BEN CONNABLE

Iraqi Army Will to Fight

A Will-to-Fight Case Study with Lessons for Western Security Force Assistance

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Preface

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Will to Fight Cases, Modeling, Gaming, and Simulation: Europe and the Middle East*, sponsored by the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army. The purpose of the project was to provide the U.S. Army with up to two detailed case studies of partner and/or adversary will to fight, focusing on the Middle East; test each case with complementary gaming and simulation efforts; and provide the Army with a will-to-fight model for incorporation into simulations.

The research was conducted within the RAND Arroyo Center's Strategy, Doctrine, and Resources Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) sponsored by the United States Army.

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Summary

> In June 2014 the weakened Iraqi Security Forces finally cracked: nineteen Iraqi Army brigades and six Federal Police brigades disintegrated, a quarter of Iraq's security forces. These losses comprised all of the Ninawa-based 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army divisions; the entire Mosul-based 3rd Federal Police division; most of the Salah al-Din-based 4th Iraqi Army division; all of the Kirkuk-based 12th Iraqi Army division; plus at least five southern Iraqi Army brigades that had previously been redeployed to the Syrian border.
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> —Michael Knights, 2015[1]

Will to fight is the disposition to fight, act, or persevere when needed. In 2014, many units from the regular forces of the Iraqi Army collapsed. Tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers in 19 brigades—all armed with modern weapons, vehicles, and armor—failed to fight, act, or persevere when needed. Their failure ceded one-third of Iraq to the Islamic State. It gave the Islamic State the funds and haven it needed to conduct worldwide terror attacks and to threaten stability across the Middle East and parts of Africa, East Asia, and Europe.

Failure of Iraqi Army will to fight meant that the United States and its allies were faced with the necessity of sending thousands of military personnel back into Iraq to prevent its collapse. More recently, American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Iraq has again diverted resources from the ongoing fight in Afghanistan. Deployment of U.S. forces to Iraq also draws away some resources from efforts to reestablish U.S. conventional military capabilities and to compete with China and Russia outside the Middle East. While this report recommends a long-term, small-footprint commitment in Iraq, creating lasting stability in Iraq would help reduce commitments and free up finite resources.

Security force assistance is the core American military approach to achieving regional stability. Instead of sending tens of thousands of troops to directly secure American interests, advisors work to establish security by, with, and through partnered military forces, such as the Iraqi Army. When these forces succeed, American security objectives are often met, and large numbers of U.S. troops are not needed. When these forces fail, American interests are put at risk, and unexpected demands on the military might suddenly arise.

As of mid-2021, official U.S. policy on Iraq centered on security force assistance support to the Iraqi armed forces and police. The United States seeks an "enduring strategic partnership" with Iraq in order to strengthen existing bilateral relationships and to help ensure that Iraq is a force for stability and democracy in the Middle East.[2] Specifically, the United

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[1]   Michael Knights, *The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015, p. 7.

[2]   This statement on the U.S. Department of State website on Iraq policy summarizes this approach: "The SFA between Iraq and the United States provides the foundation for the U.S.-Iraq bilateral relationship." U.S. Department of State, "U.S.

States "supports the development of a modern, accountable, fiscally sustainable, and professional Iraqi military capable of defending Iraq and its borders."[3] This mission is effectively unchanged from 2005, when the U.S. National Security Council issued the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq.[4]

There is much to recommend this official policy toward Iraq. Keeping Iraq stable and generally supportive of American national security objectives in the Middle East would help prevent the reemergence of the Islamic State, deter Iranian aggression, and reduce regional opportunities for Russia and China to gain economic and military advantage in Iraq and across the greater Middle East. As the events of 2014 demonstrated, providing the Iraqi Army with generous amounts of military equipment has not been enough to help keep Iraq stable. Iraqi soldiers have to be prepared to fight, act, and persevere when needed. The entire American-led coalition security force assistance mission in Iraq hinges on Iraqi Army will to fight. The purpose of this report is to inform the establishment of an enduring low-cost, low-risk, small-footprint advisory mission in Iraq.

Assessing Iraqi Army Will to Fight Case-by-Case, Factor-by-Factor

In 2018, I co-authored a RAND report that provided an analytic model of will to fight for military units.[5] From 2018 to 2020, I applied this model to the Iraqi Army. Will to fight is an essential element of combat effectiveness, or the forecasted or observed ability of a military unit to accomplish its mission and succeed in combat. Assessment of will-to-fight assessment supports assessment of combat effectiveness.

I conducted a model-guided factor-by-factor assessment of the 29 major factors in the will-to-fight model across three historical case studies: (1) the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, (2) the 1991 Gulf War, and (3) the 2004–2011 military advisory period. Findings and recommendations derive from the cases; from the literature on Iraq, will to fight, combat effectiveness, and warfare; and from interviews conducted with senior Iraqi general officers in 2019.

Correlation and General Causality Versus Causation

The RAND will-to-fight model is an explanatory model. Factors in the model are used to help explain the will to fight of a military unit or organization, not to prove a causative link. The complexity of human will to fight precludes scientific accuracy and precision. For example, we can say that weak Iraqi strategy closely correlated with the lack of Iraqi Army will to fight in both the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq. By looking at many cases together—including those analyzed previously—we can say that, in general, weak strategic design and rationale often correlates with poor will to fight and that this factor appears to have a broad causal relationship with poor will to fight. But the interplay and complexity of the many variables that constitute will to fight preclude any scientific claims of causation between

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Relations with Iraq: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet," November 13, 2019.

[3]   U.S. Department of State, 2019.

[4]   U.S. National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2005.

[5]   Ben Connable, Michael J. McNerney, William Marcellino, Aaron Frank, Henry Hargrove, Marek N. Posard, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Natasha Lander, Jasen J. Castillo, and James Sladden, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2341-A, 2018.

any one factor in the model and will to fight in any individual, military unit, or organization, anywhere, at any time. This report seeks to improve understanding of correlation and causality across many interrelated factors, not to prove single-factor causation.

A Brief History: Iraqi Army Will to Fight and Combat Effectiveness

Figure S.1 provides an overview of the history of the Iraqi Army, both its regular and elite forces, from the Iraqi Army's establishment in 1921 through 2019. The Iraqi Army remained effectively under British control, or at least under strong British influence, from 1921 through the 1940s. Army units unsuccessfully revolted against the British in 1941. Iraqi soldiers fought hard in the 1941 revolt, but their collective efforts were sluggish and ultimately prone to rapid combat setbacks.

Praetorian regime-protection and internal security missions held back the development of more-advanced combat capabilities through at least the early 1970s. Army officers were involved in a range of coup attempts—some successful—through the 1960s. The Iraqi Army deployed forces for the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, but they did not fight. Iraqi Army units did fight in the 1973 October War but were defeated. In the October War, a well-prepared Iraqi brigade charged into a kill zone, failing to adapt when other options were available. That brigade broke and retreated, though some other Iraqi forces performed effectively.

The Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 represented both a nadir and a zenith for the Iraqi Army. After a poorly planned invasion of Iran in 1980, the Iraqis had to retreat back across their border. Through 1986, they suffered a series of staggering tactical defeats. Many Iraqis fought hard during the war—individual Iraqi courage was proved many times over—but tens of thousands of Iraqis surrendered and units too-frequently scattered when surprised or enveloped. Over the course of the war, both Iraqi government and army leaders adapted and improved the combat effectiveness of the whole force. In 1988, the Iraqi Army was probably at its best. In August of that year, it pushed the Iranians back across the border and forced an end to the war.

Figure S.1
Historical Timeline of the Iraqi Army
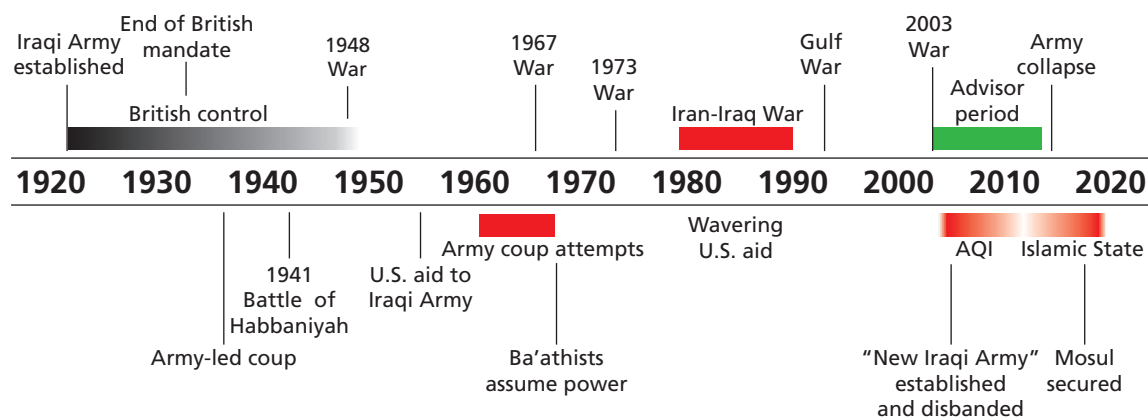
SOURCE: Derived from multiple sources cited in Chapter Two.
NOTE: AQI = Al Qaida in Iraq, in its various incarnations from 2003 to around 2010.

Two years later, in 1990, Saddam Hussein ordered his armed forces to invade Kuwait. An American-led coalition pushed the Iraqis out in early 1991. The coalition suffered fewer than 1,000 total casualties in an operation that involved well over 600,000 coalition service members. The Iraqi Army's performance in the Gulf War was generally weak. Approximately 200,000 Iraqi soldiers deserted or surrendered.

In the period between the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi Army withered under economic and military sanctions. Corruption eroded the genuine professional gains the army had made from 1980 to 1988. When another U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003, the army collapsed. Almost no regular or elite units performed well, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers deserted. In many cases, Iraqi Army officers ordered the dissolution of their own units to save the lives of their soldiers. Again, the coalition casualties were surprisingly light due in great part to the absence of an opposing force.

After the war, the Coalition Provisional Authority dissolved the Iraqi Army. From 2003 through 2011, coalition advisors rebuilt the army and, in 2011, they turned over responsibility for the security of Iraq to its organic security forces. It turned out that they were severely unprepared for this responsibility. In 2014, the Islamic State shattered four entire Iraqi Army divisions. Thousands more Iraqi security force personnel deserted or surrendered. Entire fleets of armored vehicles were abandoned, unused. Shortly thereafter, another U.S.-led coalition returned to rebuild the Iraqi Army once again. In 2019, the Islamic State no longer held territory in Iraq. In 2020, the Iraqi Army may again find itself handed responsibility for Iraq's future.

Questions for the Future of the Iraqi Army

With the Islamic State on the run, there may be a sense that the Iraqi Army is prepared to stand on its own. This is an enticing but dangerous thought. First, the Islamic State is broken but not dead. Almost total failure to address the underlying issues that gave rise to Sunni extremism in Iraq portends a conceivable resurgence. The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) pose a direct challenge to the role of the Iraqi Army as the state's primary security force. After several years of intensive combat, the elite Counter Terrorism Service (CTS)—Iraq's so-called Golden Division—has proven its worth but is insufficient, in terms of numbers and broader combat capability, to secure all of Iraq. Regular units have shown basic competence, but their ability to operate independently under national command, without direct American support, is unproven.

How long, then, will American security force assistance advisors have to stay in Iraq? What level of commitment will be required over time, and how should it be ramped down? Will there ever be a point at which the Iraqi Army can again operate independently, or has the United States created permanent dependency? What advantages and disadvantages are there to U.S. advisors staying in Iraq? If the United States does continue to support the Iraqi Army, how can it improve the army's will to fight and overall combat effectiveness? How can Iraqi leaders improve the will to fight of their army? The findings and recommendations that follow seek to help answer these questions.

Findings on Iraqi Army Will to Fight

These findings are derived from the three cases above and from all of the literature cited throughout the report. Some provide important cultural insights to inform current planning, while others are immediately practical. Some offer opportunity, while others suggest refinements in security force assistance investment.

Figure S.2 helps to put the key findings in context. It depicts my informed subjective interpretation of the general ebb and flow of Iraqi Army will to fight from 1980 through 2019. It presents some of the factors and broad dynamics that influenced will to fight during key periods. From left to right, these are (1) the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, (2) the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, (3) the Gulf War period through circa 2016, and (4) the general will to fight of the Iraqi Army in 2020.

Key Finding: The Iraqi Army Is Brittle

Rather than show the kind of adaptability and resilience necessary to succeed in combat, many Iraqi Army units have proven to be *brittle*: They are inflexible and break too easily. Brittleness has had catastrophic consequences for the Iraqi Army over decades of continual combat.

How does brittleness manifest? Many Iraqi soldiers are personally brave, and many have demonstrated professional military competence. Since 1980, quite a few Iraqi units have fought hard and won in combat. When many factors in the published RAND will-to-fight model align in a unit's favor—and when very few are lined up against it—Iraqi units can and do fight competently. However, far too often Iraqis desert. In combat, too many units break *en masse*. Desertions typically occur out of combat and over time. Collapse during combat occurs quickly and has immediate and catastrophic results.

Figure S.2
Ebb and Flow of Iraqi Army Will to Fight from 1980 Through 2019
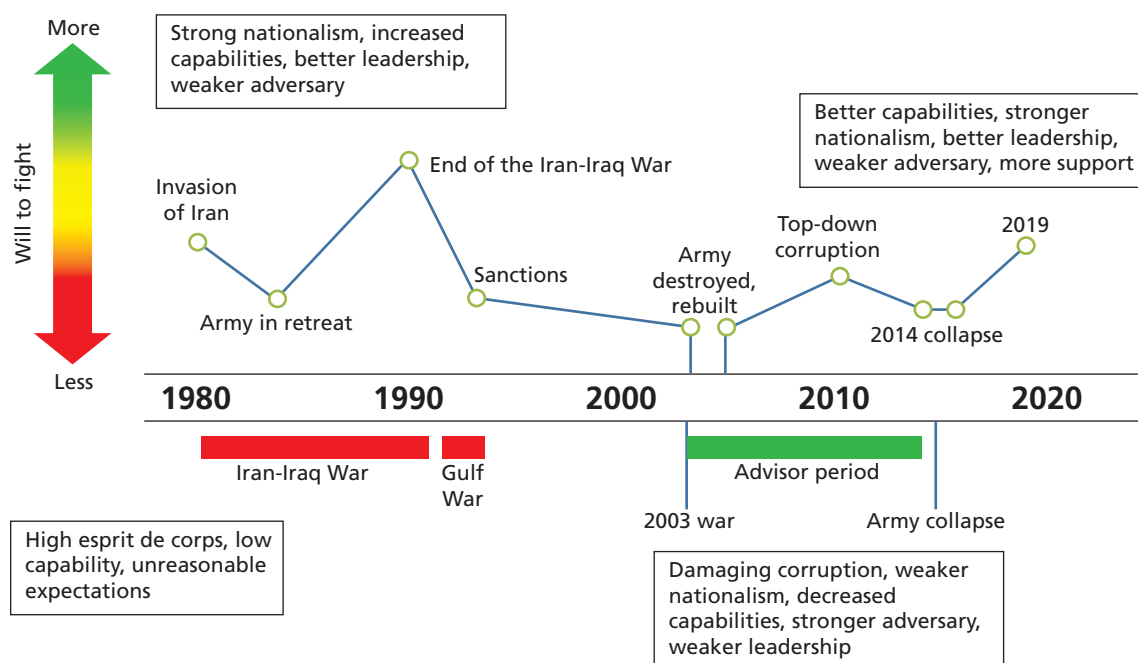
In many cases from 1980 through the 2000s, regular Iraqi Army will to fight shattered with surprising rapidity, as fully armed units in solid combat formation fled or surrendered. In almost every case, the units that have broken were fatigued. They may have been uncertain of their mission and the national strategy for victory. They were on the defensive, and their tactical position was tenuous. They felt isolated. Adversary units had caught them by surprise and, in many cases, enveloped them from unsuspecting directions. Help was not on its way or was not immediately obvious to the soldiers on the front line. Other factors in the RAND will-to-fight model were aligned in their favor, but some critical threshold had been crossed and the unit could no longer carry on.

No Single-Factor Explanation

It was impossible to isolate and identify a single factor that determined whether an Iraqi Army unit would fight or not fight. Clearly, it was not cohesion, since cohesion cut both ways—a cohesive unit could be one in which soldiers fought together but also broke together. Leadership mattered a great deal, but even units with excellent leadership broke. This was true of the Iraqi Army 3rd Armored Division in 1981 and 1982. Material support mattered but was not clearly decisive. Belief, or lack of belief, in the national strategy and the mission was quite important as well, but units evincing strong identity with the national objectives still broke and ran as late as 1986 in the Iran-Iraq War.

Brittleness as a Cultural Phenomenon

If no single factor from the RAND will-to-fight model can be isolated as causative, how can Iraqi Army will to fight be understood and improved? Based on the analysis presented in this report, it seems clear that brittleness is a collective cultural phenomenon in the Iraqi Army.

Brittleness is the result of the holistic accumulation of cultural factors that are a main focus of this report and the RAND will-to-fight model. Patrimonialism contributes to generate a system of top-down control. Top-down control helps create a vacuum of leadership and decisionmaking at the bottom. Soldiers and junior leaders come to depend almost completely on the presence, decisionmaking, and competence of their leaders. Whether or not the individual soldiers are culturally attuned to be adaptable in the Iraqi school system, they are sharply discouraged from adapting within the confines of the army. Lack of adaptability makes Iraqi Army soldiers exceptionally vulnerable to unexpected change, and particularly to unexpected threats like surprise attacks. Absent a strong professional heritage in the enlisted ranks, belief or lack of belief in the current mission takes on greater importance than it might in a Western military force.

Two phenomena occur as a result of Iraqi Army brittleness: one in the defense and one in the offense. While it is impossible to know the exact thought patterns of any individual Iraqi soldier in any battle, previous battle histories and personal descriptions of defensive combat—including those by Iraqis, cited in this report—allow for a general description of the process that likely occurred at the Battle of Abadan in 1981, in the oilfields of Kuwait in 1991, and in the battles south and east of Baghdad in 2003. The interpretive descriptions below are reinforced by my direct observation of, and interactions with, Iraqi soldiers fighting, and then fleeing and surrendering, in the 1991 Gulf War and in the 2003 invasion.

Brittleness in Defense

When Iraqi soldiers sat in the defense awaiting an attack, their sheer lack of situational awareness began to gnaw at them. Fatigue, darkness, and an aggressive adversary compounded their

fear. Soldiers at the lowest levels took on a pod mentality in the absence of strong junior leadership. In a Western army, strong junior leaders would have worked to keep the soldiers tuned in, focused on the mission, and constantly aware of their responsibilities. Such junior leadership was absent in the Iraqi Army, or at the very least the junior leaders were unprepared to generate will to fight.

Together in the dark, but isolated from other units and their senior commanders, soldiers began to take on a wait-and-see mentality. Cohesion became a factor for collective preservation rather than a contributing factor toward the disposition to fight. Confidence in individual and collective training, esprit de corps, logistics support, corruption, societal support for the war, the quality of the soldiers' weapons, and the availability of food and water were all meaningful contributing factors as the soldiers found themselves in a terrifying situation that demanded adaptation and required strong junior leadership. When the adversary's trap was sprung, the soldiers realized that their commanders had allowed them to be surprised and surrounded. They made a collective decision to break.

Brittleness in the Attack

Something similar probably happened in the cases where Iraqi soldiers refused to attack, but these decisions appeared to be more logical and practical than panicky. The case of the New Iraqi Army at the Battle of Fallujah in 2004 is instructive. At least one battalion fell apart when it was ambushed en route to Fallujah. After that battalion broke, another battalion was formed at the Taji airfield to conduct an air movement to the city.[6] The Iraqis had never been aboard helicopters before. It was nighttime, and the city of Fallujah had taken on a terrifying reputation. Soldiers refused to board the helicopters and went back to their barracks. Several hundred soldiers deserted that night. They refused to fight, act, or persevere because—in the words of the advisors with direct observation of the events—they were asked to do two things they had not specifically prepared to do: board helicopters and attack an Iraqi city. A top-down order was refused in great part because it did not align with expectations.

Brittleness and Expectation

Expectation is one of 29 factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. If one were forced to deliver a formula for brittleness, it would be

$$\text{Expectation x [the 28 other factors in the RAND will-to-fight model].}$$

This is a conceptual formula, not a practical, computational formula. But it helps emphasize the value of expectation and the collective value of all of the 28 other factors in the model. Iraqi culture does not effectively prepare Iraqis for uncertainty and psychological resilience. When their expectations for combat are met, they generally perform well. When their expectations for combat are unmet—and particularly when they are unmet in poor conditions—they often break. This is the essence of brittleness. All the other factors influence this decision point in different ways in different situations.

Figure S.3 shows this conceptual integration of the 28 factors and expectation. The 28 factors form the general disposition to fight. Expectations are set for the battlefield situation. Contextual factors, such as weather, terrain, fatigue, adversary performance, and messaging,

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6   CALL interviews 8 and 15.

combine to test Iraqi Army disposition to fight and expectations. Iraqi soldiers then make decisions to fight, act, persevere, or perform some action that undermines the mission.

Brittleness: So What?

What does this mean for security force assistance? It suggests both a limitation and an opportunity. Until something changes, Iraqi Army units should not be put into situations that require significant amounts of adaptability and resilience. Units will be particularly vulnerable in the defense when they are isolated from other units and from senior commanders. As tempting as it might be to send Iraqi Army units into the hinterlands to conduct distributed operations in dangerous conditions, that approach carries the greatest inherent risk of failure absent dedicated coalition intelligence, aviation, medical, and other support.

Opportunity also presents itself. Security force assistance cannot completely change Iraqi culture, or the culture of the army, but it can help to mitigate existing cultural challenges. The section on recommendations, below, proposes some approaches.

What About the Other Factors?

Understanding will to fight requires a holistic assessment of all 29 factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. Expectation is important, but this one factor alone does not—and *cannot*—explain Iraqi will to fight. It matters quite a bit in most cases, but any single factor can take on a different meaning in different situations. In some instances in the Iran-Iraq War, desperation may have been the most important factor. RAND interviews with Iraqi general officers show that, by 2003, almost total loss of trust in Saddam Hussein (state leadership factor) severely undercut Iraqi Army will to fight. In 2014, poor organizational leadership seems to have been

Figure S.3
Factors, Disposition to Fight, Expectation, and Combat Decisions
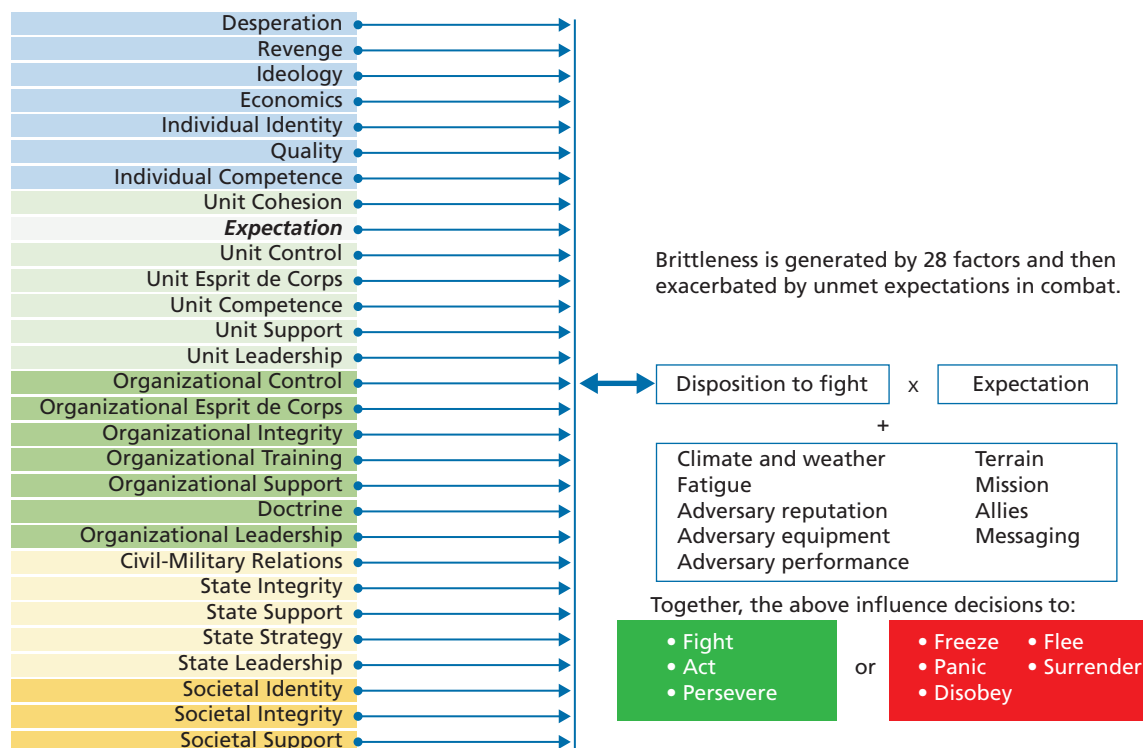
a dominant factor in the army's collapse. A central argument in RAND's published work on will to fight is that reductionism is counterproductive. Anyone seeking to understand will to fight will have to accept complexity and reject the temptation of simple answers. Findings on other factors follow.

Iraqis Can Learn and Fight, but Long-Term Support Is Probably Necessary

Many Iraqi Army soldiers have deserted, broken, or surrendered to adversary forces over the past century. But combat records show that when they are placed in straightforward, head-to-head combat, the average Iraqi is personally courageous. Iraqis accept casualties when the will-to-fight factors are aligned in their favor. Moreover, although the average Iraqi may suffer from poor literacy and a lack of basic mechanical capability, advisors and effective Iraqi leaders have repeatedly proven that Iraqis can be trained to fight as a basically competent modern combat force.

However, the degree to which the Iraqi Army will be able to operate independently to secure Iraq's borders and population is another matter. The Iraqi Army has never been tremendously successful against internal, regional, or global adversaries. It has always relied on external financial, training, leadership, and materiel support to some degree. Previous evidence of Iraqi Army success with external support shows that security force assistance in Iraq can be productive. Progress can be made. But while the Iraqi Army can certainly improve both its will to fight and overall combat effectiveness, it will probably remain dependent on external support for many years.

