. \$600 million worth of spare parts for such systems as M1A1 battle tanks, M1070 heavy equipment tactical trucks, M88A1/2 tank recovery vehicles, M198 towed howitzers, M109A5 self-propelled howitzers, plus armored vehicles, heavy trucks, Humvees, and other equipment. See Gareth Jennings, "Defense Contractor General Dynamics Iraq Requests Apache Attack Helos," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 27, 2014; and "U.S. Begins Training Iraqis on Apache Helicopters after Green Light from Congress," *World Tribune*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.worldtribune.com/2014/02/27/u-s-begins-training-iraqis-on-apache-helicopters-after-green-light-from-congress/>.
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## CHAPTER 3

# Security Forces in Iraqi Kurdistan

PROVISION OF SECURITY COOPERATION to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq presents a different—and arguably much less difficult—set of challenges for the United States and other Western powers. Kurdistan is, in many ways, an ideal basing location for the international military campaign against ISIS. A wider international effort to destroy ISIS would be far longer and more costly without Iraqi Kurdistan, which can provide secure basing and direct access to over a thousand miles of the group's front lines in northern Iraq, including the Kurdish-populated parts of eastern Syria and ISIS's lines of communications to Syria also.

The Kurds are rhetorically committed to defeating ISIS. On August 5, 2014, KRG president Masoud Barzani stated, “We have decided to go on the offensive and fight the terrorists to the last breath.” But on the ground, they are also clearly reticent to risk the lives of Kurdish fighters—the Peshmerga (“those who confront death”)—to liberate non-Kurdish areas held by ISIS. To fully join the campaign against ISIS's stronghold in Mosul and other northern areas, the Kurds want direct and continuous security cooperation with the United States and other Western militaries.

Presently Western security cooperation with the Kurds requires Baghdad's approval as the internationally recognized sovereign state, with transfers of training and equipment sanctioned by Iraq's Ministry of Defense. This has historically limited the KRG's access to U.S. and Western military support. Baghdad has claimed that Kurdistan should only be allowed to build and operate small and lightly armed paramilitary police forces, blocking Kurdish access to state-issued end-user certificates for heavier equipment. Clashes and tension between Kurdish and federal forces have been a further complicating factor.

The net effect of U.S. hesitation to directly engage the Peshmerga has been that only eight KRG brigades were built with a measly \$92 million of U.S. support during 2003–2011 (as compared with 109 U.S.-supported brigades in federal Iraq at a cost of more than \$25 billion).<sup>1</sup> To underline the minimal U.S. investment in the KRG military, the average amount invested in each KRG brigade was \$11.5 million, compared to \$229.3 million spent on each federal ISF brigade. Today the eight U.S.-assisted Kurdish units are intact, whereas almost a quarter of the federal forces have disintegrated.<sup>2</sup> Advocates of a closer military relationship between the U.S. government and the KRG can make a powerful case that security cooperation with Iraqi Kurdistan will provide far greater “bang for the buck” than similar operations in federal Iraq and may even translate into greater leverage over Baghdad in the future.

## THE STATE OF KRG SECURITY FORCES TODAY

The Peshmerga is a catch-all phrase for a range of KRG security forces that include the following elements. The first element is the fifteen Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs) that are now active under the administrative control of the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. At full strength each of these units has approximately 2,500 troops, though before the 2014 crisis they were often only partially manned, with troops receiving one week of leave for every two weeks of duty. Eleven RGBs are light infantry formations with a mix of armored and soft-skinned wheeled vehicles and organic mortar units. Two RGBs are mechanized and armored troops, comprising the bulk of Kurdistan’s old T-55 and T-62 tanks as well as various Soviet-era tracked personnel carriers. Two further support brigades contain the Peshmerga’s heavy artillery units, equipped with a mix of MRLs and Soviet-era howitzers. A small but growing light helicopter force is now fielded by the KRG.<sup>3</sup> A 1,500-man special forces brigade called Hezakane (force) Tarabatay has recently been activated to undertake special operations. In 2013 the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs forces were provided with salaries to pay 51,000 troops. (See figure 2)

Alongside the ministry-supported Peshmerga is an equally large body of troops commanded, equipped, and paid directly by the Kurdish political parties and their leaders. Those commanded by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Barzani family are referred to as Yakray (unit) 80 troops, a force of around 25,000 fighters that includes:<sup>4</sup>

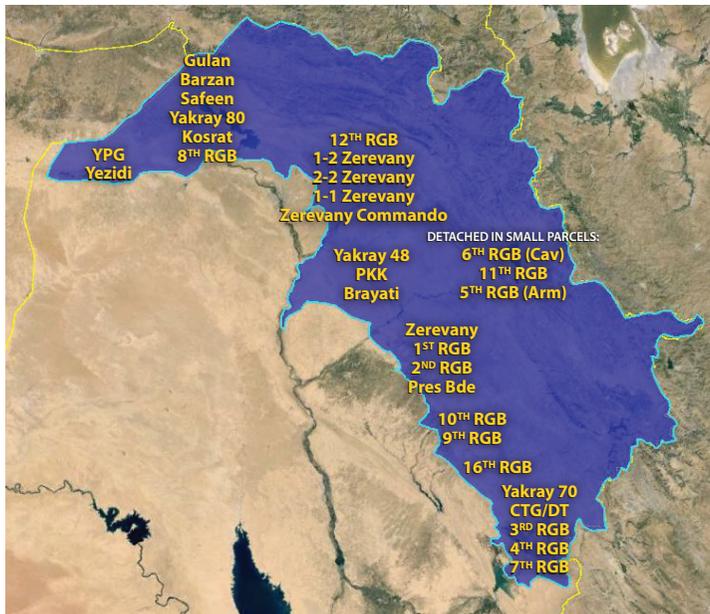


FIG. 2 Kurdish Brigade Order of Battle, January 2015.

- **Hezakane Gulan**, the presidential bodyguard brigade for KRG president Masoud Barzani, an elite formation mounted in U.S. Hummers and supported by organic MRLs.
- **Hezakane Barzan**, another praetorian unit composed of men from the president's home district and commanded by Masoud's close cousin Sirwan Barzani.
- **Ten regional brigades** of varying sizes that comprise around 20,000 troops in total and normally work on a two-weeks-off, one-week-on rotation.

Alongside the Yakray 80 troops the KDP also dominates the command and recruitment of heavily armed paramilitary police units called the Zerevani, which are administratively supported by the KDP-dominated Ministry of Interior of the KRG. The 25,000-strong Zerevani are responsible for key-point security at KRG and KDP locations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, at least five of their ten brigades have been used as frontline infantry units between the Syrian border and Kirkuk in recent years. In many cases the Zerevani are nearly indistinguishable from RGB forces when they are in the field.

Units commanded by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which is led by the Talabani family, are referred to as Yakray 70 troops, a force of around 25,000 fighters that includes:<sup>6</sup>

- **Hezakane Kosrat Rasul**, the vice presidential bodyguard brigade for KRG vice president Kosrat Rasul, an elite formation mounted in wheeled armored vehicles.
- **Fifteen regional brigades** of varying sizes that comprise around 20,000 troops in total and normally work on a two-weeks-off, one-week-on rotation.

In addition to these forces, there are two other types of unit that answer foremost to the PUK, namely:<sup>7</sup>

- **Two presidential brigades**, nominally the bodyguard force for the federal Iraqi president (who is currently PUK grandee Fouad Mas-soum) but in practice PUK praetorian units. One brigade is based in Baghdad and large elements of the second are present at various points in Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk.
- **Dizha Tiror** (DT, the Counterterrorism Group), also nominally a unified KRG unit but in practice a PUK-led elite brigade-sized special forces group with strong connections to the U.S. intelligence and special forces communities.

When added together, the frontline fighting strength of the active KRG armed forces numbers around 132,000 troops, if all Peshmerga reported for duty. During relaxed periods, around 80,000 Peshmerga might be on duty at any time. Since the KRG went fully to war with ISIS in August 2014 many thousands more Kurds—including many retired veterans—have joined the KRG armed forces as armed volunteers, though the authorities began to encourage a thinning out of their ranks when the defense of Iraqi Kurdistan stabilized. At the time of writing, it can be estimated that somewhere between 100,000 and 120,000 KRG security forces are on active duty.

To these numbers a final addition must be made to the effective strength of the Peshmerga to reflect the contributions made by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and People's Defense Units (YPG) militiamen operating in support of the KRG. The PKK maintains a large UN-monitored camp in Makhmour district plus many smaller hideouts across the KRG, and these forces mobilized to play a key role in the defense of Makhmour

and Kirkuk against ISIS since August 2014. Likewise the YPG, the Syria branch of the PKK, played a key role in supporting the Sinjar area from bases inside eastern Syria. Indeed the YPG, not the KRG, is training Iraqi Yezidi self-protection forces in Sinjar at the time of writing.

## PESHMERGA STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

After fifty years of guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi state the Peshmerga have a strong reputation as fighters, both in Iraq and in the West, where their exotic name has become synonymous with bravery. The military balance between the federal ISF and the Peshmerga has shifted in favor of the Kurds since the decline of the federal military began in 2009. At the zenith of the U.S.-built ISF, the federal government forces were both better equipped and far more numerous, with combat forces numbering around 400,000 soldiers. With the frontline Iraqi Army and Federal Police reduced now to around 80,000 soldiers, and with Kurdish units having survived the summer's battles, the Peshmerga became the single-largest security force in Iraq.

