

مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies



The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces

Dr. Michael Knights



Al-Bayan Center Publications Series

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About

Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies is an independent, nonprofit think tank based in Baghdad, Iraq. Its primary mission is to offer an authentic perspective on public policy issues related to Iraq and the neighboring region. Al-Bayan pursues its vision by conducting autonomous analysis, as well as proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern academia and policymakers.

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Introduction by Al-Bayan Center

After 2003, Iraq has aimed to build security forces on the basis of professionalism and patriotism through new military institutions after disbanding the Iraqi army after the war, and it benefited from the support of the coalition forces at the time. Iraq has also worked on introducing some new elements to the security structure, such as the Federal Police, the Counter Terrorism Force, and others. Iraq has also sought to change the perception people had about the security forces after they were one of the tools used by the regime before 2003 to hit the civilians by its hostile policies and authority.

The importance of an army to any country is to maintain its presence, ward off external threat, and protect its borders. This is what forms the basis to many countries when it comes to formulating its military policies and plans. However, the case was different in Iraq after 2003 because of the exceptional security circumstances Iraq went through and the political differences that influenced the building of the security forces.

Under the current circumstances in Iraq and after the event in June 2014 with the fall of Mosul to Daesh, many facts have been revealed which require taking close look at them and developing appropriate solutions, besides the need to reconsider the structure of the army to suit the nature of the sensitive stage Iraq is going through right now. There is a necessity to reconsider the creation of the military code of the security institutions and make it more nationalistic, which entails restructuring the security and military various forces, which will contribute to the process of building a strong qualitative Army to protect civilians, to stand against terrorism in all regions of Iraq, and to protect its borders.

The study is introduced to draw a new picture for the future of the Iraqi security forces and to identify the most important challenges that hamper the work of the security institutions and the development

of appropriate solutions. Also, it clarifies the most prominent tasks the prime minister needs, as the commander in chief of the armed forces, to continue from obtaining international support to continue reforming the military leadership by working on the construction of new enterprises and the development of existing institutions. Moreover, it focuses on the constructing of a new national security strategy. In addition to the role of the Ministry of Defense in accounting officers whom it is proved they have failed to meet their military duties, the ministries and security institutions should fight against corruption and nepotism within the military. The paper will discuss the introduction of modern techniques in the training of security forces while maintaining traditional military training methods. Armies nowadays are not completely dependent on traditional methods. They have become dependent on the intelligence effort and information, which are equivalent to traditional methods.

Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies seeks to clarify, through this study, the duties of the decision-makers in the military institutions and what they have to do at this sensitive stage, which requires the government to benefit from the international expertise to address the problems faced by the military and the security institutions, and build these institutions according to the requirements of the circumstances and the state's ability, with focusing on the best way to manage the PMU after the battle with Daesh ends.

The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces

Dr. Michael Knights *

Executive Summary

Since the fall of Mosul it has sometimes been said by Iraq's detractors that there is no longer any such thing as the Iraqi security forces (ISF). This is clearly nonsense and those peddling this line are fully aware that it is nonsense. They are motivated by schadenfreude – a foolish desire to mock Iraq in its moment of suffering.

In fact the ISF is fighting and winning at many points of the map. The ISF hold the longest frontline against Daesh of any armed force. The ISF have suffered the greatest casualties of any of the forces facing Daesh. The ISF have been more actively fighting the Salafi jihadists of Daesh than any other force for well over a decade of continuous combat. And the ISF is steadily recovering its strength. Those who mock the ISF should consider that Iraq will recover its vigor and that Iraqis have long memories.

As Iraq rebuilds its military forces it is vital to correctly diagnose the problem that needs to be remedied. Underlying all other symptoms the central reason for the defeats suffered by the ISF is a failure of political and military leadership. Almost all Iraq's military problems stem from the failure of leaders to anticipate crises, plan for them, allocate resources and fight corruption. As one Iraqi Army officer told the author after the fall of Mosul: "this is not just the army's failure, it is the government's failure."

But smart, brave leadership can fix a lot of Iraq's military problems too. Iraqi political and military leaders can work hard to maintain the cooperation of international security partners, in finishing off the current war against Daesh. Iraqi political leaders can continue to re-staff the military with more capable uniformed leadership. Political and military leaders can push real anti-corruption reforms and the tough application of military laws. Smart leaders can chose to resist pressure to build new institutions and instead can back the sensible option

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of developing existing institutions like MoD and MoI. And visionary leaders can fight the remainder of this war against Daesh in a manner that will support national reconciliation, using tools like the decentralization of local security decision-making and recruitment.

Iraq stands at a crossroads. The choice is very simple. Put the right people in charge of security and give them the right authorities and resources and allies. Or witness the further deterioration of Iraq's stability and unity.

For Iraq's Prime Minister

As Commander-in-Chief of Iraq's armed forces, the Iraqi prime minister should consider some of the following courses of action:

- **Lock-in the international Coalition's commitment to the mid-term (2018-2021) phase of the war against Daesh.** After the liberation of Iraq's cities in 2016-2017 begins the grueling work of continuing the rebuild of the ISF, securing the borders and rooting out the terrorists from their hideouts. A speedy reduction of Coalition support to Iraq could leave Iraq very exposed to a Daesh comeback, just as happened after 2011 which allowed Daesh to gain strength. The U.S.-led Coalition includes six of the eight G-8 countries, the most powerful collection of allies Iraq has ever possessed. Whilst not overlooking the quick-turnaround aid that Russia and Iran can provide (and the leverage they represent as alternative allies), the Iraqi government needs to learn from the lesson of the abrupt end of U.S. support in 2011 by locking-in Coalition support to Iraq in the mid- and long-term. The best way to do this is by establishing multi-national security joint ventures that can outlast the present war against Daesh. One option would be building long-term internationally-backed military training "Centres of Excellence" in Iraq, perhaps focused on border security and/or counterinsurgency. Iraq should also begin a quiet dialogue with various Syrian factions – particularly the Syrian Democratic Forces – about how the Syrian border might be jointly controlled in future.
- **Continue the reform of military leadership by appointing a fully-empowered Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD).** Iraq needs a powerful Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD) at the head of Iraq's Joint Headquarters (JHQ). This should be one paramount uniformed officer who is the recognized military

deputy to the prime minister of Iraq and the day-to-day commander of all ISF elements. This officer should be approved by parliament and must not be appointed in an acting capacity by executive order, which could undermine the authority of the position. The CHOD should be an officer with robust military credentials and a strong institutional vision for ISF development. The CHOD appointment should not be shaped by ethno-sectarian quotas: Iraq must leave this destructive habit behind. He should be unafraid of intimidation from militias and political groups, protected by the government from both physical threats and political pressure. The CHOD must be given strong political backing to crack the whip by enforcing a strengthened military code of discipline, punishing military incompetence and corruption at all levels. He should be reward a culture of honest and timely reporting of bad news. The new CHOD should have full political backing to shuffle or replace any officer in the ISF, including his senior deputies for administration, operations, training, and logistics. No quota must stand in the way of the ISF's ability to defend the Iraqi people and territory.

- **Resist pressure to build new institutions and instead develop existing institutions like MoD and MoI.** Smart governments don't abandon large state institutions and build entirely new structures: they fix them. At this time of deep economic austerity Iraq cannot afford to build new popular mobilization quasi-ministries. Iraq doesn't need more parallel institutions, it needs to take what is best from Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) experience but maintain the government's monopoly of force. The Al-Abbas Combat Division – where the volunteers are fully under MoD authority, receives their heavy weapons and orders from the government, do not seek arrest powers, and are committed to dissolving at government's request – is a useful model.
- **Fold the Counter-Terrorism Service into MoD.** The Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) remains adrift from any ministry and not covered either by law or a budget line item. It should be incorporated formally into MoD, the ministry with which it already informally shares personnel and resources with. This would give CTS direct access to both personnel and funding without the need for improvised bureaucratic arrangements. With this administrative and financial stability CTS could undertake multi-year planning and programming.
- **Fight the remainder of this war against Daesh in a manner that will**

support national reconciliation. In theory the Iraqi government could commit to an open-ended garrisoning of northern and western Iraq with Iraqi Army, Federal Police and other ISF units predominated recruited from southern Iraq. In this Iraqi future the sons and grandsons of the south could face an endless series of insurgencies launched by the sons and grandsons of the north and the west. The only winner would be Daesh and the movements that would come after Daesh. In another future Iraq takes the awful experience of Daesh and comes up with a formula to prevent the repetitive outbreak of Daesh-like uprisings.

- The prime minister should commission an urgent review by Iraqi officers who have a successful record of counterinsurgency over the last decade with the aim of creating and teaching an authentically Iraqi doctrine of counter-insurgency.
- Iraq should blend ideas from Iraqi provincial power legislation, the National Guard and “functioning federalism”¹ concepts, as well as the practical experience of raising Tribal Security Force and Popular Mobilization Police units to develop a civil-military “playbook” for the decentralization of local security decision-making and recruitment.
- **Commission a new Iraqi National Security Strategy.** Under the prime minister’s guidance the National Security Council needs to formulate an updated Iraqi National Security Strategy that will envisage Iraq’s transition from Mid-Intensity Conflict to border security and counterinsurgency, and finally to deterrence against regional threats. This will provide a foundational document for defence planners to program multi-year procurement, sustainment and force generation.

1. According to 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 over-watch support where necessary to combat hardened terrorist networks.”

For Iraq's Defence Minister

The Iraqi Minister of Defense should consider some of the following courses of action:

- **Undertake a widespread publicized removal of the most corrupt and ineffective mid-ranking and junior officers.** There is a strong argument for undertaking a widespread removal of unqualified officers from the ISF. There should also be zero tolerance for absenteeism from here on, working on the principle, “once an AWOL, always an AWOL.” The model might be the 2006-2007 rebuild of Federal Police divisions when thirty-five or the thirty-nine commanders of battalion-level and above were removed from the two divisions. If understrength units were amalgamated, sufficient officers would be available to replace one tranche of removals. Subsequent mass removals of those who do not improve could follow when replacement officers were ready.
- **Remove corruption and favoritism from officer selection.** Corruption must be taken out of the issue of senior officer, junior officer and NCO selection. Open-vote selection boards and careful anti-corruption efforts at recruitment centres and academies are vital if the ISF is to live up to its potential. The commandants of all officer and NCO academies and other training centres should be given the authority to dismiss any trainee.
- **Strengthen the recruitment and training of officers. The MoD should:**
 - Seek to absorb experienced combat leaders from the Al-Abbas Combat Division volunteers, Popular Mobilization Police and Tribal Security Forces. All potential recruits must meet the same training standards to avoid the problems experienced when unqualified amalgamation (damaj) officers flooded the security forces after 2003.
 - Focus on attracting more college graduates to military academies, as Egypt did after the 1967 disaster and as Iraq did in the mid-1980s as the Iran-Iraq War was going badly. Prioritize good candidates with language skills to assist their technical and international training potential.

- Expand the Defense Language Institute to quickly to remove the language barrier that reduces the value of international training and equipment.
- Though a difficult commitment to make in the middle of a war, Iraq should send more of its promising combat leaders for language training and send them abroad for professional military education. These officers and NCOs should receive pay and promotion inducements, plus special protection from intimidation upon their return.
- The gap must reduce between officers and NCOs in order that the latter can perform duties like guiding officer pilots onto targets or calling for artillery fire missions.
- **Stress ISF strengths in new recruitment efforts.** Key themes that the Iraqi government should stress include:
 - The growing battlefield success of the Iraqi Army.
 - The heavy equipment and advanced training that the international community is providing the Iraqi Army.
 - The lifelong pay and benefits of joining the army.
 - The government's commitment to attract recruits to the national cross-sectarian, multi-ethnic ISF.
- **Focus resources on force protection.** Recruitment and retention can also be increased by actively offsetting some of the fears and concerns of potential recruits. The Iraqi military needs to quickly improve and publicize:
 - Combat lifesaving.
 - Casualty evacuation and combat surgical hospital capabilities including diversion of Iraqi helicopters to casevac missions.
 - Force protection equipment and training, including field engineering, fortifications, mine-protected vehicles, counter-mine training, chemical warfare defence equipment plus Coalition overwatch.

- The government should consider schemes that promise military housing in protected gated communities, an important way to protect key officers and their families from intimidation.
- Sunni recruits travelling to the south and Shia travelling to the north, for training or transiting during leave, need to be well-protected.
- Electronic payment initiatives should be prioritized to reduce time spent on leave, as well as the added burden and risk of protecting troops moving in and out of hot areas.
- **Place the best leader possible in charge of ISF training.** To prevent a repetition of the collapse of ISF training after U.S. withdrawal the Iraqi military needs to put in place a major training surge under a high-quality DCOS for Training.
- **Restore traditional Iraqi methods of fundamental/basic military training.** Iraq should embark on a training campaign that fuses traditional local basic training approaches with adapted international standards in advanced training. Iraqi methods should be adopted in establishing military discipline issues such as dress, bearing, drill, marching, saluting, soldierly conduct, physical exercise and professionalism.
- **Advanced training should be greatly strengthened, with long-term Coalition support.** An open-ended training surge should begin during the lull in active operations prior to the commencement of the Mosul operation. Key features should include:
 - A commitment to “train-the-trainer” approaches is important to ensure a gradual transition from Coalition-led advanced training to Iraqi-led advanced training.
 - Training must be adaptive to the changing needs of the Mid-Intensity, counterinsurgency, and border security missions. All Iraqi units should issue after-action reports to their training centres advising how the training was useful and where it could be improved.
 - A minimum ten-week training program should remain the standard, allowing more time for skills development, for officer and NCO

training, and for realistic simulated battle exercises with pyrotechnics.

- The vital training area and field engineering school at Besmaya should be upgraded and expanded.
- MoD needs to allocate significant ongoing funding, programmed across multiple years, to pay for equipment and munitions at training centres like Taji, Besmaya and Abu Ghraib.
- **Place the best leader possible in charge of ISF logistics.** Iraq needs an inspired DCOS for Logistics to take charge and get equipment issue and maintenance moving again. The commander of the Iraqi Army General Depot Command at Taji should be a three-star general appointment (not a two-star as it presently is) so that the depot can interact on an equal level with the other Operations Command (including the powerful Baghdad Operations Command, where Taji is located).
- **Focus on multi-year program to prioritize the building of “enabler” units.** A key lesson from the last decade has been the need to build support units in the right proportion to combat brigades. In parallel with filling out weak combat brigades the Iraqi government needs to undertake an even more aggressive program of “catching up” in the creation of engineering, artillery, logistical, medical, communications and intelligence units. Added manpower should reflect a 5:3 ratio of combat soldiers versus support forces.
- **Establish a Defense Resources and Requirements Board.** MoD should back the development of a powerful forum that can quickly develop a 3-5 year plan for ISF procurement, budgeting and sustainment. This board should focus on improving multi-year planning, programing, budgeting and evaluation (PPBE).