Imbalance Between Special and Not-So-Special Units Undermines Army Will to Fight

Praetorianism, personalist leadership, and the fear of failure appear to drive Iraqi Army leaders to organize and rely on special soldiers and special units to fight their wars. The immediate practicality of this approach is outweighed by its prospective costs. What might be called a *competence caste system* has existed and exists today in the Iraqi Army. It undercuts the disposition to fight of all nonspecial units. It reduces the overall combat effectiveness of the Iraqi Army and exacerbates vulnerabilities in geographic areas covered by regular units. This approach generally increases the likelihood of strategic failure in the future.

Cohesion Can Undermine Iraqi Army Will to Fight

Iraqi culture can help to generate strong social bonds at the soldier level. These horizontal bonds are almost always stronger than the vertical bonds formed between the soldiers and their leaders, particularly at the junior officer and noncommissioned officer levels. Soldiers are more likely to associate leadership with their battalion commander than with their platoon commander, but a battalion commander cannot be everywhere at once. When the chips are down, horizontal social and task cohesion are as likely to generate group collapse as they are to generate will to fight.

Staff Planning and Combined Arms Operations Can Be Developed

Recent advisor interviews reveal their opinions that Iraqi officers are poor and inattentive planners, and that they are generally incapable of coordinating combined-arms operations. This may or may not be true of the Iraqi Army in the post-2003 period, but it certainly was not true of the Iraqi Army in the later parts of the Iran-Iraq War. There is no inherent cultural barrier to Iraqi staff and operational competence. In previous eras, Iraqi officers rightly prided them-

selves on their staff work. American military leaders should frequently remind themselves that in its current incarnation the Iraqi Army is approximately 18 years old and that it was designed to fight a counterinsurgency. Perceived limits should be reassessed.

Individual Courage Is a Useful Cultural Value and Narrative

Iraqi culture places great value on individual courage, and particularly on displays of courage. The outcome of combat is perceived in some cases as less important than the performance of combat. There is opportunity here. Like most other young men around the world, young Iraqi men want to prove themselves. Many of those who joined the army want to prove themselves in combat. Individual will to fight is there, and it can be harnessed.

Top-Down Control Should Be Gradually Modified over Time

Top-down control is a deep cultural phenomenon in Iraq, and particularly in the Iraqi Army. However, culture is dynamic. Many of the younger officers and noncommissioned officers in the Iraqi Army are hungry for opportunities to lead. They are also increasingly capable, and in many cases better educated than many of the former regime officers who are gradually retiring. Any effort to develop effective junior leadership in the Iraqi Army will be a very-long-term effort, but it will not necessarily be a wasted effort. Even limited progress toward the development of junior leadership will go a long way toward reducing brittleness.

Ethnicity and Sectarianism Generally Do Not Undermine Iraqi Army Will to Fight

Iraq is a heterogenous society made up of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians; Sunni and Shi'a Muslims; Christians, Yazidis, and Zoroastrians; and others. These different identities have undermined Iraqi unity in various ways during various periods in Iraqi history. Differences have created friction within the Iraqi Army and have sometimes undermined unit-level cohesion. But no Iraqi has a singular identity. The history of the Iraqi Army shows clearly that ethno-sectarianism rarely predominated and never led to a general breakdown of military order. Neither sectarianism nor ethnicity are primary drivers of Iraqi will to fight, or lack thereof.

Iraqi Nationalism Is Real but Requires Constant Reinforcement to Enhance Will to Fight

Many critics of the various coalition operations in Iraq argue that Iraqi nationalism is a 20th century fabrication and that it is practicably useless as a unifying identity for the heterogenous Iraqi population. It is true that the post-Ottoman Iraqi state did not exist until the 1920s. It may or may not be accurate to describe post-Ottoman Iraqi nationalism as a fabricated identity. But even if one believes that Iraqi nationalism is fabricated—that it does not emerge naturally from such a seemingly fragmented society—it is incorrect to assume that Iraqi nationalism is a *useless* fabrication.

Whether it is fabricated or organic, Iraqi nationalism is real, and it is a useful motivator for Iraqi Army recruiting and will to fight. Saddam Hussein used every means at his disposal to build and shape Iraqi nationalism to successfully motivate Iraqis to fight during the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout post-colonial Iraqi history—and particularly in the modern era—nationalism has been generated and used to ramp up military recruiting, to reduce ethno-sectarian discord, to motivate individual soldiers, and to help improve unit will to fight. Contemporary Iraqi leaders recognize the value of nationalism and seek to leverage it to build national unity and to support military operations. National identity and nationalist ideology present opportunities to enhance Iraqi Army will to fight.

Recommendations for Security Force Assistance in Iraq

> Armies do not win wars by means of a few super-soldiers, but by the average quality of their standard units.
>
> —Field Marshal William Slim, 1956[7]

These recommendations are designed to inform both security force assistance policy and advisor actions in Iraq. They are predicated on the assumption that the United States and its allies will continue to invest in the development of the Iraqi Army over time. There are trade-offs between long-term presence and dependency. This is unavoidable. Continual reassessment of objectives, investments, and progress will be needed to fine-tune implementation over time.

Balance the Force to Improve Will to Fight and Combat Effectiveness

Regular Iraqi Army units often have poor disposition to fight because of the current imbalance in manpower quality, resources, and training across the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). CTS "Golden Division" recruiters and PMF leaders hoard capabilities that should be divided more equally across the force. Now that the Islamic State is reduced to guerrilla attacks, U.S. Army leaders should refocus assistance toward the Iraqi Army, Federal Police, and local police. CTS can then return to smaller-scale counterterrorism operations.[8]

Train Up and Down to Improve Junior Leadership and Unit Flexibility

Training junior leaders should continue apace, even if the results are frustratingly limited and slow. Reinforcing total dependence on competent senior leadership will simply exacerbate the Iraqi Army's vulnerability to politicization and individual incompetence. Junior leaders should be trained to assume increasing levels of authority and responsibility, even if neither is immediately forthcoming. Simultaneously, mid-level leaders should be educated and trained to supervise junior leaders. This will also be a gradual, frustrating process, but it is a reasonable objective short of expecting decentralized operations. Getting a battalion commander to supervise a captain or lieutenant will help improve unit adaptability and reduce brittleness.

Expand Efforts to Build Iraqi Nationalism as an Organizing Ideology and Identity

Since overthrowing the Iraqi government in 2003, the United States has sought to help build and sustain a unified Iraqi state and nation. American advisors have continuously worked to reduce regional and ethno-sectarian divisions within the ISF and to improve a sense of collective identity and purpose.[9] While there are inherent risks in promoting nationalism, including the possibility of encouraging some types of extreme behavior, the present alternative to unified Iraqi identity is violent divisiveness that undermines the will to fight of the Iraqi Army, causes tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties, and degrades progress

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[7] William Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, London, UK: Cassell, 1956, p. 547.

[8] As of 2020, the PMF pose a special and separate challenge to American policy and security force effectiveness; recommendations for addressing the PMF fall outside the bounds of this report.

[9] Lessened influence between 2012 and 2014 greatly slowed but did not fully eliminate these efforts. Some work continued through the U.S. Embassy.

toward American national security objectives. Previous RAND research shows that dividing the Iraqi state into ethno-sectarian cantonments is a dangerous and unrealistic option. Some shift toward increased subnational power sharing might be warranted, but so is the continuing pursuit of national unification for the purposes of achieving stability.

Given this assessment, security force assistance programs should be examined to identify ways they can help support both civil and military education in national identity, and explicitly reinforce national identity in military training, ceremonies, and cultural activities. Possible approaches include, but are not limited to, increased display of the Iraqi national flag, including increasing integration of the flag and its colors into army imagery; increasing the amount of time dedicated to teaching national identity in military classes; production of literature and videos that reinforce national identity and, where appropriate, nationalist ideology; and instituting policies designed to minimize ethno-sectarian favoritism within the Ministry of Defense and the army. National leaders, Ministry of Defense leaders, and Iraqi Army leaders are already applying many of these approaches, so improvement may just require additional resources and reinforcement.

Developing national identity and nationalist ideology are related but practicably distinct efforts. A unifying identity is generally useful, but it has a few obvious drawbacks. A unifying ideology can be a powerful motivator for will to fight, but it can also unintentionally reinforce extreme beliefs and behaviors. Coalition support to Iraqi efforts to build nationalism should be carefully considered and applied.

Keep the Troops Informed

Brittleness appears to be reinforced by a lack of situational awareness. Surprise can be sharply exacerbated when soldiers do not have any cognizance of the tactical situation, and historically Iraqi Army units have been particularly vulnerable to surprise. Keeping troops informed of the evolving combat situation is a general military principle applied by many Western forces. It would be particularly useful for building and sustaining Iraqi Army will to fight by increasing the confidence of individual soldiers and reducing collective fear. Advisors should work to incorporate situational awareness into training and operations.

Practice Adaptability and Resilience

Adaptability and personal resilience are often lacking in the Iraqi Army, but they are both qualities that can be improved upon. Although it is difficult to do so, adaptability can be trained. Training programs should routinely incorporate reactions to unexpected situations, and advisors should mentor for adaptability. Chapter Five this report cites a 2006 Iraqi Army training manual—drafted by advisors—that emphasizes adaptability as a central objective of Iraqi Army training. That manual can and should serve as a continuing guide for current training programs. Iraqi officers should be educated in both adaptability and resilience concepts and provided with the technical means to train their soldiers. Resilience can be similarly developed by routinely placing soldiers in unexpected positions and allowing them to react in a safe environment.

Operate with Constant Mutual Support

Iraqi commanders and coalition advisors should avoid placing their regular army units in isolated defensive positions and should work constantly to assure that their units are mutually supported. Distributed operations, including checkpoint operations, should be avoided or at

least closely supervised and supported with intelligence and quick reaction capabilities. Nighttime combat positions should be established only with mutually supporting physical connectivity to adjacent units, interlocking fires, and continuous intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance for situational awareness.

Expect Long-Term Dependency and Use It to Advantage

Given that in its current incarnation the Iraqi Army is only 18 years old, and given that it has effectively been rebuilt after its will to fight collapsed in 2014, American policymakers should assume that the Iraqi Army will remain dependent on American support for many years, and perhaps decades. Setting expectations for long-term security force assistance in Iraq is an important first step toward assessing requirements for advisors and materiel.

It is worth keeping in mind that the army is probably the only remaining institution in the Iraqi government that is generally welcoming of American presence. It is the only organization that has built-in dependence to American support, and it is probably the best lever the United States has to influence events on the ground in Iraq. There is more opportunity than cost in the American relationship with the Iraqi Army.

Rebuild Regular Army Esprit de Corps and Emphasize Individual Courage

Before the Iran-Iraq War, regular units, such as the 3rd Armored Division, were considered the elite forces of the Iraqi Army. They had good, if sometimes embellished, reputations that gave soldiers confidence and improved their will to fight. By 1988, the Republican Guard had effectively appropriated the esprit de corps of the entire force. With some noted exceptions, regular units went into supporting roles. That legacy carries over today in the disparities between the Iraqi Army and elite Iraqi counterterror units. Esprit de corps can be a strong reinforcing factor for will to fight. The lack of esprit in regular units is telling in performance.

Ideally, units would build esprit de corps from successful combat experiences. In the absence of meaningful success, some creativity is required and appropriate. Most military units embellish their records to some extent. However, it is sufficient to find the heroes and dramatic battles in each unit's history and bring these to the fore. These can be found with some basic historical investigation, interviews, and records analysis. Note that in the Iraqi cultural milieu, even heroic failures can be used to reinforce esprit de corps. Iraqi soldiers joining every division should have many opportunities to know their units' histories. Money should be directly invested in memorials to fallen heroes; commemorations of key battles, detailed recounting of individual heroic acts, new unit ceremonies, and the creation of high-quality unit insignia, flags, and other unique markings.

This approach should be applied to the army at the organizational level as well. Iraqi leaders have already made progress here: Identification with the army has improved significantly since 2014. But much more can and should be done.

Why Not Invest Everything in Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service?

Chapter Six of this report argues that while the elite CTS has performed well, it cannot secure Iraq. A competent regular army, supported by competent police, is needed to prevent recurrence of the 2014 collapse of will to fight in the face of the Islamic State offensive. Increased investment in CTS, rather than in the regular army, would exacerbate the praetorian nature of

the Iraqi state. It would undermine the central function of CTS, which is to counter terrorism and not engage in tactical ground combat or security duties more suited to regular infantry or police. Such an investment would also further weaken the Iraqi Army by stripping away more of its human capital and materiel, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities in Iraq's national security. Investment in CTS should be sustained at a reasonable level while greater focus is placed on the army.

Using This Assessment to Improve Coalition Security Force Assistance Activities in Iraq

This assessment offers practical value for the internal coalition security force assistance process by providing greater understanding of the security force to be assisted.

Improving Understanding of Iraqi Army Combat Effectiveness

Will to fight is one important component of combat effectiveness. The information and findings in this report can be combined with other data to generate an even more holistic assessment of Iraqi Army combat effectiveness. This can and should include the information that is already being collected on manpower, equipment, training, leadership development, and logistics capabilities.

Figure S.4 depicts a broad conceptual approach to building a holistic combat effectiveness assessment from the RAND will-to-fight model and other sources of information. Will-to-fight factors should be aligned with sources of data and integrated with other, existing assessments to generate a holistic understanding of the unit's combat effectiveness. Assessment should seek holistic integration to the greatest extent possible.

However, holism should not be equated with reductionism. At no point should the will-to-fight factors be averaged, or integrated with other combat effectiveness inputs and then averaged. Averaging is a sure way to bury critical information and to generate misleadingly precise results with false accuracy. All factors should be considered individually and then reconsidered over time.

Examples of additional sources of combat effectiveness information include training reports and milestones from organizational records; advisor observations and evaluations of combat-training exercises; logistical records; educational records; personnel reporting; equipment and weapon evaluations; war gaming and simulation; doctrinal reviews; junior leader development evaluations, and, perhaps most importantly, combat evaluations. Did the unit succeed in combat? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Practical Application: Improving Conditions to Improve Will to Fight

Figure S.5 depicts a range of possible actions that might be taken to improve the conditions associated with the factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. A full assessment of current security force assistance programs would be required to offer detailed recommendations. Of the 29 major will-to-fight factors, 22 provide immediate opportunities for influence. Primary recommendations based on the present assessment were presented above. Additional possible approaches include the following:

Figure S.4
Recommended Approach to Integrate Combat Effectiveness Assessment

RAND Will-to-Fight Model

Integrate with:

- Training reports and milestones
- Equipment on-hand reporting
- Equipment combat effectiveness evaluations
- Weapons combat effectiveness evaluations
- Logistics support data-delivery statistics
- Personnel on-hand reporting
- Desertion rates and return-from-desertion rates
- Disciplinary statistics
- Combined-arms exercise evaluations
- Written testing results from promotion boards
- Force-on-force war game analyses
- Force-on-force simulation analyses
- Recruiting objectives and benchmarks
- Doctrinal review and evaluations
- Educational programs and graduation statistics
- Small unit training evaluations
- Non-commissioned office development evaluations
- Junior officer leadership evaluations
- Combat performance reviews
- **Combat results: Did they win? Why or why not?**

SOURCES: Connable et al., 2018; and multiple sources cited in this report.
NOTE: See Chapter One and Connable et al., 2018, for more information on the RAND will-to-fight model depicted in this figure.

- Given that nationalism is an important unifying ideology and identity for Iraq, and for army service, military education programs could be enhanced to increase Iraqi nationalism.
- All training, logistics, and leadership programs can be continually improved.
- Control—discipline—can be more clearly defined and regulated.
- Positive unit cohesion can be improved through increased emphasis on unit sporting events and other exercises familiar to Western military advisors.
- Advisors probably cannot directly influence desperation, revenge, most state-level factors, or any of the societal factors, but these should all be monitored.

Continually Reassess Iraqi Army Will to Fight

This report presents a baseline assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight. It can and should be continually improved upon. The model is amenable to modification: It is explanatory, exploratory, and portable, not fixed. Continual assessment will help keep assumptions and findings up to date and help to ensure that the American security force assistance in Iraq is optimized at all times.

Figure S.5
Possible Actions to Improve Will-to-Fight Conditions

Factor	Action
Desperation	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
Revenge	
Ideology	Nationalism-patriotism education
Economics	Improved pay and benefits
Individual Identity	National identity education
Quality	Recruiting improvements, pre-training preparation
Individual Competence	Individual training improvements
Unit Cohesion	Task performance exercises and organized competitions
Expectation	Improved information flow to junior soldiers
Unit Control	Clear guidance from Army staff
Unit Esprit de Corps	Enhanced unit pride activities
Unit Competence	Continual improvement to unit training
Unit Support	Continual improvement to unit logistics
Unit Leadership	Training on and for junior leadership
Organizational Control	Clear guidance on disciplinary rules and measures
Organizational Esprit de Corps	Enhanced Army pride activities
Organizational Integrity	Command influence and inspector general actions
Organizational Training	Continual improvement to organizational training
Organizational Support	Continual improvement to organizational logistics
Doctrine	Formal periodic review of Army doctrine
Organizational Leadership	Continual improvement to leadership training
Civil-Military Relations	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
State Integrity	
State Support	Institutional improvements at Ministry of Defense
State Strategy	
State Leadership	
Societal Identity	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
Societal Integrity	
Societal Support	

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Jennifer Kavanagh, director of the RAND Arroyo Center Strategy, Doctrine, and Resources Program, helped shepherd this report through to completion. Her enthusiasm and attention to detail helped to make this a better research product. Sally Sleeper, director of the RAND Arroyo Center, has been a strong supporter of our collective work on will to fight for the U.S. Army. Neither this report nor the line of research that underlies this analysis would have been possible without Sally's support and vision. Michael Hansen, associate director of the RAND Arroyo Center, has been equally supportive and helpful. His encouragement and belief in our work have helped us overcome many hurdles, and his quality assurance review significantly improved the balance and tone of this report.

A Dedication to Iraq's Soldiers and Their Families

This report offers many straightforward critiques, all of which are intended to help the Iraqi Army rebuild and improve its capacity to defend Iraq. These critiques are presented in the spirit of respect for the Iraqi Army and Iraq's soldiers. I have fought against and alongside Iraqi Army soldiers, and I have experienced their honor, generosity, courage, and dedication to their country firsthand. I offer my respect and gratitude to all the Iraqi Army soldiers who fought to defend their country against groups such as Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad and its many later iterations, including the Islamic State. Far too many of these Iraqis fought and died in quiet anonymity, often working with inadequate resources and in harsh field conditions. They served knowing that the simple act of putting on an army uniform might expose their families to violence. In some cases, Iraqi soldiers died while protecting their American partners and advisors. I also dedicate this report to the families of those soldiers who have fought and paid the ultimate price for their courage against the Islamic State. Their suffering continues and should not be forgotten.

إهداء للجنود العراقيين وأسرهم الكريمة:

تقدم هذه الدراسة العديد من الملاحظات المباشرة والانتقادات البناءة التي تهدف جميعها إلى مساعدة الجيش العراقي على إعادة بناء وتحسين قدراته في الدفاع عن العراق. هذه الانتقادات مقدمة بروح الاحترام والتقدير للجيش العراقي وجنود العراق الأبطال. فقد حاربتُ بشكل شخصي إلى جانب جنود الجيش العراقي، وقد تعرفتُ على عزة نفسهم وكرمهم وشجاعتهم وتفانيهم اتجاه بلدهم على أرض الواقع. وأقدم احترامي وامتناني لجميع جنود الجيش العراقي الذين حاربوا للدفاع عن بلادهم ضد جماعات مثل جماعة التوحيد والجهاد وكل ما لحقها من جماعات، بما في ذلك تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية.

حارب الكثير من هؤلاء العراقيين وماتوا دون أن يدري بهم أحد، وغالبا ما عملوا في ظروف ميدانية قاسية بموارد غير كافية إطلاقا. لقد خدموا وطنهم وخاطروا لأن فعلا بسيطا كارتداء زي الجيش قد يعرض أسرهم للعنف والخطر. فقد استشهد جنود عراقيون بينما كانوا يحمون شركاءهم ومستشاريهم الأمريكيين. كما أخصص وأهدي هذه الدراسة لعائلات هؤلاء الجنود الأبطال الذين حاربوا ودفعوا ثمنا باهظا لشجاعتهم ضد تنظم الدولة الإسلامية. معاناتهم ما زالت مستمرة وواجبنا ألا ننسى تضحياتهم المجيدة.

Will to Fight and Security Force Assistance in Iraq

This report has three purposes. The first is to help the U.S. military, its coalition partners, and Iraqi leaders find ways to improve the capabilities and performance of the Iraqi Army over time in order to help meet their respective national security objectives.[1] The second purpose is to improve the general American approach to assessing partner force capabilities for security force assistance missions by improving understanding of human factors and, specifically, the will to fight. The third purpose is to provide case examples and a transparent approach for future will-to-fight assessments and analyses.

Security force assistance is an irregular warfare mission defined as "Department of Defense activities that support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions."[2] In other words, advisors help train and support partner military forces such as the Iraqi Army in order to increase regional stability and reduce the burden on American forces. In war, a critical outcome of security force assistance is improved combat effectiveness, generally understood to be the practical ability of a unit to execute its missions and to defeat adversaries.[3] Iraq is a test case for what should be a broader improvement in the assessment of security force assistance contributions to combat effectiveness.

Will to fight is the disposition and decision to fight, act, or persevere when needed.[4] Will to fight encompasses a wide array of human behavioral factors, and it is a key factor—and perhaps the most important factor—in Iraqi Army combat effectiveness. In 1983, then–Colonel and Chief Battle Psychologist for the Israeli Army Reuven Gal argued that most assessments of combat effectiveness leaned too heavily on easy-to-measure quantitative factors, such as equipment capabilities. They failed to take into account difficult-to-measure human factors and, as a consequence, generally failed in their central purpose of forecasting combat performance:[5]

> Most studies fail in their attempt to analyze the qualitative aspects of military organizations. In fact, they often avoid an analysis of these aspects altogether. Concepts such as

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[1] *Coalition* refers specifically to the coalition of allied nations organized under Operation Inherent Resolve to defeat the Islamic State, a terrorist-insurgent group that controlled territory in Syria and Iraq through early 2019. See Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve, "History," undated.

[2] U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, D.C., April 2019.

[3] The U.S. Department of Defense does not officially define *combat effectiveness*.

[4] Ben Connable, Michael J. McNerney, William Marcellino, Aaron Frank, Henry Hargrove, Marek N. Posard, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Natasha Lander, Jasen J. Castillo, and James Sladden, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2341-A, 2018, Chapter One.

[5] Reuven Gal, "Foreword," in Richard A. Gabriel, ed., *Fighting Armies: Antagonists in the Middle East: A Combat Assessment*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983, p. xi.

value systems, quality of combatants, morale of combat units, codes of ethics, norms of command, and leadership—these are too difficult to evaluate, too vague to measure, and hence are not included in traditional analyses of modern armies.

Gal saw a requirement for holism in assessing combat effectiveness: "When an army's fighting power is evaluated, one cannot ignore the social and cultural characteristics of the society which developed that army."[6] His arguments align with RAND's 2018 analysis,[7] cited throughout this report, and it aligns with American military doctrine that describes war as a contest of opposing, independent, and hostile wills influenced by a range of complex factors. It aligns with a 1979 RAND report on manpower and modernization in the Middle East that concluded that "the human factor does indeed play a critical role in the development of military effectiveness."[8] Will-to-fight assessment should encompass a wide array of psychological and sociocultural factors at multiple levels, from at least the unit through to the broad societal stratum.

How to Read This Report: Leaders, Advisors, Intelligence Analysts, and Researchers

The primary audiences for this report are (1) military and civilian leaders shaping plans, policies, resource investments, and operations; (2) military and civilian advisors working to help build partnered or allied forces; (3) intelligence analysts working to understand the capabilities and intentions of adversary forces; (4) academic researchers; and (5) policy analysts. Each audience will have different interest in the significant detail presented throughout the report. The following is a rough guide for each:

1. Leaders: Summary
2. Advisors: Summary; Chapters Five and Six
3. Intelligence analysts: Summary; introductions to Chapters 1–6; Appendixes A and B
4. Researchers: Full report
5. Policy analysts: Full report.

Each case chapter (Chapters Three through Five) is designed with an introductory section intended to provide a brief overview of the case. Anyone seeking detailed knowledge of the Iraqi Army and its will to fight should read the full report.

Integrating Will to Fight and Combat Effectiveness Assessment

Combat effectiveness—a term commonly used by military experts but not officially defined by the U.S. Department of Defense—generally refers to a forecasted likelihood that a military

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[6]   Gal, 1983, p. xii.

[7]   Connable et al., 2018.

[8]   Anthony Pascal, Michael Kennedy, and Steven Rosen, *Men and Arms in the Middle East: The Human Factor in Military Modernization*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-2460-NA, June 1979, p. viii.

unit will be able to succeed in a given combat situation.[9] In other words, if the Iraqi Army is considered to have high combat effectiveness, then it is believed to have a good chance of succeeding in combat, depending on the adversary and situation. If it is considered to have low combat effectiveness, then the forecast is for poor performance in the same situations. Combat effectiveness can be forecasted for prospective battles and analyzed from battles that have already occurred. One of the primary purposes of security force assistance and will-to-fight assessment is to help build the combat effectiveness of partner military forces such as the Iraqi Army.[10]

If will to fight is a necessary component of effectiveness—a firm assumption in modern military thought and official doctrine—and tangible capabilities, such as weapons, vehicles, and observable training and tactics, constitute the other part, then combat effectiveness results from some interdependent combination of will to fight and tangible capabilities.[11] The best weapons on the battlefield are useless if soldiers do not have the will to use them, but the most strong-willed soldiers might be handily defeated by the expert use of those weapons.

Figure 1.1 shows a conceptual visualization of the two components of combat effectiveness and their relative importance: Is will to fight the most important factor in war, is it of equal importance to physical and tactical capability, or it is less important?