That being said, the war against ISIS has gravely tested the KRG security forces and exposed the Peshmerga's weaknesses as well as its strengths. On the eastern parts of the Kurdish-ISIS frontline the predominantly PUK Peshmerga had been fighting a slowly escalating war against ISIS throughout 2014. But on the KDP side of the region the collapse of the ISF was followed by a rapid expansion of Peshmerga-held territory, followed by a form of undeclared truce with ISIS. When ISIS attacked the Peshmerga on August 1–3, 2014, the Kurds reeled backward, abandoning not only the terrain they seized earlier in the summer but also many areas that had been solid Kurdish-protected territories since 2003. Simultaneously, on the eastern side of the KRG in Diyala province, PUK forces became stuck in attritional seesaw street battles against ISIS in the twin towns of Jalula and Saadiya.

In a bid to explain the Peshmerga setbacks in these battles, the Kurds focused on the need for more and newer weapons, particularly in terms of antiarmor weapons capable of disabling ISIS's many captured Iraqi military vehicles.<sup>8</sup> Another theme favored by the Kurds was that of ammunition shortages—a traditional face-saver for Middle Eastern armies, based on the premise that even the bravest troops have to give way temporarily if they lack the means to fight.<sup>9</sup> While these explanations were partially true,

the battles in Ninawa and Diyala highlight a range of other weaknesses among the Peshmerga.<sup>10</sup> These weaknesses include:

- **Poor disposition of forces.** Perhaps the main reason why western Ninawa fell to ISIS is that the disposition of Kurdish forces made it very difficult to defend that territory. The Sinjar and Rabiya areas encompass a large strip of land along the Syrian border that extends deep into ISIS-held territory. Adequately garrisoning these areas requires significant forces, but only two small Peshmerga brigades were stationed there on August 1. Likewise, ISIS was able to develop advanced outposts on either side of the Tigris River approaching Mosul Dam and in the Christian areas east of Mosul due to the paucity of Peshmerga forces in those areas. This is not because the KRG has insufficient forces—rather, Peshmerga units were overconcentrated around Kirkuk, where the two main Kurdish factions, the KDP and the PUK, are competing for influence.
- **Intra-Kurdish rivalries.** The Peshmerga's stumbles in Ninawa and Diyala were caused in part by poor coordination between some KDP and PUK units, even when those units were mixed together in purportedly unified RGBs. The defeats hurt Kurdish military pride, prompting recriminations between KDP and PUK supporters.
- **Inexperience.** Although the Peshmerga have received professional training, particularly those in RGBs, many Kurdish units are still inexperienced. Commanders also lacked the skills they needed. Retirement-age commanders fought Saddam's army in guerrilla warfare, but those experiences did not necessarily prepare them for vehicle-mounted militia warfare or counterinsurgency—the poacher does not automatically know how to be a gamekeeper. No senior Peshmerga officer or planner has experience with modern combined-arms offensive warfare, while the rank and file is typically much younger, lacking combat experience and, critically, the Arabic language skills needed to interact profitably with Sunni Arab communities.
- **Tactical surprise.** Kurdish forces proved no less vulnerable than the Iraqi army to the panic caused by surprise attacks, although it should be noted that they bounced back into counteroffensive operations far more rapidly than federal forces.

- **Equipment and logistics.** The Peshmerga have significant stocks of heavy weaponry, including tanks, rocket artillery, and howitzers, so any claim that ISIS can outgun them is simply untrue. But they may lack the ammunition required to sustain artillery barrages throughout the duration of offensive operations, as well as the spare parts and maintenance capabilities needed to keep armored vehicle fleets in service. In other words, the Peshmerga faced a logistics shortfall as much as an equipment shortfall.
- **Alienation from Sunni tribes.** Both western Ninawa and northern Diyala have strong Sunni Arab tribal networks. Unfortunately, the Kurdish military has a bad relationship with tribes in both areas, meaning that Peshmerga units can expect little or no intelligence support or reinforcements from these Sunni Arab communities. Although forging a better relationship is a tall order due to the bitter history of competing Arab and Kurdish territorial claims, such efforts may become vital if the KRG intends to garrison these areas in the long term.

#### INTERNATIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION WITH THE KRG

When ISIS raiding parties threatened to drive to Erbil, the thriving capital of the KRG, the international community responded rapidly with pledges of boosted security cooperation. While Iran did move rapidly to provide artillery and ammunition to the Kurds, the United States and other Western allies played the dominant role.<sup>11</sup> Of critical importance, the United States demonstrated its fundamental commitment to the Iraqi Kurds by commencing airstrikes on ISIS forces operating near Erbil on August 8, stabilizing the situation and bolstering the confidence of KRG forces defending the capital. The Kurds drew great reassurance from the fact that Washington's first military strikes in Iraq since 2011 came in defense of the Kurdish capital.

Since August the United States has continued to provide air support to KRG ground forces on a range of battlefields, including the first close air support missions flown by the United States since 2011, in support of the recapture of Mosul Dam on August 18, 2014. Kurdish requests for air support and logistical assistance are submitted at the Erbil-based U.S.-KRG Joint Operations Center (JOC). At the time of writing eight other Western coalition members have launched airstrikes in defense of the KRG, working through the JOC.<sup>12</sup>

Western airpower is also based in the KRG, with U.S., British, and Italian armed drones flying from Erbil. Bashur airbase in Harir, KRG, appears to be under development as a less visible location from which to mount coalition air operations. Iraqi Army Aviation Command has also dedicated four Mi-171 helicopters to the disposal of Kurdish forces at Erbil, reinforcing the small fleet of unarmored light helicopters operated by the KRG security forces.

Western nations have also pledged significant material and training support to the Peshmerga, though delivery has lagged behind the urgent expectations of the Kurds. On August 5 U.S. intelligence-community-delivered shipments of small arms, light antitank weapons and ammunition commenced, bypassing the normal channels of international arms sales (i.e., involving the federal Iraqi government). A range of European nations stepped forward to provide nonlethal equipment following the September 9, 2014, statement by the European Union that member states were free to pursue their own national policies on arming the Iraqi Kurds.<sup>13</sup>

Germany is the single-largest donor of military equipment and training at the time of writing. The German government pledged—and has begun to deliver—more than two brigades' worth of weapons and equipment to the Peshmerga. This program includes 4,000 sets of personal protective equipment (helmets and body armor), 700 radios, over 16,000 assault rifles (with 6 million rounds of ammunition), and 60 trucks and 5 mine-resistant armored vehicles.<sup>14</sup>

Most important, Germany has begun to deliver 240 Panzerfaust-3 light antitank weapons (with 3,500 missiles) and 30 Milan long-range guided antiarmor launchers and 500 missiles.<sup>15</sup> By October 2014 Milan missiles were in use at selected points on the Kurdish frontline.<sup>16</sup> Other nations like France and the UK have provided significant numbers of automatic cannons and heavy machine guns capable of penetrating ISIS's light armored vehicles at long ranges.<sup>17</sup>

### U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO THE PESHMERGA

In the coming half-year the United States has also announced plans to train three brigades of Peshmerga RGB troops. As noted previously, the ITEF<sup>18</sup> includes a \$353.8 million commitment to “address the equipment requirements” of three Kurdish brigades with exactly the same scale of equipment as the Iraqi Army. Equipment transfers outlined in the appropriation suggest that 15,000 Kurdish soldiers will be fully equipped with everything

from new personal protective equipment to sufficient 120mm mortars to equip one divisional artillery brigade. The appropriation includes 720 tactical vehicles (Hummers, trucks, fuel tankers, and engineering vehicles). It appears that the appropriation will equip existing Peshmerga brigades.

The Kurdistan Region's political leadership has intensively lobbied U.S. legislators to call for an upscaling in this effort to include U.S. training and equipping of all the Peshmerga RGBs in a continuous direct military-military relationship between the United States and Iraqi Kurdistan. A "sense of Congress" resolution drafted in the House of Representatives on November 10, 2014,<sup>19</sup> appealed to the president to "directly provide the Kurdistan Regional Government with advanced conventional weapons, training, and defense services, on an emergency and temporary basis." The motion calls for President Obama to "accept End Use Certificates approved by the Kurdistan Regional Government" to allow the KRG to directly receive U.S. "antiarmor weapons, armored vehicles, long-range artillery, crew-served weapons and ammunition, secure command and communications equipment, body armor, helmets, logistics equipment, excess defense articles and other military assistance that the President determines to be appropriate" for a three-year period.<sup>20</sup> A similar but less detailed bill has been awaiting review by the House Foreign Affairs Committee since September 19, 2014.<sup>21</sup>

## SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN THE KRG

Even if Washington set aside its policy of providing security cooperation through Baghdad, the bifurcation of the KRG security sector along party political lines might still be a brake on U.S. security cooperation with Iraqi Kurdistan. The United States has historically demanded a range of security sector reforms in Iraqi Kurdistan before it would commit to full development of the Peshmerga and Zerevani, including the full integration of such forces under KRG ministries with budgetary and parliamentary oversight as opposed to political party control.

Currently only around 51,000 Peshmerga are administered by truly unified government institutions, namely the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs RGBs. These units have served creditably but they still do not have the élan or strong military reputation of the elite party Peshmerga units like Gulan, Barzan, or Dizha Titor, which are gathering places for the most highly motivated recruits. Yakray 70 and 80 troops adminis-

tered by the parties number around 50,000 combined, though they become even larger when the Peshmerga is mobilized and swollen with armed volunteers organized by the parties. Adding in the KDP-dominated Zerevani, over 75,000 Peshmerga remain under party control while only a minority of Kurdistan's forces are truly unified.<sup>22</sup>

Peshmerga unification has been a long and winding road. The process initially aimed to create a 70,000-strong Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, two unified military colleges, and a formalized system of 30,000 reservists also administered by the ministry. As recently as May 2013 the deputy minister of Peshmerga Anwar Haji Osman outlined plans to create "22 unified brigades [i.e., RGBs] which will be classified into 2 divisions, 20 of them will consist of mechanized, motorized, armored, artillery, air defense, engineers, signals and logistic unit brigades while the last two will be combat support unit brigades."<sup>23</sup> Surplus Peshmerga were either to be retired or rolled into two new Iraqi Army divisions, the 15th and 16th, that were planned at the time but that were not subsequently built.