For Iraq's Parliament

The Iraqi parliament's Defense and Security Committee needs considerable strengthening and should begin with some simple but important steps:

- **Support balanced building of combat and enabler units.** Parliament's strength comes in the review and ratification of budgets. Parliament could play a positive role by ensuring that the government is properly planning

the balanced development of combat and support units to reduce the risk of future collapses of the ISF.

- **Call for a Defense Resources and Requirements Board and monitor its efforts.** The parliament can help MoD and the government to systematize multi-year planning, programing, budgeting and evaluation (PPBE). In particular parliament should block any major arms procurement for which there is not a multi-year sustainment plan and budget, or any major procurement that does not include a major spare parts package. All arms procurements should include train-the-trainer packages and Arabic-language training materials and manuals that allow Iraq to take over the maintenance of most systems within a planned timeframe. The parliament should closely scrutinize the sustainment and maintenance planning for very complex systems like the M1A1 main battle tank, which has proven notoriously difficult to keep operational under wartime conditions. Parliament should also closely look at arms deals negotiated with nations known for providing kickbacks in corrupt arms sales, notably Russia.
- **Demand an inventory of all equipment in Iraq’s military warehouses.** Iraq has large quantities of unaccounted-for military material in its many warehouses. If such materiel were inventoried Iraq could be saved the cost of significant arms buys, and such materiel would be available more quickly. An inventory would certainly require an investment of effort but it might be very worthwhile and it would send a message to Iraqi leaders that waste will not be tolerated at a time when the people are suffering cutbacks in salaries and services.
- **Refuse to tolerate “acting” appointments.** Parliament should consider making explicit legislation to prohibit “acting” appointments of the CHOD, his deputies and other officers of divisional command and higher for longer than two months, with appointed individuals forbidden from occupying that same position or any other senior position in the armed forces for one calendar year if their “acting” period is not ratified by parliament. Though officers must pass through the test of parliamentary ratification they can afterwards act more confidently, with a mandate, once they are confirmed by parliament. This makes them less susceptible to political pressure. “Acting” officers are less respected by their peers and their subordinates: confirmed officers are

needed to instill the discipline that must return to the ISF.

Introduction

Since the start of 2014 Iraq has suffered a string of military catastrophes that have shaken the country's trust in the army and other security institutions. The so-called Islamic State seized and held Fallujah, Mosul and later Ramadi. Twenty Iraqi Army and Federal Police brigades plus numerous other units and headquarters were wiped off the face of the map in a period of days during June 2014, lost without a trace and still not rebuilt. Iraqis asked how such a disaster could befall the country's security forces, which polls had previously shown to be one of the most respected institutions in the state².

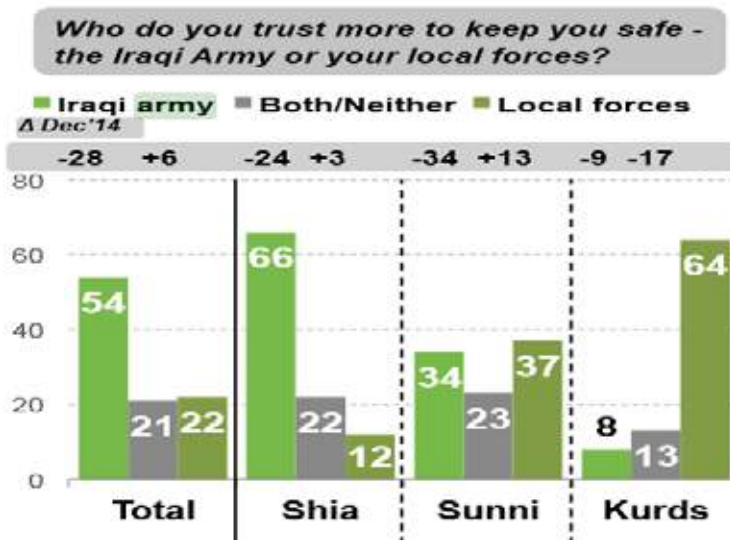


Figure 1: Greenberg Quinlan Rossner August/September 2015 poll for the National Democratic Institution. Note the significant decline in trust for the armed forces, even amongst Shia versus a December 2014 poll.

2. In 2004 Iraqis already had a 61% favorability rating for the army, rising to 70% by 2007. See Thomas E. Ricks, 80% in Iraq Distrust Occupation Authority, Results of Poll, Taken Before Prison Scandal Came to Light, Worry U.S. Officials, in Washington Post, May 13, 2004; available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A22403-2004May12.html>. news/newsarticle.aspx?id=26183 Also see Greenberg Quinlan Rossner, Lack of Responsiveness Impacts Mood, August – September 2015 Survey Findings, available at https://www.ndi.org/files/August%202015%20Survey_NDI%20Website.pdf

Iraqis are now asking themselves many hard questions about the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)³. Are the country's traditional security forces permanently broken and discredited? Can these forces be rebuilt from the ruins or should new security institutions and models be tried? Why did the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) seem to perform so well and what can be learned from their activities? Which nations should Iraq prioritize as its international security cooperation partners?

As the battle of Ramadi comes to a close and the campaign to liberate Mosul begins it is fitting to take a close look at Iraq's future national defence and security strategy. This paper will try to approach the issue from an Iraqi perspective, drawing on the author's long-standing relations with the ISF, including periods embedded with its leaders and soldiers. The report will aim to clear away some of the misconceptions that have already emerged concerning the reasons why the ISF suffered its defeats, what remains of the ISF today, and what roles were played by the PMU and international partners. Then, after establishing a clear record of the facts, the paper will diagnose the problems with the ISF and outline the solutions that Iraq might adopt in order to restore trust in the security forces and better protect the country's long-suffering people.

Why the ISF partially collapsed

News coverage of the military defeats of the ISF have focused on individual lost battles like Mosul and Ramadi but these defeats were only the symptoms of systemic breakdown, not the causes. The losses of Fallujah or Mosul might have been quickly reversed if the ISF had been more resilient across the whole country. The root causes of the collapse of major sections of the ISF go much further back than 2014 and should be briefly discussed in order to correctly diagnose the problems that must be remedied.

An overarching factor concerning the weakness of the ISF was the uncompleted business of the post-2003 reconstruction of the security sector. Put simply, the United States dismantled the country's entire security sector but then

3. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) include the traditional security forces such as the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi Force, the Iraqi Navy, the Counter-Terrorism Service, the Federal Police, the Iraqi Police Service, the Department of Border Enforcement and Coast Guard, the various Facilities Protection Service and Oilfield Police units, plus bodyguard forces for leadership sites. Also now part of the ISF by cabinet order since June 2014 is the Prime Minister's Commission of the Hashd al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Units).

ran out of time and money to put a new set of institutions and units in place. Given decades of U.S. funding and hands-on mentoring by the U.S. military, as occurred in West Germany and Korea for instance, the Iraqi military would perhaps have developed into a clone of the U.S. armed forces.

But instead the rebuild of the Iraqi security sector had hardly begun by the time the Americans withdrew. The combat units built in large numbers were not yet matched by the requisite support units – logistics, communications, artillery, airpower, medical services – which were needed to replace the U.S.-provided support. The re-training of the military was years from delivering a new generation of well-trained troops and modern defence institutions. Both Iraq, as the sovereign state requesting U.S. withdrawal, and the United States, as the architect of the new Iraq, share the blame for the reduction in support after the exit of the U.S. military from Iraq between 2009 and 2011.

Leadership vacuum

The post-2003 ISF had serious leadership problems that were never fully solved by the Americans. Senior and even junior leaders were often selected on the basis of their ethno-sectarian affiliation through the system of quotas (*muhasasa*).⁴ Untrained officers were inducted as amalgamation (*damaj*) candidates from the political parties and were often given commands despite their unsuitability for the role. Corruption was rife even when the ISF was at the zenith of its strength in 2009,⁵ resulting in senior and junior ranks being purchased in order that officers could run their units like Mafia bosses, ransoming arrested civilians and receiving kickbacks for letting soldiers go absent without leave.⁶ Even with 185,000 U.S. troops in Iraq the weakness of military leadership of the post-2003 Iraqi security system was never remedied.

4. An Unhappy Marriage: Civil-Military Relations in Post-Saddam Iraq Florence Gaub Regional Insight January 13, 2016 available at <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/01/13/unhappy-marriage-civil-military-relations-in-post-saddam-iraq/im00>

5. Drawn from the author's review of Human Terrain Team System documents on corruption in the Iraqi Army as early as 2009. There was no "golden age" in which the post-2003 army was "corruption-free:" it was deeply corrupted even at the zenith of its operational effectiveness during the Surge, albeit with U.S. forces placing limits on how badly corruption could damage operations.

6. For a detailed account of how this works at unit level see *Embedded: A Marine Corps Adviser Inside the Iraqi Army* By Wesley Gray Naval Institute Press, Aug 10, 2013 pp. 110-114

When the U.S. military began to withdraw from Iraq between 2009 and 2011, first from the cities and then gradually from each province, the quality of leadership began to decline even further in Iraq's security sector. Excessive politicization of the security sector leadership was one factor: the leading political parties of the Iraqi government continually re-staffed the senior command positions to ensure that their chosen political appointees were on top. Political, tribal and family favouritism expanded out of control. The most senior positions in the military – those responsible for the battlefield command, administration, planning, training and logistics functions – were run by unqualified persons. These low quality officers were not interested in continuing the development of the ISF and did not value training or sustaining the morale of their troops. Instead many were focused on avoiding work or making money through corruption. Junior leaders took the bad example from senior leaders and the system rotted from the head down.

As Jabbar Jaafar noted, ⁷ by the time U.S. forces left Iraq the ISF can be compared to an inverted pyramid. At the top there was a wide base of senior officers and headquarters, many competing with each other and cashing-in on corruption opportunities. Below there was a very narrow group of good junior officers and non-commissions officers (NCOs). The inverted pyramid was never going to stand for very long. As soon as an enemy arrived, in this case Daesh, the entire structure collapsed.

Lack of combat support services

As ISF expert DJ Elliott wrote at the time of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq: “The 2012 date for the withdrawal of U.S. Forces was an arbitrary political date chosen by politicians that mistake the number of combat battalions for strength and do not understand how many essential support components have not been built yet.”⁸ One reason for the failure to build such enablers was that they were

7. Restoring the Iraqi Army's Pride and Fighting Spirit Michael Knights and Jabbar Jaafar Aljazeera July 8, 2015

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/restoring-the-iraqi-armys-pride-and-fighting-spirit>

8. A specialist in strategic communications and an analyst of Iraqi and Arab issues in Washington Institute said in Iraqi Logistics - The Missing Links Montrose Toast Blog ^ | 21 March 2011 | DJ Elliott Posted on 3/21/2011, 7:46:04 AM by DJ Elliott <http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-bloggers/2692084/posts>

not initially needed due to the U.S. provision of airpower, artillery, logistics, engineering, intelligence, communications and medical services. By the time the U.S. “surge” was over and the development of support services could begin, the U.S. withdrawal was immediately underway.

Another factor was that the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD) lacked the administrative capacity and the hiring authorities to prioritize the needed support services. A hiring freeze in 2008 meant that new support units could only be manned by reducing the size of combat brigades.⁹ In the 2009 MoD budget almost 70% was dedicated to salaries (\$1.91 billion) and a further 24% (\$1 billion) to life support for the troops. New projects such as building airpower, artillery, logistics, intelligence, communications and medical units were shelved. Certain roles previously undertaken by the Americans were disastrously under-resourced: compared to an annual military maintenance bill of \$360 million the 2009 budget allocated just \$8.5 million.¹⁰ By 2011 only 40% of the necessary Iraqi Army logistical units and only 15% of Ministry of Interior (MoI) Federal Police logistical units had been built. Field Artillery Brigades had only been built in two of the fourteen Iraqi Army divisions. No Iraqi Army or Federal Police units had heavier anti-tank weapons than RPG-7 launchers. Kuwait fielded more main battle tanks than Iraq.¹¹

By the time Daesh overran the ISF in Fallujah the Iraqi Security Forces were already primed for a major military disaster. As military force development experts like DJ Elliott and Barak Salmoni noted as early as 2011, the ISF could only undertake counter-insurgency (COIN) against lightly-armed guerrillas. The Iraqi military could not engage in high-intensity and mid-intensity combat against armed forces with access to tanks, artillery, antitank weapons and air defences – all of which Daesh gained after the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011. As Elliott

9. MoD was placed under a hiring freeze from August 2008 onwards. From this point the MoD could only create support units by drawing troops out of combat units. This led to a trend where the authorized strength of combat units declined (and their actual strength after losses, under-manning, those absent training and “ghost soldiers” was even lower). See Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110 - 252), December 31 2009, (pages dated January 29, 2010), pp. 55

10. *Ibid.*

11. DJ Elliott, *The Missing Links: A Realistic Appraisal of the Iraqi Military*, Defense Industry Daily staff, July 12, 2011.

predicted in March 2011: “In a conventional war, a High-Intensity Conflict, the Iraqi Army would collapse.”¹² Salmoni was even more explicit, presciently writing in May 2011:

*The ISF would have serious difficulty autonomously attacking and neutralizing well-fortified concentrations of insurgents in Iraq. Such an effort would prove much more costly in material and human terms for the ISF than for a more broadly developed military force. It would also require much more time—perhaps too much to overcome the momentum of a large-scale domestic uprising.*¹³

The ISF crumbles

By the time Daesh began to grow stronger in 2012 the ISF was increasingly a hollow and brittle force that could be badly damaged by one major blow. Morale was lowered by the low quality of leadership and the lack of training, by the negative effects of corruption on military pride, and by the vulnerability of soldiers and policemen to assassination and intimidation. Daesh killed hundreds of off-duty ISF members, murdered hundreds more of their family members and destroyed many of their homes. In under-strength units where many “ghost jundis” were absent without leave the burden of serving was doubled on the remaining loyal troops.¹⁴ Poor leadership allowed the army and FP garrisons in Mosul and other “hot areas” to become alienated from the population, even though it was clear that no counter-insurgency can succeed unless the people are working with the security forces. Symbols of the government’s neglect of the ISF, such as the fraudulent ADE-651 bomb-detectors, continued to serve at checkpoints across Iraq.¹⁵

The eventual wholesale collapses of ISF brigades were foreshadowed in a series of smaller military setbacks in 2012-2013. In September 2012 the Iraqi Army experienced significant logistical difficulties deploying units from southern Iraq up to the Iraq-Syrian border west of Mosul. By the time the forces had arrived, nearly two weeks after their dispatch date, the Kurdish Peshmerga had fortified

12. Ibid.

13. Responsible Partnership The Iraqi National Security Sector after 2011 Barak A. Salmoni Policy Focus #112 | May 2011 p.11.