Figure 1.1
Conceptual Visualization of the Components of Combat Effectiveness
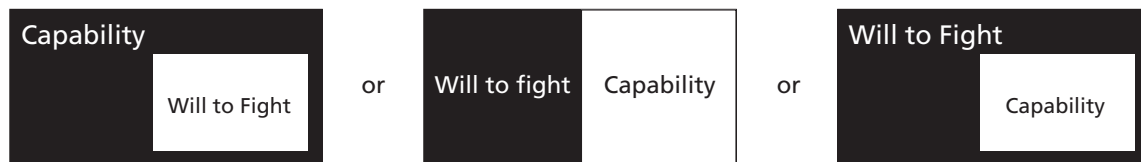
SOURCE: Connable et al., 2018, p. 28.

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[9]   Literature on combat effectiveness is voluminous and contested. See, for example, Risa A. Brooks and Elizabeth A. Stanley, eds., *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007; Stephen Biddle and Stephen Long, "Democracy and Military Effectiveness: A Deeper Look," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 4, August 2004; Philip Hayward, "The Measurement of Combat Effectiveness," *Operations Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2, March–April 1968, pp. 314–323; Trueman R. Tremble, Jr., and Cathie E. Alderks, *Measures for Research on Small Unit Preparedness for Combat Effectiveness*, Alexandria, Va.: U.S. Army Research Institute, October 1991; William J. Krondak, Rick Cunningham, Oren Hunsaker, Daniel Derendinger, Shaun Cunningham, and Matt Peck, "Unit Combat Power (and Beyond)," presentation at the International Symposium on Military Operational Research (ISMOR), United Kingdom, August 2007; Peter Paret, "Military Power," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 53, No. 3, July 1989; Maurice J. Mayfield, *Measurement of Combat Effectiveness During Peacetime Preparation for War*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1992; Dale Spurlin and Matthew Green, "Demystifying the Correlation of Forces Calculator," *Infantry*, January–March 2017, pp. 14–17; Huba Wass de Czege, *Understanding and Developing Combat Power*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, February 1984; Charles D. Marashian, *A Study of Human Factors That Affect Combat Effectiveness on the Battlefield*, thesis, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, 1982.

[10]   U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Internal Defense*, Joint Publication 3-22, August 17, 2018; Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1–2, 2018, pp. 89–142; Michael Shurkin, John Gordon IV, Bryan Frederick, and Christopher G. Pernin, *Building Armies, Building Nations: Toward a New Approach to Security Force Assistance*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1832-A, 2017.

[11]   For a full analysis of these assumptions, see Connable et al., 2018, Chapter One.

Even within a single war or individual battle, emphasis between the human and material aspects of combat effectiveness can shift. For example, in some battles during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi soldiers abandoned their weapons in the face of fanatical Iranian assaults, and in others they used those weapons to slaughter fanatical Iranian infantrymen.[12] But in both cases it was the very human nature of Iraqi will to fight that influenced those soldiers to drop or use their weapons.

Arguably, will to fight is the single most important factor in combat effectiveness for the Iraqis, and for any ground combat force.[13] Whatever importance one places on the over-arching value of will to fight, as of 2021 the will to fight of the Iraqi Army is poorly understood.[14] The human aspects of Iraqi combat effectiveness are too often described in imprecise and impractical terms. This report sets an empirical baseline to help clarify understanding of Iraqi Army will to fight and to make that understanding useful for a wide range of military decisionmaking.

Will to fight can never be precisely or accurately quantified, but it can be more clearly described with guided analysis. The RAND military will-to-fight model applied in this report is designed to provide that guidance.

Case Selection: The Iraqi Army

The Iraqi Army was selected for this assessment based on three factors: (1) Development and performance of the Iraqi Army are recorded in great detail, and data are readily available for case assessment; (2) the Iraqi Army is a critical U.S. partner, and its effective performance is essential to achieving U.S. national security interests in the Middle East; and (3) the United States and its allies have invested tens of billions of dollars in developing the Iraqi Army through security force assistance, making it a relevant test case for current policy decisionmaking.[15]

As I describe in Chapter Two, the Iraqi Army has a limited and problematic lineage. In some cases it has excelled, but it seems to collapse or suffer defeats at a rate not suggested by its relative military professionalism when compared with regional adversaries, or by its physical capabilities, equipment, and resources.

Individual Iraqi Courage Is a Not-Uncommon Virtue
This is not to say that Iraqis cannot fight. In fact, analysis shows that many individual Iraqi soldiers are quite brave and generally capable of fighting in high-threat situations. Here is an

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[12] See Chapter Three.

[13] This case is made in Connable et al., 2018.

[14] This conclusion is derived from the present research, from interviews with American and Iraqi military leaders, from a review of available policy and declassified intelligence documentation, and from a thorough review of the literature on the Iraqi Army and on will to fight.

[15] Given the funding requirement that bound the RAND study team to Middle East research, and given the focus on conventional military forces that have received sustained security force assistance from the United States, prospective alternatives included the Yemeni armed forces; the various armed forces in the Gulf Cooperation Council, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; Egypt; the Libyan Government of National Accord Ground Forces; and the Jordanian Army. None of these cases provide anywhere near the level of detail or offer the long-standing and immediate policy relevance presented by the Iraqi Army. In any event, sponsor selection determined the case.

excerpt from a report on an Iraqi Army defense of an outpost in Karma, Anbar Province, Iraq in 2006, describing strong leadership in a desperate stand by a surrounded Iraqi Army platoon.

> As the battle began, Lieutenant Umran, one of the officers at the post, ran to the top of the headquarters, concerned that the *jundi* [soldier(s)] would not return fire. He moved back and forth between the posts, directing fire, encouraging the men, and shooting at insurgents. In the course of these actions, an insurgent shot him in the chest. Lying on the ground, Umran continued to encourage the jundi. When a jundi left his post to render aid, Umran ordered him to return to his post. Shortly thereafter, a group of jundi from inside the headquarters came to carry Umran downstairs. Umran ordered them to take positions returning fire rather than help him. He continued to encourage the men until he died fifteen minutes later.[16]

Bravery like this was commonplace in each of the wars I examined, as were individual and group acts of self-preservation. Instead of revealing some kind of simplistic binary cultural phenomenon about Iraqi will to fight, the record suggests a fragility in Iraqi Army combat effectiveness: A delicate balance of factors needs to be in place to ensure its will to fight *and* the effective employment of its capabilities. Identifying and, ideally, rectifying this gap between surface-level capability and actual performance is essential to Iraq's future and to the future of the U.S. security force assistance mission.

Iraqi Army Will to Fight as an Ongoing American Policy Challenge

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

> —Michael Knights, 2015[17]

The Iraqi Army imploded less than three years after the United States withdrew its military forces from Iraq in late 2011. In Mosul in June of 2014, an Iraqi infantry division of perhaps 15,000 soldiers, equipped with hundreds of armored vehicles, artillery, heavy machine guns, and mortars—reinforced by about another 15,000 paramilitary police—broke and scattered under pressure from, at most, a few thousand irregular fighters driving pickup trucks.[18] Some analysts believe that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Mosul had a 15-1 troop advantage over the Islamic State just before the collapse.[19]

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[16] Carter Malkasian, Gerald Meyerle, Stephen Guerra, and Adam Dunn, *Primer on Insurgent Tactics in Al Anbar Province*, Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, August 2008. This is an unclassified excerpt from a report that is not available to the general public.

[17] Michael Knights, *The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015, p. 7.

[18] Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, "Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division," *War on the Rocks*, July 1, 2014.

[19] Michael Knights, "Battle for Mosul: Critical Test Ahead for Iraq," BBC, June 11, 2014.

By the end of that summer, at least three entire Iraqi Army divisions, and perhaps as many as 19 full army brigades, effectively ceased to exist.[20] As large parts of the army collapsed, one third of Iraq was absorbed by the Islamic State. Baghdad was placed under direct threat. Eight years of intensive and expensive coalition security force assistance in Iraq appeared to have gone up in smoke. In retrospect, sanguine pronouncements from senior American leaders during the 2011 military withdrawal seem questionable.[21] America's war in Iraq was not over.

Tactical catastrophe had immediate strategic consequences for the United States and its armed forces. Scores of American high-technology aircraft and intelligence systems were diverted from the war in Afghanistan, and also from increasingly critical deterrence missions in Europe and Asia, to stem the Islamic State tide. Thousands of American military advisors were redeployed to shore up and help rebuild the army that the United States had twice crushed and, from 2003 to 2011, spent tens of billions of dollars rebuilding.[22] Some estimates suggest that rebuilding the parts of Iraq destroyed in the fighting since 2014, including sites paid for and then later destroyed by the United States, may cost tens of billions of additional dollars.[23]

Why did the Iraqi Army fail in 2014? Just after the fall of Ramadi in May 2014, then–Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter stated that "the Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight."[24] If will to fight is the disposition and decision to fight, act, or persevere when needed, then he was at least partly correct. Iraqi Army forces showed some will to fight, but not much. They had poor disposition to fight, they decided to fight only for short periods of time, and they did not persevere.[25]

But this conclusion—that the Iraqi Army lacked will to fight—only raises more questions, some of which at first glance seem ephemeral or even rhetorical. *Why* did the Iraqi Army have no will to fight? Had they *ever* had will to fight, historically? Would they have had will to fight in a different situation, perhaps against a different enemy? Did the entire army lack will to fight, or just the units that collapsed? What, if anything, could coalition advisors have done

[20]   A division generally consists of about 15,000 soldiers, and a brigade generally consists of about 3,000 soldiers. Michael Knights, arguably the most notable Western expert on the Iraqi security forces, estimated that 19 brigades collapsed (Knights, 2015, p. 7). Other sources on Iraqi Army order of battle in 2014 include U.S. Army, *OE Threat Assessment: Iraq*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity, December 2012; Jessa Rose Dury-Agri, Omer Kassim, and Patrick Martin, *Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, December 2017.

[21]   For example, in 2011 President Obama stated, "America's war in Iraq will be over" (The White House, *Remarks by the President and First Lady on the End of the War in Iraq*, transcript of a speech given at Fort Bragg, N.C., December 14, 2011).

[22]   Estimates of the costs related to rebuilding the Iraqi armed forces, and specifically the Army, are disputed and generally rounded out to approximately $25 billion. See Anthony Cordesman, *U.S. Military Spending: The Cost of Wars*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 10, 2017; Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 8, 2014.

[23]   For example, "88.2 Billion Price Tag for Rebuilding Iraq After Islamic State War," Associated Press, February 12, 2018; Uri Friedman, "$300,000 an Hour: The Cost of Fighting ISIS," *The Atlantic*, November 12, 2014.

[24]   Greg Jaffe and Loveday Morris, "Defense Secretary Carter: Iraqis Lack 'Will to Fight' to Defeat Islamic State," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2015.

[25]   The question of disposition is tricky, and it is addressed in greater detail in the analytic section of the report. For contemporaneous assessments see, for example, William Astore, "Why Did the Iraqi Army Collapse So Easily?" *Mother Jones*, October 16, 2014; Keren Fraiman, Austin Long, and Caitlin Talmadge, "Why the Iraqi Army Collapsed (and What Can Be Done About It)," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2014; Adam Scher, "The Collapse of the Iraqi Army's Will to Fight: A Lack of Motivation, Training, or Force Generation?" *Army Press Online Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 8, February 19, 2016, pp. 1–6.

from 2003 through 2011 to shore up the Iraqi Army's will to fight? More troubling strategic questions are also brought to mind. Is it even possible to improve the Iraqi Army's will to fight, or was the entire effort to build up the Iraqi Army a waste of time? Did the Americans leave too early? Would more time partnering, as the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army suggested in 2011, have made the difference?[26]

   This report does not seek to answer all these questions. But it can help to begin to do so by improving understanding of the Iraqi Army. Improvement in assessment is needed in any event. Assessments in Iraq often defaulted to the most quantifiable factors: counting equipment, checking troop numbers, categorizing visible performance.[27] Will to fight was an afterthought in the few cases in which it was given real consideration. The cost of treating will to fight as an afterthought was paid in blood and coin in 2014.

The Will-to-Fight Military Assessment Process

In this report, I seek to take the question of Iraqi will to fight and place it at the center of the assessment process. RAND's will-to-fight military assessment model is derived from a nine-part multimethod research process.[28] The model is designed to help assess either a military organization, such as the Iraqi Army, or a specific military unit within a larger armed force. Ideally, further exploration and modification of the model will lead to a holistic combat effectiveness assessment approach that integrates both the tangible and intangible factors of warfare.

Previous Field Assessments Often Lacked Purpose, Structure, and Credibility

Security force assessment is a tricky process that often generates imprecise, or precise but inaccurate, results. Through the Vietnam War, there were few efforts to structure the assessment of partner force combat effectiveness. Military Assistance Command—Vietnam instituted a wide array of assessments and gathered what, at the time, was an extraordinary amount of information on partnered forces such as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and Regional Force/Popular Force units. A remarkably similar assessment process carried over into Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s. Previous RAND analysis of these assessments show that they often lacked clear purpose, structure and, ultimately, credibility with decisionmakers.[29] One of the

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[26] Lieutenant General Babaker Zebari stated that the Iraqi Army would not be ready for independent operations until 2020 ("Iraq General Says Planned U.S. Troop Pullout 'Too Soon,'" BBC, August 12, 2010).

[27] See examples throughout this report, to follow.

[28] For a full explanation of the model, see the 2018 *Will to Fight* report (Connable et al., 2018).

[29] RAND has done considerable work in an effort to rectify this gap. See, for example, Michael J. McNerney, Angela O'Mahony, Thomas S. Szayna, Derek Eaton, Caroline Baxter, Colin P. Clarke, Emma Cutrufello, Michael McGee, Heather Peterson, Leslie Adrienne Payne, and Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-350-A, 2014; Stephen Watts, Trevor Johnston, Matthew Lane, Sean Mann, Michael J. McNerney, and Andrew Brooks, *Building Security in Africa: An Evaluation of U.S. Security Sector Assistance in Africa from the Cold War to the Present*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2447-OSD, 2018; Jefferson P. Marquis, Michael J. McNerney, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Merrie Archer, Jeremy Boback, and David Stebbins, *Developing an Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Framework for U.S. Department of Defense Security Cooperation*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1611-OSD, 2016.

central purposes of the will-to-fight assessment approach is to add purpose, structure, and credibility to what is often derided as an overly subjective process.[30]

The Military Will-to-Fight Model

Understanding the will to fight of the Iraqi Army requires assessing the factors that influence it. Factor-by-factor assessment is the most realistic, practical, and feasible way to assess the disposition of a military organization or unit to fight, act, or persevere. It is necessary to accept at the outset that finite clarity is out of reach. Further, there is no single factor or small set of key factors that can explain will to fight in any one case, or in general. Instead, understanding will to fight is a process of factor-by-factor assessment with the goal of identifying strengths that might be reinforced and weaknesses that need to be shored up through security force assistance.

Figure 1.2 shows the will-to-fight model's 29 major factors and 61 subfactors. All these are derived from a nine-part, mixed-method research effort published in *Will to Fight*.[31] The model helps focus analysis of each factor at four different levels and along three broad dimensions: at levels from the individual, to the unit, to the organization, to the state, to the society; and dimensionally by motivation, capability, or cultural factor. For example, unit competence is assessed as a capability, while societal identity is assessed as a cultural factor. Most of the factors have subfactors designed to help break down analysis and categorize evidence. For example, organizational control consists of methods of coercion, persuasion, and the cultural approach to discipline. All factors are more or less *durable* in battle, rated from high, to mid, to low. Durability reflects the likelihood that they might change during the course of a single battle, or over a short series of battles. All the factors together help describe the unit's or organization's disposition to fight in a prospective battle.

Each factor in the model represents a line of influence on the disposition to fight. Every factor is interdependent in some way. Organizational leadership affects unit leadership, which affects esprit de corps, and unit support, and cohesion, etc. In an ideal world, this model would be fully interactive and dynamic. There would be a theory-driven way to show every relational value between every factor, and a way to calculate all those dynamic relationships to generate a finding. As of mid-2021, no field of scientific endeavor has come close to cracking the code on this kind of interwoven human complexity. Therefore, the model pursues clearer understanding of each factor. Completed analysis will show trends across factors.

Another way to view the model and factors is in a table. Table 1.1 shows the same factors, subfactors, levels, and categories aligned vertically and horizontally. Factors are highlighted in yellow.

Even a quick review of the factors shows the holism inherent in the assessment approach. The model includes a range of military-specific cultural factors, motivations, and capabilities, and also a broad array of factors exogenous to, but also critical to understanding the will to fight of the military force. It includes analysis of material factors, such as the quantity and quality of military equipment (under Unit Support, Organizational Support, and State Support), and other nonmaterial factors, such as training, fitness, individual skills, and leadership,

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[30]   See Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1086-DOD, 2012; and Connable et al., 2018.

[31]   Connable et al., 2018.

Figure 1.2
The Military Will-to-Fight Model
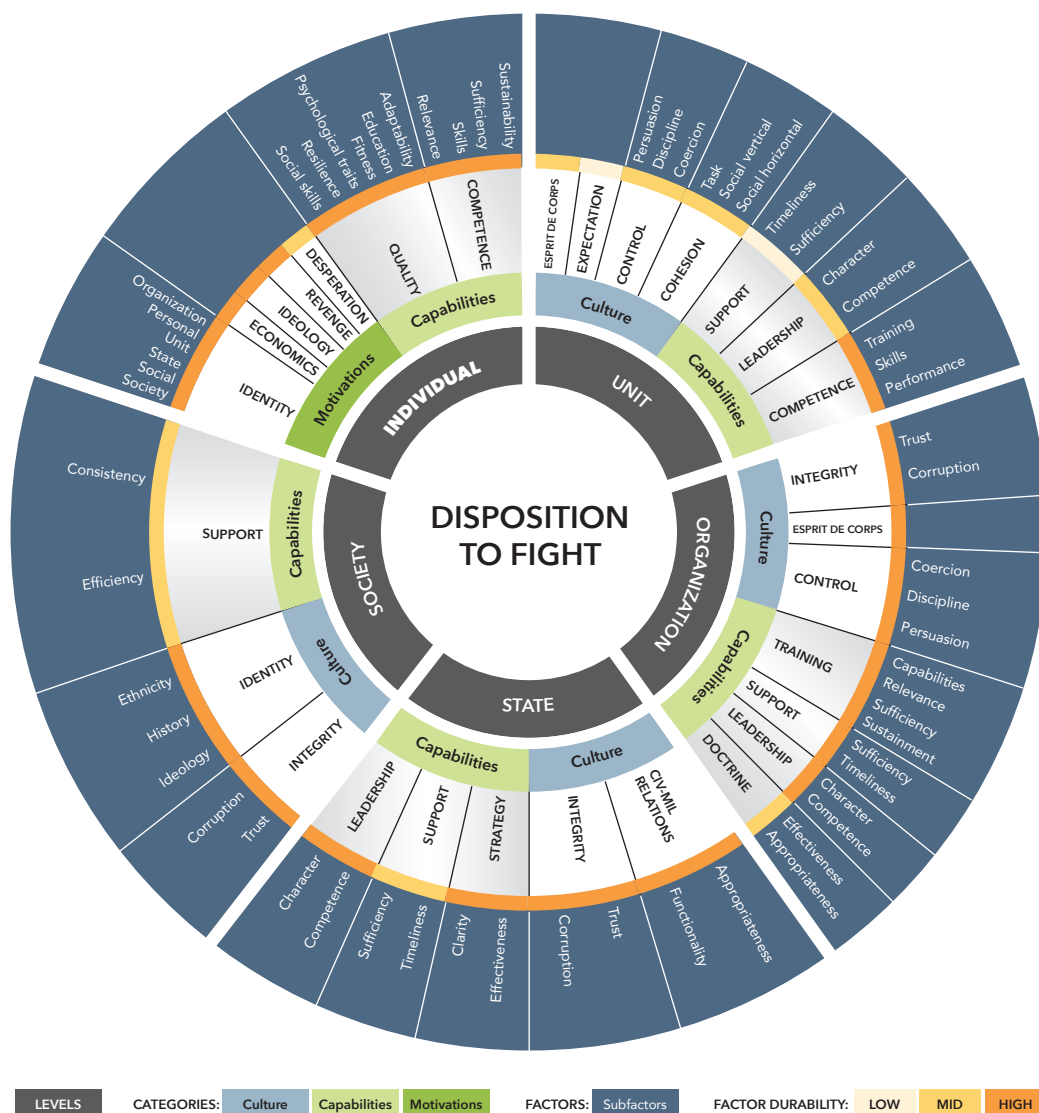
SOURCE: Connable et al., 2018.

that are often woven in to existing combat effectiveness assessment tools such as the Iraq Transition Readiness Assessment.

Added Factors for Conditional Assessments

The RAND research team generated two types of will-to-fight assessment to improve the portability of the model: general and conditional. A general assessment looks at the military organization or unit and judges it on its endogenous, or internal, merits. No context is applied to a general assessment; it could be used for any prospective military situation. A conditional assessment puts the organization or unit into a specific combat condition, either an ongoing war or a forecasted war. Conditional assessments require the addition of on-the-ground factors

Table 1.1
The Will-to-Fight Model in Table Form

Level	Category	Factors	Subfactors
Individual	Individual Motivations	Desperation	
		Revenge	
		Ideology	
		Economics	
		Individual Identity	Personal, Social, Unit, State, Organization, Society
	Individual Capabilities	Quality	Fitness, Resilience, Education, Adaptability, Social Skills, Psychological Traits
		Individual Competence	Skills, Relevance, Sufficiency, Sustainability
Unit	Unit Culture	Unit Cohesion	Social Vertical, Social Horizontal, Task
		Expectation	
		Unit Control	Coercion, Persuasion, Discipline
		Unit Esprit De Corps	
	Unit Capabilities	Unit Competence	Performance, Skills, Training
		Unit Support	Sufficiency, Timeliness
		Unit Leadership	Competence, Character
Organization	Organizational Culture	Organizational Control	Coercion, Persuasion, Discipline
		Organizational Esprit De Corps	
		Organizational Integrity	Corruption And Trust
	Organizational Capabilities	Organizational Training	Capabilities, Relevance, Sufficiency, Sustainment
		Organizational Support	Sufficiency, Timeliness
		Doctrine	Appropriateness, Effectiveness
		Organizational Leadership	Competence, Character
State	State Culture	Civil-Military Relations	Appropriateness, Functionality
		State Integrity	Corruption, Trust
	State Capabilities	State Support	Sufficiency, Timeliness
		State Strategy	Clarity, Effectiveness
		State Leadership	Competence, Character
Society	Societal Culture	Societal Identity	Ideology, Ethnicity, History
		Societal Integrity	Corruption, Trust
	Societal Capabilities	Societal Support	Consistency, Efficiency

SOURCE: Connable et al., 2018.

that are likely to influence will to fight, including the climate, adversary performance, and fatigue. These additional factors are presented in Table 1.2. Additional factors could be added depending on the situation at hand.

Assessing the Combat Effectiveness of the Iraqi Army: Case Approach

The will-to-fight model directly and indirectly emphasizes culture as a core element of will to fight. Culture is one of the three categories of factors, and it also has a strong influence on motivations, the individual-level category. Understanding Iraqi Army will to fight therefore requires an examination of Iraq, and specifically of Iraqi military culture. This, in turn, requires an examination of Iraqi history. The assessment approach is therefore built around case-by-case historical analyses of the Iraqi Army, and it is also informed by published histories of Iraq. Chapter Two provides more insight into the overarching cultural issues that affect Iraqi Army will to fight. Chapters Three, Four, and Five describe three cases to build both an empirical and narrative thread from the early 1980s through mid-2020 to elicit long-term trends and to create a rich body of descriptive data to support defensible findings and recommendations.

Historical Case Selection: The Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and the 2004–2011 Advisory Period

Given the focus on historical analyses, it was necessary to select warfare cases within the broader Iraqi Army case study. The Iraqi Army has existed on paper since the early 1920s, but it did not stand as an independent fighting force until the 1940s.[32] Between World War II and the start of this project in 2018, the Iraqi Army fought in a number of internal and external wars. Even though it deployed forces to fight against Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973, and on

Table 1.2
Conditional Factors for Assessment

Factor	Brief Description
Climate and Weather	How well are soldiers acclimated? Are harsh conditions sapping will to fight?
Terrain	Are soldiers prepared for the terrain? Is it familiar or unfamiliar? Is it harsh or forgiving?
Fatigue	This is accumulated fatigue over the course of a war, or immediate fatigue in a battle.
Mission	Does the mission make sense to the soldiers? Do they support it? Is it achievable?
Adversary Reputation	What is the reputation of enemy soldiers? Are they intimidating or considered weak?
Adversary Performance	How does performance match reputation? How intimidating are enemy actions?
Adversary Equipment	Is there overmatch in equipment for either side? Do specific weapons intimidate?
Messaging	How effective is messaging against the soldiers? How effective is internal messaging in support?
Allies	If allies are present, are they reliable or not reliable? Are they effective or ineffective?

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[32] For a detailed analysis of the history of the Iraqi Army, see Pesach Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon: A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921–2003*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017.

several occasions to fight against its own Kurdish minority, it did not engage in full-scale land warfare against a near-peer land army until the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War. After that, it fought against U.S.-led coalitions in the 1990–1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[33] Most recently, it fought against various incarnations of what is often called Al Qaida in Iraq.

Only three cases demonstrate the Iraqi Army's full combat potential in war: (1) the Iran-Iraq War, (2) the Gulf War, and (3) the 2003 coalition invasion. All three cases offer significant detail and available data. All three are immediately relevant to understanding security force assistance and generating combat effectiveness. Because the most-relevant information on the Iraqi Army in 2003 remained classified in 2018, we selected (4) the period of 2004–2011 to show the development of the Iraqi Army over time, with the direct support of American security force assistance. This case was required by our research agreement, but it is also eminently relevant for the research topic.

Applying the Explanatory, Exploratory, Portable Will-to-Fight Model
The will-to-fight model is explanatory, exploratory, and portable. It *explains* will to fight without generating precise causal arguments. In other words, the model can significantly improve understanding of will to fight but it will probably not provide an irrefutable "ah ha!" answer. *Exploratory* means that the model should be used to constantly improve the method of assessment. *Portability* means that the model should be adjusted as needed for each specific use. This last feature is central to the historical approach.