Though fifteen RGBs were built from converted and merged party Peshmerga units, the process then stalled for lack of funding—Kurdish, federal Iraqi, or U.S.—and because of political resistance by the parties. The PUK froze its integration of party units into the RGBs when they lost the Peshmerga ministerial portfolio to Gorran's Mustafa Sayid Qadir on June 18, 2014. In light of the summer's military setbacks, on August 25, 2014, KRG president Masoud Barzani ordered a revitalization of Peshmerga unification, stipulating that all the Yakray 70 and 80 brigades be incorporated into the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs by the end of February 2015.<sup>24</sup> This could prove to be an ambitious deadline considering the attachment of the parties to their praetorian units and the limited administrative capacity of the ministry.

Furthermore, bringing the party Peshmerga units administratively under the ministry is one thing, but creating a truly unified command and control system is another. Though President Barzani is the commander-in-chief of the KRG armed forces (and Vice President Kosrat Rasul is the deputy commander) the reality is far more complex. Both the KDP and PUK have operational command and control staffs that are not currently part of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.<sup>25</sup>

In the 2014 fighting against ISIS the KRG did not utilize recognizable corps or divisional headquarters, and instead established front commanders for different parts of the front line.

- Zummar, Bashiqa, Khazr, and Makhmour fronts were commanded by senior KDP party leaders such as Iraqi deputy prime minister Rowsch Shaways and Sirwan Barzani, a cousin of Masoud Barzani and the owner of the Korek business group.
- Kirkuk was split into two fronts, reflecting KDP-PUK competition in the province.
- The long Garmian front, stretching from southern Kirkuk to Iran, was nominally under a PUK commander, Mahmoud Sangawi, but in practice evolved into a chain of uncoordinated battles under independent PUK junior commanders.

The minister of Peshmerga, a member of the third major party, Gorran, did not feature in any of these arrangements. The fight against ISIS was not in any sense centrally directed or coordinated by the KRG government. Nor did the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs logistically support most of the Kurdish armed forces during the summer's crisis, with most Peshmerga buying their own weapons and ammunition, and drawing on civilian transport, earthmoving equipment, and local markets for food and water. Such rudimentary and ad hoc logistical and engineering capabilities cannot form the basis of sustained offensives against ISIS or the successful defense of liberated areas far from core Kurdish-populated areas.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 4

# Optimizing U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH a wide range of coalition partners the United States has committed itself to a new program to combat ISIS. The U.S. government has asked Congress for \$5.6 billion in emergency funding, including \$1.6 billion to strengthen Iraqi and Kurdish security forces.<sup>1</sup> This marks the opening of a new chapter in U.S.-Iraq security relations. At this moment, it is appropriate to consider what lessons can be learned from previous U.S. efforts to build partner capabilities.

### LESSONS LEARNED

In 2013 the RAND Corporation undertook an exhaustive historical survey of twenty-nine case studies of U.S. security cooperation with partner nations since the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> The study looked for patterns that were relatively constant across examples of successful and unsuccessful security cooperation efforts. RAND gauged success using quantifiable metrics wherever possible and seems to have adopted a nuanced view of whether U.S. and partner nation objectives were met. The study produced detailed findings on two key issues: what kinds of partner nations proved the most successful security cooperation partners, and what U.S. approaches worked best in security cooperation efforts.<sup>3</sup>

#### OPTIMAL PARTNER NATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the RAND study, successful security cooperation was most often associated with particular types of partner nations.

- ***Shared national security interests*** and concerns. Optimal partner nations share vital security interests and mutual threat perceptions with the United States.<sup>4</sup> Ideally the United States also shares national security interests with the neighbors and key allies of the partner

nation as well, to prevent other security assistance providers from working at cross-purposes to the United States and to lessen political pressures on the partner nation.<sup>5</sup>

- **Significant partner nation ability** to invest in security cooperation. Optimal partner nations are economically strong and, importantly, are willing to invest their own funds to support and sustain new defense capacity.<sup>6</sup> Having “skin in the game” is a strong indicator that a partner nation values U.S. security cooperation. Being able to sustain investment is vital for maintaining the capacities that are initially built with the United States but that will lean on partner nation resources over the long term.<sup>7</sup>
- **Partner has sufficient absorptive capacity** to fully exploit U.S. assistance. Successful partners need absorptive capacity, defined as “equipment, organizational characteristics, readiness, the extent of existing training, technological sophistication, education, language abilities, and doctrine.”<sup>8</sup> Strong defense and security institutions are vital indicators of good absorptive capacity. All-volunteer militaries with a high degree of professionalism regularly proved to be good security partners. Countries with high governance indicators<sup>9</sup> at a societal level tend to be better security partners, reflecting the military advantages that accrue from low levels of corruption and stable governance.

#### MOST SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES TO SECURITY COOPERATION

The RAND study likewise identified factors most often associated with successful U.S. security cooperation efforts. These included:

- **Large, well-funded U.S. programs achieved greater effects.** Unsurprisingly the more money the United States invested and the broader the range of initiatives undertaken with partner nations, the greater the dividends.<sup>10</sup>
- **Consistency and sustainment are vital.** Steady U.S. engagement that was paced to continue over the long term proved more effective than episodic modes of cooperation. Training and advising on a continual basis had more lasting effect than rotational presence and exercises. Likewise the RAND study noted that “sustainment considerations are highly correlated with long-term effectiveness . . . whether it involves

building a separate logistics capability or funding stream or expanding existing programs and capabilities to facilitate sustainment.”<sup>11</sup>

- ***Development of partner nation absorptive capacity is worthwhile.*** The RAND study highlighted the importance of making suboptimal partners better able to receive U.S. security assistance. The report particularly stressed the development of “ministerial capacity (the capability of a partner’s ministry of defense or ministry of interior to plan for and manage the partner’s military and security forces)” as “foundational to other forms of capacity.”<sup>12</sup>
- ***U.S. assistance needs to be tailored to the strategic objectives and absorptive capacity of the partner.*** Successful security cooperation initiatives address areas of mutual concern, preferably issues that are an urgent priority to the partner nation. Likewise, security cooperation must be phased and geared to fit with the absorptive capacity of the partner nation at the time when the assistance is delivered.<sup>13</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION

A theme running through the RAND study is the need to tailor security cooperation efforts to the unique needs and objectives of each partner nation. So how do federal Iraq and the KRG measure up as U.S. partners? And what should be the guiding principles underpinning U.S. security cooperation in Iraq?

### FEDERAL IRAQ: LESS ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY THAN BEFORE, BUT FIXABLE

Federal Iraq is no longer the security cooperation partner that it was in 2009, a point at which the United States was the paramount external power in Iraq and when the entire security architecture of the country had been built specifically to absorb U.S. security assistance. U.S. and Iraqi threat perceptions began to significantly diverge due to the Arab Spring, Syrian civil war, and Sunni protests in Iraq, all of which contributed to declining trust in U.S. reliability as an ally and also accelerated the Iraqi government’s drift toward Iran as a security partner. As this report has already stressed, any tactical synergies between Iran and the United States are unlikely to last in Iraq, and Tehran will quickly revert to working at cross-purposes to American interests.

Iraq is dependent on oil revenues for 90 percent of state revenues, making its economy and defense budget highly dependent on oil prices. At present, burdened with additional war costs and suffering disruption to northern exports and refining operations, Iraq has limited capacity to invest in security cooperation. But by global standards it still invests heavily in defense, committing \$19.47 billion (3.4 percent of GDP) to defense and security spending in its last executed budget in 2013.<sup>14</sup> With plans to develop oil export capacity of between 6 million<sup>15</sup> and 9 million<sup>16</sup> bpd by 2020, Iraq is a potential future economic powerhouse, particularly if it can absorb its internal security crisis.

Iraq's capacity to absorb U.S. security assistance is not what it was at the zenith of U.S. influence in 2009 but it remains considerable. Progressive U.S. military withdrawal from cities, missions, and eventually the entire country opened up space for the Maliki government to install cronies in many key defense positions and to purge U.S.-trained professionals from the command structure. Ministries have been severely damaged by cronyism, rampant corruption, and underinvestment. The coming years may witness an aggressive Iranian-backed effort to develop a parallel Lebanese Hezbollah-style army out of today's Hashd forces, with militia leaders staking out ever more prominent roles in the political arena and in government. It is sobering to note that almost as much time has elapsed since the end of intensive U.S. mentoring in 2010 as was invested in this effort between 2005 and 2010.

All that being said, Iraq was hardly lacking in military infrastructure or traditions before 2003 and it continues to possess the skeleton of an advanced military establishment. Construction of the Iraqi Training and Doctrine Command (ITDC) was one of the most significant projects developed by the U.S.-led coalition, and was "structurally complete" by 2009 and capable of "providing training from Basic to Advanced."<sup>17</sup> ITDC survived the summer of 2014, albeit in shabby shape after years of neglect. All major regional training bases outside Ninawa, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din are intact. The Iraqi Military Academy in Nasiriyah continues to operate and has already trained the cadres of two new Iraqi brigades since June 2014. Iraq's professional military education institutions—the National Defense University, National Defense College, War College, Joint Staff and Command College, and Defense Language Institute—are available for development and use.<sup>18</sup> These institutions, if properly manned and engaged by the international community, could shape the future environment within the ISF chain of command and at the unit level. (See table 2.)