14. Author’s interview with ISF senior NCO A, October 2015.

15. BBC News, Iraqi Interior ministry still backing <bomb detector>, 24 Jan 2010, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8477601.stm

the area and the Iraqi Army was outgunned and backed down. In April 2013 a mini-uprising in Hawijah resulted in a partial collapse of two brigades of the 12th Iraqi Army division and the temporary loss of the town of Suleiman Beg as other ISF battalions collapsed in neighbouring Salah al-Din.¹⁶ Later in 2013 the Iraqi government sought to reinforce the Syrian border with Iraqi Army units drawn from southern Iraq and these forces again suffered logistical difficulties making the transition, moving far away from their static logistics bases (called “location commands”). Garrisoning remote desert areas they suffered high levels of desertion and were quickly reduced to defending their isolated bases against Daesh raids.

The rest of the story is well known: the fall of Fallujah in December 2013 and almost Ramadi as well; the collapse at Mosul and the disintegration of numerous headquarters and bases plus fourteen Iraqi Army and six FP brigades. On June 12, 2014 as many as 1,566 Shia Iraqi Air Force cadets were massacred in an attack on Camp Speicher – a black day that Iraq will never forget. Iraq lost control of its second largest city, Mosul, and much of the territories north and west of Baghdad. But at least as importantly the Iraqi military lost the confidence of the people and even lost the faith of its own troops. As one Iraqi officer told the author: “the soldiers don’t trust us anymore as leaders.”¹⁷

Residual capabilities of the ISF

Since the fall of Mosul it has sometimes been said by Iraq’s detractors that there is no longer any such thing as the Iraqi security forces. This is clearly nonsense and those peddling this line are fully aware that it is nonsense. They are motivated by schadenfreude – a foolish desire to mock Iraq in its moment of suffering. In fact the ISF is still fighting and winning at many points of the map. The ISF hold the longest frontline against Daesh of any armed force. The ISF have suffered the greatest casualties of any of the forces facing Daesh. The ISF have been more actively fighting the Salafi jihadists of Daesh than any other force for well over a decade of continuous combat. And the ISF is steadily recovering its strength. Those who mock the ISF should consider that Iraq will recover its vigor and that Iraqis have long memories.

16. Bringing Iraq’s ‘Ghost’ Forces Back to Life Michael Knights Aljazeera December 10, 2014 <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bringing-iraqs-ghost-forces-back-to-life>

17. Author’s interview with ISF officer A, October 2015.

ISF order of battle

The table on the page below (Table 1) provides a comparative listing of combat brigades and “brigade equivalent” forces in Iraq at the zenith of ISF strength in 2009, and then again shortly before the fall of Mosul, and also in January 2015 and January 2016. The table also provides estimated manpower strength in those brigades.

One key trend is that the ISF had already suffered significant reduction in frontline combat strength before Mosul fell, largely due to gradual erosion of the actual available manpower between 2009 and the fall of Fallujah in December 2013. Units had not disintegrated as they later would: instead the damage was more insidious and harder to detect.

A second key trend is that the collapse of the ISF in June 2014 resulted in the removal of nineteen Iraqi Army brigades from the order of battle, fourteen¹⁸ of which disappeared permanently and five¹⁹ of which have resurfaced and reformed since then. Six Federal Police brigades²⁰ from Mosul were permanently destroyed and six Department of Border Enforcement brigades on the Syrian frontier also disbanded. Four Iraqi Army and one Federal Police division headquarters were destroyed, as was the corps-level Nineveh Operations Command.

The recovery from this disaster has been steady but also very slow. By January 2015 a fair number of brigades had been salvaged and a couple of new brigades were built but the overall frontline combat strength of the ISF was halved due to attrition in the manning of each brigade. With PMU and Sunni tribal elements added in, the ISF could boast almost as many combat units as prior to the fall of Mosul but these units were weaker and many were too demoralized or lightly equipped to do more than hold in place. A year later, by January 2016, significant progress has been made in terms of available forces albeit largely by shuffling around personnel and raising around a dozen new and very small 1,000-strong brigades.²¹

18. Brigades 6, 7 and 8 (of 2nd IA division); 9, 10, 11 and 12 (of 3rd IA division); 14, 17 and 48 (of 4th IA division); plus 15, 46, 47 and 49 (of 12th IA division).

19. Brigades 38, 39, 40 and 41 (of 10th IA division) and brigade 51 (of 14th IA division).

20. The brigades of the 3rd Federal Police division, including Askari, Fursan, Mosuli, and three brigade equivalents of Emergency Police.

21. Brigades 64, 66, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76 of the Iraqi Army, a new Federal Police brigade in

	Late 2009		May 2014		Jan 2015		Jan 2016	
	Brigade equivalents	Frontline on-duty strength	Brigade equivalents	Frontline on-duty strength	Brigade equivalents ^{*1}	Frontline on-duty strength	Brigade equivalents	Frontline on-duty strength
Iraqi Army	55	151,250	55	110,000	36	54,000	54	81,000
Federal Police	30	82,500	30	60,000	24	36,000	25	37,000
Counter-Terrorism Service	3	8,250	3	^{**} 7,250	3	4,500	4	^{**3} 8,500
Bodyguard units	5	13,750	5	13,750	5	^{**4} 13,750	2	7,000
Border forces	15	41,250	15	30,000	9	13,500	9	13,500
Total ISF	108	297,000	108	221,000	77	121,750	87	147,000
PMU			Unknown quantity operating in unofficial militia role 8		15	Approx 22,500	15	Approx 22,500
Non-PMU Shia volunteers ^{**5}					Approx 12,000	8	Approx 12,000	
Sunni PMU / Tribal Security Forces					2	Approx 3,000	3	Approx 6,000 ^{**6}
Total ISF plus Hashd					102	^{**7} 159,250	113	187,500
KRG security forces	47	94,000	47	94,000	54	108,000	54	108,000

Table 1: Iraqi Security Forces frontline on-duty strength levels, 2009-2016. For estimative purposes I have assumed 2009 average brigade strength of 2,750.²² The May 2014 average

Anbar, plus seven Tribal Security Forces of varying sizes. These forces have typically received between twelve and fifteen weeks' training. Since the fall of Mosul, one more Iraqi Army brigade disbanded: Brigade 26, destroyed in the Thar Thar region.

22. An average drawn from a survey I did of just under forty brigade units that year.

*1. Does not include units still “scattered” from the summer of 2014 and waiting to reform.

*2. A calculated guess based on the high levels of CTS retention and limited combat role before the siege of Baiji refinery.

*3. Iraqi special forces have regained their strength at the expense of some reduction in selection and training standards. The MoI Emergency Response Division has expanded since the fall of Mosul to six full battalions, drawing on southern Iraqi SWAT teams, whilst a new CTS special forces reconnaissance regiment has also been raised.

*4. These units stayed at May 2014 manning levels.

*5. Shrine volunteers, Al-Abbas Combat Division and Saraya Salam.

*6. Though parliamentary speaker Salim al-Jubbouri mentioned around 17,000 Sunni PMU, the available combat forces seems to be under 6,000 strong.

*7. Around 27,000 other armed PMU elements are paid by the PM's Commission, indicating a significant “rear area” force in Baghdad and southern Iraq.

brigade strength assumes a reduced complement of 2,000 troops per brigade.²³ The January 2015 and Jan 2016 average brigade strength is assumed at 1,500 troops per brigade, reflecting the lower 1,000-man strength of about half this total and higher 2,000-man strength of the other half, mainly the Baghdad Operations Command units.²⁴ The Peshmerga are counted at a steady-state 2,000 troops per brigade equivalent. PMU totals are less scientific and are based on a survey of known units and expert views. Neither local defensive checkpoint PMU nor Iraqi Police are counted as the intent is to survey combat brigade equivalents with offensive military capabilities.

The distribution of the remaining ISF elements is revealing. The table below profiles the distribution of combat forces in the key theatres of war. The Iraqi government is clearly holding significant reserve forces under the Baghdad Operations Command: only around 20,000 of the 83,150 combat troops in the Baghdad area are tied down in holding the Fallujah perimeter and the western approaches to Baghdad. A full fourteen Iraqi Army and Federal Police brigades, 28,000 troops, are dedicated to patrolling the city of Baghdad. The battle of Ramadi has tied down nearly twenty understrength brigades, a portion of which will now be released for operations against Mosul and other locations. The Jazirah and Baida Operations Command has performed magnificently considering its slender resources: it is amazing that Haditha has been continually held considering the small number of forces dedicated to its defense.

23. An average derived from a smaller sample of Iraqi Army and Federal Police units I visited in 2011-2012.

24. An average drawn from various conversations with a number of Iraqi commanders.

Location	Total front-line on-duty strength	Iraqi Army	Federal Police and other MoI combat units	CTS	PMU and non-PMU Shia volunteers	Sunni kPMU and Tribal Security Forces
Baghdad Operations Command (Baghdad, Fallujah, Taji)	83,150 (48.1%)	50,000	22,000	3,000	*1 5,500	650
Anbar Operations Command (Ramadi and surrounding areas)	29,750 (16.8%)	13,000	6,500	3,000	250	500
Samarra Operations Command (Samarra, Tikrit, Bayji)	21,700 (12.2%)	4,000	8,000	2,000	5,200	500
Tigris Operations Command (Diyala, Hamrin, Tuz (Khurmatu	22,000 (12.4%)	6,000	4,500		8,500	
Jazirah and Baida Operations Command (Haditha, (Al-Asad, Barwana	7,750 (4.3%)	4,000	500	500	250	2,000
All Iraq	177,000 (100%)					

Table 2: Assessed allocation of frontline combat strength, January 2016. The table uses the same unit average strength assumption (1,500 per brigade, except for Baghdad Operations Command, which receives 2,000 per brigade) and weaves in hard data from individual units in some cases.

In terms of geographic focuses of the different types of forces, the Iraqi Army is present in strength on every key battlefield. The Federal Police is concentrated in Baghdad and the Tigris River Valley north of Samarra: in Baghdad they perform a defensive ground-holding role but in the Tigris River Valley they have been at the forefront of the fighting. MoI combat units performed perimeter security roles in the Ramadi operation. CTS has three hubs: the Emergency Response Division counter-terrorism raiding force in Baghdad; the force based around Tikrit and Bayji; and the force supporting the Ramadi operation, which will now be freed up to refit and under take further operations. PMU elements have one main focus area after liberating Bayji – Fallujah – and are also holding

*1. Not including checkpoint defensive PMU. This only includes offensive-capable PMU units, mostly deployed on the Fallujah perimeter.

the desert flank west of Karbala. Sunni tribal elements have played a major role in the Western Euphrates River Valley in Anbar and other forces not shown on the table are mustering at the edges of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to support the Mosul operation.

ISF battlefield performance since Mosul

The widespread perception of ISF performance is that the regular security forces (Iraqi Army and MoI elements) have struggled to regain cohesion since the fall of Mosul, whilst more compact forces (CTS and PMU) have carried most of the weight. There was certainly some truth in this in the opening weeks and months after Mosul. It was the CTS that led the defence of Bayji refinery and the PMU were critical in reinforcing the “stop-line” around Samarra and east of Fallujah beyond which the ISF did not retreat any further. Iraq will never forget these two forces – CTS and the PMU – for this vital contribution.

At the same time, it is often overlooked that the other main ISF elements – the army and Federal Police, plus Sunni tribal groups – also fought successful defensive actions against Daesh. Though Ramadi eventually fell in May 2015 the fall of the city had been prevented once before in December 2013 by a combination of Ramadi tribes and the ISF. Ramadi had then been defended against constant Daesh attacks for seventeen months without reinforcement.²⁵ It was a shock but not a surprise when the ISF defenders finally cracked in 2015. Until May, the ISF had shown tremendous bravery and dedication in the defence of Ramadi.²⁶

The defence of Haditha, its vital dam and power and refining facilities, is another heroic story of the Iraqi Army, police and tribal factions working together with the U.S.-led Coalition to defeat Daesh. Since the first day after Mosul’s fall Daesh has been trying to take Haditha and Al-Asad base. The Jazira and Baida Operations Command, the 7th Iraqi Army division, special forces and around two thousand Jughaiifi-led tribesmen have succeeded in holding off Daesh for nineteen months at the time of writing, with only 4,000-7,000 troops for most of

25. Retaking Ramadi: U.S. Assistance and Shiite-Sunni Cooperation Michael Knights May 19, 2015 <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/retaking-ramadi-u.s.-assistance-and-shiite-sunni-cooperation>

26. Arwa Damon and Hamdi Alkshali, CNN, Inside the battle for Ramadi: Iraqi soldier recalls the battle with ISIS, May 26, 2015, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/26/middleeast/iraq-ramadi-inside-the-fight/>

that time. At Dhuluiyah the ISF worked with Sunni tribes to undertake a similar defense, holding off Daesh for six months before the siege was relieved.²⁷

The Iraqi Army has also been on the counter-offensive for much of 2015, playing a key role in Daesh's most significant defeats in central Iraq – Tikrit, Bayji and Ramadi. There is no doubting that the PMU led the liberation of Amerli, Jurf as-Sakr and the rural areas of the Hamrin Mountains and Diyala River Valley. But elsewhere the Iraqi Army and special forces have led the counter-attack.