In the case of the Iraqi Army, a portable assessment approach means that I applied the same version of the published model but changed the emphasis and research approach in each case based on the information available. Each of the three cases I selected took place in different contexts and offered different types and quality of information. For example, most of the sources for the war between Iran and Iraq from 1980 through 1988 are Iranian, Iraqi, or from journalist observers, whereas the richest available sources for the 2004–2011 advisory period are American. Some interviews spanned long periods of Iraqi Army history, whereas others were only relevant for a single case.

I conducted long-form, semistructured interviews with eight Iraqi one-, two-, and three-star general officers who had served in the Iran-Iraq War, and either (or both) the Gulf War and coalition invasion in 2003. Their insights provided a thread of continuity across the first two cases and set a firm baseline for the third.[34]

The Iran-Iraq War has been thoroughly documented in secondary sources, many of which rely directly on hard-to-obtain primary source material, including declassified Iraqi military documents. For the Gulf War, I conducted a second research-driven assessment; this is presented in Chapter Four. For comparison, RAND also engaged Kenneth M. Pollack to apply his subject-matter expertise to both the regular Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Republican Guard in

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[33]   The term *Gulf War* is variously used to describe the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 war, and also the 2003 war. Sometimes the Iran-Iraq War is called the First Persian Gulf War, and sometimes the 1991 war is called the First Gulf War. This report refers to the 1991 war as the Gulf War, since this is the most common reference in the cited, contemporary, Western sources most relevant to the sponsor and the likely readership of this report.

[34]   We drew on other published interviews as well, including those conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses in 2011 (Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, Elizabeth A. Nathan, Laila Sabara, and Ana M. Venegas, *Saddam's Generals: Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War*, Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2011).

the Gulf War. Pollack's assessment informed my analysis of Iraqi Army will to fight but is not included in the report.

Originally, the assessment of the 2004–2011 period centered on coded data from 120 interviews conducted by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) from 2006 through 2012. This assessment was intended to showcase a distinct approach to assessing will to fight with one type of rich data. However, given our desire to provide a full scope analysis, the 2004–2011 case replicates the research-driven design presented in the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf War cases. It will have to be sufficient to consider the value of subject-matter expertise and interviews as possible alternative approaches to assessment.

Longitudinal Analysis: Assessing Iraqi Will to Fight over Time

This report does not present a separate case for the 2011–2020 period. However, I have been involved in the assessments of Iraqi Army performance during this period. The key finding, additional findings, and recommendations are built from the three case studies and a range of current information, including cited literature. Other academic and official sources informed the narrative arc, fleshing out the historico-cultural factors that are so important to under-standing Iraqi will to fight.[35] Collectively, the historico-cultural analysis, the three case studies, and the overview of the 2011–2020 period provide a longitudinal assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight. Figure 1.3 depicts this approach from 1921 through 2020, providing a chapter map for each section of the assessment:

Coding by Factor

The will-to-fight assessment model constitutes this project's methodology. I coded three cases, and Kenneth Pollack and I both coded the Gulf War case to establish one point of inter-coder reliability.

Figure 1.3
Longitudinal Assessment of Iraqi Army Will to Fight
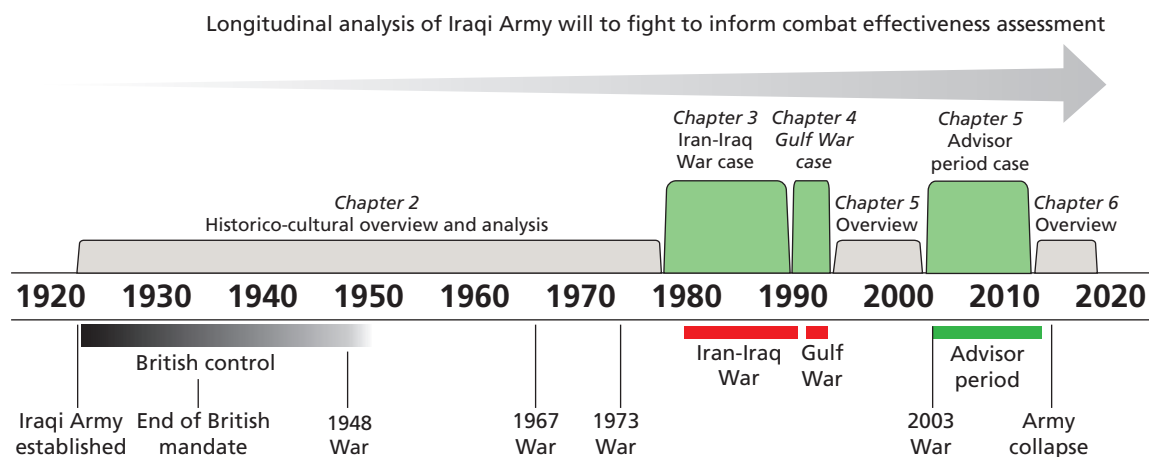
SOURCE: Historical timeline is derived from the sources cited in Chapter Two.

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[35] All are cited herein.

There are effectively two ways to use the model to help guide assessments of will to fight. The first is the quickest and easiest, and it is probably the most likely way the form will be applied: A subject-matter expert, such as a military advisor, working alongside partner forces fills out the form based on their close and detailed exposure to the partnered unit. They might provide some evidence for some factors, but for the most part the factors and definitions in the model will constitute a structured subjective assessment. The second approach requires more time and resources. Sources are identified; data are collected and analyzed; interviews are conducted; and only then is a factor-by-factor assessment conducted. This study applied both approaches.

I, a veteran of the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom and an Iraq subject-matter expert, took a standard historical analytic approach to the Gulf War case in Chapter Five and also to the Iran-Iraq War and the 2004–2011 advisory period. For the historical approach, available sources—books, articles, interviews, reports, etc.—were coded by factor. Each source was read in full, and during the reading each quote relevant to one or more factors was marked. I then went back through each source and added the citation as evidence to support the assessment of the given factor, or factors.

Further explanation and source identification are provided in each chapter and in the appendixes.

Unclassified Sourcing for an Unclassified Report

All the sources in this report are publicly available, including officially declassified American and British intelligence reports. Declassified reports suggest that a deeper narrative of the Iraqi Army may remain hidden behind the closed doors of Western intelligence agencies. There are a few interesting disparities between the canon of academic literature on the Iraqi Army and the contemporaneous declassified reporting by (for example) the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. National Intelligence Council. However, there is nothing sufficiently clear in these disparities to prove the public record inaccurate. For example, while the declassified reporting on the Iraqi Army suggests that it was often combat-ineffective, it also suggests its relative competence in comparison with other developing nations. Several CIA reports from the Iran-Iraq War period (1980–1988) describe Iraqi failures, but one CIA report written in December 1980 states "Iraqi units have performed well in comparison to those of other Third World armies."[36] Until more intelligence reports on the Iraqi Army are declassified, and until it is proven that there is considerable and conflicting evidence, there is nothing in the publicly available literature to challenge the evidence presented in the canon.

Organization of This Report

Chapter Two provides background on the Iraqi Army and describes the policy implications of the Iraqi Army's development through, and beyond mid-2021. Chapters Three, Four, and Five and Appendixes A and B present the case analyses. The Iran-Iraq War case is the central case in this study. It provides both an assessment of the Iraqi Army in context, and a detailed example of will-to-fight assessment. It is presented in one chapter and an appendix.

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[36] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Iran-Iraq War: Military Performance and Prospects*, declassified intelligence analysis, Langley, Va., December 1, 1980, p. 4.

Chapter Three (Iran-Iraq War Part I) provides a narrative overview of the Iran-Iraq War case. Chapter Four (Persian Gulf War) provides a historical analysis of the Iraqi Army's will to fight in a modern war against a superpower foe. This chapter also focuses in on the differences between regular army units and the more elite Iraqi Army Republican Guard Corps. Chapter Five (2004–2011 Security Force Assistance) showcases the interview approach to will-to-fight assessment. Chapter Six analyzes the collection of longitudinal cases to develop the key findings and recommendations of this report.

Three appendixes to this report are provided in a separate volume, available at www.rand.org/t/RRA238-1. Appendix A (Iran-Iraq War Part II) showcases the factor-by-factor research approach to assessment, providing an in-depth look at Iraqi Army will to fight from 1980 through 1988. Appendix B provides my factor-by-factor research assessment of the Iraqi Army in the Gulf War, with a full key for sources and evidence. Appendix C presents the semistructured interview questions prepared for the interviews with retired Iraqi general officers in 2019.

Iraq's Army: History and Culture

Military power is measured by the period which difficulties become severe, calamities increase, choices multiply, and the world gets dark and nothing remains except the bright light of belief and ideological determination. If the fighter does not care about principles and ideals, and his life becomes difficult, he forgets his military knowledge in favor of his love and fear for himself only. If he ignores his values, principles, and ideals, all military foundations would collapse. He will be defeated, shamed, and his military honor will remain in the same place together with the booty taken by the enemy.

—Saddam Hussein, 1981[1]

Assessing will to fight requires an examination of history and culture, or what some call an historico-cultural view of a problem.[2] A soldier's psychological state and predispositions are central to the decision to fight, act, or persevere.[3] An Iraqi soldier's decisionmaking is shaped by everything he has learned up to the point of decision. Therefore, collective perceptions of history and the shared transmissions of customs, beliefs, and norms—culture—have a powerful influence on the creation of these dispositions to act in war.[4]

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the key historico-cultural issues relevant to Iraqi will to fight, and a more detailed description of the relevance of Iraq and its army to American national security. Information presented in this chapter underwrites the assessments that follow. This chapter provides an example of the kind of holistic assessment required to understand will to fight, focusing on the difficulties inherent in assessing and describing culture.

Each case study in this report touches on both history and culture, and the final chapter of this report draws some key findings about their influence on Iraqi will to fight. For deeper reading on the history of Iraq and on Iraqi culture, see the cited texts throughout this report.

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[1] Quoted in Williamson Murray and Kevin M. Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 61, from a lecture given by then–President of Iraq Saddam Hussein at the 3rd Islamic Summit on January 28, 1981.

[2] An anthropologist might argue that history is part of culture, and a historian might argue that culture is part of history. However, these arguably semantic distinctions are not important for this report. I highlight history and culture because they are both commonly understood terms. They both describe approaches to learning and understanding complex human issues. For an examination of the term *historico-cultural*, and fundamental terminology and concepts associated with it, see, for example, Nigel Rapport, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts, Third Edition*, New York: Routledge, 2014.

[3] This argument, along with extensive citation, is presented in detail in Connable et al., 2018.

[4] This argument is presented in detail in Ben Connable, *Warrior-Maverick Culture: The Evolution of Adaptability in the U.S. Marine Corps*, doctoral thesis, London, UK: King's College London, 2015.

There is a rich, detailed literature on the history and culture of Iraq that can be accessed by interested readers.[5]

Historical Issues and Background of the Iraqi Army Pre-1980

This section highlights key historical issues that continue to affect assessments of the Iraqi Army, and it provides a brief historical narrative of the Army from its inception in 1921 through 1980, the point at which our case studies begin. The purposes of this section are to help the reader appreciate some of the historical threads that run through each of the cases, and to set the narrative background for the cases.

Two Historical Issues for Will to Fight: Nationalism and State Leadership

Scholars of Iraq and military advisors to the Iraqi Army typically home in on two major historical issues related to combat effectiveness: nationalism and leadership. Other factors might matter equally, or more, but these set the baseline for the analyses that follow.

Iraqi Nationalism

Depending on which broad narrative one accepts, Iraq is either a centuries-old region with a shared regional identity, three old Ottoman provinces with a more shallow collective identity, or a flimsy and generally ill-advised construction of various international agreements and conferences held from 1916 to 1923.[6] This ongoing debate over the nature of Iraqi national identity is central to will to fight. If there is a broad Iraqi national identity—and perhaps an identity deeply rooted in the idea of an ancient Iraqi society bridging the old Ottoman Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra Provinces—then nationalism might be considered a strong reinforcing factor for will to fight.[7] If nationalism has only existed as a powerful, central Iraqi identity in the modern era, as I suggest in Chapter Three, then it might still be used to improve Iraqi will to fight. But if Iraqi national identity is a farce, as some of the experts cited in this report sug-

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[5]   This chapter and the case analyses draw on these and other works: Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2012; Hanna Batutu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978; Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994; Amatzia Baram, "Neotribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991–1996," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1997, pp. 1–31; Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, eds., *The Creation of Iraq: 1914–1921*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; Reidar Visser and Gareth Stansfield, eds., *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Abbas Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Founding of the Modern State*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; Sami Zubaida, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 34, 2002, pp. 205–215; Sara Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map': Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 1)," *Jadaliyya*, June 2, 2015; Reidar Visser, "Historical Myths of a Divided Iraq," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2008; and Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009.

[6]   These include the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement; the 1920 Treaty of Sevres; the 1921 Cairo Conference; the Anglo Iraqi Treaty of 1922, ratified in 1930 and put into effect in 1932; the 1922 Uqair Protocol; and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. For citation referencing these treaties, and for analysis of the creation of the Iraqi state and issues of origin and identity, see Heather M. Robinson, Ben Connable, David E. Thaler, and Ali G. Scotten, *Sectarianism in the Middle East: Implications for the United States*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1681-A, 2018, Chapter Three.

[7]   For an image of these provinces see Robinson et al., 2018, p. 30.

gest, then national identity might in fact undermine will to fight: Few people would want to fight for a farce.

Historical analysis of national identity is heavily shadowed by the parallel cultural narrative of ethno-sectarian division (see below). Existing RAND research argues that Iraqi national identity is deeper and more viable than critics suggest, and that at the very least a constructed sense of Iraqi nationalism in the 20th century was substantial enough to influence Iraqi unity and will to fight during war.[8] Certainly the widespread, grassroots nationalist protests in late 2019 and early 2020 support the idea that Iraqi nationalism is real, whether or not it is manufactured.[9] But no simple claims can be made for either case. Nationalism does not necessarily need a thousand-year pedigree to have the power to shape identity and motivate behavior. Binary analyses do not apply here, nor do they apply to the way Iraqi leaders control the state.

Iraqi State Leadership

The modern Iraqi state came into existence in the early 20th century. A self-governing Iraq did not emerge from under the British mandate until the decade before World War II. Independence in Iraq is, as of 2020, less than a century old. As with most nation-states that emerged from decades of colonialism, Iraq has struggled with self-rule. From independence through the entire period of President Saddam Hussein's rule to 2003, Iraq was beset by revolutions, coups, counter-coups, and failed assassination and coup attempts. Paranoia became a necessary prerequisite for leadership survival. Culturally congruent survivalist approaches to state control evolved: patrimonialism, praetorianism, psychological manipulation, and punishment.[10]

At first glance, this approach to leadership seems to inherently undermine will to fight. In some Western perceptions of warfare, democracies inspire more will to fight than dictatorships.[11] Advocates of this perspective generally argue that centralized control is less effective than decentralized, mission-driven, and adaptable military design. Co-author of *Will to Fight* Jasen J. Castillo shows in his 2014 analysis of national armies that this is not a safe assumption.[12] Authoritarian governments such as Saddam Hussein's can be quite effective in the right cultural context, and when paired with the right kind of military force. Our cases reveal a nuanced and nonbinary response to this assumption.

Analyses of Saddam Hussein have generated an entire category of literature encompassing biography and psychological profiling.[13] He showed flashes of military competence and

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[8]   Robinson et al., 2018, Chapter Three.

[9]   See, for example, Yasmeen Serhan, "The Nationalist Movements Against Sectarian Politics," *The Atlantic*, October 30, 2019; Jen Kirby, "Iraq's Protests, Explained," *Vox*, November 5, 2019; Alissa J. Rubin, "Iraqis Rise Against a Reviled Occupier: Iran," *New York Times*, November 4, 2019.

[10]   Many other factors also contributed to the evolution of these approaches. *Patrimonialism* is a personal, centralized form of government that typically operates through a system of control, punishment, and reward directed by an authoritarian ruler. *Praetorianism* is generally taken to mean excessive military involvement in government. It also means the manipulation of the armed forces by the state leader to ensure his or her survival, perhaps at the expense of combat effectiveness. See Amos Perlmutter, "The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army: Toward a Taxonomy of Civil-Military Relations in Developing Polities," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 1969, pp. 382–404.

[11]   For example, Biddle and Long, 2004, pp. 525–546.

[12]   Jasen J. Castillo, *Endurance and War: The National Sources of Military Cohesion*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014.

[13]   For example, John Nixon, *Debriefing the President: The Interrogation of Saddam Hussein*, New York: Blue Rider Press, 2016; Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; Aaron M.

incompetence at various times during his rule. Saddam's leadership had continuing and direct influence on all aspects of the Iraqi Army. His personal fate rested in the Iraqi Army's hands, and the army's fate rested in his. The relationship was certainly contentious. As I describe in the cases, Saddam was a ruthless disciplinarian. However, he also used personal generosity to manipulate Iraqis and to ensure loyalty. Indeed, from 1980 through 2003, many Iraqi soldiers genuinely respected Saddam. Today, some retired officers loath Saddam for what he did to Iraq, but others feel a persistent sense of loyalty to the former president. The personality cult that Saddam Hussein established and nurtured from the late 1970s through his death in 2006 lives on in the photographs that some retired officers continued to display proudly in their homes in 2020.[14] Again, binary assumptions are not useful when assessing the Iraqi Army.

A Very Brief History of the Brief History of the Iraqi Army

This section provides an overview of the Iraqi Army through the period covered by the cases in the following chapters. Figure 2.1 depicts a timeline of key events for the Iraqi Army from its inception through 2019.[15]

The Iraqi Army was established on January 6, 1921, under the direct supervision of the British occupying authorities. It was a tiny force through the early 1930s, growing to fewer than 10,000 officers and men in its first decade. Just as the American Revolution helped to shape the culture of the American Army, and the Chinese Communist Revolution helped to shape the culture of today's Chinese People's Liberation Army, these formative years have left an indelible imprint on the Iraqi Army.

Faust, *The Ba'athification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015.

[14]   My personal observations, 2019. This is also consistent with previous visits to other officers' homes and places of business in the United States, Jordan, and in Iraq.

[15]   Additional sources of information include The White House, *Measures to Improve U.S. Posture and Readiness to Respond to Developments in the Iran-Iraq War*, declassified document, National Security Decision Directive 139, April 5, 1984; Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Desert Storm and Its Meaning: The View from Moscow*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-4164-AF, 1992; Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "The Long Shadow of the Gulf War," *War on the Rocks*, February 24, 2016; Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Moscow and the Gulf War: Decisions and Consequences," *International Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 301–327; Patrick Lee, "Impact of the Gulf War: Crude Plunges; Gasoline Prices to Dealers Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1991; Walter L. Perry, Richard E. Darilek, Laurinda L. Rohn, and Jerry M. Sollinger, eds., *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Decisive War, Elusive Peace*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1214-A, 2015; Nina M. Serafino, *Peacekeeping and Related Operations: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 18, 2006; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Lessons of the Iraq War: Main Report*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 21, 2003; Belasco, 2014; Peter L. Hahn, "Securing the Middle East: The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 38–47; Jeffrey Kimball, "The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 59–74; Bruce R. Kuniholm, "The Carter Doctrine, the Reagan Corollary, and Prospects for Untied States Policy in Southwest Asia," *International Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Spring 1986, pp. 342–361; Ben Connable, Natasha Lander, and Kimberly Jackson, *Beating the Islamic State: Selecting a New Strategy for Iraq and Syria*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1562-OSD, 2017; Ranj Alaaldin, *Containing Shiite Militias: The Battle for Stability in Iraq*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, December 2017.

Figure 2.1
Key Events in the History of the Iraqi Army, 1921–2019
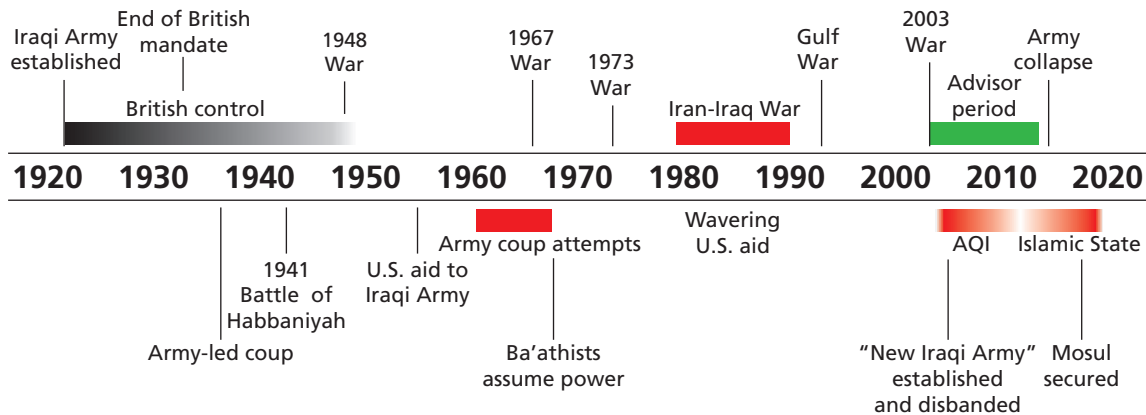
SOURCE: Derived from multiple sources cited in Chapter Two.
NOTE: AQI = Al Qaida in Iraq, in its various incarnations from 2003 to around 2010.

A Proto-Army in Britain's Shadow and Iraqis' Collective Memory: 1921–1948

From 1920–1932 the army of Iraq was virtually a British appendage.

—Mark Heller, 1977[16]

Working from primarily Iraqi sources, Pesach Malovany describes the extraordinary British influence—and until the end of the mandate period in 1932, outright control—over the Iraqi Army in its first three decades of development.[17] British officers shaped the force, its doctrine, and its authorities. They purposefully organized the Army as an internal security force to ensure continuing British control over Iraq. While it does not paint a complete picture on its own, this origin story is essential to understanding the role of the Iraqi Army in the state and its relationship to the people. Thrust into a praetorian role by the British, Iraqi officers were intensely politicized. The emerging military class was viewed by early Iraqi civilian leaders as both a very real threat and, when they cooperated, as a measure of control.[18] Over time, the distinction between military and civilian leadership evolved into a distinction without difference.

The first Iraqi Army coup came in 1936. This was followed by the 1941 coup that instigated a British military intervention and brief occupation. Iraqi Army soldiers fought in direct

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[16] Mark Heller, "Politics and the Military in Iraq and Jordan, 1920–1958: The British Influence," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1977, pp. 75–99.

[17] This section is derived primarily from Malovany's authoritative history of the Iraqi Army (Malovany, 2017, pp. 3–72). Additional sources are added for key points. Also see Heller, 1977.

[18] Perhaps the best analysis of the Iraqi officer class, its motivations, its perceptions, and its actions, can be found in Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1970. Be'eri's analysis is thorough and particularly useful because it is written with contemporaneous, comparative cases in Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, and Lebanon. See Be'eri, 1970, pp. 15–40, 171–209, 326–332, and 401–410.

combat against the British Army and fledgling Royal Air Force.[19] In this, its first major combat operation, the Iraqi Army was soundly defeated, even though it had the direct support of German Wehrmacht weapons and combat airpower. At the Battle of Habbaniyah, 400 Iraqi Army soldiers surrendered to the British.[20] Iraqis tend to hold Habbaniyah in reverence despite their historic defeat. Through the Iraqi lens, their army demonstrated courage by fighting against a great Western power.

In Iraq's cultural milieu, perception of courageous effort signified more than the singular tactical defeat. This perception can help inspire individual courage, but it can also undermine collective learning from defeat. A comparison with the American experience in the Vietnam War is useful here. The United States was defeated in Vietnam, and this led to decades of public recrimination and soul searching in the United States. In the aftermath of military defeats in Iraq, collective bias and official filtering were extenuated to the fantastical (more on this in the following chapters). The way Iraqis collectively understand the concept of sacrifice, victory, and defeat are essential to understanding Iraqi Army will to fight.

1948 War Against Israel: Mixed Reviews Under British Direction

Iraq sent its army to join the loose Arab coalition that attacked to destroy the Israeli state in 1948. Malovany effectively summarizes the (primarily) Iraqi perspective of their role in the 1948 war.[21] Several important points emerge in this retelling. First, the Iraqis successfully mounted a combined-arms expeditionary operation of over 6,000 regular and militia soldiers, sustaining this ad hoc force across national boundaries. While their overall combat performance was mixed, the Iraqis stood toe-to-toe with the David Ben-Gurion's Carmeli Brigade, and in many cases fought hard. Iraqi Army units conducted complex maneuvers, including relief-in-place operations; reinforcement under fire; multiple counterattacks in rough, hilly terrain; and at least one successful night attack, a difficult maneuver even for more modern forces with night-vision equipment.

Kenneth Pollack accepts some of this narrative but draws sharply different conclusions.[22] He argues that while the Iraqis often fought hard, their tactical acumen was severely lacking. They failed to coordinate attacks and ignored the critical role of scouting and intelligence. Junior officers were "unaggressive, unimaginative, and uninspiring," an assessment of the lower officer ranks that would be echoed in accounts of modern wars.[23] Iraqis were sluggish and passive, showing some élan only at the lowest tactical levels. Pollack states plainly, "Overall, the Iraqis fought very poorly in 1948."[24] Individual soldier skills were wholly inadequate, and it is not clear that enlisted Army soldiers believed in the mission at hand. But, importantly

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[19] See Douglas Porch, *The Other "Gulf War"—The British Invasion of Iraq in 1941*, strategic insights paper, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, December 2, 2002.

[20] For details on the Habbaniyah battle, see Malovany, 2017, pp. 21–22 (he cites 500 casualties); James A. Thorpe, "The United States and the 1940–1941 Anglo-Iraqi Crisis: American Policy in Transition," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Winter 1971, pp. 79–89; Robert Lyman, *Iraq 1941: The Battles for Basra, Habbaniya, Fallujah, and Baghdad*, Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2006; Kelly Bell, "Air War Over Iraq: 1941," *Aviation History*, May 2004.

[21] Specifically, see Malovany, 2017, pp. 37–47.

[22] Ken Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness—1948–1991*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002a, pp. 151–155.

[23] Pollack, 2002a, p. 155.