Indicator of Optimal Partner Nation (PN)	IRAQ 2009	IRAQ 2014	KRG
PN strategic objectives and threat perceptions aligned with U.S.	4	3	4
PN allied states aligned with U.S.	3	2	3
PN has strong economy and can invest own resources	3	4	2
PN has high absorptive capacity for U.S. security cooperation	5	3	3
PN has high governance indicators	3	3	3
Overall rating	3.6	3	3

**TABLE 2. Assessment of ISF and Kurdish Forces as Security Cooperation Partners.**  
Ratings range from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

### KRG SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT: RUDIMENTARY BUT WILLING

In Iraqi Kurdistan the United States arguably enjoys a reversed situation—a potential partner that is very willing but that has never before been the recipient of significant U.S. security cooperation. The fiscal stability of the Kurdish Region is still up in the air, with the KRG pushing forward on two tracks—a Baghdad-KRG revenue-sharing deal in which some of Kurdistan’s monthly budget will continue to come from Baghdad in 2015, if not beyond, or an independent export-driven economy in which all of the KRG’s budget comes from independent oil sales via Turkey. In either case, the KRG will not be lavishly endowed for many years. Its government spending is likely to remain focused on meeting the salary requirements of its bloated government sector and subsidies.

Though Iraqi Kurdistan represents a credible and willing partner, the United States will need to build the absorptive capacity of the rudimentary Kurdish defense establishment. The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs needs to be strengthened and the KRG Ministry of Interior may also need to be depoliticized and truly unified. A whole new professional and apolitical command and logistical structure needs to be built. The war against ISIS has shown that these processes remain at a very early stage and that they are deeply ingrained in the party and clan politics of Iraqi Kurdistan.

If empowered by the leaders of the main Kurdish parties the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs can probably absorb large-scale training programs and can become a mechanism to ensure the interests of all parties are satisfied. The favorable domestic security environment in the KRG will give foreign trainers a relatively benign force protection environment in

which to operate. The Kurds have been open about their willingness to host a long-term U.S. military presence in Kurdistan. The KRG already operates two military academies, at Zakho and Sulaymaniyah, each capable of operating with three classes of recruits in rolling nine-month training cycles. It is less clear whether the Kurds would be willing to plug back into the federal Iraqi training and doctrine establishment to any extent. There are obvious synergies to reintegrated ISF and Peshmerga training and professional military education but also significant distrust between the parties.

Kurdish alignment with U.S. strategic interests is often assumed, and the Kurds are certainly a pro-Western ally against Islamic extremism and, to some extent, the expansion of Iranian influence within the Middle East. But there are also divergences between U.S. and Kurdish interests and threat perceptions. The United States does not presently back the *de jure* declaration of independence by Iraqi Kurdistan, an aspiration that Iraqi Kurdish leaders periodically discuss. The KRG views the Iraqi military as the key military threat to the region in the future, a potential Gordian knot that will greatly complicate any U.S. effort at a trilateral security cooperation relationship.

#### **U.S. SUPPORT SHOULD BE AMBITIOUS, SUSTAINED, AND INTEGRATED**

In keeping with the RAND study's findings, the next phase of U.S. security cooperation with Iraq must build the absorptive capacity of both federal Iraq and the KRG. This will require a broad, well-resourced, and sustained security cooperation effort by the United States and other allied nations. The RAND study makes clear that relationship building is as important as capacity building at the ministerial and armed service levels. The U.S. government needs to "go big" in its security cooperation planning in Iraq, looking beyond the timelines of Theater Campaign Plans, Theater Security Cooperation Plans, and Iraq Country Plans.<sup>19</sup> Big does not necessarily mean massive expenditure or deployment of forces in any given year but rather describes an ambitious vision of the future U.S.-Iraq relationship. What is needed to stabilize Iraq, ensure U.S. interests, and counter Iranian influence is an expansive vision for a long-term security partnership that far exceeds the security facets of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement. Though it may seem tempting to narrow U.S.-Iraq cooperation to certain missions (counterterrorism against ISIS) or certain geographies

(the U.S.-friendly Kurds), these efforts cannot secure U.S. interests in Iraq. The U.S. government redeployed military forces to Iraq with great reluctance, and this only happened because such significant U.S. equities were at risk. Even if ISIS is defeated, Iraq might still collapse into ethnic and factional cantons. The United States should try to shape any such process toward functioning federalism, not warring statelets. Nor should ceding Iran unchallenged dominance of the federal security sector be an acceptable outcome of U.S. policy.

The U.S. government's Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) offers an interesting model, aspects of which might be adapted in Iraq. Since 2000 CSDI has utilized expanded statutory authorities granted by the U.S. Congress to provide sustained \$500 million-per-year U.S. assistance to Colombia in order to better support the country's National Consolidation Plan, a civilian-led whole-of-government campaign against narcotics and terrorism.<sup>20</sup> CSDI is interesting to consider in relation to U.S.-Iraq security cooperation due to a number of its characteristics that give it the potential to evolve over time from the anti-ISIS focus of today to a broader and deeper security relationship:

- **Subnational approach.** CSDI utilizes “an integrated and geographically targeted approach” that identifies five corridors of operation. The initiative aims to coordinate multiple U.S. agencies to support multiple Colombian agencies in a whole-of-government(s) approach. Recognizing the geographically varied nature of the threats to shared U.S. and Colombian interests, “not all zones and clusters within those zones will require the same sequencing or mix of interventions.”<sup>21</sup> This concept fits well with the variation of security cooperation needs in the northwestern Sunni provinces of Iraq, the KRG, and the Shia south. In each subtheater a different blend of U.S. and Iraqi agencies will be involved to varying degrees.
- **Multifaceted security cooperation.** CSDI tackles a complex problem set with a whole-of-government approach. In addition to training, equipping, and advising local security forces, the initiative integrates programs undertaken by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) plus U.S. Embassy Political, Economic, and Narcotics Affairs sections, along with the Department of Justice.<sup>22</sup> In Iraq the United States should aim to build institutional ties across the spectrum of Iraqi government bodies, mindful that the military phase of

defeating ISIS will give way to a longer counterterrorism and peace-building phase in which civilian agencies will have the lead.

- **Pathway from narrow to broad cooperation.** The relevance to Iraq is that the CSDI was born out of a particular mutual U.S.-Colombian concern (narco-trafficking and narco-terrorism) but grew in time into a set of closer security and political relationships.<sup>23</sup> Born out of the campaign to defeat ISIS, a major new U.S.-Iraq security cooperation initiative could achieve similar results, particularly if it evolves to support other shared interests such as Iraqi strategic independence, an idea that will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER 5

# Issues and Options for U.S. Policymakers

U.S.-IRAQ SECURITY COOPERATION is clearly well under way, boosted by the November 7, 2014, request for \$5.6 billion of supplementary funding for Operation Inherent Resolve, including a \$1.6 billion ITEF.<sup>1</sup> If built upon, the current security assistance being provided to Iraq could be the foundation of a new and valuable security cooperation partnership, assuming that we move fast enough to reinforce and support the moderate forces within Iraq's government. This represents the rarest of opportunities: a second chance for both Iraq and the United States to correct the mistakes made since the withdrawal of U.S. forces was initiated in the November 2008 Status of Forces Agreement. ISIS has created an unforeseen opening for reengagement after only a remarkably short reset period for both sides. Sensitivities over cooperation exist in both countries, meaning that great care must be taken to account for tender public and elite sentiments. But equally, the opportunity is there, at a far earlier point than many would have predicted, to rebuild a strong U.S.-Iraq security relationship.

### THE U.S. ROLE IN THE DEFEAT OF ISIS

If the United States is to build its new security relationship with Iraq on the basis of shared interests and mutual concerns, the defeat of ISIS<sup>2</sup> is the only place to start. RAND's study of successful cases of security cooperation notes that meeting the emergency needs of a partner nation is a powerful way of building (or rebuilding) trust. This is exactly the kind of opportunity the United States currently is faced with in the war against ISIS.<sup>3</sup> If current trends continue, the campaign against ISIS in Iraq is likely to unfold in three broad phases: First, a battle to reduce ISIS to a large insurgent group rather than a Potemkin state by regaining control of cities like Mosul, Tikrit, Fallujah, and Tall Afar. In this phase, ISIS continues to operate as a muscular terrorist army based in Iraq's ungoverned wastes,

especially those adjacent to Syria. The second phase of the campaign will see ISIS evicted from these areas and further dispersed, with restricted ability to move back and forth between Iraq and Syria. A third phase would be the long effort to hunt down remaining militants in an intelligence-led counterterrorism campaign against covert cells of ISIS militants. The Iraqi government would ideally engage the Sunni Arab communities in Iraq in a reconciliation dialogue in tandem with all of these phases.

In the first battles of the first phase Iran has undoubtedly proven itself a useful security partner to the Iraqi government but it is arguable that this appeal will wear thin in subsequent phases. Iran's strength is in the cross-sectarian areas with a significant Shia population, particularly around Baghdad. As the fight moves further north and west, the role of the predominantly Shia Hashd fighters is likely to diminish significantly, though not disappear. As forays into the Western Euphrates River Valley have shown, Hashd fighters can deploy to these areas and even be welcomed by Sunni tribes during dire emergencies. But they are not welcome as long-term occupiers. Only forces that reflect the local demographics can persistently operate in the key ISIS areas like Mosul, Tikrit, and the Western Euphrates River Valley. And these forces, although they are not firm allies of the United States, trust the U.S. government more than either Baghdad or the Iranian-backed Hashd forces.