- Western Euphrates River Valley: At Haditha and Barwana the 7th Iraqi Army division and tribes have been consistently on the offensive for a year, launching both ground operations and airmobile special forces raids to clear Daesh out of local areas.
- Jallam Desert and Hamrin: The 5th Iraqi Army division armoured columns, working closely with Iraqi air and helicopter forces, played a critical role in clearing Daesh from the areas between the Diyala River Valley and Bayji.
- Tikrit: Iraqi Army, Federal Police, CTS and Sunni tribal forces were heavily involved in the liberation of Tikrit from start to finish. When the PMU-led effort to clear the inner city was suspended on March 26, 2015, the Iraqi Army, Federal Police, Emergency Response Brigade (ERB), CTS and Al Abbas Combat Division forces cleared the city with Coalition support within just five days, allowing Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to walk around in the city centre on April 2.
- Bayji: The traditional ISF have likewise played a critical role in the see-saw struggle to control Bayji refinery and town. Federal Police, CTS, ERB, Iraqi Army and Al Abbas Combat Division forces have worked alongside PMU elements there since the beginning. Iraqi Army artillery, tanks and attack helicopters all played crucial roles in winning the struggle. Indeed when the bulk of PMU forces transferred to Fallujah in late August 2015 the balance of forces in Bayji shifted so that local forces comprised around two thousand Al-Abbas Combat Division volunteers, a thousand Iraqi Army troops, 500 CTS, 500 Federal Police, and only 500 other PMU. After five months of

27. Al-Jazeera, Pro-government forces complete recapture of strategic town which had been held by ISIL for months, commanders say, 31 Dec 2014, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/iraqi-forces-retake-dhuluiyah-from-isil-201412310022423590.html>

fighting the Bayji area was finally cleared within just eight days when a fresh Iraqi Army brigade, the 57th, was committed to Bayji from the Baghdad reserve in early October 2015.

- Ramadi: Unlike in Tikrit and Bayji the traditional ISF led the show in Ramadi from the outset. Though very slow to develop, the Ramadi operation saw the Iraqi Army leadership command five fronts, including more than 13,000 Iraqi Army troops and 3,000 CTS forces plus 6,500 Federal Police troops and Sunni tribes in support. New Coalition-provided capabilities such as combat bridging and “combined arms breaching” of minefields demonstrated that the Iraqi Army has come a long way in the last year.

Since the autumn of 2015 the ISF have displayed a new solidity. They are resistant to Daesh counter-attacks. They consolidate more quickly after capturing an objective, digging in with their new engineering equipment. They seem to have lost some of their fear of mines and booby-traps due to better training and equipment. They have regained some of their trust in their officers. They are also increasingly reliant on Coalition air support, which is a tendency that cannot be sustained over the long-run.

The above survey of recent battles is intended to illustrate that perceptions of the combat capabilities of the Iraqi Army and other traditional ISF units are increasingly out-of-date. In the autumn of 2014 the PMU carried much of the weight of the war and they still play vital roles today. But today when it is time to fight major decisive battles with Daesh, the heavy forces of the Iraqi Army, Federal Police and air and helicopter forces are increasingly playing the key role. These forces not only bring heavy equipment and engineering capability: they also bring the full weight of the Coalition’s intelligence, planning and airstrike capabilities to an operation. Months of deadlock and attrition at Tikrit, Bayji and Ramadi have been transformed by days of concentrated military operations by the ISF-Coalition team.

There is much that still needs to be fixed in the Iraqi Army, the Federal Police, the CTS and other traditional ISF formations. But these are increasingly the forces that are taking the lead. As one Coalition planner told the author: “The biggest misconception in Iraq is that the Peshmerga or the Hashd al-Sha’abi are better fighters than the Iraqi Army. In fact Iraqi Army are the best fighters:

the most capable, with the most professional leaders and the best ethics.”²⁸ As an Iraqi staff officer added during the late stages of the Ramadi campaign: “the Iraqi general staff believe we can do Mosul ourselves now, as long as we have Coalition training and air support.”²⁹

Popular mobilization and security

Since June 2014 Iraqis have looked proudly at the PMU phenomenon, and with just cause. The popular mobilization gave Iraqis a patriotic symbol to offset the failure of their government agencies. The religious and political leadership called on the people to mobilize and the result was powerful. Instead of feeling weak, Iraqis felt strong. Perhaps as many as 120,000 volunteers were raised almost immediately after Mosul's fall.³⁰

Of these a small proportion brought firsthand recent battle experience from the fighting undertaken by Iraqi Shia militia groups in Syria.³¹ These junior leaders were the only officers in Iraq with experience of mid-intensity combat of the kind fought against Daesh. Iraqi families felt safer knowing their sons would be fighting within units that were highly motivated, under officers who would not abandon their children or sell them out to the enemy.³²

Led by forceful politicians with military backgrounds (like Hadi al-Amiri and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis) the PMU initially were able to gather together Iraqi Army, Federal Police and air units to support their operations. The PMU under the Prime Minister's Commission played key roles in the protection of Samarra, Baghdad and Karbala; in the relief of the siege of Amerli; in the liberation of Jurf as-Sakr and the protection of pilgrim routes; and in the clearing of Daesh from

28. Author's interview with CJTF officer A, November 2015.

29. Author's interview with Iraqi officer B, October 2015.

30. Michael Knights, *The Long Haul* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, 2015), pp. 7-11.

31. The most effective PMU units in late 2014 were the ones that had recently been fighting in Syria on behalf of the Assad regime, namely Kataib Hezbollah affiliates such as Saraya al-Dafa al-Sha'abi, Saraya Aqadiyan, Kataib al-Imam Ali, Saraya al-Tali'ah al-Khurasani, and Firqat al-Abbas al-Qataliya – al-Dafa an Muqadisat al-Iraq.

32. This sentiment, widespread in Shia Iraq, is well summed-up by one interviewee: “Iraqis know there isn't a snowball's chance in hell any PMU unit would sell their sons to ISIS.” Another noted: “Add on top incidents like Speicher and Saqliwiyah and soldiers no longer trust their leadership. They always feel they might be left for dead, while with the militia they have their commanders close by on the battlefield (which is a big moral boost).”

large swathes of Diyala. Interestingly a different form of popular mobilization – by tribe – also played a critical role in the successful defence of Ramadi against Daesh’s attempted takeover in December 2013. In that case it was the Sunni Arab tribes of Ramadi to took up arms overnight to repel the invader.³³ Both Shia and Sunni mobilized to save Iraq.

These powerful national experiences have naturally prompted Iraqis to wonder whether a form of popular mobilization should be a permanent part of Iraq’s defence system. Though there are few advocates of a return to conscription there is interest in how the popular mobilization or reserve forces could be worked into Iraq’s defence institutional structure. Partial or full demobilization of the PMUs is a related issue. Likewise there is much discussion about how Iraqi can raise and organize local “hold forces” for the areas liberated from Daesh. These forces intuitively should be drawn from local people and linked to provincial and district councils, but with strong input from the national command structure and central government administrative support. The idea of a National Guard was initially suggested by the United States as a means to resolve all these issues. So how should Iraq’s defence system be re-shaped by the experience of popular mobilization and the need to prevent a return to conflict after Daesh is evicted from Iraq’s cities?

Permanent popular mobilization?

The PMU model seemingly has some attractive features, notably its ability to rapidly call up reserves and the high morale of its units. Many Iraqis, particularly younger ones, want to try something new, and to reject old institutions. The PMU also offered a military experience that appealed to many young people. Pay and benefits (pension, disability allowances) are not as good as a permanent government job but service is flexible, with recruits able to come and go as they please. Discipline is lax, which suits many young people. The command style of PMU leaders, as previously discussed, is based on their personal characteristics and level of battle experience, which is again highly attractive to young people who are looking for role models, not necessarily for leaders who must be obeyed whether you like them or not. In many PMU units an emphasis on Shiism and the protection of Shia shrines is another attractive feature.

33. Michael Knights, ISIL’s Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor, CTC Sentinel, May 29, 2014, available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-isils-stand-in-the-ramadi-falluja-corridor>

The military weaknesses of the PMU model are the reverse side of all of these strengths. In a long campaign like the war against Daesh the “easy come, easy go” membership and leave structure of the PMU makes it difficult to retain numeric strength in long battles. The religious mandate issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani could expire or be revised. Old institutions like the Ministry of Defense may be dull to young men but they do pay a steady wage and full benefits for life. The ministry system also provides a channel of investment in equipment, training and medical care – and whilst these services have declined in the ISF in recent years they are nonetheless better than nothing.

With these weaknesses in mind the PMU leadership has begun to seek a larger state budget to pay salaries, benefits and widows pensions, and to purchase equipment and supplies. This trend could lead to an expansion of the temporary Prime Minister's Commission of the PMU into a permanent ministry-type entity akin to the Iranian Basij or Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, with its own permanent facilities, hospitals, headquarters and equipment procurement program.

There are reasons why Iraq's interests may not be best served by the creation of a permanent popular mobilization institution. On the battlefield the PMUs have drawbacks that were not immediately evident in the crisis of 2014. Defending Shia and cross-sectarian areas is a simpler process than recapturing Daesh-held predominately Sunni cities full of minefields, snipers and counter-attacking armoured suicide car bombs. Success in defence has not given the PMU the ability to crack Daesh defences in cities like Tikrit, Bayji, Ramadi or Fallujah. As stated earlier, only the heavily-armed and internationally-supported forces of the Iraqi state can take Mosul back from Daesh. Likewise, the light infantry forces of the PMU are not well-suited to the subsequent stage of the war against Daesh – the pursuit of the terrorists into the deserts, the closing of Iraqi's borders and the long-term monitoring of these areas. These tasks will require long-term commitment, a large logistical effort and significant equipment and training packages supported by the international community.

The PMU have fought fiercely but indiscipline has resulted in unnecessarily high casualties. On battlefields like Tikrit, Bayji, Saqliwiyah and Karma the attacking PMU units reportedly suffered extremely heavy casualties without

achieving their objectives.³⁴ Enthusiasm is no substitute for real training. The loose discipline of the PMUs has resulted in major breakdowns such as the looting of Tikrit and abuse of civilians on other battlefields.³⁵ The increase in militia and criminal activity across Baghdad and southern Iraq is partly related to the mobilization of non-state armed groups who claim to be PMU but really are criminals. Indeed one of the reasons the Baghdad Operations Command has to hold back so many units from key battlefields is precisely to leave no space for militias to gain greater power in the capital. Militias pretending to be PMU are holding back the entire war effort.

Off the battlefield it is not a good idea to build a new state security institution at a time when the Iraqi government is struggling to fund and operate existing institutions like MoD, MoI and CTS. The development of Iran's Basij and IRGC offers some cautionary pointers. As military institutions, neither the Basij nor the IRGC is considered to be very effective on the modern battlefield.³⁶ But worse, they are also strong political rivals to the government elected by the people.³⁷ They spend extensive time teaching their members not military skills but ideological indoctrination.³⁸ And they form their members into voting blocs that

34. The author undertook a focused question program in Iraq in September and October 2015 to survey the number of PMU casualties in key battles. A range of military and political respondents suggested PMU losses of over two thousand killed in three weeks of street-fighting in Tikrit; nearly 2,500 killed in the Bayji fighting from April to August 2015; and over 350 killed in a single week's fighting in Karma and Saqliwiyah in September 2015. Iraqi Army and Federal Police operation are slower and draw on more international air support but also cost far fewer government casualties in the long-run and deliver victory.

35. For an example of one of the many open source reports on this see: "Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq Amnesty International," Amnesty International, October 2014. Available at http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute_impunity_iraq_report.pdf

36. Anthony Cordesman assesses the weaknesses of the IRGC and Basij models of training and war-fighting in his opus *The Lessons Of Modern War Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War*, Westview Press/Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990. For a wider view of the weaknesses of IRGC naval and air forces also see David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (Penguin, 2012).

37. Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran* (Columbia University Press, 2015). Also see Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/WhoRulesIran.pdf>

38. Saeid Golkar, *The Ideological-Political Training of Iran's Basij*, Brandeis Middle East Brief 44, September 2010, available at <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB44.pdf>

can turn the tide of domestic elections. The parallel security state in Iran often has different priorities from the elected government. This is similar to the Iraqi PMU elements that send part of their manpower to Syria at a time that Iraq itself is in desperate need of manpower. Even Sunni PMUs such as the Jughafi tribal confederation in Anbar have divergent priorities from the state, with their tribal lands defining their limit of advance. In the words of militia expert Austin Long, non-state armed groups are “the poisoned chalice of weak states.”³⁹

These factors all point to the need to reform existing security institutions rather than make permanent the temporary expedient of the popular mobilization. Iraq doesn't need more parallel institutions, it needs to take what is best from PMU experience but maintain the government monopoly of force. One model that has proven highly successful is that of the Al-Abbas Combat Division.⁴⁰

This is the collective organization used to draw together non-PMU security volunteers (of all sects and ethnicities) mobilized by the religious shrine foundations, political parties and local communities. The key difference between this 7,000-strong unit and the PMU is that Al-Abbas works fully under MoD authority, receives its heavy weapons and orders from the government, does not seek arrest powers, and is committed to dissolving at government's request. Though the PMU claim to be under government authority they are in fact highly autonomous. The Al-Abbas Combat Division model is truly under government control. This distinction is important because at some point in the next two years there may be a formal end to the religious order that established the collective responsibility for armed popular mobilization. In the meantime groups gathered under the Al-Abbas Combat Division are well-positioned to take part in internationally-supported operations, whilst the PMU usually withdraw from such operations. Al-Abbas Combat Division elements are also well-positioned to be incorporated into the ISF if they want to join and are eligible. In contrast it is unclear whether other PMU elements would resist demobilization, potentially causing a further schism within Iraqi society.

The National Guard issue

Though the form and language of the National Guard idea is a foreign implant – an American idea somewhat modelled on the U.S. National Guard

39. Author's interview with Austin Long, Washington DC, June 2015.

40. Official webpage of Al Abbas Combat Division (PMU) <http://www.alabbas.iq>

system – there is a fundamental Iraqi need at the heart of the concept. Existing ISF forces probably can clear Mosul and other Daesh-controlled areas but they cannot hold those areas for the months, years and decades to come. In theory the Iraqi government could commit to an open-ended garrisoning of northern and western Iraq with Iraqi Army, Federal Police and other ISF units predominated recruited from southern Iraq. But this would just be to replay recent history. The sons and grandsons of the south would face an endless series of insurgencies launched by the sons and grandsons of the north and the west. The only winner would be Daesh and the movements that would come after Daesh.

The concept underpinning the idea of a National Guard is what U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk, an American with Iraq in his blood, called “functioning federalism.” He described functioning federalism as a “political-military approach that might begin to address the root causes of the current crisis” and “a longer-term strategy to deny space for [Daesh].”⁴¹ According to 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 over-watch support where necessary to combat hardened terrorist networks.*⁴²

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*

41. McGurk, Brett. “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: pg. 10-11. <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McGurk%20Testimony%20072414-Final%20Version%20REVISED.pdf>

42. Ibid, p. 11.

in an over-watch 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 ISIL;

5. The federal government must work diligently on a package of reforms that can address legitimate grievances and deny any pretext for ISIL activities.⁴³

Points of dissent on the National Guard Law include whether provincial National Guard forces should be deployable outside of their home province and what should be the balance of power between the federal and local government in recruiting and commanding National Guard forces. It may be that the law proposed on 2014 will never pass. But the basic idea of local people leading in the provision of local security is a good one if we want to defeat Daesh and prevent a future successor to Daesh from emerging. In many ways all we are doing is to honor some of the spirit of the 2013 amendment to the Law on Governorates Not Organized in a Region (Law 21 of 2008), which sought to give the provinces more of a role in security policy.