[24] Pollack, 2002a, p. 155.

for the present assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight, Pollack gives the Iraqis high marks for unit cohesion and toughness:[25]

> The only categories of military effectiveness in which the Iraqis showed any cause for praise were unit cohesion and, possibly, logistics. Iraqi forces hung together in battle and fought hard. Their units took very severe casualties, but the soldiers continued to hold their positions in defense and launched repeated attacks on offense.

Ibrahim al-Marashi and Sammy Salama describe some ethno-sectarian friction within the deployed Army units, as well as a pervasive resentment amongst Iraqi soldiers toward the British.[26] Nonetheless, considering Britain's direct control of the Iraqi Army through 1932, and its dominant influence over the Army through 1948, Iraqi performance in Israel must be viewed partly as a by-product of British security force assistance. In great part because of the resentment of Iraqi military personnel, after 1948 British influence began to wane.

Coup, Coup, Coup, Coup, Coup, and Coup

Once the bulk of its forces returned from the 1948 war, the Army again turned inward.[27] In 1952, the military took control of the state in a relatively peaceful transition, temporarily erasing—and permanently eroding—the line between civil and military leadership. Iraqi Army soldiers were used extensively to suppress internal dissent to the new government. In the wake of the 1955 Baghdad Pact, the United States began providing direct military aid to the Iraqi Army.[28] Another military-led coup upended the state in 1958, after which the Iraqi Army began to receive aid and training from the Soviet Union. Instead of picking sides, the Iraqis took in training, doctrine, and equipment from around the world, creating a confusing mix of approaches to warfighting. In any event, the Iraqi Army was primarily used to violently suppress internal dissent in between its continual coup attempts: in February 1963, November 1963, September 1965, and mid-1966, the last coup attempt before the July 1968 revolution in which the Iraqi Ba'ath Party took power.[29]

To this point in history, the Iraqi Army effectively had only two major combat engagements against a regular military force: In 1941 they fought with the Germans against the British, and in 1948 they fought with the British against the Israelis.[30] In both cases, the Iraqi Army received direct combat support from an ally. In both cases the Iraqis had limited tactical success but ultimately failed. They lost these respective military campaigns, and their tactical failures contributed to strategic defeat in both wars. In both cases individual Iraqi sol-

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[25] Pollack, 2002a, p. 155.

[26] Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History*, New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 66–68.

[27] For a brief history and a good analysis of the military-led coups in Iraq, see Majid Khadduri, "The Role of the Military in Iraqi Society," in Sydney Nettleton Fisher, ed., *The Military in the Middle East: Problems in Society and Government*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1963, pp. 41–52.

[28] For a brief summary of the Baghdad Pact, see U.S. Department of State, "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)," webpage, January 20, 2009.

[29] Joseph Sassoon's 2012 analysis of captured Ba'ath Party files offers the best insight into the development, structure, and actions of the party. See Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[30] The Iraqi Army also fought several internal battles against well-armed Kurdish militias. See Malovany, 2017.

diers demonstrated personal courage. Small units were generally cohesive, whether they fought together or surrendered together.

1966–1973: Internal Security and a Bench Seat in the Six-Day War

Iraq mobilized its army for the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel but it saw very limited action, primarily on the receiving end of long-range Israeli air attacks.[31] Malovany and others argue that the mobilization was chiefly a demonstration of good Iraqi institutional organization and logistics. As Pollack pointed out in his observation of the 1948 war, the Iraqis have a flair for logistics. In his overall analysis of the Iraqi Army, he states that "Some of Iraq's logistical accomplishments were impressive by any standards."[32] The Iraqi Army was also involved in a range of counterinsurgency operations against various Kurdish groups throughout this period, reprising and reinforcing its role as an internal security force. The 1973 October War, or Yom Kippur War, was the Army's next conventional conflict.

1973–1979: The October War Through the Rise of Saddam Hussein

Iraqi leaders put together an expeditionary force of approximately 60,000 soldiers, 500 tanks, 500 armored personnel carriers, and 200 artillery pieces to support the 1973 war against Israel. Logistics officers excelled as they had in 1948 and 1967. Because of poor readiness across a number of units, army leaders cobbled together the combat force by stripping the best, most ready elements away from standing divisions.[33] Spearheaded by the 3rd Armored Division, a unit with a solid reputation inside the Army, this ad hoc force represented the best of Iraq's fighting power. But it also left behind commanders, soldiers, and entire units that could only be described as leftovers. Generating this kind of imbalance was, and still is, expedient. It also raises questions about the overall health of the Iraqi Army, its collective combat effectiveness, and the impact on the whole force of unshared risks and rewards in combat.

As with the 1948 war, in 1973 combat results were uneven. And, as with the 1948 war, two parallel narratives tell an interesting and important tale of cultural perspective. Pollack describes how the Iraqi 12th Armored Brigade of the 3rd Armored Division—an ostensibly crack unit—drove into an Israeli armored kill zone, failing to adapt to a rapidly changing tactical situation. The brigade lost 50 tanks and was quickly "retreating and running off the battlefield." Pollack is unforgiving about the entire campaign, writing "The performance of Iraq's tactical forces was awful in virtually every category of military effectiveness."[34] While individual courage was rarely found lacking, intelligence was inadequate; tank crews could not adapt; regular infantry were poorly used, if at all; British doctrine was inexpertly applied; and combined arms were combined in name only.[35]

Malovany presents the Iraqi perspective on the 1973 war, also centering on the performance of the 12th Armored Brigade. In this version, the brigade thrust itself into a dangerous operational gap and bravely stopped an Israeli advance despite heavy losses:

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[31] The Iraqi Air Force did conduct some long-range attacks with poor results.

[32] Pollack, 2002a, p. 265. Also see the chapter-by-chapter and final conclusions in Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990.

[33] Pollack, 2002a, p. 167.

[34] Pollack, 2002a, pp. 173–174.

[35] Pollack, 2002a, pp. 174–175.

The 12th Armored Brigade, which was sent into battle without any prior preparation and was the vanguard of the Iraqi expeditionary force's participation in this war, succeeded in blocking the IDF's attack on Damascus, becoming a source of pride for the entire Iraqi Army. The Iraqis portrayed its performance as an additional heroic episode in their army's glorious history.[36]

Both of these narratives bear on current assessments of will to fight. Both speak to combat effectiveness, but also to Iraqi perception. If Iraqi Army officers and soldiers had taken all their collective defeats to this point at face value, they might never have fought again. By all objective standards, their performance (both intrinsic and relative to their adversaries) was poor. But the Iraqi perception of these outcomes—both organic and manipulated by state-controlled media over time—effectively transformed these defeats into a useful national propaganda message: Iraqi underdogs displayed courage and upheld Iraqi honor, thereby achieving important moral victories. Perceptions of moral victory buoyed esprit de corps within the army, generated popular support across Iraq for the army, and gave leaders such as Saddam Hussein sometimes-irrational confidence leading into the wars that followed the 1973 strategic defeat.

The Saddam Era, and the Post-Saddam Era Through Mid-2020

Saddam Hussein gradually obtained de facto control of the Iraqi state in the late 1970s and then seized absolute control in 1979 in what might be termed a soft coup. After slaughtering his political adversaries at the top of the government, Saddam rapidly evolved the Ba'ath Party apparatus into a multilayered and internally competitive security apparatus. He applied four specific, integrated measures to dominate the Iraqi Army. Each of these would have consequences for the army's culture and its effectiveness in combat.[37]

1. Military bureaus: Local party bureaus applied political control down to the lowest army units. There were more than 100,000 bureau apparatchiks active from 1991 to 2002.
2. Ba'athification of the army: Rewards for army service were good, but progression required good party membership and activity. This helped ensure loyalty to Saddam.
3. Dominant control: A detailed and carefully balanced system of punishment and rewards was applied, ranging from death sentences to gifts of Mercedes cars.
4. Parallel forces: Multiple, competing military forces were created, including the Ba'ath Popular Army, the Fedayeen Saddam, and the Special Republican Guard.

As with most popular dictators, Saddam Hussein is a study in unresolved dichotomy, or dualism. He simultaneously tried to divide and unite the Iraqi people and the armed forces in a complex web of manipulations. He resented the military after his rejection from the Army officer corps as a young man but cloaked himself in military trappings and tied his future to the Army's future. Saddam had thousands of Shi'i Arab Iraqis and Kurdish Iraqis murdered and tortured, but he also treated them with remarkable equanimity within the Ba'ath Party

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[36] Malovany, 2017, p. 62.

[37] A good summary of these measures, including data on the military bureaus, can be found in Sassoon, 2012, Chapter Five. More detail follows in the case studies.

structure. He was constantly worried about the weaknesses of the Iraqi military, but he was constantly driven to thrust it into conflicts it was unlikely to win.[38]

All of Saddam's dictatorial foibles had an equally dualistic effect on the Iraqi Army, at once pulling it together and driving it apart. During Saddam's tenure, the Iraqi Army fought three major wars: the Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 coalition invasion. Objectively, the first was a tie, the second was a glaring strategic defeat, and the third was an existential catastrophe. These cases are described in the section on Iraq's role in American national security strategy, below, and in the case studies that follow.

Culture and the Iraqi Army: Practicalities and Sensitivities

The next two sections describe specific cultural issues relevant to the assessment of will to fight in general and specifically for the Iraqi Army. Taken together, this section and the previous section provide the general historico-cultural context for the cases that follow, and for the overall longitudinal assessment of the Iraqi Army's will to fight.

Simplistic Visions of a Complex World: Ethno-Sectarianism and Iraqi Identity

Westerners often describe Iraq as a nation of fractions. Iraqis are neatly categorized as Sunni Arab, Shi'i Arab, or ethnic Kurd; they are defined by their preferred sect of Islam or by their ethnicity. Applying Occam's Razor to a seemingly opaque and intractable problem is a commonplace approach in cases such as Iraq.[39] If Iraqis have singular, or at least universally dominant identities, and if the country can roughly be broken up into thirds, then why not break it apart? And, it follows, the United States should not expect the Iraqi Army to fight well because Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurd would not want to fight together for a unifying super-ethnic, super-sectarian cause such as Iraqi nationalism. Identity, one of the factors in the will-to-fight model, might render the Iraqi Army permanently combat ineffective.

The Problems with Primordialism

This thinking is generally called primordialism. Middle East and ethno-nationalism expert Carsten Wieland explains this viewpoint: "[P]eople share common primordial features and so necessarily have common political interests as well, and thus, ideally, their own state."[40] In 2006, then-Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr., and Leslie H. Gelb argued for "giving each ethno-religious group [in Iraq]—Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab—room to run its own affairs, while leav-

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[38]   Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp provide the best analysis on the dualistic nature of both Saddam Hussein and the state, which together constitute an overarching dualism (Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988, Chapter 12).

[39]   Briefly, William Occam argued that simple explanations of complex issues are preferable and more likely to be correct than complex explanations. For a more detailed explanation see Don L. Anderson, "Occam's Razor: Simplicity, Complexity, and Global Geodynamics," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 146, No. 1, March 2002, pp. 56–76.

[40]   Carsten Wieland, "The Bankruptcy of Humanism? Primordialism Dominates the Agenda of International Politics," *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2005, pp. 142–158, p. 144.

ing the central government in charge of common interests."[41] But there are many problems with this way of thinking about human identity, and particularly about Iraqi identity.[42]

No Iraqi has a singular, or even constantly dominant, identity.[43] A colonel in the Iraqi Army during the Saddam era might simultaneously have been a genetic and gender-identified male, an Iraqi national, a Shi'a Muslim, a military officer, a Basrawi (person from the Basra region), a husband and father, a land owner, a Ba'ath Party member in good standing *and* a secret Communist Party member, and even one of a small number of ethnic Circassians who choose to practice Shi'a Islam.[44] All these identities might play on the colonel's willingness to fight differently in any given situation. The colonel himself might not have been fully aware which identity dominated, or which had the most influence on will to fight, if any did.

Complexity Rules—a Difficult but Logical Alternative to Primordialism

Clifford Geertz, one of the original proponents of the term *primordialism*, recognized this complexity and argued that primordial identity could apply to "blood, race, language, locality, religion, or tradition"[45] He argued that subnational identities were most dangerous to national unity in emerging states such as Iraq. This may be true, but it is not a sufficient basis for dropping Iraqis onto homogenous cultural islands and then predicting their behavior in linear pathways.

Most experts on Iraq argue for a rejection of primordial simplification.[46] Nationalist identity can and does coexist with other identities in Iraq, as it does in Russia, a country with one of the world's most powerful armies. And, as in the Soviet and modern Russian armies, the Israeli Army, and in the U.S. Army, complex identities can be a source of both strength and prospective weakness.[47]

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[41] Joseph R. Biden, Jr., and Leslie H. Gelb, "Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq," *New York Times*, May 1, 2006.

[42] See Robinson et al., 2018, Chapter Three; and Ben Connable, "Partitioning Iraq: Make a Detailed Case, or Cease and Desist," *War on the Rocks*, May 16, 2016.

[43] For more on identity, see Matthew J. Hornsey, "Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory: A Historical Overview," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008, pp. 204–222; P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Who Am I? The Identity Crisis in the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2006, pp. 63–73; Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity*, Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass and Co., 1995.

[44] Circassians are part of an ethnic group from the northern Caucuses. Many were displaced by the Russian state in the 1800s, and thousands settled in Iraq. Most Circassian Iraqis practice Sunni Islam.

[45] Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in: Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe and London, 1963, pp. 105–157, p. 106. Also see Joseph R. Gusfield, "Primordialism and Nationality," *Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2, January 1996, pp. 53–57.

[46] For example, Visser, 2008. Fanar Haddad has some of the most interesting takes on post-2003 identity in Iraq: Fanar Haddad, "A Sectarian Awakening: Reinventing Sunni Identity in Iraq After 2003," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 17, 2014, pp. 70–101; Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[47] Susan L. Curran and Dmitry Ponomareff, *Managing the Ethnic Factor in the Russian and Soviet Armed Forces: An Historical Overview*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-2640/1, July 1982; Deborah Yarsike Ball, "Ethnic Conflict, Unit Performance, and the Soviet Armed Forces," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Winter 1994, pp. 239–258; Lloyd J. Matthews and Tinaz Pavri, eds., *Population Diversity and the U.S. Army*, Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, June 1999; Carl Forsling, "Why the Military Needs Diversity," *Task and Purpose*, April 28, 2015; Jane Corbin, "Israel's Arab Soldiers Who Fight for the Jewish State," BBC, November 8, 2016.

This brings us back to a recurring argument in this chapter: Simple solutions do not apply in Iraq, or to understanding will to fight. There is no easy explanation of Iraqi culture, and there is no singular theory or formula that allows advisors, intelligence analysts, or researchers to avoid the hard work associated with cultural assessment. *All* complex, interwoven aspects of culture influence the disposition to fight in the Iraqi Army. The frustrating but logical alternative to primordialism is complex cultural assessments and analyses that improve understanding of the Iraqi Army but never generate a simple and clear result.

Arab Culture and Combat Effectiveness: Assumptions and Analyses

> Arab military culture devolved into an echo of its former self, resting on a complex mix of myths and notions of bravery, tribal loyalty, raiding parties, and martyrdom that was, in many ways, indifferent to the effectiveness model inherent in the accoutrements and models of Western militaries. Such attributes have made Arabs extraordinarily brave warriors throughout the ages, but relatively poor soldiers in the context of wars since the nineteenth century.
>
> —Williamson Murray and Kevin Woods[48]

In the lead-up to the 1973 October War, the CIA made several assumptions about the Arab military forces massing against Israel. Ultimately, their inaccurate forecast—CIA analysts argued the Arabs would not invade, but they did—stemmed in part from their equally inaccurate assumptions about Arab will to fight. A bracing agency post-mortem highlights this unfortunate trend in the Near East bureau at the time. This quote describes an underlying assumption about Arab will to fight, one that sometimes reemerges in contemporary interviews and literature:

> There was . . . a fairly widespread notion based largely (although perhaps not entirely) on past performances that many Arabs, as Arabs, simply weren't up to the demands of modern warfare and that they lacked understanding, motivation, and probably in some cases courage as well.[49]

Other contemporaneous CIA reports questioned Arab combat motivation and soldiers' basic capabilities to operate military equipment.[50] One report noted, "the average conscript lacks the necessary physical and cultural qualities for military service."[51] Some might view these assumptions as ethnocentric, or perhaps prejudiced or racist: *Arab* is an ethnicity. Grouping Arabs together and suggesting that they all share an undesirable trait—that they cannot

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[48] Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 5.

[49] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Performance of the Intelligence Community Before the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973: A Preliminary Post-Mortem Report*, declassified intelligence assessment, Langley, Va.: Intelligence Community Staff, December 1973, p. 14. Some of the interviews and articles reviewed for this report revealed similar assumptions, although typically in more oblique terms.

[50] For example, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Israel's Requests for Military and Economic Assistance: Analysis of U.S. Military Options*, declassified intelligence assessment, Langley, Va.: Directorate of Analysis, 1970, pp. 4–5.

[51] The declassified 1973 post-mortem cites this otherwise publicly unavailable report (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 1973, p. 14). This specific quote refers to the Egyptian Army but summarizes the CIA's description of "Arab manpower" more generally.

fight well or that they lack courage—is a fraught step to take for any analyst. In past eras, outright racism was evident. A 1930 British report on the Iraqi Army leadership noted that the Iraqi men in general were "stupid and dull."[52] One way of dealing with the questionable gray area between assessment and harmful cultural bias would be to avoid sensitive cultural questions entirely. But nearly every expert on military effectiveness makes a straightforward case for culture's central importance.

Culture Is Essential to Assessing Combat Effectiveness and Will to Fight

Sometimes culture has been an explicit part of theoretical combat effectiveness formulae. Stephen Biddle and Stephen Long argue in a 2004 paper that a handful of key cultural factors make democracies successful in war.[53] In other cases, cultural factors are pervasive in the analyses but only indirectly described in cultural terms.[54] Nearly every military history case study explores culture in detail and suggests its influence on battlefield performance.[55]

If there is general agreement that culture is one of the most important aspect of combat effectiveness, and if culture primarily informs the human aspects of effectiveness, then culture must be studied in some detail to assess will to fight. The RAND will-to-fight model also centralizes cultural factors. But if culture is a fraught topic, and if cultural assessments are prone to overgeneralization or even accusations of racism, how should the culture that influences Iraqi Army will to fight be assessed? *Can* culture be safely assessed?

Yes, culture must be assessed, and it can be assessed with some degree of thoughtful objectivity. A considerable literature on culture and military performance establishes the utility of cultural analyses in broader assessments of military performance and the need to study culture in order to understand military performance. Theo Farrell, Elizabeth Kier, Colin S. Gray, Williamson Murray, Dima Adamsky, and others have clearly established the need for cultural analysis in strategic and military organizational studies.[56] Lessons from their collective works bleed into other analyses on the transmission of behavioral norms at the lowest tactical levels most relevant to the present study.[57]

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[52] Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 54, quoting from a British military report filed in 1930.

[53] Biddle and Long, 2004. Also see Stephen Peter Rosen's take on culture and effectiveness at the societal level of analysis: Stephen Peter Rosen, "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1995, pp. 5–31.

[54] Millett, Murray, and Watman describe effectiveness in largely organizational and operational terms, but each analytic benchmark is pinioned to a wide array of societal, state, and organizational cultural factors (Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Summer 1986, pp. 37–71).

[55] Connable et al., 2018, Chapter One.

[56] For example, Theo Farrell, *The Norms of War: Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005; Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the U.S., and Israel*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010; Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989; Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997; Williamson Murray, "The Future of American Military Culture: Does Military Culture Matter?" *Orbis*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1999, pp. 27–42; Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1999, pp. 49–69.

[57] For example, Keith Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000; Christopher Coker, *The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror*, New York: Routledge, 2014; Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell, eds., *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, Stanford,

In late 2019, Peter Mansoor and Williamson Murray published an edited volume on military organizational culture. Their central premise is that culture "has an enormous influence on military organizations and institutions and their success or failure in the ultimate arbitration in war."[58] In this same volume, Kevin M. Woods obliquely touches on a central problem in military cultural analyses: To understand the cultural norms and behaviors of a military organization like the Iraqi Army, it is necessary to study and understand the broader culture from which it emerged, and within which it resides and constantly evolves.[59] This need for cultural holism—studying all available cultural inputs to disposition rather than treating military organizations as cultural islands—drove the development of the RAND will-to-fight model.[60]

Given the centrality of culture to combat effectiveness, it is incumbent upon researchers examining the Iraqi armed forces to find a careful and objective way to talk and write about Arab and Iraqi culture. In practice, nearly every assessment of Iraqi Army combat effectiveness is, intentionally or unintentionally, a primarily cultural assessment. These include nearly all of the works cited in this and in the following chapters. RAND's 1979 net assessment of Arab military effectiveness relied partly on the observations of American advisors, and the report stated explicitly that "Cultural generalizations are fraught with subjectivism and, particularly because our informants were Westerners, may include significant traces of ethnocentrism as well."[61] This kind of transparent recognition of risk and bias is essential in the pursuit of reasonable objectivity.

One way to help alleviate some of the concerns associated with ethnocentrism and other biases is to check assumptions and analytic findings against Iraqi sources. A useful example emerged from the present analysis. There is a general Western perception that the Iraqi Army has a weak and generally ineffective noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps, and that its lack of capability results in part from the limited individual capabilities—the individual *qualities*—of the Iraqi soldiers available for leadership positions. This is a potentially fraught observation. Adding Iraqi insights can help. Retired Iraqi Army Major General Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas has commented on the qualities of Iraqi Army NCOs:

> The army began losing its NCO corps, little by little after the Revolution of 1958. The mettle of the Iraqi soldier deteriorated over time. When the army started to expand in the early 1980s, the importance of NCOs diminished and more emphasis was placed on the officer corps. Second, the moral fiber and level of education of the average Iraqi was not high. This is where the NCO corps came from. We could not trust them—not all of them,

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Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013; Anthony King, *The Ethos of the Royal Marines: A Precise Application of Will*, Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 2004; Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959. My doctoral work on military culture (Connable, 2015) also informs this analysis.

[58] Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, eds., *The Culture of Military Organizations*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 1.

[59] Kevin M. Woods, "The Weight of the Shadow of the Past: The Organizational Culture of the Iraqi Army, 1921–2003," in Mansoor and Murray, 2019, Chapter 12.

[60] See Connable, 2015, pp. 21–23, for more explanation of cultural holism in relation to military organizational studies.

[61] Pascal et al., 1979, p. 34.

but most of them. As a result, the position of the NCO lost, little by little, its significance. . . . This was a bad thing for the Iraqi Army.[62]

Only a few authors have taken on the daunting task of assessing Arab cultural influences on combat effectiveness, and specifically on human factors and will to fight. Work by Hisham Sharabi, Williamson Murray, Kevin Woods, Ibrahim Al-Marashi, Rob Johnson, Abbas Kadhim, Pesach Malovany, Toby Dodge, Kenneth Pollack, Michael Eisenstadt and Kendall Bianchi, Michael Knights, and other authors cited throughout this report provide more than sufficient baseline for further analysis.[63]

Expert Analyses of Arab Culture and Combat Effectiveness

Scholarly literature on Arab culture is extensive, with an acceleration in focus across the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology occurring in the 1960s.[64] In the 2019 *Armies of Sand*, Pollack reinforces his previous arguments but pads them with some helpful caveats. He argues that "Like nitroglycerin, you have to treat culture with a lot of respect if you want to use it without doing a lot of damage."[65] Pollack argues that Arab culture—including Iraqi culture—conveys several weaknesses and some strengths.[66]

Whereas most assessments of Arab military culture focus on civil-military relations and praetorianism, Pollack sees fundamental flaws in the system of education across the Arab world. He sees insufficient emphasis on practical, hands-on learning, which makes basic and specialized military training more difficult; the CIA made the same assessment in 1970.[67] He provides evidence showing that Arab youth are discouraged from taking risks and making independent decisions. It follows that they are also loath to do so when risk-taking and rapid decisionmaking are most needed in combat. He argues, "The dominant culture consistently suppresses creativity, innovation, imagination, and all similar divergences from established patterns of action and thought."[68] A hierarchical patriarchy translates to top-down control and further suppression of initiative and adaptability. Knowledge is coveted and "atomized,"

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[62] Woods, Murray, and Stout, 2011, p. 146.

[63] Hisham Sharabi, *Palestinian Guerrillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1970; Michael Eisenstadt and Kendall Bianchi, "The Ties that Bind: Families, Clans, and Hizballah's Military Effectiveness," *War on the Rocks*, December 15, 2017.

[64] Some of these studies are, in retrospect, ethnocentric and bordering on racist. A few of these retain some viability despite contemporaneous biases. Unfortunate examples include Raphael Patai's *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1973). Others are more detached and scientific. Fouad M. Moughrabi provides a dated but useful literature survey: Fouad M. Moughrabi, "The Arab Basic Personality: A Critical Survey of the Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1978, pp. 99–112. Other examples include Harold Feldman, "Children of the Desert: Notes on Arab National Character," *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 45c, No. 3, 1958, pp. 40–50; Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "Some Psychosocial and Cultural Factors in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Review of the Literature," *Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1972, pp. 269–280; Sania Hamady, *Temperament and Character of the Arabs*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960; Halim Barakat, "Evolutionary Change in Arab Society," *Mawaqif*, Vol. 28, 1974, pp. 8–20 (Arabic).

[65] Kenneth M. Pollack, *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 343.

[66] For the remainder of the references to Pollack in this section, unless otherwise specifically cited see Pollack, 2019, Part IV.

[67] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 1970, pp. 4–5.

[68] Pollack, 2019, p. 372.

preventing necessary information from reaching soldiers and, in turn, contributing to further lethargy and brittle, undeviating behavior in combat.

On the plus side, Arab cultural emphasis on personal honor motivates personal courage. The highly social nature of Arab culture can, in some cases—many of which are cited in this report—contribute to tight unit social cohesion. Pollack pushes back against loose accusations of Arab cowardice like those assumed by the CIA in 1973. Arguably, these collective findings line up with the 1973 performance of the Iraqi Army 12th Armored Brigade in combat against Israel: Individual soldiers fought bravely and generally remained cohesive, but the unit reacted sluggishly when quick adaptation was called for. Brittleness resulted in breakage.