The United States also offers a far richer security relationship than Iran, particularly in meeting Iraqi needs in later phases of the war against ISIS. Iranian-backed militias have proven effective at battling through ISIS defensive zones and pummeling Sunni villages occupied by ISIS. But proficiency in this slow-moving attritional warfare along Iraq's main populated river valleys has little relevance to the battles that will follow in Iraq's ungoverned spaces and along the Syrian border. Shia militias simply cannot persist in those environments—they have neither the logistics nor the local relationships to operate effectively. Only professional armed forces with greatly improved logistics and a degree of local support can extend ISF presence back into the desert and northern and western borderlands. As importantly, only the United States and other Western partners have the wide-area surveillance capabilities and air mobility to advise, train, and equip Iraq to control these vast expanses. Finally, only the Western model of sectarian reconciliation and “functioning federalism”<sup>4</sup> offers a way to end the war against ISIS and other Sunni Arab rejectionists. Iran can probably help Iraq to fight a never-ending war of attrition against its

Sunnis but its model offers no hope to the country. The holistic counterterrorism approaches endorsed by Western partners may be open to ridicule or cynicism, but they at least strive to end the conflict and return Iraq to full peace and stability within a meaningful timeframe.<sup>5</sup>

### RECAPTURE OF IRAQ'S CITIES

The first phase in the defeat of ISIS is both under way and beginning to succeed. The United States could be Iraq's primary security partner in planning and preparing for the offensive operations to liberate Mosul and the Western Euphrates River Valley from ISIS. The ITEF is explicitly designed to develop the offensive forces that Iraq and the KRG will need to complete the recapture of Iraq's lost cities in 2015. As noted, the U.S. position as the key supporter of the Sunni Sahwa and Sons of Iraq in 2006–2009 gives the United States far greater potential access to northern and western battlefields than the Iranian-backed Shia militias.

As RAND's study showed, successful security cooperation efforts are tailored to address the most urgent shared security concerns of U.S. partners, with the current campaign focused on the right near-term objective. But Iraqi officials believe that there is a mismatch in U.S. and Iraqi perceptions of urgency—in Baghdad's view, with U.S. officials seemingly content to gradually rebuild Iraqi offensive capacity. Iraqi partners also critique the U.S. government's unwillingness to provide combat advisory support that would allow U.S. Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) to embed with Iraqi units and facilitate far more airstrikes. Whether accurate or not, Iraqis perceive a juxtaposition between Iran's apparent eagerness to rapidly "lean forward" and a U.S. tendency to "hang back."

Style and substance are at play in the formation of this perception. The United States has been quite reticent in trumpeting its numerous successes in Iraq in 2014. These include the resupply of Iraqi forces throughout the year, timely military interventions to minimize panic in Baghdad and Erbil, the prevention of ethnic massacres at Sinjar and Amerli, a significant role in ISIS's first signature defeat at Mosul Dam, and so forth. In contrast, Iran and its Shia militia proxies try to claim credit for almost any positive development, parading their leaders' presence on key battlefields in social media blitzes. Mindful to give Iraqi and Kurdish forces full credit for their lead role in operations, the U.S. government should do much more to publicize the impact of its involvement in the war against ISIS, including within Iraq.

On the substantive charges that the United States could do more, one way to counter this perception may be to expand the ITEF with various augmented efforts. For instance, a missing element in ITEF is IED Defeat (IED-D) capabilities, which has proven to be a major challenge for both ISF and Kurdish forces. As recently as 2012 the Iraqi Army had planned to expand its divisional engineers from a single battalion to a four-battalion brigade per division.<sup>6</sup> This ambitious program was scheduled to take over five years but a crash IED-D program is now badly needed to meet urgent operational requirements. Every area reclaimed from ISIS is found to be liberally seeded with crude roadside IEDs and booby traps. This not only slows the rate of ISF and Kurdish advance, preventing useful momentum from building, but it increases casualties, contributes to exhaustion of forces, prevents resettlement of displaced populations, and sometimes prompts ethnosectarian retaliation by troops against local Sunnis. Though the Pentagon's Joint IED Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) sent a small number of advisors to Iraq in November 2014, a larger, structured train, equip, and advise process could be a critical enabler of both ISF and Peshmerga forces in 2015.<sup>7</sup>

Deployment of U.S. combat advisor teams is another means by which the United States could signal commitment and bring about a swifter and less bloody recapture of Iraq's lost cities. The U.S. civilian and military leaderships seem split over this potential course of action. On September 10, 2014, President Obama seemed to rule out such operations in a televised address to the nation when he said, "American forces will not have a combat mission—we will not get dragged into another ground war in Iraq."<sup>8</sup> Likewise U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice stressed on October 12, 2014, that a U.S. military request for U.S. frontline advisors was "not what is required by the circumstances that we face and even if one were to take that step, which the president has made clear we are not going to do, it wouldn't be sustainable."<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey has repeatedly outlined the circumstances by which "case-by-case" consideration of combat advisory support might be considered.<sup>10</sup> Also on October 12, 2014, General Dempsey predicted that the critical battle for Mosul "will require a different kind of advising and assisting because of the complexity of that fight."<sup>11</sup> It is highly likely that there will be many opportunities for decisive positive interventions by U.S. JTACs in the offensive operations of 2015. This will be particularly the

case in close urban fighting where Iranian and Russian-supplied aircraft will not have the precision to intervene effectively in support of ISF and Kurdish forces.

Combat advice by U.S. forces will also lay one of the foundations for a long-term military-military relationship between the United States and Iraq. The U.S. military does not want to be connected to a half-dozen key people at the top of the ISF, many of whom might be gone in a few years. The United States needs to be connected to key future actors throughout the system. This is what the Iranians are doing. This is what we need to do. One day the Iraqi captains, majors, and colonels fighting alongside U.S. advisors will be the generals running the ISF.<sup>12</sup>

A final way to signal near-term U.S. commitment is to continue and intensify the defense sales and combat support services needed to support the large fleets of U.S. equipment in use by the ISF and Peshmerga. Rapid and ungrudging authorization of new arms sales must sit alongside rapid authorization of support services and ammunition resupply for the U.S. systems already in ISF and Kurdish service. Such systems include significant numbers of M1-series main battle tanks,<sup>13</sup> whole families of artillery and transportation vehicles,<sup>14</sup> and light helicopters.<sup>15</sup> In the near term, it may be valuable to shape the kinds of equipment being released to Iraq to minimize the sustainment burden on the ISF, including export of simplified versions of systems.

The ITEF requests U.S. funding to receive thousands of vehicles, but thousands of others will also be needed if, for instance, the nine reminted Iraqi Army brigades and three Peshmerga brigades are to be fully motorized. For standardization, as well as to maximize U.S. influence, it would be optimal for Iraq to continue to buy U.S. vehicles, weapons systems, and equipment. The United States undoubtedly faces competition, with Iraq already opting for quicker purchases of Russian attack helicopters and air defense systems in some cases.<sup>16</sup> But outside of emergency purchases there remains a preference in Iraq for U.S. arms sales, which are seen to be transparent and well supported in terms of logistics and sustainment.<sup>17</sup> Iraq's Air Force and Army Aviation Command will require particularly close support as they seek to expand from a very minimal institutional base.<sup>18</sup> The Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program provided by the U.S. government can provide tremendous support to underdeveloped military institutions such as the Iraqi MOD, which—even with some Abadi-era restaffing—is unprepared for a major reequipping effort.

If Iraq requests U.S. systems like the AH-64 Apache, the request should be viewed favorably and through the lens of urgently supporting a key ally (with a good record of protecting sensitive U.S. equipment) as it fights a critical battle for survival. Likewise everything possible should be done to meet any reasonable request from Baghdad to expedite the transfer of Iraqi F-16IQ multirole aircraft to an Iraqi base, perhaps Imam Ali airbase in the relative security of Nasiriyah or, if secure enough, Balad.

### PURSUIT PHASE

When ISIS is driven from Iraq's cities a new phase of the campaign will begin. This next stage will be fought in Iraq's ungoverned spaces—its deserts, mesas, and remote borders. This will require a different set of military capabilities from the ones that Iraq possesses, or even from the new forces being developed under the ITEF program. In fact, Iraq will need to develop forces of a kind that were never, in reality, developed, even at the zenith of U.S. influence. The pursuit of ISIS into the deserts and borderlands will require wide-area surveillance capabilities and highly mobile air and ground forces. As the U.S. military campaign peaked in 2009, for instance, the ISF never possessed the capabilities to truly control western Anbar. The only forces capable of continuous deep desert patrolling were the reconnaissance units, drones, air forces, and satellites of the U.S. military. It is no coincidence that, following the progressive withdrawal of these U.S. assets, al-Qaeda's first reconquest of territory in 2011 occurred in western Anbar.<sup>19</sup>

The Iraqi government will need extensive assistance if it is to “finish the job” of reducing ISIS back down to the proportions of a manageable terrorist threat—groups of terrorists forced to operate covertly. Even after losing the cities, ISIS will try to mount large raids into Iraq from its secure bases in Syria and from deep desert redoubts in Iraq—much as it did in 2013.<sup>20</sup> Alongside tribal engagement and sectarian reconciliation initiatives the ISF needs to develop defensible border forts, wide-area surveillance, muscular armored cavalry units, and aerial quick-reaction forces with twenty-four-hour capabilities. Platforms like the F-16IQ and Apache could be critical to meeting these requirements. Multiple Iraqi Army brigades and special forces units need to be available for desert operations and reconfigured for such missions. (To date only one such unit, the 37th Iraqi Army armored cavalry brigade, partnered with U.S. Marine Light Armored Reconnaissance battalions, has effectively performed such mis-

sions.) Extra effort needs to be invested in developing strong brigade supply battalions for desert-deployed troops. With its focus on technology, logistics, and training, the U.S. military can effectively contribute to the defense of Iraq's ungoverned spaces.