There are also encouraging signs that the spirit of the National Guard and functioning federalism concepts is being followed. Tribal Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Police units have been activated in Fallujah, Haditha, Ramadi, Tikrit, Makhmour, Taji and Baghdad. These forces are recruited via a committee made up of the provincial governor, tribal sheikhs, sometimes the local Iraqi Army commander and a senior intelligence official responsible for vetting the candidates through national intelligence databases. Pay for the troops may come from a variety of sources: some are paid out of the PMU budget, some from MoD and some from shrine foundations. We can expect a growing number of Tribal Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Police units to continue to receive support at least until Daesh has been reduced to a terrorist-type threat. As with the PMU, some Tribal Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Police members will integrate into the permanent ISF, especially the Iraqi Police Service. A lot of lessons can be drawn from the experience of improvised Tribal Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Police units plus Al Abbas Combat Division for

43.Ibid, p. 11-12.

a more permanent arrangement for local security forces.

How to organize popular support for security

The issue that both the population mobilization and national guard draft legislation address is how to bring the people into the security system. This is a key challenge for Iraq. When the people have aligned with the security forces – during the 2005-2008 Awakening, in Ramadi in late 2013, and during the popular mobilization of 2014-2015 – the state has been greatly strengthened. Whenever the ISF have been alienated and separated from the people – most notably in Mosul prior to the city’s fall – the Iraqi state has found itself in a much weaker position.

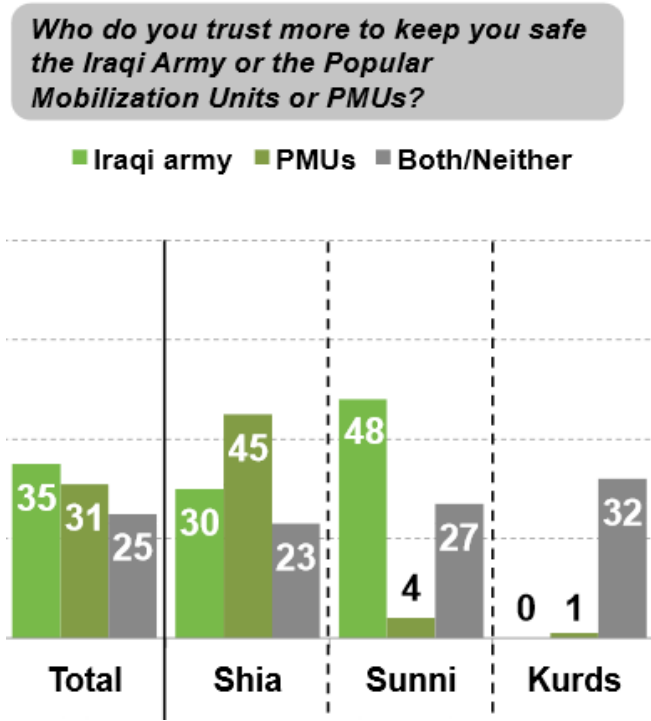


Figure 2 Greenberg Quinlan Rossner August/September 2015 poll for the National Democratic Institution. Of note, the margin of difference between the army and the PMU is not perhaps as great as might be expected in Shia respondents. In the Sunni communities demonstrated an ongoing level of confidence in the Iraqi Army as a neutral force and strong skepticism of PMU presence in Sunni areas.



It is possible that Iraq does not need a new institution to oversee a permanent state of popular mobilization, and that it does not need a new national guard. Instead Iraq needs to keep strengthening the institutions it already has. The Ministry of Defense is the right institution to manage the country's heaviest armed forces and the Ministry of Interior is the right institution to manage the country's police forces. These ministries should have reserve forces, for mobilization during crises and wartime, as practically every other developed country in the world does. In a future crisis the religious establishment could explicitly lend strength to these institutions as they call up the reserves in a well-practiced manner. The permanent ISF will recover its strength quickly if the ISF integrates enough PMU, Al-Abbas Combat Division, Tribal Security Force and Popular Mobilization Police personnel. A more determined effort by the federal and local governments to craft joint command relationships based on the Law on Governorates Not Organized in a Region will satisfy many of the requirements of the draft National Guard Law. This is how smart governments act. They don't abandon large state institutions and build entirely new structures: they fix them.

Rebuild Iraq's security sector leadership

At the heart of all of Iraq's security force weaknesses is a collective failure of leadership. It was Iraq's political leaders, alongside their American counterparts, that failed to put in place a more gradual reduction in U.S. military support to the part-completed ISF. Iraq's political leaders allowed, even encouraged, the staffing of the most senior command appointments with unqualified political appointees. Iraqi political and military leaders tolerated corruption that ruined the ISF. Key ministries were allowed to degrade in performance and funding. Political and military leaders failed to adopt the right counterinsurgency approaches that would have built on the gains in 2009-2010 and finished off Daesh's forerunner, the Islamic State of Iraq.

On the flipside, strong, smart leadership can help to reverse practically all of Iraq's military weaknesses now. Iraqi political and military leaders can work hard to maintain the cooperation of international security partners, particularly the United States, in finishing off the current war against Daesh. Iraqi political leaders can continue to re-staff the military with more capable uniformed leadership. Political and military leaders can push real anti-corruption reforms and the tough application of military laws. Smart leaders can chose to resist pressure to build

new institutions and instead can back the sensible option of developing existing institutions like MoD and MoI. And visionary leaders can fight the remainder of this war against Daesh in a manner that will support national reconciliation, using tools like the decentralization of local security decision-making and recruitment.

Iraq stands at a crossroads. The choice is very simple. Put the right people in charge of security and give them the right authorities and resources. Or witness the further deterioration of Iraq's stability and unity.

Reform the civilian security ministries and institutions

Under the Iraqi Constitution the ISF is under civilian control so the buck stops first at the civilian agencies and their leaders. The National Security Council needs to be encouraged and allowed to formulate an updated Iraqi National Security Strategy that will envisage Iraq's transition from Mid-Intensity Conflict to counterinsurgency to deterrence against regional states.⁴⁴ The parliament's Security and Defense Committee and the equivalent councils in the provinces need to be play a strengthened oversight role. The Board of Supreme Audit and the Integrity Commission need to likewise be closely involved in monitoring security budgets. Most importantly the security ministries need to be fixed before the armed forces can be expected to operate effectively. As one Iraqi Army officer told the author after the fall of Mosul: "this is not just the army's failure, it is the government's failure."⁴⁵

The Iraqi security ministries were hastily built, initially operated under very testing conditions, and then left to fend independently of U.S. support at too early a stage.⁴⁶ The Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) remains adrift from any ministry and not covered either by law or a budget line item: it should be incorporated formally into MoD, the ministry that it already informally shares personnel and resources with.⁴⁷ Decision-making at the ministries remains overcentralized on the ministers' offices, with the minister frequently required to sign off on low-

44. The last Iraqi national security strategy was released in 2007 and only looked out to 2010.

45. Author's interview with ISF officer C, October 2015.

46. An Unhappy Marriage: Civil-Military Relations in Post-Saddam Iraq Florence Gaub Carnegie Regional Insight January 13, 2016.

47. David Witty, The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, Brookings, 2015, available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/iraq-counter-service-witty/david-witty-paper_final_web.pdf

level decisions. Ministry processes are still overwhelmingly analog or paper-based instead of computerized, including payroll and equipment issue. Key systems and processes that were flagged as problems during U.S. withdrawal in 2010 have only gotten worse. These include planning programming, budgeting, budget execution, contractor support, plus maintenance and readiness inspection. Ministry positions are under-staffed and the educational and training standards of ministries remain low.⁴⁸ Even after initial rounds of reform, political favoritism has left many unqualified political appointees in place. As with the military, a major re-training “surge” is required in the civilian-led security ministries.

The ministry systems for planning, programming, budgeting and evaluation (PPBE) require particularly close attention. As the U.S. military ceased directly funding and administering parts of the ISF from 2009 onwards the number of major completed projects started to reduce. Iraq's ministries never managed to adopt true multi-year procurement or the sustainment spending plans (with maintenance built into future budgets) needed to develop effective military forces. Much of this is basic common sense: at a minimum Iraqi ministries have to ensure every arms procurement project includes a large spare parts clause and Arabic-language manuals to allow Iraqis to train other Iraqis how to use equipment. Iraq needs a Defense Resources and Requirements Board that can quickly develop a 3-5 year plan for ISF procurement, budgeting and sustainment. Initially this effort may require extensive international support, and many partner nations have the capacity to help. Tough decisions may be needed: for instance, until Daesh is defeated, should Iraq really be building air defence forces? Likewise Iraq is desperately in need of standardization in its vehicle fleets, with over 160 vehicle types in service.⁴⁹

Transform military leadership

The uniformed military leadership of the ISF also needs to be fixed from the top down. In 2013 RAND undertook an exhaustive analysis of 29 security sector reform processes and found that the more efficient kind of reform focused on the ministerial and senior leadership level, which provided the “foundational”

48. Ibid.

49. See Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110 - 252), September 30 2009, (pages dated January 29, 2010), pp. 58.

improvement that enabled all other kinds of security sector reform activities at the military unit level. This would certainly prove the case in Iraq where so many problems are anchored in weaknesses at the senior and mid command levels. Indeed when Mosul fell the Iraqi military was even much more broken at the top than it was at the bottom. Some changes have been made to the senior leadership since Mosul, and improvement is now showing. Iraqi troops can recapture Mosul and win other battles if they are allowed to train and operate under capable leadership that can manage battles and resources properly.

The first part of fixing the inverted triangle of the ISF – with too many senior leaders competing at the top and too few junior leaders working underneath – is to establish a powerful Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD) at the head of Iraq's Joint Headquarters (JHQ). Iraq needs one paramount uniformed officer who is the recognized military deputy to the prime minister of Iraq and the day-to-day commander of all ISF elements. This officer should be approved by parliament⁵⁰ and must not be appointed in an acting capacity by executive order, which could undermine the authority of the position.⁵¹ The CHOD should be an officer with robust military credentials and a strong institutional vision for ISF development. The CHOD appointment should not be shaped by ethno-sectarian quotas: Iraq must leave this destructive habit behind.⁵² He should be unafraid of intimidation from militias and political groups, protected by the government from both physical threats and political pressure. The CHOD must be given political backing to crack the whip by enforcing a strengthened military code of discipline, punishing military incompetence and corruption at all levels. He should encourage a culture of honest and timely reporting of bad news.⁵³

50. There is a strong argument that no acting ministers or senior generals should be allowed. Iraq should consider making explicit legislation to prohibit appointing the CHOD, his deputies and other officers of divisional command and higher from being employed in these roles for longer than two months, with appointed individuals forbidden from occupying that same position or any other senior position in the armed forces for one calendar year.

51. Restoring the Iraqi Army's Pride and Fighting Spirit Michael Knights and Jabbar Jaafar Aljazeera July 8, 2015 <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/restoring-the-iraqi-armys-pride-and-fighting-spirit>

52. Ibid.

53. Gaub makes many excellent points on the tendency of Iraqi leaders to hide bad news. An Unhappy Marriage: Civil-Military Relations in Post-Saddam Iraq Florence Gaub. Regional Insight January 13, 2016 available at <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/01/13/unhappy-marriage-civil-military-relations-in-post-saddam-iraq/im00>

The new CHOD must have full political backing to shuffle or replace any officer in the ISF, including his senior deputies for admin, operations, training, and logistics. No quota must stand in the way of the ISF's ability to defend the Iraqi people and territory.⁵⁴ The Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCOS Ops) should be Iraq's best battlefield commander. Working together with the CHOD and a strong JHQ planning cell, the DCOS Ops needs to transition the ISF from a force that cannot win tough urban battles without Coalition help to a force that can operate largely independently, much as Egypt's Lieutenant General Ahmed Ismail Ali fused Egyptian approaches with Soviet doctrine to build Egypt's successful operational plan to breach the Suez Canal defence line in 1973.⁵⁵ The CHOD needs to back DCOS Ops to ensure that ground forces work as effectively as possible with Iraq's increasingly powerful helicopter and air forces. The DCOS for Training has one of the most critical roles of any soldier in today's Iraq and he should be Iraq's best trainer of battalions, brigades and divisions. Likewise the DCOS for Logistics must be a proactive unorthodox officer who is willing to take risks and work around official systems, with strong support from ministers and the CHOD, to get equipment issue and maintenance working again.

The new CHOD also needs to undertake a "unity of effort" drive to fix the broken operational-level command and control arrangements at battlefield level. In the Ramadi battle there were five three-star or two-star generals controlling fronts with as few as two thousand frontline troops on duty – so corps-level and divisional-level commanders were leading forces closer to weak brigades in actual size. Over these forces were two main headquarters – the Combined Joint Operations Centre (CJOC), essentially filling in for a partial collapsed Anbar Operations Command, and the Baghdad Operations Command. Again we see the inverted pyramid with too many three-star generals commanding overlapping military regions and commands. Conflicting orders were often given regarding the movement of forces, creating gaps where outgoing forces

54. At present it is often the case that a division commander will be a Shia and the deputy a Sunni. This kind of appointment, independent of technical suitability to command, prevents many Iraqi units from achieving their potential.

55. Michael Eisenstadt, *Defeat into Victory: lessons for Rebuilding the Iraq Security Forces from Modern Arab Military Success Stories*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2015, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/Eisenstadt-IraqDefeatVictoryBrief-20150121.pdf>

have left before relieving forces arrived. This is how the collapses at Mosul and Ramadi began.

The CHOD must get the chain of command working properly again. The three-star Operations Commands (i.e., Baghdad Operations Command, Anbar Operations Command, and so on) remain very useful organizations. They control all ISF forces within clearly-defined areas of operation, and if a very powerful CHOD referees the situation, these lines can remain clear even if senior generals are trying to fight turf wars. The commander of the Iraqi Army General Depot Command at Taji should be a three-star general appointment (not a two-star as it presently is) so that the depot can interact with the other Operations Command (including the powerful Baghdad Operations Command, where it is located). The CHOD has to get the three-star Operations command generals under control. This will stop negative behaviour such as territorial disputes,⁵⁶ commandeering each other's forces and breaking up the cohesion of new divisions,⁵⁷ committing reserve units to sudden emergencies⁵⁸ and hoarding forces that are needed elsewhere.⁵⁹ As these behaviors occur less often, Iraqi operations will become more effective.