Other analyses propose similar findings about Arab culture and military effectiveness. Norvell B. De Atkine adds the general inability to conduct effective combined-arms operations and harmful cultural fissures between officers and enlisted soldiers.[69] De Atkine also laments the general inability of Western military security force assistance to assess and adapt to cultural realities in the Middle East.[70] A 2004 RAND report further reinforces the harmful effects of over-centralization on Arab military effectiveness.[71] While factor-by-factor analyses are different, there is a general consensus on the main points, including from Iraqi observers cited in the main chapters.

Cultural Generalizations Can Be Useful but Are Insufficient for Assessment

Analysis of the Iraqi Army in combat shows that sometimes the generalizations about Arab culture were on the mark. In other specific cases, however, they fell flat. Centralization and lack of initiative and adaptability were generally commonplace from case to case. Many Iraqi Army units in each of the three cases I examined proved to be sluggish and brittle, even while individual officers and soldiers displayed courage. Other commanders displayed significant initiative. The Iran-Iraq War case shows that in the early 1980s the Iraqis were ineffective at applying combined arms and maneuver, but that by 1988 they were at the very least competent practitioners, running a fairly well-oiled military machine against Iran's crumbling ground forces.

Cultural norms may have *restrained* the development of complex military skills, but they did not *prevent* the Iraqi Army from learning, adapting, conducting aggressive and tactically sound counterattacks and surprise amphibious operations, or from developing wicked technical innovations, such as thrusting high-powered electrical lines into bodies of water to electrocute advancing Iranian soldiers. The 2004–2011 case shows that primordialist expectations of ethno-sectarian discord in the Iraqi Army were unmet, just as they were from the 1980s through 2003.

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[69]   Norvell B. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 1999.

[70]   Norvell B. De Atkine, "Western Influence on Arab Militaries: Pounding Square Pegs into Round Holes," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 2013, pp. 18–31; James F. Jeffrey and Michael Eisenstadt offer similar, more detailed critique in "U.S. Military Engagement in the Broader Middle East" (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2016). Eisenstadt flips the paradigm and offers recommendations to the Iraqis for their campaign against the Islamic State in 2015: Michael Eisenstadt, *"Defeat Into Victory": Arab Lessons for the Iraqi Security Forces*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 17, 2015. This advice is still relevant in 2019; see Chapter Six.

[71]   Nora Bensahel and Daniel L. Byman, eds., *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Change*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1640-AF, 2004.

Once again, broad generalizations or binary analyses do not neatly apply to all combat effectiveness assessments. Books on Arab militaries and the collective works of experts are essential prerequisite reading for anyone seeking to understand the Iraqi Army. But because assessment of combat effectiveness has real-world consequences for policymakers and military practitioners, policy assessment demands an assumptions check.

If the Iraqis are culturally capable of achieving combat effectiveness and generating will to fight, then perhaps the detrimental cultural factors are simply impediments that can be at least partially overcome with the help of security force assistance and strong Iraqi leadership. This is an important thought for Western military officers working to help develop Iraq's Army, and for Iraqi leaders working to build their own army.

Thread of Continuity from Iran-Iraq Through Mid-2020: Lingering Assumptions

Several analytic themes directly linked to culture, and to cultural assumptions, emerged from the literature review for this research effort.[72] Many of these themes carried over into assumptions that continue to affect the way U.S. military personnel think about and interact with the Iraqi Army in 2021. This section presents one general conclusion about Saddam Hussein's performance in the Iran-Iraq War that did not bear up to scrutiny, and then a summary of the themes that survived as lasting assumptions. Some have enduring validity, but others need to be revisited. Each is addressed in the assessment in the three case study chapters that follow. It is important to note that the statements behind these assumptions are not necessarily consistent or wholly true, but they do reflect some of the available evidence.

The purpose of including these assumptions in this report is to help link together the various analyses of each case across the longitudinal assessment from the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, to the 1990–1991 Gulf War, to the 2004–2011 advisor period, to the mid-2020 period. They are intended to both anchor the contemporaneous debate in each phase, and then to help compare and contrast those contemporaneous findings over time. Did they hold up to scrutiny? Were the conclusions from one era valid in the next, or across the arc of the entire period of analysis? Later chapters and sections touch back to these assumptions to help anchor the longitudinal understanding of the Iraqi Army's will to fight.

A General Conclusion from the Literature: Saddam Lacked Military Competence

This conclusion from the war is not necessarily relevant in 2021, but it colors the way that current military professionals view the history of the Iraqi Army and its combat effectiveness. Several analysts of the war describe Saddam Hussein as a neophyte whose total lack of military experience, combined with irrational overconfidence, led to terrible wartime decisionmaking. Writing in 1990, Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner dismissed Saddam's military acumen during the Iran-Iraq War: "For all his political skills, Saddam Hussein was never to show any particular military aptitude during any phase of the war . . ."[73] In a dictatorship with centralized control over the military, this would be disastrous. Considerable blame for

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[72] This list is aggregated from all of the sources cited throughout this report. Each represents a point that emerged as a key theme, and then carried over in follow-on research into the modern Iraqi Army.

[73] Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, p. 108.

Iraq's military failures is attributed to Saddam, but this conclusion is overstated and in some areas of performance wrong. Saddam erred often, but he learned, adapted, and in many cases demonstrated strong and effective military leadership during the Iran-Iraq War.[74] It is also true that, despite his dominant role in the Iraqi state, Saddam was not, and could not have been, solely responsible for all that went well or poorly with Iraq's various wars. This point is further developed in the cases.

Assumption 1: Oppressive Centralization Limits Performance in the Iraqi Army

All the cultural analyses of the Iraqi state and its military forces, and all the military histories and analyses, find a strictly hierarchical, paternalistic command and control relationship in the Iraqi Army. Routine decisionmaking is pressed to the highest possible levels, in most cases to general officers. Decisions that might be handled by a one-star general in the American Army might require presidential direction in Iraq. Units rarely act without explicit orders for fear of making mistakes and being punished. Many experts on the Iraqi Army therefore suggest, intentionally or unintentionally, that the top-down leadership approach in the Iraqi Army may be a cultural constant that precludes effective, high-tempo operations.[75]

Assumption 2: Iraqis Struggle to Apply Combined-Arms Warfare

Battle histories of the Iran-Iraq War, many of which refer to the Iraqi Army's 1973 experience, describe the Army's struggles with combining fires from artillery and aircraft with the maneuver of its ground forces. Pollack wrote in his 2002 analysis of the Iraqis in the Iran-Iraq War: ". . . [n]o matter how hard Iraqi training stressed the integration of the various combat arms, Iraqi tactical formations simply could not fight as combined-arms teams."[76] Combined-arms fire and maneuver is the hallmark of modern ground combat forces. To some analysts, the inability to apply combined arms is endemic. This judgement extends to general Iraqi competence with complex military activities. Many experts on the Iraqi Army therefore suggest, intentionally or unintentionally, that the Iraqis will never develop a highly capable ground combat force.[77]

Assumption 3: Senior Iraqi Army Leaders Are Politicized to the Point of Ineptitude

Historical analyses, interviews, and archival records of the Ba'ath Party and Iraqi Army show that the army was heavily politicized in 1980. This changed over the course of the war as Saddam became increasingly frustrated with the weak performance of his generals. By 1988, the Army had professionalized, and most of the political appointees were sidelined or simply gone. However, some analysts argue that the positive trend was immediately reversed in late 1988, and that appointments again undercut performance in later years.[78] Many experts on the Iraqi Army therefore suggest, intentionally or unintentionally, that Iraqi leaders are mostly political appointees with limited martial capabilities.

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[74] For example, Caitlin Talmadge, "The Puzzle of Personalist Performance: Iraqi Battlefield Effectiveness in the Iran-Iraq War," *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2013, pp. 180–221; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990.

[75] For example, Pollack, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014.

[76] Pollack, 2002a, p. 213. The sentence begins with the word "similarly," removed here for context.

[77] For example, Pollack, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014.

[78] For example, Talmadge, 2013.

Assumption 4: Junior Iraqi Army Leadership Is Weak

Oppressive centralization all but precludes the development of sound junior leadership. Lieutenants and sergeants are given almost no authority or responsibility. Junior soldiers know this and offer their immediate superiors little respect and only limited responsiveness. Without sound junior leadership, it is difficult to train military units effectively, to apply tactics in combat, and to apply effective coercion and persuasion to control soldiers' behavior. Many experts on the Iraqi Army therefore suggest, intentionally or unintentionally, that the Iraqi Army has no effective junior leadership and that this, in turn, is a critical weakness in Army performance.[79]

Assumption 5: Soldier Quality in the Iraqi Army Is Generally Poor

During the Iran-Iraq War, many recruits into the Iraqi Army were illiterate. Few had technical capabilities or even basic experience with mechanics to prepare them for weapon or vehicle training. As a result of their generally low quality, they were inexpert soldiers who could not shoot straight or keep their equipment running. Many experts on the Iraqi Army therefore assume that Iraqi soldiers have strict performance limits and cannot perform complex individual or team tasks.

Assumption 6: Iraqi Nationalism Is a Weak and Fleeting Sentiment

Building from the earlier discussion on primordialism, some observers of the Iran-Iraq War and the contemporary Iraqi Army find the idea of Iraqi nationalism to be insufficient glue to hold the army together. Iraqis may be temporarily motivated to fight for the state, but only under exceptional duress. Once counterattacking Iranian ground forces crossed into Iraqi territory, Saddam's nationalist propaganda found a foothold in the Iraqi imagination. When the war was over, nationalism faded in the face of primordial identities. Some experts on Iraq therefore suggest, intentionally or unintentionally, that ethno-sectarian identity will trump nationalist identity in the Iraqi Army, leading to insoluble fissures.[80]

What Do These Assumptions Tell Us About Iraqi Army Will to Fight?

If it is true that the Iraqi Army has oppressive and stifling centralization; if it struggles with the essential military tactic of combined-arms warfare; if it is led by incompetent officers at the top and timid soldiers at the bottom; if it is built on a foundation of poor quality soldiers; and if it suffers from a crippling identity crisis—then why would any Iraqi soldier fight for the Iraqi Army? Is there some other factor, or combination of factors built into the organization, that help it motivate soldiers to fight? Are unit, or perhaps state or societal, factors sufficient to overcome these egregious flaws?

These six assumptions are compelling because they are all grounded in evidence. Strong arguments have been made to establish each one. An advisor could point to the Iraqi Army in 2004, or 2011, or 2021 and make similar cases. But generalizations should not necessarily be used to shape billions of dollars in security force assistance investment. Some of these assumptions hold up, but not as a universal rule. Some look thin on further investigation. The following chapters and the detailed analysis in the appendixes provide more details.

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[79] For example, Cordesman and Wagner, 1996; Murray and Woods, 2014.

[80] See all of the previous citations on primordialism.

Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the Iran-Iraq War—Part I

This chapter presents Part I of the first of three case studies on Iraqi Army will to fight. The narrative analysis in this chapter is informed by, and is intended to supplement, the factor-by-factor analysis in Appendix A of this report (Appendix A is available online at www.rand.org/t/RRA238-1).

The Iran-Iraq War case is the central case in this report. It is intended to highlight the research assessment approach to applying the RAND will-to-fight model. This approach is suitable when the assessment's objective is deep knowledge, when time and resources are plentiful, and when the case offers a static, well-recorded history and multiple primary and secondary sources.

Figure 3.1 shows how this case fits in with the overall approach to (1) building the longitudinal understanding of Iraqi Army will to fight and (2) demonstrating the portability of the will-to-fight model.

The 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War was only the second real test of the Iraqi Army in combat, but it was a face-to-face conventional war unparalleled in scale since the Korean War.[1] Hundreds of thousands of combatants fought across the Iran-Iraq border from the Kurdish mountain region in the north to the rivers, lakes, swamps, and deserts in the south. By 1988, the last year of the war, Iraq and Iran had fully mobilized their states and their military forces,

Figure 3.1
Iran-Iraq War Research Assessment Case

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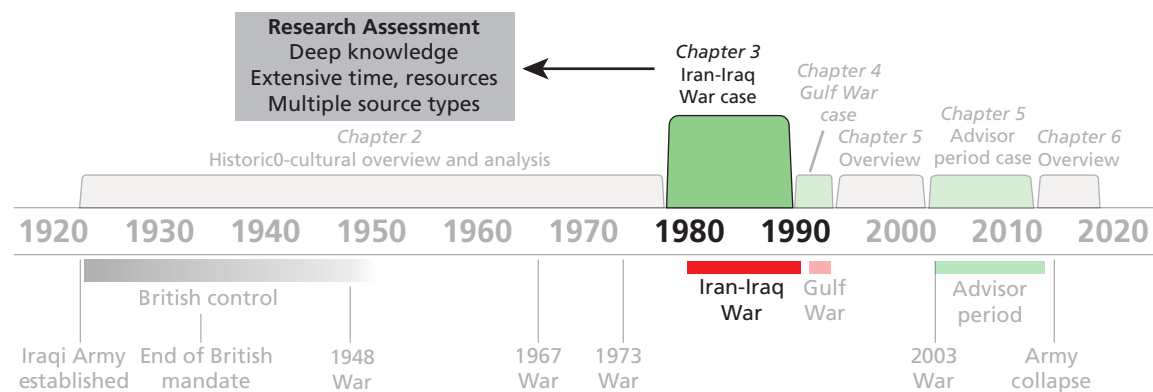
[1] This chapter provides only a brief overview of the political context for the war, and it does not provide a detailed battle history. Readers interested in this kind of detail should select from the works cited throughout the chapter.

together fielding more than 1.6 million people under arms.[2] Iran probably suffered far more than 600,000 wounded and 450,000 killed, and Iraq suffered more than 400,000 wounded and 150,000 killed. Higher-end estimates suggest as many as 1 million dead and 2 million wounded combined for both sides. By comparison, the United States suffered 36,574 killed and 103,284 wounded in the Korean War, a contest that pitted hundreds of thousands of troops from the North Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army against approximately 400,000 combined allied ground combat forces.[3] As in the Korean War, millions of civilians were made refugees in the Iran-Iraq War. Tens of billions of dollars were spent by Iran, Iraq, and by supporting states. It is the only war since World War I in which chemical weapons were used on an industrial scale, with horrific effects.

This chapter provides a narrative analysis of Iraqi Army will to fight during this period. The narrative builds from the underlying factor-by-factor analysis using the will-to-fight assessment model. Detailed results from that analysis, including evidentiary citation, can be found in Appendix A.

Brief Background and Overview of the Iran-Iraq War

The war began in 1980 when Saddam Hussein ordered an incursion into Iran to seize the primarily Arab areas east of the strategic Iraqi city of Basra. There are many complex reasons behind Saddam's decision, including a desire to create a buffer zone against Persian encroachment in southern Iraq, disputes over control of the strategic Fao (alt. Faw) Peninsula and Shatt al-Arab waterway, and opportunism in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Saddam thought he could take advantage of perceived disarray and weakness in the Iranian regime and in its armed forces to seize Iranian terrain and cement control over the strategic oil region across the northern end of the Persian Gulf. His calculations, and later calculations made by the Iranian regime about perceived fissures in Iraqi national will to fight, were mistaken.

Figure 3.2 depicts an overview of the Iran-Iraq War, showing the initial Iraqi incursion in 1980, the subsequent Iranian counterattacks that included penetration across the Iraqi border, and the strategic air and missile wars used by both sides in an effort to shake national will to fight, to undermine the adversary's economy, and to manipulate the international community. Iraq fired missiles into the Iranian capital, Tehran, and Iran fired missiles into the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, in what has been termed by historians as the War of the Cities. Both sides attacked each other's oil infrastructure, as well as international shipping in the Persian Gulf in the Iran-Iraq Tanker War. The heaviest fighting of the war took place in the area depicted in the inset

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[2]   Statistics in this section are drawn from the key sources used to code this case: Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, p. 3. Cordesman and Wagner present a range of figures. All other sources cited in this chapter refer to casualties and costs, many citing the same original sources but others offering different insight. See, for example, Pierre Razoux and Nicholas Elliott, tr., *The Iran-Iraq War*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015; Murray and Woods, 2014; Malovayny, 2018; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, London, UK: Grafton Books, 1989; Rob Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, London, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011; Chubin and Tripp, 1988.

[3]   See Gordon L. Rottman, *Korean War Order of Battle: United States, United Nations, and Communist Ground, Naval, and Air Forces, 1950–1953*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002; Troy J. Sacquety, "A Giant Enters the Battle: Order of Battle of the UN and Chinese Communist Forces in Korea, November 1950," *Veritas*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2010; Nese F. DeBruyne and Anne Leland, *American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 2, 2015.

Figure 3.2
Map Overview of the Iran-Iraq War
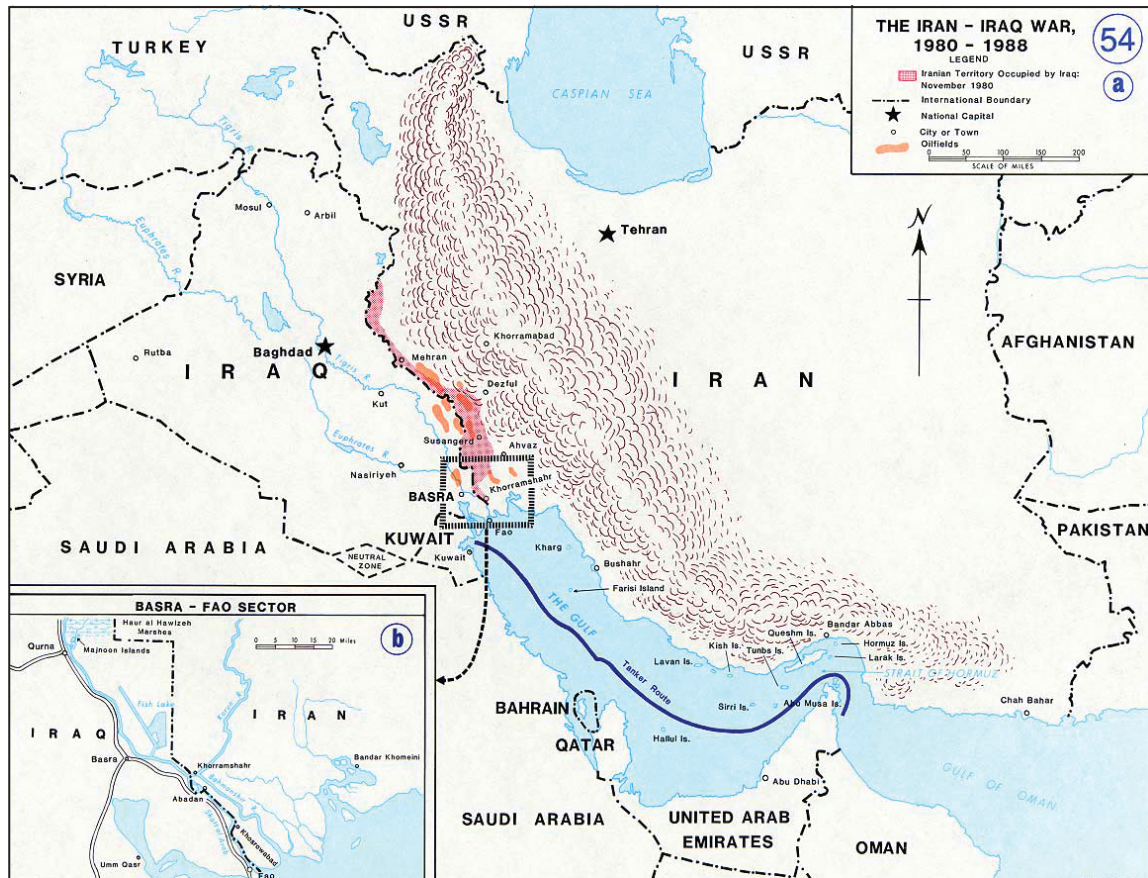
SOURCE: U.S. Military Academy, map of the Iran-Iraq war, undated-a, with overlay derived from the sources cited in this chapter.

map chip to the lower left, between Khorramshahr, Basra, Fao, Abadan, Fish Lake, and the Majnoon Islands.

Iran is approximately three times the size of Iraq, and its population is also approximately three times as large as that of Iraq. Despite the chaos in Iran in the post-revolutionary period, Saddam was taking a significant risk in attacking such a large and militaristic state. Iran's army was indeed in disarray, but it was also fairly well stocked with American, British, and other Western hardware. Table 3.1 shows a general summary of the balance of forces in 1980.

In the 1980 invasion, Saddam ordered his military forces into southern Iran with the hope that they would both seize territory and incite Iranian Arabs in the area to revolt against their own state.[4] There was no Arab revolt. Iraqi battle planning was muddled and derived primarily from a decades-old British contingency plan. Attacks into Khorramshahr and other

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[4]   This section is derived from the sources cited throughout this chapter. It summarizes key points highlighted specifically in the full narratives of the war, including Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017.

Table 3.1
Balance of Forces Between Iraq and Iran—1980

Category	Iraq	Iran
Population	13 million	38 million
Defense budget	$2.7 billion	$4.2 billion
Armed forces	242,000	240,000
Army	200,000	150,000
Reserves	250,000	400,000
Combat aircraft	332	445
Tanks	2,850	1,985
Artillery pieces	800	1,000+
Paramilitary forces	80,000	75,000

SOURCES: Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983, p. 30; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, Chapter 12; Murray and Woods, 2014; pp. 356–357. Most sources refer back to contemporaneous International Institute for Strategic Studies *Military Balance* publications. Pierre Razoux provides more detailed and different data. See Razoux, 2015, Appendix D.

NOTE: All numbers are approximate.

areas in the south were tactically successful but lacked follow-through.[5] Many Iraqi leaders and soldiers had little understanding of the war's strategic purpose. The Iraqi Army was an armor- and artillery-heavy force that lacked sufficient, or sufficiently capable, infantry to seize and hold urban terrain.

Saddam requested a ceasefire after seizing Iranian territory, but Iranian leaders rejected his attempted *fait accomplis*. Iranian ground forces aggressively counterattacked with what can be described as exceptional zeal. Quickly rebounding from the Iraqi incursion, Iranian religious and military leaders rallied their forces around Persian identity, revolutionary fervor, and, to a lesser extent, Shi'a identity. Thousands of poorly trained, poorly armed volunteers charged headfirst into Iraqi defensive positions in human waves reminiscent of the Chinese People's Liberation Army attacks against American positions in North Korea in the 1950s.[6] Casualties were appalling, but the waves kept coming.[7]

Iran pushed the Iraqi Army back from Khorramshahr and other areas, and between 1981 and 1986 it conducted successive counter-offensives. Iranian ground formations penetrated Iraqi territory in both the Kurdish areas in the north and across the waterways in the south. They invested Basra and put Baghdad at risk. Saddam used this existential threat to rally the Iraqi state behind the armed forces, and particularly the Iraqi Army. Hundreds of thousands

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[5] For more on the battle of Khorramshahr, see R. D. McLaurin, *Military Operations in the Gulf War: The Battle of Khorramshahr*, technical memorandum, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., U.S. Army Human Engineering Laboratory, July 1982.

[6] In fact, Iran took some of its battle tactics doctrine and training from North Korea. See Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, for multiple references to North Korean support to Iran throughout the war.

[7] For a heavily biased but interesting Iranian perspective of the Iran-Iraq War, see Abdel-Majid Trab Zemzemi, *The Iraq-Iran War: Islam and Nationalisms*, San Clemente, Calif.: United States Publishing Company, 1986.

of Iraqis were mobilized and put into uniform. By 1987, Iraq had generally professionalized the Army. Table 3.2 shows the balance of forces between Iraq and Iran in 1988, the last year of the war.

In 1988, Iraq executed a massive counter-counter-offensive that sent the Iranians reeling. By this point, the Iraqi Army was making regular use of chemical weapons to slaughter poorly equipped Iranian infantry. Saddam reset the original 1980 borders by force. With their economy in tatters and with societal support for the war flagging, the Iranians submitted, and the war ended in August 1988.[8]

The 3rd Armored Division in the Iran-Iraq War: Will to Fight in Context

Will to fight is something that is only truly tested in combat. Even with direct observation, it is impossible to precisely or accurately measure human will, at least in any reasonable understanding of the process of measurement. How, then, can we understand what happened with Iraqi Army will to fight in the Iran-Iraq War? This section begins with the output: performance in combat. It describes the combat outcomes that offer the best evidence for Iraqi will to fight. A small set of combat vignettes of the Iraqi Army 3rd Armored Division at the beginning and end of the war will help anchor the factor analysis that follows.[9]

Table 3.2
Balance of Armed Forces Between Iraq and Iran—1988

Category	Iraq	Iran
Armed forces	1,000,000	600,000
Army	480,000	350,000
Paramilitary forces	650,000	3,000,000

SOURCES: Murray and Woods, 2014; p. 356. Also see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 1988–1989*, London, UK: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1988, pp. 100–103. Again, Razoux provides more detailed but different data: Razoux, 2015, Appendix D. Also see U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, August 1984.

NOTE: All numbers are approximate.

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[8]   Additional sources used in the coding of this case include Woods, Murray, et al., 2011; Gary Sick, "Trial by Error: Reflections on the Iran-Iraq War," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Spring 1989, pp. 230–245; Hanns Maull and Otto Pick, eds., *The Gulf War*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989; Pollack, 2002a; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983; Talmadge, 2013; David Segal, "The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 5, Summer 1988, pp. 946–963; Will D. Swearingen, "Geopolitical Origins of the Iran-Iraq War," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 4, October 1988, pp. 405–416; Michael Sterner, "The Iran-Iraq War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Fall 1984, pp. 128–143; Efraim Karsh, "Military Power and Foreign Policy Goals: The Iran-Iraq War Revisited," *International Affairs*, Vol 64, No. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 83–95; Efraim Karsh, "Geopolitical Determinism: The Origins of the Iran-Iraq War," Middle East Journal, Vol. 44, No. 2, Spring 1990, pp. 256–268; Richard A. Gabriel, ed., *Fighting Armies: Antagonists in the Middle East: A Combat Assessment*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983; John F. Antal, "The Iraqi Army: Forged in the (Other) Gulf War," *Military Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2, February 1991, pp. 62–72; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008; Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime, 1978–2001*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[9]   Factor analysis in Appendix B focuses on 1980 and 1988 to show change over time.