In time more advanced technology-enabled sensor networks<sup>21</sup> could reduce some of the strain on ISF units. U.S. government support to Saudi Arabia's Project Miksa—the country's integrated border security program—provides some pointers as to the potential scale, longevity, and cost of such an initiative.<sup>22</sup> The United States should also step forward to encourage Iraq to build security into new major critical infrastructure projects—such as the planned Basra-Haditha-Aqaba alternative oil export route—as well as restored infrastructure such as the Kirkuk-Beyji pipeline. Only well-planned critical infrastructure protection programs that integrate guard forces, physical defenses, and electronic surveillance can properly protect Iraq's northwestern infrastructure.

### CONFLICT TERMINATION

Long-term provision of niche U.S. counterterrorism and criminal justice sector assistance will be critical to hunting down the remnants of ISIS in Iraq. By 2010 the United States had powerfully demonstrated its counterterrorism capabilities as a partner to Iraq. The industrial-scale U.S. and British counterterrorism campaign against ISIS's forerunners involved a constant daily cycle of raids, rapid exploitation of new intelligence, and follow-on operations. Undertaking state-of-the-art intelligence exploitation techniques, numerous terrorist cells were frequently rolled up before detainees had even learned that connected cells had been targeted earlier the same day. Iraqi leaders gained a healthy respect for U.S. special operations and intelligence-gathering capabilities that lives on today.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside these tangible kinds of security is an even more distinctive and powerful aspect of U.S. and Western security cooperation, namely, support for a holistic counterterrorism strategy for Iraq that aims to end ethnosectarian conflict through power sharing and reconciliation. "Functioning federalism" has been framed by the U.S. government as "an emerging political-military approach that might begin to address the root causes of the current crisis" and "a longer-term strategy to deny space for ISIS."<sup>24</sup> According to U.S. deputy assistant secretary Brett McGurk, "functioning federalism"

would empower local populations to secure their own areas with the full resources of the state in terms of benefits, salaries, and equipment. The national army, under this concept, would focus on securing international borders and providing overwatch support where necessary to combat hardened terrorist networks. Other critical reforms, such as an amnesty for those detained without trial, amendments to the criminal procedure laws, and addressing other legitimate grievances from the Iraqi people including those related to de-Ba'athification, will also be necessary elements to strengthen and empower local actors to stand and fight ISIL.<sup>25</sup>

McGurk continues:

The “five core principles” of the approach can be summarized as follows:

1. Local citizens must be in the lead in securing local areas;
2. Local citizens defending their communities must be provided state benefits and resources (modeled along the lines of a National Guard type force structure);
3. The Iraqi Army will rarely deploy inside cities, but will remain outside in an overwatch posture and to carry out federal functions (such as protecting borders);
4. There must be close cooperation between local, regional (KRG), and national security services to gradually reduce operational space for ISIS;
5. The federal government must work diligently on a package of reforms that can address legitimate grievances and deny any pretext for ISIS activities.<sup>26</sup>

The National Guard model is a contentious issue. On the one hand, the model has features that do seem likely to contribute to sectarian confidence building, and thus to draining the swamp of recruits to ISIS and other Sunni rejectionist groups. After a tumultuous decade of clashes with the army, Sunnis do not want the federal military—viewed as Shia-dominated and Iranian-influenced—to occupy their streets. The National Guard model puts elected local politicians—the provincial councils—at the center of the recruitment and operation of local security forces. This broadly conforms to both the principle of administrative decentralization that is embedded throughout the Iraqi constitution<sup>27</sup> and the security powers granted to provincial councils in Iraqi provincial powers legislation.<sup>28</sup> The National Guard would seem to differ

from the Sons of Iraq scheme of previous years because it offers full-time government jobs with pensions—making its employees difficult to sack and thus offering cautious Sunnis an additional inducement to join. The idea of a locally raised light infantry force sounds enticingly similar to the Kurdish Peshmerga, a force that underwrites the semi-autonomy that Iraqi Kurdistan now enjoys from Baghdad and that Sunni provinces would equally welcome.

For some Shia and Kurds, the National Guard model at least offers an “off ramp” so that their forces do not need to look forward to years, or decades, of garrison duty in the Sunni Arab badlands. Even so, arming the Sunnis is a tough proposition fresh on the heels of a massive military collapse and wholesale loss of thousands of military vehicles and heavy weapons to ISIS. The idea of a “Sunni Arab Peshmerga” is unpalatable to many Shia and Kurdish politicians, who want the Sunnis deactivated as a future threat through occupation and disarmament. (One need only think back to some of the more radical allied plans for the postwar treatment of Nazi Germany<sup>29</sup> to recognize common themes.) Nonsectarian opponents of the National Guard model also argue that it could provide an opening for the final Balkanization of Iraq, creating a mechanism for numerous small armies to legally rise up under provincial warlords. For some the idea of building a whole new institution is a nonstarter, and they instead advocate for the reinforcement of existing institutions like the Iraqi Army.

It remains to be seen whether the National Guard model is rolled out as envisaged by the U.S. government or whether the impetus behind the scheme evolves into something else. Immediately full-scale implementation of the model seems ambitious, with Iraq too distrustful and fractured for formal implementation of the scheme, with a National Guard law endorsed by parliament. Aspects of the scheme—local citizens leading on local security, long-term commitment to these volunteers—are undoubtedly attractive for the Sunnis. In the interim some of these aspirations can be achieved through U.S.-backed Tribal Security Force brigades, particularly if such forces are bankrolled by the federal government in the same way as other Hashd forces. The National Guard is emerging as a potential midterm means of institutionalizing the Hashd, and functioning as a demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) mechanism for temporary fighting formations.

## SUPPORTING IRAQI STRATEGIC INDEPENDENCE

Alongside the defeat of ISIS the United States may be well positioned to support a second, less obvious security objective of the Iraqi government—that of strengthening the strategic independence of the Iraqi state. Though cynics may scoff at the thought, the United States is arguably committed to the emergence of a freestanding moderate Iraqi state that does not need to lean on the United States or Iran for support. The quest for strategic independence is also pursued by some Iraqi leaders, who view such an outcome in terms of Iraq having a sovereign civilian-led government and military free of undue foreign or militia influence. Iraq's embattled politicians and technocrats often share security concerns and threat perceptions with U.S. leaders—namely the need to develop defenses against Iranian and Shia militia influence. For a couple of years Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki arguably operated in this area of overlap between his interests and those of the United States, during which time he cracked down on the key Iranian-backed Shia militias.

One lesson from the last decade in Iraq is that Iraqi strategic independence has little to do with the fielding of external defense forces such as armored divisions, air defenses, and a navy. Before these capabilities can come into play, strategic independence must be grounded in internal stability and resilient sovereign decisionmaking processes. In its keenness to wrap up the U.S. mission in Iraq, the first Obama administration encouraged Iraq to rush toward external self-defense capabilities before the country had even achieved basic internal stability. As al-Qaeda in Iraq was being reborn as the far more capable ISIS, Iraq and the United States took their eyes off the ball, focusing on pie-in-the-sky visions of Iraqi armored and mechanized divisions, with antitank and anti-aircraft units to overmatch Iran's ground forces.<sup>30</sup> It will be a while before Iraq or its security cooperation partners consider such lofty goals again, which is good because the real foundation of national independence is the resilience of Iraq's defense and security institutions, which are themselves anchored in the nature of the body politic and civil-military relations.<sup>31</sup> If the government and its defense structures are commanded by Iranian proxies, what good will squadrons of F-16s do? If, on the other hand, Iraq's defense and security leadership knows how and when to draw redlines for a powerful neighbor like Iran to respect, then national defense forces begin to mean

something once again. Iraq's strategic independence requires the advancement of political and military leaders who see the drawbacks of overreliance on Tehran as Iraq's closest patron and ally.

### STRATEGIC DECISIONMAKING ON DEFENSE AND SECURITY

A Chinese proverb says “the fish rots from the head”<sup>32</sup> and this saying is highly applicable to the defense and security establishments of Iraq. If all is well at the level of top decisionmakers, many positive results will flow down through the system. The United States has strongly backed the government of Haider al-Abadi and has given the new premier significant personal support in the early days of his administration. The United States has contributed to Abadi making tough calls on key security appointments, for instance, blocking Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri from receiving direct command of either of Iraq's security ministries. Key Ministry of Defense leaders and uniformed military commanders have increasingly been selected based on ability since Abadi's appointment in September 2014. The U.S. government has made a good start with Abadi and must now continue to reinforce this effort with continual engagement on strategic and security-related matters. While always respecting Iraq's sovereignty, the United States can provide the Abadi government with an honest sounding board for its security policies and operational plans. The United States genuinely wants nothing more than for the Abadi premiership to succeed and for Iraq to stabilize as quickly as possible. Though they may seem trite or naïve, these are powerful, simple truths that can serve as the bedrock for a solid strategic alliance, if the United States plays its card right.

The dismantlement of the Maliki-era Office of the Commander-in-Chief (OCINC) has reopened space for a formal cabinet-based system of security decisionmaking. Iraq may be ripe for the development of a formalized National Security Council-style forum with defined bylaws, building on the general cabinet bylaws issued in November 2014 by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers (GS-COM). The United States may be able to provide GS-COM leaders like General Secretary Hamid al-Musawi with illustrative documents and visits to observe National Security Council systems in use in a range of states. The United States could also provide significant insight to Iraqi parliamentarians on the function of congressional oversight of defense and security appoint-

ments, appropriations, and operations. Other non-U.S. security partners should likewise be encouraged to share their experiences of strategic and security decisionmaking with senior Iraqi leaders to provide Iraq with a range of models to build on. The United States can provide an external view on Iraq's strategic and defense decisionmaking that balances respect for Iraq's democratic constitution with clear-eyed understanding of the urgent day-to-day exigencies that require decisive treatment.

