

Why Iraqi Security Forces Are Promoting the Arts

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Sep 18, 2017

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Cultural initiatives serve key defense goals, but Baghdad should steer clear of programs that turn the arts into a mouthpiece of the state or a divisive sectarian tool.

Just as the Iraqi armed forces geared up for their advance into Western Mosul in February 2017, the Ministry of Defense newspaper *Khaimat al-Iraq* announced the revival of Iraq's Army Theater, an institution that once held musical and theatrical productions on its stage dating back to Saddam Hussein's days. The paper acknowledged that the joint Ministry of Defense-Ministry of Culture undertaking was ambitious, but argued that it was nonetheless vital in order to "document the victories of our army to raise the morale of our heroic fighters." In the midst of such bloodletting, the launch of such a project may seem surprising at best and a waste of resources at worst. A survey of the Ministry of Defense's publications, however, reveals that arts and culture initiatives are actually a crucial part of its strategy to fight the Islamic State and rebuild the country. Compared with issues like the next Sunni insurgency or the future of Iraq's Shiite militias, the role of arts and culture in restoring security has flown under the radar. But from an Iraqi perspective, it is a security issue in its own right...

[Read the full article on the Foreign Affairs website. \(https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/persian-gulf/2017-09-18/why-iraqi-security-forces-are-promoting-arts\)](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/persian-gulf/2017-09-18/why-iraqi-security-forces-are-promoting-arts) ❖

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