There is a broad ebb and flow to the war that belies a more complex set of tactical actions, attacks and counterattacks, and the entire air and naval campaigns not covered in this report. Figure 3.3 provides a timeline with the major shifts in the war above.[10] The names of areas or cities where major battles were fought are listed by year below the timeline. Colors represent an Iraqi perspective: green for Iraqi success, red for Iranian success, and gray for stalemate.

While the 3rd Armored Division is only one unit in the Iraqi Army, these vignettes are generally representative of regular Iraqi Army will to fight and overall combat effectiveness throughout the war. They describe a complex mix of courage and self-preservation alongside occasional élan, commonplace basic competence, and varying displays of military ineptitude.

All these narratives are aggregated from Hiro, 1989; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Pollack, 2002; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017, and informed by the other cited works.[11] Because the narratives represent aggregated knowledge, citation is provided only when specific quotes are used or new information is offered. See Appendix A for detailed evidentiary citation and the factor-by-factor assessment. This chapter is, in effect, a narrative summary of insights gained from the evidence-driven, model-guided, factor-by-factor assessment presented in Appendix A.

1980: The 3rd Armored Division in the Khorramshahr-Abadan Attack

One of the main thrusts of the initial Iraqi Army ground invasion targeted the Iranian cities of Khorramshahr and Abadan. Whoever controlled these cities effectively controlled Iran's access to the Shatt al-Arab and the Fao Peninsula. This critical mission fell to the 3rd Armored Division, the same unit that had spearheaded the Iraqi expeditionary force in the 1973 October

Figure 3.3
General Timeline of the Iran-Iraq War, 1980–1988
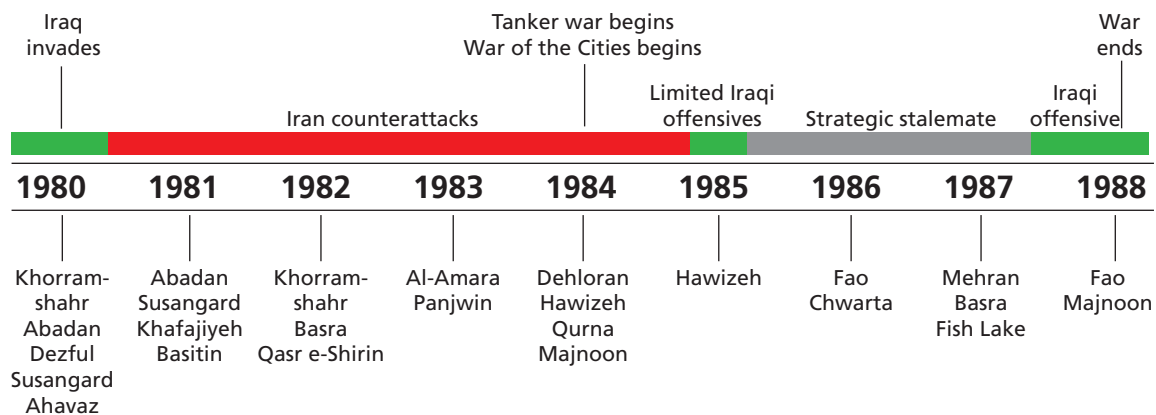
SOURCES: Derived from Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017.

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[10]   This timeline is derived primarily from Hiro, 1989; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Pollack, 2002a; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017. Readers interested in specific battles should refer to one or all of these books.

[11]   Some sections also referred to: Michael E. Hoffpauir, *Tactical Evolution in the Iraqi Army: The Abadan Island and Fish Lake Campaigns of the Iran-Iraq War*, thesis, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991; Pollack, 2019; and Sassoon, 2012. The narrative is informed by all of the declassified intelligence reports cited in the References at the end of this report.

War against Israel. Once the division seized Khorramshahr, the follow-on plan was to take Abadan and then take control of the eastern shore of the Shatt al-Arab. Soldiers and officers in the division had high esprit de corps and generally high-quality equipment. The 3rd Division's home base was in Tikrit, then the unofficial center of power in Saddam's Iraq; they were clearly a favored unit in Saddam's eyes. Artillery, logistics, and engineering support were plentiful. The division had some of the better senior and junior leaders in the Iraqi Army in 1980. It was commanded by the well-respected Brigadier General Kaduri Jaber Mahmud al-Duri.

On September 22, the division penetrated Iranian territory to the north of the city and hooked right to approach from a north-south direction. The city was lightly defended by mixed Iranian forces, but the Iranians had built complex obstacles and fortifications to stop the Iraqi advance. The Iranians were well prepared for the attack. Reinforced by the 33rd Special Forces Brigade, an additional army brigade, and some People's Army militia, the 3rd Armored Division conducted a simultaneous three-pronged assault into the city supported by artillery. Figure 3.4 depicts an overview of the 3rd Armored Division's attack into Khorramshahr and its follow-on attack toward Abadan.

While the special operations units secured the port, al-Duri sent his tanks thundering into the center of Khorramshahr's city center without infantry support. They bogged down under Iranian close attack and were forced into an orderly, temporary retreat. The Iraqis regrouped and re-attacked, and eventually had to grind forward with added infantry. It took them a full 27 days to push the Iranians out of Khorramshahr in often close-quarters urban combat. There are no reports of Iraqi surrenders in this, the first battle for Khorramshahr.[12]

Toward the tail end of the siege, the 3rd Division's 6th Armored Brigade broke off to attack Abadan. The corps command drafted a plan for a hasty night river crossing to gain the element of surprise. A river crossing is a difficult operation even with months of planning and when conducted in broad daylight. Iraqi engineers laid a pontoon bridge across the approximately 250-meter wide Karun River in only a few hours. Iraqi Army soldiers from the 6th Brigade crossed in darkness in coordination with a massive artillery barrage designed to pin the Iranian forces and prevent a counterattack. Iraqi armor broke out of the bridgehead and caught the Iranians by surprise. The commander coordinated the use of attack helicopters to spoil Iranian reaction efforts. In short order, the 6th Brigade of the 3rd Armored Division had invested Abadan in what would be a long and ultimately unsuccessful siege.

The Rest of the Story: Iraqi Army Will to Fight at Khorramshahr-Abadan—1980

All the stars were aligned for the Iraqi Army 3rd Armored Division in this battle. It had a significant numerical advantage. The entire Iraqi Army enjoyed the element of strategic surprise. The division's soldiers had high esprit de corps; they were fresh, well fed, and well cared for; and they had ample tactical support. Their tasks were straightforward, and the ground forces did not have to react to Iranian counterattacks. People's Army militia were brought in to hold seized ground, freeing up the regulars for front-line combat and giving them flexibility and periodic relief. Opposing Iranian units had limited capabilities and were composed primarily of irregular infantry. Arguably, this was an ideal set of circumstances for an attacking force.

Still, concerning behavior and results emerged. It took nearly a month to clear out a defending force that might have been one-tenth the size of the attackers. While the night assault was, by all available reports, competently conducted, failure to support armor with

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[12]   Surrenders may very well have occurred absent reporting.

Figure 3.4
The 3rd Armored Division Attacks to Khorramshahr and Abadan, 1980
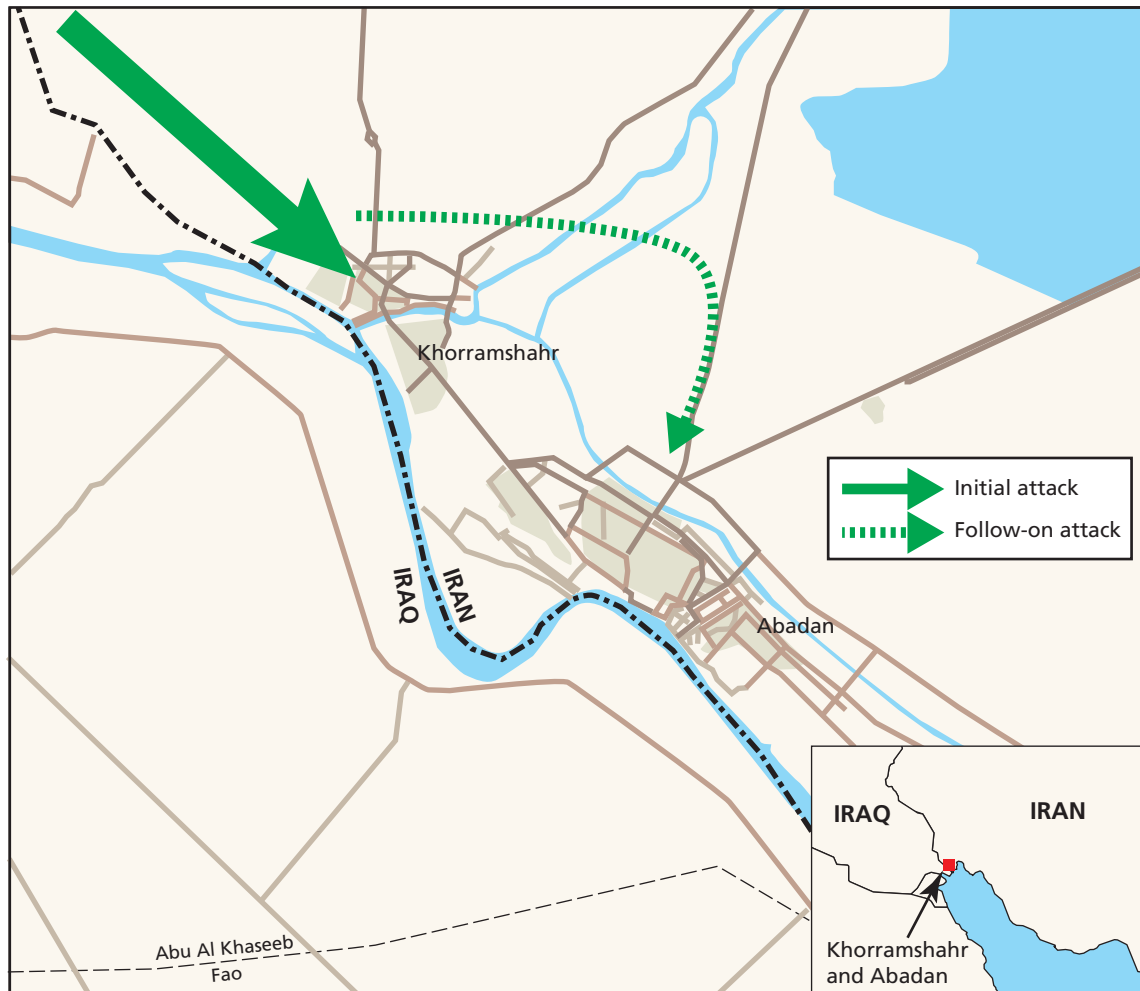
SOURCES: Derived from: Brian J. Dunn, *The First Gulf War and the Army's Future*, Arlington, Va.: Institute of Land Warfare, Land Warfare Paper #27, October 1997, p. 9; Swearingen, 1988, p. 410; and also Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017.

NOTE: This graphic is based on the modern layout of Khorramshahr and Abadan. The circa 1980 roadways and populated areas may have been different than they appear in this map. Comparisons to the map used in Dunn, 1997, show considerable similarities.

infantry is a fundamental mistake in combat. The entire division is credited with hard, close-quarters combat, but piecing together the various tactical narratives reveals hints that the special forces units led the most dangerous attacks and were central to the most intense close-in fighting. It is not clear how hard-pressed Iraqi infantry were at any point in the battle.

In the given advantageous conditions, and despite some tactical errors by their commanders, the division's soldiers had the will to fight. They fought, acted, and persevered when needed. Perhaps some of this early exuberance can be attributed to naiveté about war. Iraqi

Army soldier Yacoub Yousif describes his perspective upon being drafted in 1981, a perspective equally applicable to the soldiers at Khorramshahr and Abadan in 1980:[13]

> Everyone took for granted that joining the army and defending the homeland was the unquestionable duty of every citizen. After all, hasn't this been the lot of people everywhere throughout history? People avoided digging any deeper than this superficial way of think- ing, especially when they had not yet experienced the horror of war nor lived to see its bitter fruits. This is, unfortunately, the way we humans are; our conscience is shaken only when we begin to suffer.

Yousif and many other young Iraqis willingly submitted to conscription, or voluntarily enlisted, to flesh out the Iraqi front-line units that would soon bear the brunt of an aggressive Iranian counteroffensive.

1981: The 3rd Armored Division Collapses at Abadan

Almost exactly one year after the 3rd Armored Division set itself into its positions around Abadan, the Iranians mounted an all-out assault to relieve the city and to drive the Iraqis back across the border. Three Iranian divisions, including two robust Revolutionary Guards divi- sions, executed a high-tempo surprise attack that placed the Iraqis in what effectively amounted to a double envelopment.[14] Iranian leaders infiltrated thousands of soldiers along the Karun River into Abadan proper, giving them excellent tactical position against the Iraqi defenders to the east. Poor Iraqi situational awareness—a recurring problem—allowed a bad situation to develop into an existential crisis for the entire division.

Corps leadership immediately recognized the threat and launched the corps reserve, the experienced and combat-tested 10th Armored Brigade. Despite the 10th Brigade's counterat- tack, the 3rd Division retreated. This gave the Iranians their first major operational success in the war.

Depending on which narrative one accepts, the retreat was either a routine affair or a rout. Malovany's Iraqi sources unsurprisingly prefer the former interpretation. Murray and Woods cite an Iranian Pasdaran report with a different take. In this telling, the Iraqis retreated in a "wild stampede" over a single pontoon bridge across the Karun River.[15] Cascading collapses like this were occurring up and down the Iraqi lines as the Iranians went on the general strate- gic offensive. In this case, there was hard evidence of a disaster. Razoux adds to the narrative:[16]

> In a panic, the Iraqis chaotically beat back to Darkhovin to try and cross the Karun on the pontoon bridge repeatedly targeted by Iranian air force strikes. The Iraqis abandoned some fifty T-55s [tanks], 200 other armored vehicles, and their entire heavy artillery on the eastern bank.

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[13] Yacoub Yousif, *I Put My Sword Away*, Rifton, N.Y.: Bruderhof, 2015, p. 24.

[14] A double envelopment is achieved when the attacking force flanks the defending force simultaneously on both sides, and effectively closes off its avenues of retreat. In this case, one narrow path to safety seems to have been preserved.

[15] Malovany, 2017, p. 167; Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 173.

[16] Razoux, 2015, p. 182. This is spelled out in more detail in Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp. 122–123. Since Razoux provides thin citation it is likely he drew his assessment from Cordesman and Wagner.

The tactical defeat is undeniable. The vaunted 3rd Armored Division was brought low. Abadan was lost, as were the Iraqi hopes of driving stakes into strategic Iranian ground. The right flank of the Iraqi Army was rolled up, generating cascading effects that would eventually contribute to the Iraqi Army's withdrawal from Iranian territory and the somewhat panicked defense of Iraq that followed.

The Rest of the Story: Iraqi Army Will to Fight at Abadan—1981

There is no evidence that the 3rd Division was lacking for support, soldiers, equipment, or capable leadership in September of 1981. All of the material and tangible human requirements for successful combat were in place for the Iraqis when the Iranians sprung their attack at Abadan. This was Iraq's most storied division, and for a regular Iraqi Army unit its esprit de corps was probably unparalleled. One retired Iraqi general called it the "mother division" of the Iraqi Army.[17] Yet the division broke and ran when it was caught by surprise and placed at a significant tactical disadvantage.

Fatigue was a factor at this point. The soldiers had been in combat for a year. It is not clear that they fully believed in their strategic mission. What were they doing sitting in the desert outside Abadan if the Iranian Arabs didn't want them there? All the narratives of the war suggest that at this point there was general uncertainty across the Iraqi Army about the state strategy and operational mission. At the tactical level, the commander's failure to press his patrolling and reconnaissance and adjust defenses helped to put the division into this bad spot. Bad tactical decisions tend to undermine soldier confidence, and in turn undermine their will to fight.[18]

This last insight brings forth a recurring debate over causality in combat: What caused the Iraqis to collapse? Was it the Iranian's three-to-one advantage in mass at Abadan? Was it the result of bad Iraqi tactics? Did will to fight matter if every other factor portended defeat? Proximate cause may never be discerned, but the answer to the last question is evident: Iraqi soldiers in the 3rd Armored Division at Abadan in September of 1981 did not fight, act, or persevere when needed. They abandoned their equipment on the field of battle and fled. Alternative actions were available: They could have retreated in an orderly fashion, or they could have circled the wagons and fought until reinforced or annihilated. They did neither and lost.

1982: Rout of the 3rd Armored Division Near Khorramshahr

Over the subsequent months, things went from bad to worse for the 3rd Armored Division. After the retreat from Abadan, the division regrouped to the west and reset its defenses on the other side of the Karun River. Lost equipment was replaced. Engineers built complex earthworks across the defensive sector, and artillery units lined up in support to help fend off the inevitable Iranian counteroffensive. A new division commander—an Iraqi ethnic Kurd, Brigadier General Jawad Shitnah—was brought in to revive the division and lead it through the next phase of the war. Shitnah had combat experience in the Kurdish north and had a good reputation.[19] The division still fell under the control of the Iraqi Army 3rd Corps.

By late April 1982, the Iranians were fully on the strategic offensive. Only about 150,000 soldiers remained in the dwindling Iraqi Army. Tactical defeats were piling up, and a disturb-

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[17]   Retired Iraqi Army Lieutenant General Ra'ad al-Hamdani, in Woods, Murray, and Stout, 2011, p. 34.

[18]   See Connable et al., 2018, Chapters One and Two.

[19]   Woods et al., 2011, p. 33.

ing number of tactical routs suggested that something was wrong with Iraqi Army will to fight. Combat leaders appointed for their political loyalty were not performing well in combat and units were breaking *en masse*, leaving valuable equipment behind for the Iranians. Saddam recognized the discipline problem, describing it as "the Iraqi spirit I always feared."[20] He took quick action to bring everyone in line. He and his senior generals implemented capital punishment and started executing officers who failed or were perceived to have failed in combat. While he balanced punishment with increasing incentives over time, Saddam always saw the necessity of fear. He stated "When soldiers no longer fight for the love of their leader, then they must fight for fear."[21] This approach had mixed results at Khorramshahr in 1982.

At the very end of April 1982, Iran pushed approximately 20,000 troops and 500 armored vehicles across the Karun river and launched them at the 3rd Armored Division as part of a broader, province-wide offensive.[22] As they had done at Abadan in 1981, the Iranians penetrated the Iraqi lines with night infiltrations, adding to the subsequent tactical confusion. They even reportedly executed an airborne assault to establish a far-side bridgehead across the Karun river. Figure 3.5 depicts this attack.

Both the division and corps headquarters were caught by surprise, despite Iraqi intelligence reports of an Iranian buildup. Iranian attack helicopters reinforced Iranian massed artillery fire. Fanatical Iranian volunteers launched human-wave attacks against the Iraqis, terrifying thousands of People's Army soldiers, who broke, fled, or surrendered over the following

Figure 3.5
Iranians Break the Iraqi Lines Around Khorramshahr, 1982
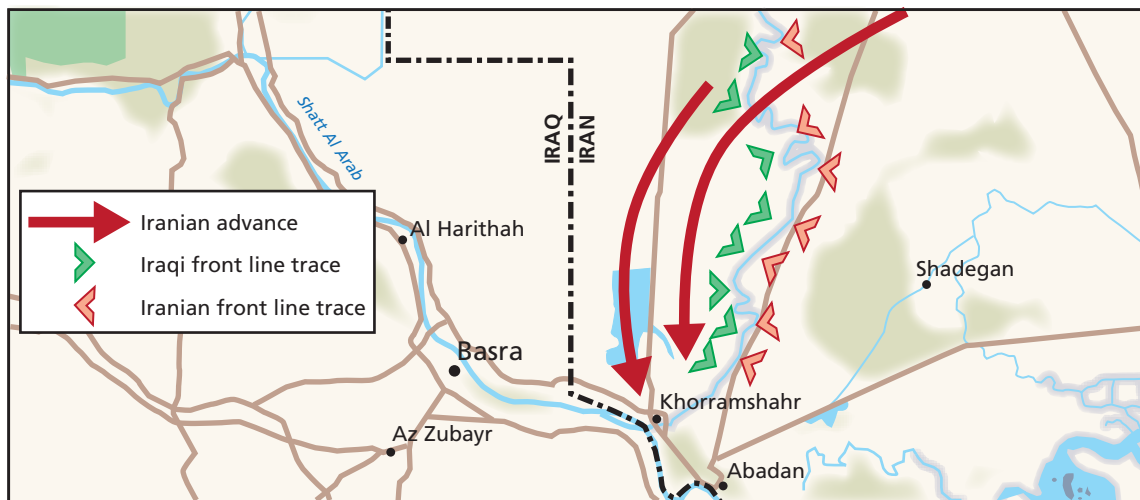
SOURCES: Derived from Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Murray and Woods, 2014; Razoux, 2015; and Malovany, 2017.

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[20] Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 113.

[21] Woods, Murray, and Stout, 2011, p. 51.

[22] Different sources offer different dates for the beginning of this operation: April 29th, April 30th, or May 1st.

days of battle. Murray and Woods argue that Saddam's recently issued order to execute deserters fed into their decision to surrender to the Iranians rather than flee toward Iraqi lines.[23]

Regular soldiers fought hard, but many of them broke. In less than two weeks of combat, the remainder of the 3rd Division was pulled off the line to save it from total destruction. Approximately 15,000 Iraqi soldiers surrendered to the Iranians around the Khorramshahr pocket in a humiliating operational defeat. Saddam had Brigadier General Shitnah executed.

The Rest of the Story: Iraqi Army Will to Fight Around Khorramshahr—1982

At the point in time just before the April offensive, the 3rd Armored Division had already been badly shaken by its defeat at Abadan. Confidence in the division's capabilities was dwindling. Divisional esprit de corps could not have been particularly strong. Expectations for the quick victory promised by political and military leaders were quashed.

Across the Iraqi Army, fear was becoming pervasive: fear of punishment or execution for some perceived military or political shortcoming; fear of execution for desertion; fear that the army's training was inadequate for combat; an ominous, overarching fear that Saddam had blundered by entering into a war with Iran and perhaps put the whole nation at risk; and the more immediate fear of the increasingly confident and effective Iranian ground combat forces. Iranian human-wave attacks added a new layer of fear for the average Iraqi soldier.

Watching wild-eyed Iranian youth trampling over the dead and mutilated bodies of their fellow soldiers to run headfirst into heavy machine gun fire was unnerving, to say the least. The Iranians were purposefully using these tactics to crack the will to fight of the Iraqis. The terms *fear* and *panic* are central to the Pasdaran histories of the Iran-Iraq War. In the aftermath of the Khorramshahr battle, the Iranians made particular note of the fear factor:

> The enemy obviously panicked and . . . conducted totally uncoordinated and ineffective attacks and strikes. This effort was a laughing matter to our forces, but to the enemy it brought fear for they could see that our force was not concerned, and they realized they could not stop this force that was moving like a flood. . . .The Iraqis' fear was not without reason, and it was beneficial to us. This fear caused them to launch an immediate retreat even though they had constructed facilities for a long-term occupation.[24]

Another will-to-fight consideration at Khorramshahr was the possibility that one small unit's retreat led to a cascading collapse of the weakened division. The general idea of cascading collapse is that shattering one unit generates fear in other units, causing them to shatter. In turn, this spreads the fear and desire to flee to adjacent units, until eventually an entire army falls apart. There is a great deal of literature on the influence of proximate connections on con-

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[23] Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 183.

[24] Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 179–180, citing the Pasdaran history SH-MISC-D-001-350, *The Passing of Two Years of War: Iran-Iraq*, Political Office of the Islamic Revolution Pasdaran Corps (no date provided, and the authors explain that the source was not accessible to the general public at the time of their writing).

tagious collective action.[25] There are examples in military history where cascading collapses appear to be evident.[26]

But cascading collapse is not a general law of war: Breaking one unit will not necessarily cause adjacent units to quit. Some Iraqi Army units in the Gulf War fell apart and surrendered, but others fought on. This was also true in the 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq. Indeed, at Khorramshahr in 1982, several units within the 3rd Armored Division and adjacent to it acquitted themselves well, even as many of the division's soldiers surrendered or fled. As of mid-2021, the social sciences have not established a firm causal, generalizable argument for military collapse. Rather than think about cascading influence in a binary way, it is better to think about it as one of many influencing factors on Iraqi Army will to fight. In this particular case, observing People's Army troops surrender by the thousands to the onrushing Iranians undermined the will to fight of some, and probably many regular Iraqi Army soldiers.

For approximately one week, some of the soldiers of the Iraqi Army 3rd Armored Division fought, acted, and persevered on the outskirts of Khorramshahr in May 1982. Then they broke.

Interregnum: Paradigm Shifts in the Iraqi Army from 1982 to 1988

Existential danger has a way of prompting action. After the defeat at Khorramshahr, the Iranians crossed into Iraqi territory. Basra was placed under siege, and the road to Baghdad was put at risk. Iranian missiles were hitting the capital. Iraqis had their collective backs to the wall. Instead of surrendering to Iran, Saddam and his ministerial leaders and top generals nationalized and militarized the entire Iraqi state. Every ministry was mobilized to support the war, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men and women from all religious sects and ethnic groups were recruited into the armed forces and militias.[27] Top-down control gave Saddam and the Ba'ath Party an exceptionally efficient and effective mechanism to manipulate the entire population through a complex and pervasive campaign of propaganda, to put the economy on a war footing, and to insinuate internal security services into every crevice of society.

Saddam was a ruthless dictator responsible for the brutal slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people. He should not, and almost certainly will not be, remembered kindly by most historians. However, Saddam does not receive sufficient credit for his performance as Iraq's president in the 1980s. He was a generally inadequate military strategist, but he understood the human aspects of war as well as any leader in the 20th or 21st centuries. He was an almost constant forward presence on the battlefield; he repeatedly put himself in harm's way and was fairly close to the fighting at many key battles, exhorting commanders to drive forward or to hold out as the situation demanded. He was enamored with military technology, but he firmly

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[25] For example, James H. Fowler and Nicholas A. Christakis, "Cooperative Behavior Cascades in Human Social Networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 107, No. 12, March 2010, pp. 5534–5538; David Hirshleifer and Siew Hong Teoh, "Herd Behavior and Cascading in Capital Markets: A Review and Synthesis," *European Financial Management*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2003, pp. 25–66.

