

# The Iraqi Security Forces: Local Context and U.S. Assistance

by [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.



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Over the past several decades, the Iraqi Security Forces have been shaped not only by external wars, but also by local factors. As the December 2011 deadline for full U.S. military withdrawal approaches, the success of American assistance in Iraq will rely more than ever on a clear understanding of the strategic, political, and cultural context of the country's security sector development, as well as the fashioning of initiatives that take this context into account.

In this new Washington Institute Policy Note, military expert Michael Knights offers a status report on the transition from U.S. to Iraqi security leadership, the ISF's progress toward self-reliance against external threats, and the subtle ways in which historical narratives, domestic politics, and economic priorities are shifting the trajectory of ISF development away from the path originally laid out by U.S. planners.

## the author

**M**ichael Knights is a Lafer fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, Libya, Yemen, and the Gulf Arab states. He received his doctorate from the Department of War Studies, King's College London, with a dissertation on U.S. no-fly zones and air operations against Iraq.

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