56. For instance along the seam of Baghdad Operations Command and Anbar Operations Command in Karma and the Tigris Canal, northwest of Baghdad.

57. Brigades intended for the Ramadi fight have been commandeered while passing through other Operations Command territories.

58. Such as the commitment of 71 Brigade of the Iraqi Army to contingencies twice during training.

59. As Table 2 showed, 48.1% of combat forces are held by the Baghdad Operations Command at a time when the battles of Ramadi and Bayji were raging.

Figure 3 Operations Commands (OCs) in Iraq. There is some mixed reporting over whether Babil Operations Command was collapsed into Furat Operations Command in December 2014 or whether it continues to operate. Likewise Samarra Operations Command and Salah al-Din Operations Command appear to overlap jurisdictions.

Combat leaders: Junior officers and NCOs

The final part of inverting the triangle of the ISF is that broaden the number of capable junior leaders at unit level, making a strong base that flows upwards to the clearly recognized military leadership of the CHOD. If the civilian agencies and senior military leadership is reformed that will have a good trickle-down effect on the junior leaders, but specific measures are also required to fix junior leadership. There are still far too many unqualified leaders at unit level, emplaced prior to the fall of Mosul when the officer and NCO cadre was new and when military commands were sold for their money-making potential. The low quality of many Iraqi Army junior officers is a much-cited cause of unit collapses, due to officer absenteeism, apathy or incompetence. In contrast the PMU gained the people's trust in 2014 because their junior officers were always with the troops and could boast combat experience.

There is a strong argument for undertaking a widespread purging of unqualified officers from the ISF. This may seem counter-intuitive in the midst of a war but there are many reasons this could be undertaken. First, large swathes of the ISF are not in battle every day. The forces of the Baghdad Operations Command function as a kind of reserve in which the officers might be selectively reorganized without risk of unit breakdowns. Other forces released from the Ramadi battle could also be re-officered. Currently the proportion of junior officers is relatively high because units are so gravely understrength. If brigades were amalgamated to bring them up to strength, there would be excess officers.⁶⁰ If PMU, Al-Abbas Combat Division, Popular Mobilization Police and Tribal Security Force officers were shifted into the Iraqi Army and Federal Police, this too would provide a set of experienced combat leaders.

There is also a precedent for such a purge. The Federal Police (known as the Iraqi National Police or INP until August 1, 2009) was heavily infiltrated by militias and sectarian criminals but was partially reformed by a determined

⁶⁰. This would obviously not please officers who corruptly purchased their commands, but their discomfort is not our concern.

Iraqi-led reform effort under an independent minister, Jawad Bolani, and a tough army commander, Lieutenant General Hussein al Awadi, who was empowered to replace corrupt or inept commanders. Thirty-five or the thirty-nine commanders of battalion-level and above were removed from the two FP divisions.⁶¹ 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.”⁶² “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.”⁶³

Iraq can fix its junior leader problem with a similarly determined, if more spread-out campaign today. In addition to sacking the worst junior officers the Iraqi leadership should focus on attracting more college graduates to military academies, as Egypt did after the 1967 disaster and as Iraq did in the mid-1980s as the Iran-Iraq War was going badly.⁶⁴ Iraq should prioritize good candidates with language skills, and should expand its Defense Language Institute quickly to remove the language barrier that reduces the value of international training and equipment. The new generation of Iraqi officers needs to treat Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) differently from prior generations of officers: the gap must reduce between officer and NCO in order that the latter can perform duties like guiding officer pilots onto targets or calling for artillery fire missions. Indeed boosting Iraq’s NCO cadre is the best way to keep more good officers alive, being that many of Iraq’s brightest young officers are the first to be killed because they are leading attacks in the manner that NCOs do in other armies. Above all, corruption must be taken out of the issue of senior officer, junior officer and NCO selection. Open-vote selection boards and careful anti-corruption efforts at

61. Perito, Robert M. «The Iraq Federal Police.» USIP, October 18, 2011: pg. 9. <http://www.usip.org/publications/the-iraq-federal-police>. The commanders of the two INP divisions, seven of the nine brigade commanders, twenty-five of the twenty-seven battalion commanders, and eight hundred rank and file personnel were removed from the INP.

62. Ibid. p 9.

63. “Interview of Major General Michael D. Jones Conducted by Dr. Kim Kagan.” Institute for the Study of War. Pg. 6. <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Maj%20Gen%20Jones%20Transcript%20PDF.pdf>

64. Eisenstadt, Defeat into Victory, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/Eisenstadt-IraqDefeatVictoryBrief-20150121.pdf>

recruitment centres and academies is vital if the ISF is to live up to its potential. There must be zero tolerance for absenteeism from here on out: as one tough old Iraqi officer told the author, “once an AWOL, always an AWOL.”⁶⁵

Sustainable Iraqi force generation

Iraq needs to bulk up its available forces quickly, to fill up the weak brigades and to staff the “enabler units” (artillery, logistics, transportation, etc). This is probably not the time to be doing deep thinking about whether Iraq needs a seventeen division Iraqi Army versus fifteen divisions. There will be plenty of time for that after Daesh. But nor should the immediate needs of the war negatively affect unit quality. If this war has taught Iraqi anything about its military, it is that units must be solidly built or they simply melt away and leave their equipment for the enemy. As discussed previously, men from the PMU, Al-Abbas Combat Division, Popular Mobilization Police and Tribal Security Force will be needed to fill out the permanent ISF. But they cannot be accepted wholesale without being qualified as fit for duty and trained. The previous post-2003 experience of incorporating the amalgamation (damaj) troops into the military suggests that unqualified recruits will only weaken the force.

Recruit and protect the new ISF

Alongside careful incorporation of PMU, Al-Abbas Combat Division, Popular Mobilization Police and Tribal Security Force troops the Iraqi government also needs to recruit heavily. Most modern states have identified national conscription as an expensive and ineffective way to develop military manpower. Instead volunteerism is the key. The Iraqi government needs to tap into some of the nationalistic energy that the popular mobilization utilized, and which energized many of the reform protests in the summer of 2015. Key themes that the Iraqi government should stress include the growing battlefield success of the Iraqi Army and Federal Police; the heavy equipment and advanced training that the international community is providing the permanent ISF; and the lifelong pay and benefits of joining the formal ISF. As the August/September 2015 poll on the next page shows, extra effort needs to be invested in making sure other sects recruits are attracted to the national cross-sectarian, multi-ethnic ISF.

More subtle messages also need to offset some of the fears and concerns of
65. Author's interview with ISF officer D, October 2015.

potential recruits. The Iraqi military needs to genuinely improve and publicize its combat lifesaving, casualty evacuation and combat surgical hospital capabilities. Force protection equipment and training needs to be publicized above all other forms of propaganda: body armour, fortifications, mine-protected vehicles, counter-mine training, chemical warfare defence equipment and Coalition overwatch – the eye in the sky. The government should consider schemes that promise military housing in protected gated communities, an important way to protect officers and their families from intimidation. Recruits from different sects, when traveling for training or transiting during leave, need to be well-protected.⁶⁶ One of the lessons of Fallujah and Mosul is that a patient ruthless enemy like Daesh can wear down any force, no-matter how strong, if given enough time and opportunities to attack troops and their families off-duty.

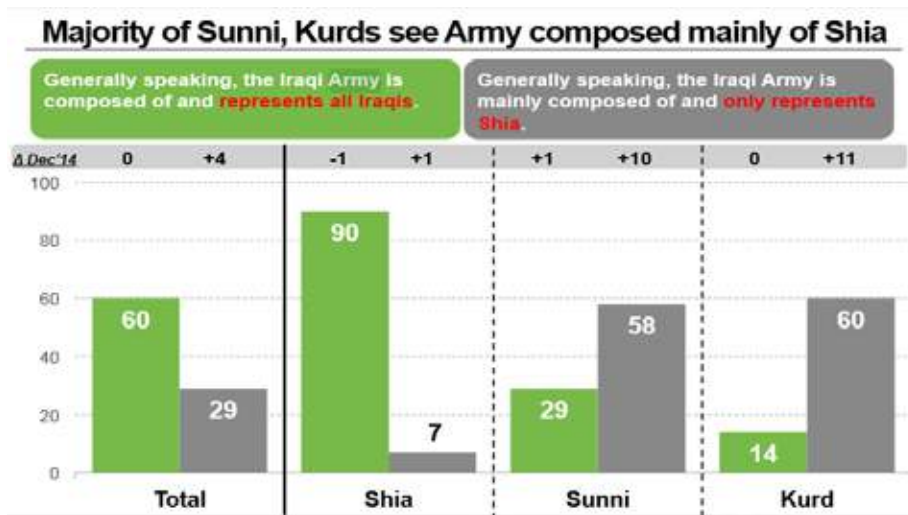


Figure 4 Greenberg Quinlan Rossner August/September 2015 poll for the National Democratic Institution.⁶⁷ Effort needs to be invested in restoring the reputation of the military as a non-sectarian institution. Quotas are not the best way to do this: a meritocratic system of recruiting, training and promoting is the best way to balance the need for inclusiveness and combat effectiveness.

Train the new military

66. As an example, CTS troops had their names and home addresses protected within the Iraqi government payroll system. This could be extended to other forces.

67. Greenberg Quinlan Rossner, Lack of Responsiveness Impacts Mood, August – September 2015 Survey Findings, available at https://www.ndi.org/files/August%202015%20Survey_NDI%20Website.pdf



Iraq should embark on a training campaign that fuses traditional local basic training approaches with adapted international standards in advanced training. This is how regional militaries have overcome major operational challenges in the past: Egypt prior to the 1973 war, Iraq in the build-up to the very successful 1988 offensives, and Lebanese Hezbollah in the 2006 war against Israel.

The first steps – basic training to take the recruit from civilian to soldier – can take place at Iraq's numerous surviving military academies, divisional training centres and other locations.⁶⁸ Though these sites need some development to maximize retention of recruits and the efficiency of training – better food, water and air conditioning – they are essentially functional.

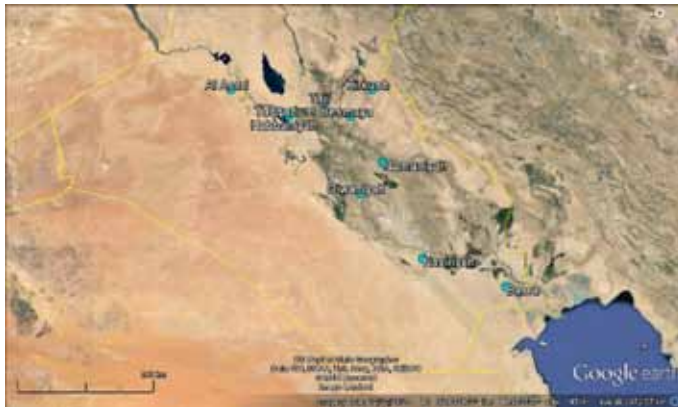


Figure 5 Training bases and military academy (Nasiriyah). Besmaya is the key facility. Numerous smaller divisional training centres, Al Abbas Combat Division and PMU training bases dot the map. There are also major federal police training areas at Camp Dublin in Baghdad. Divisional training sites at Mosul, Kisik and Kirkuk were lost in 2014. Nonetheless, Iraq's training infrastructure survived the summer of 2014 essentially intact.

Tough Iraqi-style training was absent for much of the Coalition occupation of Iraq. In the old army there had been significant stress on fundamental military discipline issues such as dress, bearing, drill, marching, saluting, soldierly conduct, physical exercise and professionalism. Troops polished their boots, tidied their beds and rooms and ironed clothes. Physical training was brutal

68. Even the Al-Abbas Combat Division has a network of 120 small basic training bases spread across Iraq. See Interview with senior supervisor of PMF Al-Abbas Brigade, affiliated to Al-Abbas shrine in Karbala run by Sistani rep Safi, 4 Jun 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJfKXmjA8Y4>

and discipline could be severe. Under the Coalition Iraqi troops instead received high-quality cooked food, limited physical exercise, and experienced limited discipline. They also were never forced to submit to the military life in the way they had under the old army. As one officer noted: “They don’t even shave their hair now. Shaving the hair is important because the recruit realizes ‘it’s real now, you are a soldier; this is your identity.’” Before 2003, the soldier could not easily blend back into civilian life: after 2003 it became very easy for recruits to dip in and out of service as they pleased. Iraqi basic training needs to be restored to old army standards to whatever extent possible.

Many lessons have been learned, both prior to the fall of Mosul and since, about the best way to provide advanced training to ISF units. International training efforts have been increasingly tailored to Iraqi culture and the practical needs of troops. Gone are the days when the United States tried to build a clone of its own forces: the limited scale of the Coalition on-the-ground commitment since 2014 has forced the U.S.-led Coalition to adopt more modest goals. The package of individual and collective training (squad, platoon and company) is focused on simple combat skills: counter-explosives, combat life-saving, weapons training, small unit maneuvers plus specialist skills packages. Coalition trainers have recognized the need to focus on narrow skill-sets appropriate to today’s Iraqi battlefield, driven home by rote memorization of drills and repetition.

Most importantly the Coalition trainers learned that six weeks of training was insufficient, that training must not be interrupted for any reason, and that troops must be deployed straight to combat after completing training or their skills quickly degrade. A longer ten-week training program is now standard, allowing more time for skills development, for officer and NCO training, and for realistic simulated battle exercises with pyrotechnics. As a senior Iraqi NCO told the author: “I have to stress him (the soldier] as hard as I can before he goes into combat.”

This underlines the importance of improving key training facilities like Besmaya, where training of any scale and using any ordnance can be undertaken. As the Coalition does not spend money on permanent infrastructure this is fully an Iraqi responsibility. Centres like the Iraqi Sapper School at Besmaya (a combat engineering academy) need funding support. Iraq also needs to allocate significant ongoing funding, programmed across multiple years, to pay for equipment and

munitions at training centres. In locations like Taji and Abu Ghraib the Iraqi Army Artillery School is limited to drilling recruits on imaginary howitzers chalked out on the ground because of a lack of artillery pieces. Likewise many training areas lack the weapons, equipment and ammunition required to properly train troops and this situation will only get worse as international training efforts tail off in the coming years. To prevent a repletion of the collapse of ISF training after U.S. withdrawal the Iraqi military needs to put in place a major training surge under a high-quality DCOS for Training.