### DEVELOPING STRONG MINISTRIES

As noted previously the RAND study on security cooperation stressed the development of "ministerial capacity (the capability of a partner's ministry of defense or ministry of interior to plan for and manage the partner's military and security forces)" as "foundational to other forms of capacity."<sup>33</sup> The study noted that ministerial capacity building included developing "sufficient ministerial capacity to plan and integrate strategy and operations," as well as the "ability to combat corruption."<sup>34</sup> This was a major focus of the U.S. effort in Iraq until 2011 and was later carried forward by the Senior Advisors' Group of the U.S. Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I), which was charged with "enabling Iraqi senior military and civilian leaders to develop the Iraqi institutional capability for internal and external defense across security ministerial functions in order to foster and facilitate a strategic security partnership between the U.S. and Iraq governments."

The United States should consider MOD as its principal partner and consider how issues like the National Guard, reintegration of the Hashd, and the future administration of the Counterterrorism Service will affect MOD. If the United States wishes MOD to be a strong ally, Washington needs to keep building its stock of goodwill. Indeed the United States has made a good start in its partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense under Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's government. First, Washington spent some of its hard-won political capital to signal its unwillingness to work with Hadi al-Ameri as a security minister, even though Ameri led one of the most influential blocs within the Shia body politic. The United States has strongly backed the Sunni minister of defense, Khalid al-Ubeidi, and the Kurdish chief-of-staff of the Iraqi Army, General Babakir Zebari. Anticorruption efforts are vital in MOD, where a half-decade of hollowing-out brought many corrupt political appointees into senior positions. These have started to be replaced by the Abadi government in

waves of dismissals but the process will only improve MOD capacity if the replacement leaders are carefully chosen, supported, and monitored by both ministry inspectors and parliamentary oversight.

The United States needs to keep up its strong engagement with the Iraqi MOD, to support Iraqi procurement of U.S. equipment and training, and to rapidly implement the nine-brigade train-and-equip program. Logistics should be a priority for security cooperation, giving Iraq the ability to sustain its existing and newly built capabilities.<sup>35</sup> Looking in the longer term, the United States can also play a major role in the evolution of underdeveloped MOD affiliates like the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, the Department of Border Enforcement, infrastructure protection units, and air defense forces. As previously noted the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs has been sidelined by the main political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan but now, by order of the KRG presidency, needs to undergo rapid transformation to become the focal point for Iraqi federal funding support and foreign security assistance. The Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs needs strong U.S. support and mentoring to grow professionalized administrative, logistical, and command and control capabilities.

#### MINISTRY OF INTERIOR ENGAGEMENT IN IRAQ AND THE KRG

The U.S. military may be tempted to focus its efforts on the above institutions but it is vital not to overlook the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI) and its Kurdish equivalent. Led by Badr loyalist Muhammed Salem al-Ghabban, the federal MOI could grow significantly in the coming years. If the National Guard scheme is resisted or if it fell under MOI's control, the ministry has the potential to morph into a parallel army under the control of Iranian-backed Shia militia leaders. This occurred once before in 2005–2006 when Badr-related politicians ran MOI and various Shia militias filled out its ranks. MOI paramilitaries committed gross human rights violations on a massive scale, even as U.S.-embedded advisors were present in their units. In September 2007, a U.S. congressional commission on the ISF urged that MOI paramilitary units be disbanded and reorganized under Iraq's MOD.<sup>36</sup> Such an outcome could easily recur, particularly if Badr is allowed to use MOI as a mechanism to keep Shia militants from the Hashd active over the long term. Any U.S. effort to prevent the "Hezbollahization" of Iraq therefore

needs to consider how the United States can shape the evolution of the Iraqi MOI.

Preventing such an outcome is undoubtedly less costly than reforming a militia-infested MOI. Following just a couple of years of Badr and Shia militia colonization, the Federal Police (known as the Iraqi National Police, or INP, until August 1, 2009) could only be saved as a viable force following a determined Iraqi-led reform effort under an independent minister, Jawad Bolani, and a tough army commander, Lt. Gen. Hussein al-Awadi, who was empowered to replace corrupt or inept commanders. Thirty-five of the thirty-nine commanders of battalion-level and above were removed from the two police divisions.<sup>37</sup> Extensive U.S. monitoring and later Italian Carabinieri retraining were undertaken in all Federal Police units. As Robert Perito noted, “the Italians’ participation in the INP training process was the key to transforming the INP from a rogue force into a competent constabulary.”<sup>38</sup> “Rebluing” units involved taking them off the front line, moving them to remote training bases, “and going through a fairly robust training program in order to kind of give that unit a fresh start under new leadership.”<sup>39</sup> It is hard to imagine such a massive on-the-ground presence being possible today.

The United States has two options to prevent a Badr-led MOI from becoming a parallel security structure. One possibility is to support the diminishment of MOI’s paramilitary function. From the outset Iraqi leaders have questioned whether the Federal Police and related MOI paramilitaries should be true constabulary (gendarmerie) forces, which the U.S. Institute for Peace noted are “normally defined as police forces with military capabilities,” or whether they should be separated from MOI and developed as “military forces with little or no police training.”<sup>40</sup> The militarized Federal Police have almost been absorbed into the Iraqi Army before and this idea could surface once again.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, the National Guard initiative, administered by either MOD or a separate agency, could absorb the Federal Police and provincial-level paramilitary Emergency Police battalions.<sup>42</sup> At least six MOI paramilitary brigades were destroyed in the summer of 2014 and may need to be rebuilt to serve in the Mosul area—potentially as National Guard elements rather than Federal Police.

In addition to recommending the reduction of MOI’s potential paramilitary role, the United States arguably needs to engage elements within the ministry. As no one knows what the future may bring—a Badr-led MOD, for example—it will pay for the U.S. government to develop relationships in

all parts of the Iraqi defense and security sector. Indeed the United States may find Iraqi allies in any effort to professionalize the ministry, particularly if the United States can use its unique insights into the ISF to build alliances with political and bureaucratic factions in the ministry. Since 2006 the Dawa Party has been gradually expanding its control within MOI, at the expense of Badr and other Iranian-backed Shia militias.<sup>43</sup> Until the October 2014 appointment of Badr loyalist Muhammad Salim al-Ghabban as minister of interior, the MOI was dominated by Deputy Minister of Interior Adnan al-Asadi, the Dawa power behind the throne within MOI. Though Asadi left the ministry in late November 2014 his departure was counterbalanced by the appointment of two non-Badr delegates. In addition to new Deputy Minister Akeel al-Khazali (from Dawa),<sup>44</sup> Ghabban's power will be balanced by Samir Musa al-Haddad, the powerful Dawa deputy director of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service who now heads the MOI National Intelligence and Investigation Agency (NIIA).<sup>45</sup> Such figures are by no means pro-American but they will seek to maintain Prime Minister Abadi's degree of control of and insight into the MOI. Abadi has also reached down into the MOI to undertake a housecleaning of senior generals, often within key administrative and procurement offices where corruption has had the most widespread effect on MOI capacity.

The U.S. government can extend considerable assistance to the federal MOI. Federal Police forces, which may well stay under MOI, are partly mechanized infantry units that require the same training, equipping, and logistical support as many MOD units. The Federal Police have always been deficient in brigade-level support battalions, divisional support brigades, and a functional Federal Police Sustainment brigade.<sup>46</sup> The Kurdish MOI needs similar support, as Zerevani brigades also possess the most rudimentary logistical support. This presents an opportunity for the United States to leverage its support to push for either the reassignment of Zerevani brigades to the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs or, failing that, unification of the Kurdish MOI. Presently the ministry is effectively a nonunified KDP agency, and a mechanism to support multiple brigades of KDP party Peshmerga. The Zerevani brigades are largely present in Erbil and Dohuk, the KDP-dominated provinces of the KRG.

### BROADER SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

As the RAND study noted, one factor present in optimal security partners is strong governance and economic indicators.<sup>47</sup> Iraq's governance indicators

continue to be weak at a societal level. The World Bank Governance Indicators in 2014<sup>48</sup> give Iraq very poor scores on all six dimensions of governance. The percentile rank used by the World Bank indicates the percentage of countries worldwide that rank lower than the indicated country, so that higher values indicate better governance scores. On Voice and Accountability Iraq received a rank of 16.59. On Government Effectiveness it received a cripplingly low rank of 14.35. Regulatory Quality was ranked 10.55. Control of Corruption received a remarkably low rank of 7.18, reflecting Iraq's status as one of the world's most corrupt countries. Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism was unsurprisingly ranked 4.27, and this rating was released before the collapse of central government authority across northwestern Iraq in June 2014. Rule of Law was ranked 3.79, again a cripplingly low rating for a major regional state.<sup>49</sup> It is hardly surprising that the military of such a chronically weak state became enfeebled and brittle half a decade after international support began to ebb from the country.

Alongside security cooperation efforts the United States should continue with its broad-based engagement under the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) signed in November 2008. Intended to provide a means of maintaining close contact between Washington and Baghdad after the U.S. withdrawal, the SFA sought to develop a “durable and mutually beneficial relationship” that would at the same time “protect U.S. interests.”<sup>50</sup> The eight-page SFA established a Higher Coordinating Committee (HCC), a top-level body intended to oversee the work of the following Joint Coordination Committees:

- **Political affairs and diplomatic cooperation.** This committee aims to “support and strengthen Iraq’s democracy and its democratic institutions,” a strong formulation intended to keep the United States engaged in Iraq’s internal affairs and election processes. The committee also supports Baghdad’s efforts to develop positive relations in the region, including U.S. support for Iraqi elections, UN Chapter VII items, relations with Kuwait and Syria, and refugee issues.
- **Security and defense cooperation.** This committee aims to foster closer defense relations, primarily through overt means such as arms sales, training, and exercises. Counterterrorism and intelligence assistance is handled behind closed doors by the U.S. intelligence community under Title 50 of the U.S. Code (as opposed to Title 22 authority, shared between the State and Defense Departments).