Fix the logistical system

When the U.S. military left Iraq it left behind a partially completed but nonetheless mammoth logistical system. The South Taji Maintenance Depot is a mile-wide collection of repair facilities for engines, generators, radios and weapons. The North Taji Maintenance Depot is similar sized, with workshops for tracked and wheeled vehicles. The MoI likewise has vehicle maintenance and logistics complexes in Taji. National Supply Depots still exist at Taji, Numaniyah, Basra, Habbaniyah, Iskandariyah, Kirkush and Nasiriyah. Every Iraqi Army division had a Location Command for receiving and redistributing logistics and the Federal Police had a Sustainment Brigade in Salman Pak. The U.S. military built everything imaginable: Bakery units, pipeline repair units, well-drilling units, and on and on. Much of this highly valuable infrastructure and equipment could be salvaged in a national campaign to fix ISF logistics. Indeed there are still hundreds of millions of dollars of pre-2011 U.S.-provided military equipment sitting in warehouses in Taji in crates that have never been opened let alone distributed to the units that badly need these supplies. This is a national disgrace: so much unused materiel while frontline troops go without.



Figure 6: Surviving National Depot locations for the Iraqi Army and Federal Police (Salman Pak). The serviceability of Bayji and Habbaniyah are greatly reduced. Northerly depots at Mosul and Kisik were destroyed.

At the moment it can take the signatures of three three-star generals and the minister of defence to release a shipment of Humvee tires from Taji to a military unit. Depot commanders are still hesitant to release equipment to where it is needed. Logistics commanders remain fearful of trusting electronic systems, feeling they can minimize theft and loss if they stick to paper systems and sign-offs that they are more familiar with. But what is needed is a return to the past, when the Iraqi military was actually very good at logistics during the 1970s and 1980s. The damage caused by sanctions and the post-2003 dis-establishment of the military wrecked the existing system and the replacement U.S. system was too complex and was never completed. Iraq needs an inspired DCOS for Logistics and a new empowered three-star head of the Iraqi Army General Depot Command at Taji to take charge and get equipment issue and maintenance moving again. Leadership – not complex new systems – can bring near-term improvement. Iraq could inventory what it already has, forgotten in its many warehouses, and discover surprising reserves of equipment through a national salvage effort. In the context of stronger military discipline and positive examples from senior officers, authority for the issue of equipment could be loosened and the culture of risk aversion could slowly reduce.

International security assistance

The wholesale redesign of Iraq's security sector was never completed by the U.S.-led Coalition. The experience of nearly a decade of intense international security cooperation threw up both positive and negative experiences, as well as many lessons to be learned about how the ISF should work with international partners. During 2003-2011 Iraq had limited choice with regard to its security partners as the Coalition was at first the occupying power, then the main funder of ISF development. By the time the Coalition withdrew Iraq was tied into a range of large equipment procurements involving the U.S. defence sector, was required to maintain huge fleets of donated U.S. equipment, and in any case funding and Iraq's capacity to administer weapons purchases were limited. From 2011-2014 Iraq had quite limited interaction with international security partners, with the exception of controversial arms purchases from Russia that subsequently were linked to high-profile corruption cases.

New security partners since 2014

Since the fall of Fallujah there have been two main channels of international security assistance coming to Iraq. Much attention has focused on the new provision of Russian, Iranian, Lebanese Hezbollah and Chinese military assistance. These actors moved much faster than the U.S.-led Coalition to provide certain types of combat equipment and training during 2014.

By July 1, 2014, Iran delivered seven (former Iraqi) Su-25 ground attack aircraft directly to Baghdad, complete with ordnance and support packages.⁶⁹ Iran also loaned Mohajer-4 drones and pilots to act as forward air controllers for the Su-25 fleet.⁷⁰ Iran provided ammunition, advisors,⁷¹ signals and electronic intelligence,⁷² Iranian Dehlaviyeh copies of Kornet-E anti-tank guided missiles,⁷³

69. Nadimi, Iran's Expanding Military Role in Iraq (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2014).

70. Nadimi, Iran's Expanding Military Role in Iraq.

71. Nadimi, Farzim. «Iran Is Expanding Its Military Role In Iraq In A Bunch Of Ways.» Washington Institute for Near East Policy Policywatch 2312, September 10, 2014; Blanford, Nicholas. "Why Hezbollah is playing a smaller role in this Iraqi conflict». Christian Science Monitor, July 16, 2014

72. Gordon, Iran Secretly Sending Drones and Supplies into Iraq

73. "Iraqi Army Uses Russian Anti-Tank Guided Missile Systems Against IS for First Time." Sputnik News, September 9, 2014. <http://sputniknews.com/military/20140922/193173741/Iraqi-Army-Uses-Russian-Anti-Tank-Guided-Missile-Systems-Against.html>

and artillery systems ranging from HM-21 122mm multiple rocket launchers (MRLs) to jeep-based HM-14 107mm MRLs to Improvised Rocket-Assisted Mortars (IRAMs).⁷⁴ Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah trainers have supported these systems at PMU training locations and on the battlefield.

Russia bolstered Iraq's firepower with quick-turnaround deliveries of five Su-25 ground attack aircraft, sixteen Mi-35M and thirteen Mi-28NE attack helicopters plus four TOS-1A short-range thermobaric MRLs.⁷⁵ 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 28 Mi-35M and fifteen Mi-28NE attack helicopters (plus 42-50 mobile SA-22 Pantsir low-level air defense systems) in a \$5 billion deal.⁷⁶ In 2015 China provided some CH4B Rainbow armed drones with a Hellfire-type missile, the HJ-10.⁷⁷ The first two of fifteen Czech L-159 advanced armed trainer jets arrived in Iraq in November 2015.⁷⁸

74. This rocket is called Al-Qahir (at least that's the way the rebels call it) and has been seen first in the hands of Asaib Ahl Al-Haq). See: Higgins, Elliot. "New Heavy Short Range Rockets Deployed By Pro-Syrian Government Forces." Bellingcat, July 16, 2014. For evidence of the Iranian HM-21 MRL in Iraqi use, see: Now in Iraq the Badr Organization, there were Iranian 122 mm MLRS HM-20, video posted by Mohammad al-Iraqi al-Koufa: "terrifying...the heroes of the Badr Brigades demolishing evil ISIS nests in the village of Haliwa," October 4, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYImJz7mUo0#t=51>

75. "Iraq Receives Russian Jets as It Takes Fight to Militants," AFP, June 29, 2014; Russian TOS-1A thermobaric MLRS at Baghdad Int. Airport see: pic.twitter.com/VcC0LG13QS; "Iraq Gets Third Batch of Russian Mi-35M Helicopters," Sputnik News, October 1, 2014; Arms Think Tank MOSCOW, October 1 (RIA Novosti) [http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20141001 ... Think.html](http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20141001...Think.html)

76. "Baby Come Back: Iraq is Buying, Fielding Russian Weapons Again," Defense Industry Daily, November 3, 2014, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/baby-come-back-iraq-is-buying-russian-weapons-again-07571/>

77. Defense Blog, New Iraqi CH-4B Drones now in Operation from Kut Airbase, Oct 10, 2015, available <http://defence-blog.com/news/new-iraqi-ch-4b-drones-now-in-operation-from-kut-air-base.html>

78. Gareth Jennings, Iraq receives first L-159 jets from the Czech Republic, IHS Jane's Defence Weekly, 4 November 2015, available at <http://www.janes.com/article/55766/iraq-receives-first-l-159-jets-from-the-czech-republic>

The U.S.-led Coalition

Though slower to provide whole new weapons systems the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) allied with Iraq has nonetheless provided more direct combat power and more security assistance than any other group of international partners. Emergency supply of the ISF has included emergency provision of ammunition,⁷⁹ missiles,⁸⁰ plus vehicle⁸¹ and light helicopter⁸² spare parts for the mass of U.S. equipment used by the Iraqi military. Since the fall of Mosul the U.S. government has continued to process large-scale logistical support contracts for the ISF to offset their operational losses in vehicles and artillery pieces.⁸³ The United States also committed full equipment sets, provided at a cost of \$1.24 billion to the U.S. taxpayer, to rebuild nine Iraqi Army brigades and one Tribal Security Force. The Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) included equipment for 45,000 Iraqi Army soldiers, including everything from new personal protective equipment to sufficient 120mm mortars to equip three divisional artillery units. The

79. 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>

80. "Iraq Wants Hellfires – Lots and Lots of Them," Defense Industry Daily, October 9, 2014. <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/iraq-wants-hellfires-lots-and-lots-of-them-026078/>. In July 2014 Iraq requested and was approved to receive 5,000 AGM-114K/N/R Hellfire missiles and associated equipment. They have thus far purchased over two thousand Hellfires in sales going back to 2009.

81. The Foreign Military Sales Order II (FMSSO II) will "provide funds for blanket order requisitions, under a Cooperative Logistics Supply Agreement (CLSSA) for spare parts to support M1A1 Battle Tanks, M1070 Heavy Equipment Tactical Trucks, M88A1/2 Tank Recovery Vehicles, M113 Vehicles, M198 Towed Howitzers, M109A5 Self Propelled Howitzers, High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV), Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Trucks (HEMTT), heavy and light machine guns, common repair sets, and additional authorized items with associated equipment and services. The estimated cost is \$600 million." See: "Iraq – Foreign Military Sales Order II (FMSSO II) Transmittal No. 14-53." Defense Security Cooperation Agency. <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/iraq-foreign-military-sales-order-ii-fmso-ii>

82. 5-year continuation of contractor logistics support for its Bell 407 (T-407 and IA-407), OH-58, and Huey II helicopters.

83. Smith, Rich. "Defense News: Pentagon Rushes Millions of Dollars Worth of Weapons to Iraq." The Motley Fool, November 15, 2014. <http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2014/11/15/defense-news-pentagon-rushes-millions-of-dollars-w.aspx>

appropriation includes 3,496 tactical vehicles (Hummers, trucks, fuel tankers and engineering vehicles).⁸⁴ The U.S. not only delivers this equipment and logistical support but also pays for Iraqi contractors to deliver by road it to the point of issue to Iraqi units. The United States also provided Iraq's first jets capable of dropping precision-guided munitions, the F-16IQ Block 52 multi-role aircraft, now being flown over Iraq by Iraqi pilots.⁸⁵ A major \$1.95 billion for the eighteen aircraft F-16IQ was signed in January 2016 to provide over fourteen thousand bombs and missiles for the fleet.⁸⁶

Beyond U.S. provision of equipment the Coalition also plays a critical role in the training and operations of the ISF. Two expeditionary advise-and-assist operations centers were developed in Baghdad and Erbil to provide support for the Iraqis.⁸⁷ The U.S. has committed a corps-level headquarters to assist Iraq in managing operations and a brigade combat team of over a thousand troops to oversee the training alongside large contingents of Australian, New Zealander, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese troops.⁸⁸ CJTF is now embedded within twelve

84. Office of the Secretary of Defense Department of Defense, Budget Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Amendment - Justification for FY 2015 Overseas Contingency Operations - Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF). November 2014, see http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY15_ITEF_J_ook_Final_November_20-2014.pdf

85. Iraq's F-16s will give the country a combination of fast jet responsiveness and precision strike capability that Iraq currently lacks. The aircraft will carry AN/AAQ-33 SNIPER or AN/AAQ-28 LITENING targeting pods and a range of television and laser-guided munitions. See: Marshall C., Tyrone, "Iraqi Pilots to Train on Iraqi-purchased F-16s in Arizona" DoD News, November 10, 2014. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123611>

86. Iraq - F-16 Weapons, Munitions, Equipment, and Logistics Support Jan. 20, 2016 <http://www.dscamilitary.com/major-arms-sales/iraq-f-16-weapons-munitions-equipment-and-logistics-support>

87. See "Obama signals <new phase> against Islamic State in Iraq," BBC, November 9, 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29979042>; Ruoulo, Claudette, "President Authorizes Additional Troops for Counter-ISIL Effort" DoD News, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123595>; Also see: Babb, Carla "US Accelerates Training in Iraq's Anbar Province." Voa News, November 17, 2014. <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-accelerates-training-in-iraq-anbar-province/2522705.html>; "Dempsey says battle with ISIS starting to turn, U.S. forces already in Anbar." Reuters, November 17, 2014. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Nov-17/277864-dempsey-says-battle-with-isis-starting-to-turn-us-forces-already-in-anbar.ashx>

88. See a CJTF update on the training program at http://www.fayobserver.com/military/soldiers-from-fort-bragg-s-rd-brigade-combat-team-prepare/article_275e0960-eeef-5d8d-ae55-

Iraqi headquarters, intimately involved in the joint management of key battles like Tikrit, Bayji and Ramadi. The Iraqi-CJTF partnership is extremely powerful and mutually beneficial. At the time of writing the Coalition had undertaken 6,713 airstrikes in Iraq since August 2014, destroying a total of 20,352 targets and counting.

Almost all of Iraq's battlefield intelligence is derived from CJTF and the Coalition provides the only clear picture of the evolving front line positions. Coalition air and intelligence assets provide the vast majority of intelligence on Daesh targets beyond the frontline. In comparison the so-called quadrilateral intelligence-sharing centre launched by Iran, Russia, and the Assad regime is almost inactive with Russian involvement reduced from flag officer to junior officer representation. In the near-term at least the Coalition is an indispensable partner in the battle of Mosul and the pursuit phase that will see the war transfer to the deserts and borders, requiring even more technology, intelligence and logistics.

Looking ahead: The United States in 2017 and beyond

One key unknown for Iraq is the posture that the United States may choose to take under a new president in 2017 and beyond. The U.S. president has almost complete control of U.S. foreign and security policy and their preferences can strongly shape U.S. engagement with foreign security partners. Though it is too early to even identify the party candidates – “primary” races are still being fought to select the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees – it is likely that the United States will sustain a significant level of commitment to finishing off Daesh in the opening years of a new presidency. It is highly significant that the outgoing Obama administration has ramped up its level of military support to the anti-Daesh fight in terms of intensified train-and-equip activities, partnered raiding with Iraqi government permission, and loosened airstrike rules of engagement. The next president does not need to make a decision about escalation: the United States is already providing as much military assistance as Iraq is willing to accept. The U.S. is presently offering options – such as Apache helicopter close air support – that may be accepted by the Iraqi government in the battle of Mosul or which may be rejected. But the point is that a new more robust approach is already in place.

The option facing the next president would be whether to sustain this level of effort or power down. It is likely that the battle of Mosul will still be underway, in its closing stages, and the next U.S. president, whoever they are, will be entirely committed to that struggle. The choice facing the new president will be: is our job done in Iraq, or should we extend our support to help into helping Iraq secure its borders and transition to counter-insurgency? The next president, whether a Republican or Democrat, is likely to be mindful of the experience of 2011-2014, when the defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq was allowed to regenerate as Daesh.

This may convince either a Democrat or Republican successor to Obama to keep up the pressure on Daesh remnants in Iraq through basing of an ongoing special operations task force, if federal Iraq will permit such a U.S. involvement or perhaps a lower-profile Kurdistan-based equivalent if Baghdad politics do not allow a long-term U.S. presence in federal Iraq.⁸⁹ There will also be a willingness of an expanded U.S.-led Coalition to undertake sustained train and equip programs to get the ISF on a long-term stable footing. The experience of the 2011 withdrawal from Iraq will loom large over the new administration: Republicans will be hesitant to repeat the same error they believe was made by the Obama administration in 2009 by withdrawing too completely. Hillary Clinton or another Democratic president would be looking for a way to downscale U.S. support without further destabilizing Iraq. All parties will be focused on building up a cross-sectarian ISF and Kurdish forces to secure gains made in Iraq and eventually to finish the task of defeating Daesh in Iraq. This points towards the presence of a large U.S.-backed training effort in Iraq, possibly involving significant non-U.S. training contingents (mainly from NATO and G-8 countries presently in the Coalition). A U.S.-led coalition will probably be very willing to help Iraq institute a strengthened border security system in Anbar and southern Nineveh.

Iraq should not expect the next U.S. president to champion ideas regarding Iraq that are radically different from the ones currently being pursued by the United States. A lot of heated words will be said during the election campaign but in reality the options open to a president are limited. American leaders know that deploying U.S. ground forces to Iraq is increasingly neither necessary nor

89. This paragraph and the following ones are adapted from Michael Knights, *The Next U. S. President and Iraq: U. S. - Iraqi Relations and the War Against Daesh*. Al-Bayan Center, July 2015, <http://www.bayancenter.org/2015/08/790>

possible considering Iraqi objections to the option. All candidates show a strong preference for intensified commitment of U.S. special forces and airpower, a popular low-risk option and fits with most candidates' view of the anti-Daesh struggle as an extension of the counter-terrorism war against Al-Qaeda, not a nation-building mission with "boots on the ground." Ideas about a second Sunni "awakening" and direct arming of the Sunnis are quickly dropping off in Washington as the ISF secure ground with the cooperation of Sunni tribes. U.S. politicians will continue to discuss a closer U.S. relationship with the Kurds but Washington will be cautious not to be forced into a position where it has to choose between Baghdad or Erbil. The next president may be a lot more focused on containing Iran's influence in the region, including in Iraq, and may be keen to see Iraq choose U.S. security partnership over Iran.

Iraq's future security partnerships

As Iraq recovers from the Daesh crisis it will have more choice regarding its preferred security partners that at any point since the Iran-Iraq War. It will be a time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different partners and to work out how the strengths of security cooperation partners might be combined to give Iraq the best support. In the aforementioned RAND analysis of 29 cases of security cooperation the following indicators were present in cases of successful security cooperation:

- The partners share national security interests and concerns. Optimal partner nations will share vital security interests and mutual threat perceptions with Iraq.⁹⁰ The RAND report notes that a country may receive less support if its different security partners are not aligned with each other, as in the case of the United States and Iran or Russia, for instance.⁹¹
- Consistency and sustainment are vital. Steady engagement over the long term is 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

90. The Long Haul, p. 41.

91. Ibid, p. 42.

capabilities to facilitate sustainment.”⁹² This means Iraq will benefit most from working with partners who can provide a “total package” of not only weapons but support and security sector reform assistance.

- Partners who improve absorptive capacity. The RAND study highlighted the importance of allies who want to help increase the nation’s ability to absorb foreign security assistance. The report particularly stressed the development of “ministerial capacity (the capability of a 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.”⁹³ So Iraq should focus on partners that want to strengthen state institutions.
- Partners should be willing to tailor security cooperation to match 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 receiving nation. Likewise, security cooperation must be phased and geared to fit with the absorptive capacity of the receiving nation at the time when the assistance is delivered.⁹⁴

These factors suggest that Iraq will face a difficult challenge in integrating the different streams of security cooperation coming from the U.S.-led Coalition on one hand and the Russian-Iranian axis on the other. This has already been somewhat difficult, as shown by the tussles over whether the Iranian-backed PMU elements or Coalition-backed permanent ISF should lead the battle of Tikrit. What can be said is that Iraq probably benefits from engaging with both sides: Russian and Iran can be very helpful at short notice and Iraq can use their presence as a lever to get more out of the United States and other Western partners. Some of their weapons systems – main battle tanks and attack helicopters – are probably better-suited to Iraq than massively complex U.S.-provided equivalents. And the U.S.-led Coalition ultimately offers a more impressive package of assistance, including major direct provision of airstrikes and intelligence and longer-term assistance with security sector reform. The trick is locking in long-term Western

92. Ibid, pp. xx, 33-42.

93. Ibid, p. 34.

94. Ibid, pp. 35-37.

commitment to Iraq's security.

To achieve this commitment Iraq needs to invest effort in establishing some joint ventures that can outlast the present war against Daesh. There are already discussions underway with the Coalition about building long-term internationally-backed military training "Centres of Excellence" in Iraq. The idea is to program long-term training and sustainment and provide a gradual way of reducing reliance on external security partners and allowing Iraq to do more itself without a sudden loss of capability, as occurred post 2011. It may seem like a tough commitment to make in the middle of a war but Iraq should send more of its promising officers for language training and send them abroad for professional military education. Both officers and NCOs should be encouraged to travel overseas for training – whether close by in Jordan or further afield in Europe, Australia or the United States – with a generous support package. This means full pay while training, subsidized travel to allow periods of leave to return and see family, and the understanding that successful education and training typically brings a promotion. As an example Iraq should send numerous students to U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs and should ensure they do not face any negative treatment at home as a result. The benefit is to Iraq – and anyone who cannot see that may not have the country's best interests at heart.

Conclusion

This report has made some simple observations regarding where the ISF has been, where it is now, and where it is heading. Readers may disagree with some points and agree with others. The aim is to provide food for thought and a foil for informed debate on these issues. Iraqis will lead that debate. Only Iraqis can choose the future of their country and their security forces.

The paper has made the judgment that there are tangible signs of progress in the rebuild of the Iraqi Security Forces. Initially after the fall of Mosul there was certainly an urgent need for popular mobilization but increasingly such forces are unable to play a decisive role in the urban battles in northern and western Iraq. Leadership is shifting to the permanent ISF – the Iraqi Army and the Federal Police – as the battle moves to Mosul and thereafter the deserts and borders. Iraq is not best served by discarding its large existing ministries and military machine

in favor of brand new institutions like a permanent popular mobilization or a national guard. Instead Iraq needs to complete the job of developing its ministries and applying its provincial powers legislation.

The current rebuild of the ISF is the second major effort since 2003. This time it will be led by Iraqis. A wider range of international partners will contribute. There is a lot of reason to hope that Iraqis can finish the job of building a set of loyal, effective security institutions. The new leadership of the Joint Headquarters, of the Combined Joint Operations Centre and of the various Operations Commands and divisions are already making important changes and winning battles. The veterans of the PMU, the Al-Abbas Combat Division, the Popular Mobilization Police, and the Tribal Security Forces will add their experience to the ISF. The next generation of young people have the potential to make great ministry civilians, officers, NCOs and soldiers. As one soldier told the author: “Look at the protestors, look at the Iraqi flags: that is the Iraqi Army of tomorrow.”

If we strip away all the details the problems of the ISF are leadership problems. Ambassador Ryan Crocker hit the nail on the head when he wrote: “Iraqis have a strong military tradition. They’ve got good soldiers. They need good leadership [...] The Iraqi military is not rotten to the core. It was rotten at the top.”⁹⁵ The ISF is still an inverted triangle with too many competing leaders at the top and too few competent junior leaders at unit level. The appointment of an empowered strong Chief of Defense Staff could change everything. He needs the authority to sack anyone and the confidence to delegate to trusted deputies. He must lead by example and enforce military law and standards. The corrupt and incompetent must be purged from the military: the remainder must be trained up to a high level. As an Iraqi Army trainer told the author: “The army is weak, only discipline and training will make it strong.”

Near-term priorities

Iraq’s priorities in 2016-2017 are to continue to rebuild the ISF to support the liberation of the remaining Daesh-held cities including Mosul, Tall Afar, and Hawijah. Iraq is already doing many of the things it needs to be doing to

95. Q&A: Ryan Crocker on Iraq’s Role in the Long War Against ISIL September 28, 2014 By Bernard Gwertzman, Council on Foreign Relations <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2014/09/ryan-crocker-iraqs-role-long-war-against-isil/95273/>

ensure success in these battles, particularly the new ten-week training program and specialized combined arms breaching and engineering training modules. The political-military aspects of these battles are vital: local Sunni stakeholders must be engaged and brought into the planning and execution of the battles. The international Coalition's help will be vital in liberating these cities at acceptable cost and minimal damage, requiring caution in the deployment of some elements of the PMU in these battles. Coalition intelligence, airpower and special operations will provide the ISF with decisive advantages. Baghdad-Erbil coordination will also be vital in making the battle run smoother and with fewer casualties.

The build-up to these battles should be gradual and careful: it is better to do the attack once and do it right. ISF units should receive as much training and equipment as they can in the months before moving up to the northern battlefields. The new units should be told exactly what sectors and tasks they will be assigned, and allowed to undertake mission analysis and train for those geographies and tasks. When tactical assembly areas have been gained close to Mosul the assault brigades should undertake realistic training on mock-up areas that resemble the actual battlefields on which they will be fighting. As numerous famous commanders have noted, the more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in combat. In contrast to Ramadi, where a long indecisive seventeen month battle preceded the final liberation, the battle of Mosul should be all preparation, then burst of short, sharp decisive action. This will lessen casualties and destruction within Iraq's second largest city. As Mosul is far larger than any city liberated so far the ISF should break it down into segments and clear these one after another – like fighting 4-5 Tikrit battles in a row.

Mid-term priorities

After the cities are liberated the war will partially shift from 2017 onwards to the deserts of Nineveh and Anbar province, particularly the border with Syria. Some of this border will already be secured from the Syrian side by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF, the Syrian Kurd and Arab allies). Strong efforts should be put into coordinating with the SDF, perhaps with the assistance of the U.S.-led Coalition and the Kurdistan-based Counter-Terrorism Group, both of whom work closely with the Syrian factions. Other parts of the border are completely open and should be the areas that the Iraqi government prioritizes for its new border security effort.

Iraqi leaders will be bombarded with expensive technologically-complex schemes for border security systems such as the \$12 billion system being built in Saudi Arabia. But costs aside, what Iraq needs in the coming years is not a fancy high-tech system but an effective system that focuses on supporting the men and machines that can close down the border. The line of border forts and checkpoints failed in 2012-2013 even when they were heavily reinforced with Iraqi Army units from the south. This was because each post was isolated and lacked resupply. Morale was low, desertion high, and the posts could be overrun due to a lack of air support and quick reaction forces (QRF). As Iraq extends its forces back along the Syrian border it will find many, probably most, of the 51 border forts partially demolished. The new border garrison will need places to live, plus regular supplies of food, water and supplies. Forts, berms, ditches and barbed wire will need to be repaired. The convoys bringing supplies in and rotating soldiers out will need protection. Each post will need its own mine clearance forces to defuse the bombs laid around each fort and on patrol routes. Aerial surveillance will be needed to monitor enemy penetration routes. The forts will need a helicopter-borne QRF force and air cover to help forts under attack. Local desert scouts and tribal forces will be needed to show smuggler routes to the ISF and to win over the tribes by offering them employment. This is a massive undertaking that needs to unfold step-by-step with powerful international assistance. First the Points of Entry must be secured, then the main smuggler routes, and finally the whole border.

At the same time as the border is being closed the ISF must transition to counterinsurgency (COIN) to prevent a new Daesh uprising in the liberated areas. This will be partly a counter-terrorism mission, rooting out Daesh leadership and cells, but the COIN effort will also focus on reducing the level of local sympathy for Daesh or similar organizations. The Iraqi government should undertake an immediate review of COIN best practices and lessons learned from the last decade. This should be commissioned by the Iraqi prime minister, defence minister and CHOD and should be undertaken by a panel of Iraqi officers who had the most success at population-focused COIN in the last decade. This could produce a practical Iraqi doctrine of counter-insurgency that could be taught to officers. The doctrine would be a civil-military approach that aimed to keep the ISF connected to the local population, not alienated from them. Aspects of provincial powers legislation and the National Guard concept could be worked

into the doctrine, creating a standardized “playbook” for Iraqi commanders as they move into liberated areas and begin working with local communities.

“Right-sizing” the Iraqi military

A blueprint for the re-design of the ISF is too large a task for this study, and it is an Iraqi responsibility, but the above sections do provide some insights that should guide future force design. Iraq needs security forces that can flexibly change size and shape according to the country's needs. During crises the force needs to be able to expand, suggesting a reserve forces structure where trained personnel can be kept on-call even if they are not always employed full-time. The force also needs to have a lot more agility than the ISF of the last decade. A somewhat smaller ISF is likely to emerge from the current crisis – for instance not the 17-plus division Iraqi Army but a smaller force of around a dozen divisions or less – and this will mean there are not Iraqi Army forces in every province. Crises will not always happen where forces are concentrated, requiring the ISF to be able to re-deploy en masse to other parts of Iraq and to bases themselves in the new area. ISF units are going to need to be a lot more mobile, able to relocate and their logistics will need to be “expeditionary,” able to pick up and go.

In terms of what units the ISF should rebuild, the key lesson from the last decade has been the need to build support units in the right proportion to combat brigades. The pre-2011 force was hopelessly out of balance, with too few support units for the total number of combat brigades. There is no point rebuilding whole units or filling out weak combat brigades if the government does not invest in building support units in the right proportions to match. In 2010 the Iraqi Army, for instance, had 192,687 troops assigned to the combat brigades and 42,383 assigned to support units, and even this ratio was deemed to give only half of the needed support units. Today the Iraqi Army has 54 combat brigades and around 81,000 combat troops in those brigades. Using the above numbers as a guide, the correct number of support forces for this army would be 48,000. Thus a rule-of-thumb would suggest that for every 100,000 combat troops the ISF needs to be providing around 60,000 support forces. In parallel with filling out weak combat brigades the Iraqi government needs to undertake an ever more aggressive program of “catching up” in the creation of engineering, artillery, logistical, medical, communications and intelligence units.