- **Energy cooperation.** This committee aims to strengthen Iraq's economy and power sector, and to serve U.S. economic interests by ensuring that Iraq lives up to its potential as the largest source of new oil in the global market over the next two decades.
- **Law enforcement and judicial cooperation.** This committee aims to develop Iraq's criminal justice system, police, and anticorruption capabilities. Although police training efforts have been drastically scaled down due to funding shortfalls and security constraints, the committee continues to provide support to judicial projects.
- **Cultural and education cooperation.** This committee aims to preserve Iraq's heritage and build stronger bilateral educational and professional exchanges. It oversees a busy roster of higher education, exchange, and heritage projects.
- **Services, technology, environment, and transportation cooperation.** This committee aims to strengthen Iraq's infrastructure and service-delivery capacity. It is presently one of the less active JCCs but it has a significant potential contribution to make through capacity building in vital sectors such as health, agriculture, sanitation, drinking water, and private-sector job creation.
- **Trade and finance cooperation.** This committee aims to help Iraq diversify its economy and integrate into the global economic system. It focuses on bilateral business links, private banking, and microfinance.

Indeed, influence can be rebuilt one meeting at a time. Persistence pays in Iraq, and the United States has a lot to offer a country where every sector of the economy lacks technocratic capacity, and where U.S. prowess is still fresh in the memory of many officials. Iraq is arguably ripe for reenergized relations, initiatives, exchanges, and scholarships through the SFA. The United States should press forward energetically with these committees, seeking to hold JCC meetings more regularly, even if some must be held via video conferencing. For example, the Obama administration has noted that key JCCs should meet on a quarterly basis; this has not happened yet, but it should. JCC delegates should seek to weave the KRG into such meetings, possibly hosting a portion of them in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The United States also has a bevy of opportunities for high-impact projects. A determined effort is already under way to encourage (but not fund) development of Iraq's north-south strategic oil and gas pipeline system

and facilitate export spurs to Jordan and Turkey. Less obviously, Washington could help Iraq engage consultants to guide its refining sector; local expertise on this issue is limited due to the retirement of veteran professionals, and the sector received relatively scant treatment in Baghdad's recently released Integrated National Energy Strategy. U.S. advice may also be welcome regarding the design and operation of maximum-security prisons following nearly a dozen major jailbreaks in the past year. And in local governance, the late June amendment of Iraq's provincial powers law will transform a number of governor's offices into multibillion-dollar spending units—a responsibility for which they are entirely unprepared. To increase their spending capacity and reduce waste and corruption, a major Iraqi-funded, U.S.-designed local capacity-building program is desperately needed.

#### DERISKING U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION WITH IRAQ

All the courses of action recommended in this paper carry risks—although, as has been argued, inaction is by far the greater risk. Nevertheless, the United States would be remiss if it did not try to minimize risks to a level that is acceptable. For instance, the ongoing conflict in Iraq necessitates serious consideration of force-protection issues. Threats abound, both from ISIS and other Sunni groups, but also from anti-American elements of the Hashd forces. Just three years ago groups like Kataib Hezbollah—a core component of the Hashd—were the most prolific killers of American service personnel in Iraq. In June 2011 alone they killed sixteen U.S. personnel in a range of sophisticated and well-resourced attacks. They also proved adept at penetrating Iraqi government facilities to undertake highly professional kidnap operations against Western contractors and soldiers. In January 2007 Asaib Ahl al-Haqq, another key contributing militia in today's Hashd forces, bluffed its way onto an Iraqi military base in Karbala, killed one U.S. soldier, and kidnapped four other American soldiers, executing them in cold blood when it proved impossible to spirit them away to a militia jail.

As the United States is already engaged in brigade-level training at bases in northwestern Iraq, the Pentagon has clearly assessed and mitigated the risks to an acceptable level in headquarters and training missions. Immunities for U.S. personnel are in place, albeit rather anemic ones. Though no one wants to replay the pointless attempt to force Iraq to ratify U.S. immu-

nities through parliament, it is noteworthy that U.S. forces in Iraq are presently only protected from potential arrest by Shia militants in the security forces by what U.S. officials called “acceptable assurances” through the exchange of diplomatic notes.<sup>51</sup>

In coming months and perhaps years the activities needed to boost U.S.-Iraq security cooperation—notably combat advising at the front line—increase the risk of attack from both Sunni insurgents and from Iranian-backed Shia militants. Any course of action worth taking in Iraq needs to be able to survive the force protection failures that will inevitably come. This is one area where risks may already be as low as reasonably practicable and what must change is our risk tolerance instead. If Iran thinks the first kidnapping of a U.S. soldier will collapse our effort, it is far likelier to undertake this effort. The U.S. government should make clear, if it has not already, that any hostile act against U.S. personnel that is traced back to Iranian-backed forces will severely prejudice the outlook for a U.S.-supported nuclear deal and sanctions relief.

A host of other concerns will dog enhanced U.S.-Iraq security cooperation effort in years to come and will test U.S. determination and flexibility. End-use monitoring of U.S.-provided equipment is perhaps one of the most manageable. The ISF has proven relatively good at protecting U.S. sensitive equipment, and ongoing U.S. support to major platforms and weapons systems suggests that this will continue to be the case.<sup>52</sup> Human rights present a much more acute concern. When training the ISF in 2006, as such Iraqi units moonlighted as sectarian death squads, U.S. officials reportedly “warned Iraqi leaders that, under the Leahy Amendment, U.S. law prohibited assistance to foreign security forces that committed gross violations of human rights.”<sup>53</sup> Similar concerns exist today, in both the ISF and the Kurdish security forces. The Hashd militias already have a gruesome record of sectarian atrocities<sup>54</sup> against civilians and the regular MOD forces are probably not spotless either.<sup>55</sup> Kurdish forces have a cleaner public record but they also take part in ethnic retaliation against Arab and Turkmen populations who are viewed as having collaborated with ISIS or who are living on lands claimed by the Kurds.<sup>56</sup> The only way to ameliorate such incidents is with professionalism, developed through the strengthening of Iraqi institutions and unit-level training. The fish rots from the head, and can only be reborn through the head. There is no silver bullet solution and it will be a slow process, so the United States needs to adopt the same realistic outlook and patient engagement that it did in the past with highly

compromised units such as the Iraqi National Police. Open-ended mentoring of Iraqi units by embedded U.S. advisors or international trainers (like the Italian Carabinieri) is probably not an option in most parts of Iraq, although such “rebluing” efforts might be possible in safer base locations in southern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

## NOTES

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2. Defeat in the sense that ISIS’s effort to take over and administer large parts of Iraq has been defeated. ISIS is once again whittled down to a tough terrorist and insurgent group, operating covertly in populated areas and sometimes overtly in remote or unpopulated areas.
3. Paul, *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and under What Circumstances?*, p. 21.
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11. “Future Ground Role for U.S. Military Advisors in Iraq Likely: Dempsey,” Agence France Presse.
12. The author owes a special debt to Michael Eisenstadt for his close reading of this section and his suggested reformulation of key passages.
13. One example of this is the specialized training, contractor logistics support, and base life support for the Iraq M1A1 Abrams Program. Iraq may buy another 175 M1 Abrams tanks, worth around \$1.2 billion. See “M1 Abrams Tanks for Iraq,” *Defense Industry Daily*, July 16, 2014, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/m1-abrams-tanks-for-iraq-05013/>. Iraq recently purchased 46,000 rounds of 120mm main-gun ammunition, undoubtedly related to retraining and offensive combat operations in 2015. See “Iraq—M1A1 Abrams Tank Ammunition Transmittal No. 14-38,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/iraq-m1a1-abrams-tank-ammunition-0>.
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16. The United States reportedly offered Iraq AH-1Zs Viper attack helicopters instead, and eventually offered AH-64D/Es; by then, Iraq had already ordered Mi-28s and Mi-35s from Russia. The 30 Mi-28s (one attack squadron, probably to be based at Taji) are reported to be \$1 billion, with the price for

the Pantsir-S1s and additional air defense items reported to be \$2.3 billion according to Iraqi sources. See D. J. Elliot, "Iraqi Arms Purchases October 2012," *Montrose Toast*, October 15, 2012, <http://home.comcast.net/~djyae/site/?/blog/view/121/>.

17. These systems are by no means delivered at bargain prices. In addition to price and corruption scandals involving the Russian sale, the Pantsir-S1 is not even a good option for Iraq, being susceptible to jamming. See Elliot, "Iraqi Arms Purchases October 2012."
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  32. Robert Garratt, *The Fish Rots from the Head: The Crisis in our Boardrooms—Developing the Crucial Skills of the Competent Director* (United Kingdom: Profile Books, 2010).
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### SELECT PUBLICATIONS by Michael Knights

- *ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq* (West Point CTC, 2014)
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Alongside the war against ISIS, we face a far more dangerous midterm prospect. A parallel struggle is being fought for Iraq's future and it will probably prove far more consequential than the war against the self-styled Islamic State. This is the struggle by Iran and her Iraqi proxies to take over Iraq's government and security sector....If we lose Iraq in the process of defeating ISIS, we have achieved a Pyrrhic victory on a monumental scale.