[26] For example, in World War II most of the French Army surrendered when the Wehrmacht cut off the Maginot Line in June of 1940, and the Soviet Army suffered cascading surrenders in the early phases of Operation Barbarossa. However, in both cases many units fought hard and did not surrender, or only gave up when they ran completely out of ammunition and supplies rather than join their adjacent units in conscious capitulation. A good source on this subject is Bruce Allen Watson, *When Soldiers Quit: Studies in Military Disintegration*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger Press, 1997.

[27] While Kurdish resistance groups continued to rebel against the state in the north, thousands of Iraqi Kurds served with distinction in the military and continued to sign up to fight through the end of the war.

believed that the war would be won or lost in the minds of the Iraqi and Iranian people. At a staff meeting with military leaders in 1984 he said:

> My brothers, as long as our army has strong morale and has the ability to wage an attack there is no fear, even if the enemy were able to occupy some of our land. As long as we are strong, we can get this land back now, a year from now, or two years from now, but if we lose our morale and our ability to wage an attack, then we will lose the whole of Iraq.[28]

Saddam recognized early in the war that socialist Ba'athist ideology would be insufficient to rally the Iraqi people and his army. In place of pan-Arab socialism, Saddam applied the kind of personalist-nationalist cultism favored by most dictators. Saddam and his subordinates made the dictator's visage ubiquitous. It appeared nearly everywhere in aggrandized and flattering motifs: on posters, on murals, on postage stamps, on money, and on television. Saddam's many writings and speeches were pressed into the minds of Iraqis as near-holy writ. He coalesced considerable power in his hands and in the hands of his top ministers and generals. This approach is not remarkable on its own. More notable is Saddam's success in generating a sense of unifying pro-war nationalism in a society that so many observers had written off as hopelessly divided.

If one believes that Iraqi nationalism did not exist prior to 1921, that it did not spontaneously materialize in 1921, and if one ignores all the structured efforts to generate nationalism from the 1920s through the late 1970s, it is hard to avoid the evidence that nationalism had certainly emerged and was functioning by 1988.[29] Saddam leveraged religion, secularism, populism, militarism, socialism, capitalism, democracy, diplomacy, terror, paternal love, and outright payoffs to unite Iraqis behind the state and behind the war with Iran.[30] By 1988, Iraq was probably more united than it had ever been or has been since. National unity was a significant factor in Iraqi Army will to fight.

Saddam and his top generals reshaped the Iraqi Army. The Army gradually got rid of some incompetent officers through execution or transfer and (with some exceptions) installed more competent and proven professionals in their place. The Republican Guard Corps was established, and guard units quickly gained a reputation for competence and dependability. Military control was firmly established through an intricate system of punishment and rewards, enforced by thousands of Ba'ath Party commissars planted at every level of the military. Army leaders implemented a lessons-learned program to help improve military training and education. Many top army leaders understood the critical value of human factors in training. In 1982, in the wake of the collapses and retreats at places like Khorramshahr, one commander told Saddam:

> Sir, our training does not include psychological factors. The psychological factor is very important. Training is not only about knowing how to use the weapons, training is also

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[28]   Quoted in Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 226.

[29]   See Robinson et al., 2018; Simon and Tajirian, 2004; and Reeva S. Simon, "The Teaching of History in Iraq Before the Rashid Ali Coup of 1941," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986, pp. 37–51. Also see Amatzia Baram, "A Case of Imported Identity: The Modernizing Secular Ruling Elites of Iraq and the Concept of Mesopotamian-Inspired Territorial Nationalism, 1922–1992," Poetics Today, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 279–319.

[30]   His efforts coincided with other factors to fuel a unified national spirit; see Chapter Four.

about knowing how to use the human psyche in order to improve the consistency and determination to fight. Sir, if we are able to breed such soldiers, we will be able to fight.[31]

Already predisposed to view warfare as a primarily psychological endeavor, Saddam took this complaint seriously. In the next few years, training was prioritized and, at least according to Iraqi sources, professionalized. Even though these efforts might look more impressive in retrospect than they were in practice—establishing policies and programs is not the same as successfully applying them across a military force of 1 million—they pointed the military toward better effectiveness. Psychological indoctrination, improved physical training to build confidence, and efforts to build esprit de corps and cohesion were all reportedly woven into the new regimens. By 1988, units were reported to be regularly conducting high-tempo training even under combat conditions.[32] This kind of aggressive focus on success is a hallmark of a good, or at least basically competent, military organization. Saddam and his senior staff leveraged coercion and diplomacy to obtain huge loans and then used this money to equip Iraq's military with some of the best arms in the world.

Iraqi leaders had several built-in advantages as they sought to improve Iraqi combat effectiveness, and particularly the will to fight of the Iraqi Army. The very fact of Iranian presence on Iraqi soil was enough to trigger sentiments of both desperation and revenge across Iraqi society, and particularly within the military. In general, Iraqis were ready, willing, and able to serve. The Iraqi Army expanded over the six years from 1982 to 1988, from 150,000 to nearly half a million soldiers, and the overall armed forces including militias grew to perhaps 1,000,000 people in uniform. The government was able to recast the early defeats in 1981 and 1982 into episodes of historic victory by deftly manipulating three broad Iraqi cultural predispositions: (1) the shared belief that the act of fighting bravely is generally more important than the outcome of the fight, (2) that defeat in battle against a superior, or in this case larger, adversary is often construed as a victory, and (3) an uneven but sufficiently broad Iraqi belief in the Islamic concept of religious martyrdom.

At the same time as Saddam and the Ba'ath Party leadership were successfully rallying the Iraqi state and the army, the Iranians struggled to maintain the zealous enthusiasm that had empowered their early battlefield victories. They managed to press through economic collapse and battlefield stalemate in the mid-1980s, but by 1988 the Iranians were reaching their culminating point. Support for the war ebbed and recruiting started to dry up, even as the ranks of the Iraqi military swelled. The Iraqi Army's mass use of chemical weapons had eroded Iranian will to fight and struck terror into front-line soldiers and recruits alike. Just as the Iraqis lost enthusiasm in 1980 when the Arab Iranians failed to rally behind their cause, the Iranians received a cold welcome from the Shi'a Arab Iraqis in the occupied territories; they were not welcomed as liberators. The Iranian purpose in southern Iraq became less and less clear as the

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[31]   Murray and Woods, 2014, p. 202, quoting an internal meeting with Saddam Hussein in 1982.

[32]   Inevitably some of these reports of army-wide improvement are exaggerated. Some contemporaneous records were probably falsified by leaders seeking to impress Saddam and avoid punishment. The degree to which the Iraqi Army actually improved its internal practices will never be known. It is sufficient to record some general improvement and then the subsequent battlefield successes that correlated with these reported improvements.

war ground on. By 1988, the Iraqi Army was not necessarily pushing on an open door, but its adversary was much diminished.[33]

1988: The Return of the Chastened 3rd Armored Division and the End of the War

The 3rd Armored Division was conspicuously absent from the narratives of major combat operations through the middle of the decade. Secondary sources do not explain its role during this period in any detail, but we can assume that it went through a lengthy rebuilding period after the debacle at Khorramshahr. While the 3rd Corps continued to fight for control of the southern sector through the middle of the 1980s, it relied heavily on newly formed infantry units created to help balance out the Iraqi Army's armor-heavy force. By early 1988, the 3rd Armored Division was held in corps reserve.[34]

In April of that year, the Iraqi Army was ordered to retake the Fao Peninsula in Operation Blessed Ramadan. Preparations were extensive, including the reported creation of a massive corps-level training ground just behind friendly lines. Units conducted large-scale rehearsals in preparation for attacking the well-defended and entrenched Iranian defensive lines. Malovany's Iraqi sources noted that in the run-up to Blessed Ramadan and the operations that would follow, "A special effort was made in the sphere of morale and psychology, in order to strengthen the fighters' spirit, belief, and self-discipline."[35] The operational plan called for a spearhead attack by most of the Republican Guard Corps, supported by synchronized and massed artillery fires; airstrikes; special operations, including underwater demolitions and infiltrations and a naval blockade south of Fao. In this operation, and in the follow-on attacks that included the 3rd Armored Division, a complex deception plan was put into place and ruthlessly enforced.

After the Iraqi Army retook Fao from the Iranians, it conducted two follow-on operations to clear the entire sector and retake the last Iraqi territory in the south. In late May 1988, the army executed Operation Tawakalna-1, a smaller version of the massive combined-arms operation on Fao. Corps leaders committed the 3rd Division to this fight. In the operations east of Basra and south of Fish Lake, the 3rd Armored Division executed its mission in line with other regular and guard divisions. Figure 3.6 depicts the Fao operation.

Supported by massed artillery fires and roving helicopter gunships, and enjoying a significant numerical advantage, the entire Iraqi ground force executed the attack with basic military competence. Iranian soldiers fought, counterattacked, and then retreated. Many Iranian units crumbled, leaving behind artillery pieces and machine guns next to stacks of unfired ammunition. Cordesman and Wagner describe the scene:[36]

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[33]   Caitlin Talmadge argues that Iraqi success in 1988 was primarily due to Saddam's internal efforts. She downplays the erosion of Iranian combat effectiveness and other factors such as the support of Iraqi allies or the impact of chemical munitions. Her argument is interesting but not necessarily accurate (Talmadge, 2013).

[34]   One Iraqi interviewee who had served in an armored brigade during the Iran-Iraq War stated that the 3rd Division was regularly employed in this reserve role, and that it retained its place of honor throughout the war. There was insufficient information in the published sources cited in this report to substantiate the interviewee's claim. A second interviewee with contemporaneous knowledge corroborated the claim without providing supporting evidence or detail. Unfortunately, I did not have ready access to, or resources to pursue, archival material to identify the activities of the 3rd Armored Division during this period.

[35]   Malovany, 2017, p. 387.

[36]   Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, p. 382.

Figure 3.6
Iraqi Army Retakes Lost Territory in the South, 1988

SOURCES: Derived from multiple sources cited throughout this chapter. The underlying map is of modern Iraq, and some of the developed areas are probably quite different than they appeared in 1988.

There is no way to determine how much of the Iranian retreat was driven by the Iraqi use of gas, panic, or loss of morale. The Iranian forces were driven out of their forward positions within five hours of the second major Iraqi wave of attacks, however, and quickly fell back toward Ahwaz and Khorramshahr, often commandeering private cars and passenger buses. Many of the retreating Iranian troops did not even remove their personal effects, and reporters who examined the battlefield after the Iraqi attack found little evidence of either an orderly withdrawal or high casualties . . . at least 350 Iranians surrendered.

After the Iraqi Army cleared the central and northern sectors, it seized a bit of Iranian territory to force a settlement. At this point, the Iranians were in no position to continue the war. Fighting ended on August 20, and the borders were reset. Iraq began a period of nationwide celebration with parades, parties, and commemorations. Despite the loss of more than 125,000 soldiers killed or missing; the destruction of approximately 5,000 of its combat vehicles; more than 500,000 wounded; approximately 70,000 prisoners of war; and the fact that Iraq gained

no Iranian territory, the Iran-Iraq War was—and still is—considered a great Iraqi military victory.[37]

Learning from the Vignettes—Trends, Will to Fight, and Combat Effectiveness

When the 3rd Armored Division crossed the line of departure into Iran in 1980, it was one of the elite units in the Iraqi Army. The so-called mother division fought well in the opening months of the war. At the time, many factors from the RAND will-to-fight model had aligned in the division's favor: It had some well-qualified tactical leadership, solid logistics and fire support, robust esprit de corps, decent training, effective equipment, and popular support from the Iraqi people. Units to its left and right were basically competent, if not in comparison to Western military forces, at least relative to the Iranian adversary. The division's soldiers were fresh, well fed, and had not yet seen any of their friends wounded or killed. They had the element of strategic surprise. The adversary fought hard but ineffectually. For a brief moment in time, the mission to invade Iran and to take away part of the hated Persian state might have made sense to many soldiers.

Within a year, these factors had changed. Fatigue had set in, and it was no longer clear why the Iraqi Army was so intent on taking a city (Abadan) whose population clearly did not want to defect to Iraq. Iran's military had quickly and surprisingly rebounded. Fanatical Iranian troops were willing to slaughter themselves to overrun the Iraqi positions. Iraq had lost the initiative, and it was now the Iranians who were launching bold surprise attacks. Incompetent Iraqi tactical leaders who might have survived in the shadows in the beginning of the war were, by late 1981, an albatross around the neck of the units trying to coordinate a long defensive line. Tactical incompetence and outright laziness in the defense led the Iraqis to lower their guard. When they were suddenly surprised to find themselves pinched between two aggressive Iranian units, they broke and ran.

By 1982, the 3rd Armored Division had poor disposition to fight. Almost none of the factors that gave it advantage in 1980 still aligned in its favor. Any benefit it might have gained from its prewar esprit de corps was now badly eroded. Equipment was being worn down, as was the initial popular exuberance for the war. Most of the soldiers in the division had experienced panic firsthand, and many of them had already made a fateful decision to turn and run when they had been asked to stand and fight. A single episode of panic does not necessarily forecast another, but in some ways the 1981 collapse at Abadan does represent the breaking of a behavioral seal: Disorderly retreat was highly discouraged, but it was now an option worth considering for self-preservation. In 1982, when the Iranians again caught the division by surprise and began to squeeze its lines of egress, it fought gamely and then retreated in various stages of cohesion and disarray.

The division recovered between 1982 and 1988, but its role had shifted from elite spearhead unit and mother division to flanking support. This role for the 3rd Armored Division reflected a broad trend. Gradually, through the middle of the decade, the Iraqi Army shifted from an organization generally led by regular units to an organization led by special groups and supported by regular units. Doctrine and tactics changed to fit this new force design. Massed artillery fires, including volumes of quickly dispersing chemical agents, would be used to soften up the enemy lines. Special forces units would spearhead attacks in the most difficult

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[37] For various casualty assessments, see Cordesman and Wagner, 1990; Malovany, 2017; Murray and Woods, 2014; Johnson 2011; and Razoux, 2015. These figures are aggregated from these sources.

sectors, acting as shock troops and preserving regular forces that would be more likely to break. Regular infantry units attached to elite Republican Guard divisions would flood in behind, or in parallel to the special forces units to establish a foothold in the softer gaps. Then the guard units would plow through to finish the enemy and secure the objectives.

This shift toward special units was certainly influenced by the lack of regular army will to fight in so many dramatic and well-publicized cases. It was not just Saddam and the senior generals who had trouble trusting the fighting spirit of the regular soldiers. The shift in role forced on regular divisions was replicated across the Iraqi Army at many levels of command throughout the war. Commanders lived in constant fear of punishment—including capital punishment—for tactical failure. Fed up with the poor will to fight and overall combat effectiveness of their divisions, brigades, battalions, or companies, they would form ad hoc teams of the best soldiers, or send the best-qualified units into the breach over and over again rather than risk a tactical failure with mediocre performers. This sometimes led to tactical success. However, it exhausted the best soldiers and units in the army. It stripped regular units of their good soldiers, creating an informal caste system of competent and weak units. This dynamic carried forward through the Gulf War and the 2003 coalition invasion, and it persists in 2021.

Expectation in the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War

Expectation is the belief that something will or will not happen. If an Iraqi Army soldier expects food to be delivered daily and it is not delivered for three consecutive days, the unmet expectation might undermine his will to fight. On the other hand, if the soldier had low expectations for Iraqi logistics, then the failure to deliver food might have less negative effect. This applies to leadership and support at all levels, to adversary reputation and performance, and a range of other factors.

Expectation is the only factor in the RAND will-to-fight model that did not appear in the foundational literature on will to fight. It is most effectively applied in a general way, across all the factors. For the case of the Iran-Iraq War, expectation emerged as an important modifier:

- Iraqi soldiers expected the Iranians to fold in 1980. When the Iranians fought back, this unmet expectation contributed to lowered Iraqi will to fight.
- Iraqi soldiers did not expect Iranian fanaticism. When it emerged, it was therefore all the more terrifying.
- Iraqi soldiers expected their leaders to perform with at least adequate capability in combat. When some of those leaders fell apart under pressure, ran away, surrendered, or were simply overwhelmed by Iranian tactics, the soldiers were rightfully afraid that their expectations for all-important combat leadership were unfounded.
- Precombat Iraqi training created an expectation for straightforward, almost simplistic forms of combat. The Iraqis did not expect flanking attacks, night attacks, camouflaged amphibious assaults, or airborne raids behind their lines.

This last point about tactical surprise is perhaps the most salient for the general assessment of Iraqi will to fight.

Surprise in the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War

Iraqi military units seemed to perform particularly poorly when they were surprised. Any time Iranian troops attacked at night or infiltrated Iraqi lines, the Iraqis were shocked and slow to

react. In far too many cases, they broke and ran, even though they still formed cohesive units with extensive material ready for combat. Ra'ad al-Hamdani describes the collapse of the 34th Infantry Division after a surprise attack at Khurmal:

> The Iranians caught the Iraqis by surprise and in the initial attack captured the 34th ID's commander and almost entirely destroyed the division. In terms of military effectiveness, it represented a terrible performance.[38]

In another example, this time in 1981 at Qasr e-Shirin, another Iraqi unit collapsed after being caught by surprise: "Taken by surprise [in terrible weather], the Iraqis retreated and abandoned the two towns."[39] Returning to the 1982 defeat at Khorramshahr, when the Iranians achieved tactical surprise against Iraqi frontline forces:

> On the ground the situation had turned into a rout. The panicked Iraqis abandoned their vehicles and tried to get to the Shatt al-Arab to cross on inflatable dinghies, makeshift rafts, or even by swimming. Barely 40 percent of them reached the opposite bank. The others were killed or captured.[40]

One of the worst cases of surprise and collapse occurred at the battle for the Fao Peninsula in 1986. This was perhaps Iran's most aggressive and successful operation during the war. Iran put hundreds of thousands of troops into the field, including hyper-aggressive Basij infantry-men.[41] Despite electronic intercepts warning of an impending attack, the Iraqis were caught by surprise at the strategic and tactical levels. Iranian special operations forces infiltrated across water obstacles that the Iraqis had assumed were impassable. The entire force conducted a mass night attack and flanked the soldiers of the Iraqi 26th Infantry Division from the north and south. Razoux describes the scene: "Groups of crazed soldiers in tattered uniforms attempted to escape their pursuers through the salt marshes."[42] Figure 3.7 depicts this battle.

A full assessment of expectation and surprise contributes to a central finding in this report: Iraqi Army forces are often brittle. They fight effectively when conditions are in their favor, but poorly when conditions turn—and particularly when they turn quickly—against them.

Factor-by-Factor Analysis of Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988

This narrative provides the necessary background and understanding of the Iran-Iraq War to help place the factor analysis in context. Appendix A describes how each of the factors from the will-to-fight model, including all the contextual factors, affected the will to fight of all the Iraqi Army units engaged in combat in the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 and then in 1988. Comparative analysis between these two years shows change over time, highlights the most significant shifts, and helps to show that no single factor is necessarily more important than any other.

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[38]   Quoted in Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 310–311.

[39]   Razoux, 2015, pp. 186–187.

[40]   Razoux, 2015, p. 215.

[41]   Basij infantry were in play earlier in the war, as well.

[42]   Razoux, 2015, p. 354.

Figure 3.7
The 26th Infantry Division Breaks at the Battle for Fao in 1986
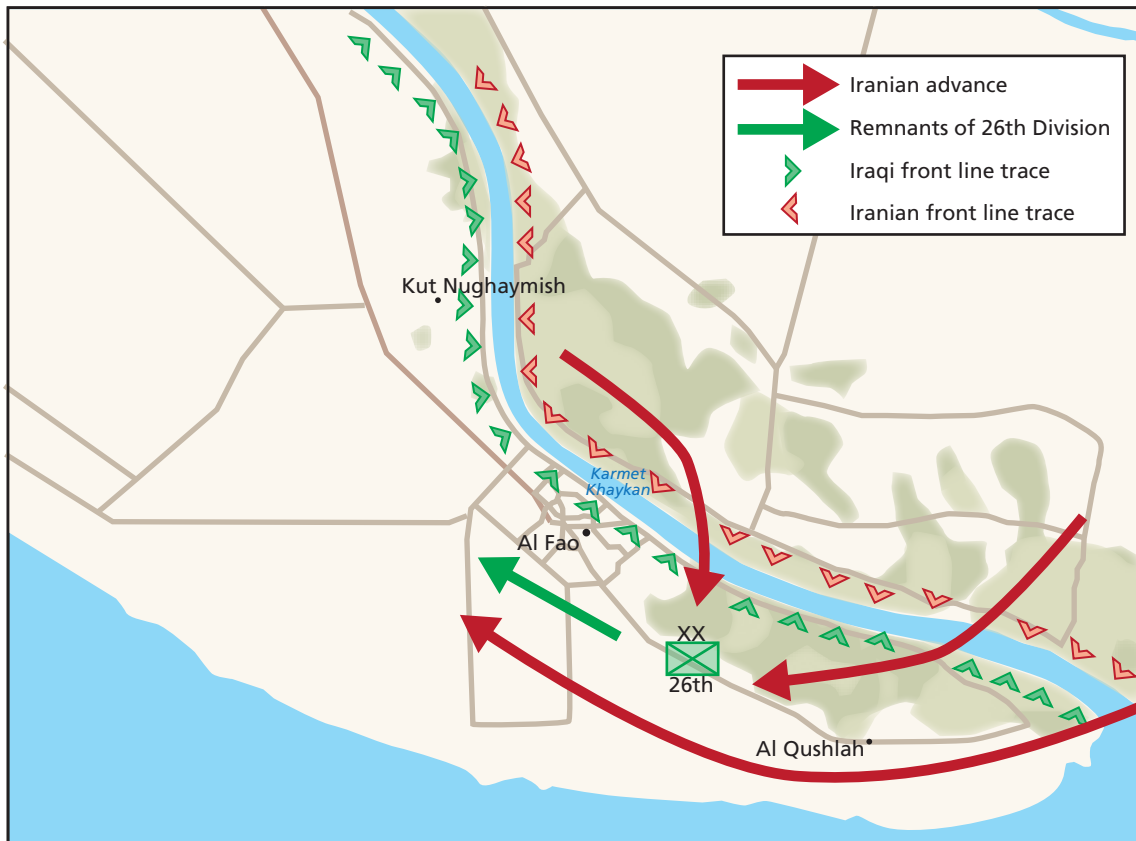
SOURCES: Derived from multiple sources cited throughout this chapter and in Chapter Three. The underlying map is of modern Fao, and some of the developed areas are probably quite different than they appeared in 1988.

All factors must be considered to understand will to fight. This section summarizes the more-detailed analysis in Appendix A.
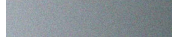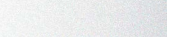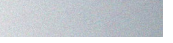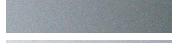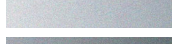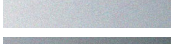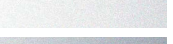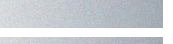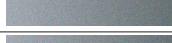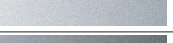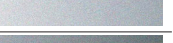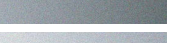
To help describe my findings for each factor in the will-to-fight model, I used the collected evidence to assign a subject-matter expert score on a ratio scale. Definitions for these informed, subjective scores were derived from Connable, McNerney, et al., 2018.

Summary of Factor-by-Factor Analysis

Tables 3.3–3.8 provide a summary of the comparative, subject-matter-expert-informed, factor-by-factor will-to-fight assessment of the Iraqi Army by level, from individual to societal, and including contextual factors from the Iran-Iraq War. Each table presents both an assessment of the factor condition and its effect on will to fight. For example, units within the Iraqi Army are more or less competent, and that level of competence affects the confidence, and therefore the will to fight, of the soldiers within those units. Darker shades indicate worse conditions and worse impacts on will to fight. Black or dark gray would be a very poor or poor indicator and light gray to white would be excellent or elite, with potentially very positive impact on will to fight.

Table 3.3 depicts the individual-level factors from the RAND will-to-fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq war in both 1980 and 1988. It shows an across-the-board shift in these factors over the eight-year span, with much of the improvement coming in the final two years of the war. These assessments show the collective impact of Iraqi state messaging, the shift in war aims and personal motivations in the wake of the Iranian counter-offensive, modest but important improvements in individual quality and competence, and improved economic incentives for soldiers in the Iraqi Army.

Table 3.3
Comparative Assessment of Individual Will-to-Fight Factors: Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988

Category	Factor	1980		1988	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Individual Motivations	Desperation	(very poor)	(poor)	(elite)	(elite)
	Revenge	(moderate)	Null	(good)	(good)
	Ideology	(moderate)	(moderate)	(good)	(good)
	Economics	(good)	(moderate)	(outstanding)	(good)
	Individual Identity	(moderate)	(moderate)	(sufficient)	(sufficient)
Individual Capabilities	Quality	(sufficient)	(poor)	(sufficient)	(sufficient)
	Individual Competence	(sufficient)	(moderate)	(good)	(good)
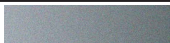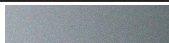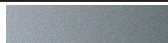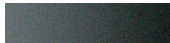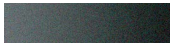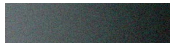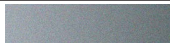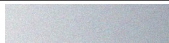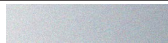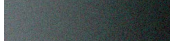
Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 51, 66, 109, 112–113, 133, 215–216, 265, 270, 285; Johnson, 2011, pp. 27, 41, 54, 62, 64, 66–68, 76, 79, 85, 118, 123, 130; Hiro, 1989, p. 44, 45, 51, 61, 70, 88–90, 107, 148–149, 188, 250, 257–258; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 71–79, Chapter Three, Chapter Six by Tareq Y. Ismael; Sassoon, 2012, pp. 3, 7, 135; Sick, 1989, p. 231, 236; Kifner, 1986, p. 1; Khoury, 2013, pp. 24–26, 50, 56–57, 182–183, 208, 212; Yousif, 2015, pp. 15–17, 24–26, 35–36, 46–51, 59–63, 66–67; Blaydes, 2018, pp. 63–73, 76–78, 108–113, 176–195, 63–73, 271–272, 281–292, Chapter Nine; Malovany, 2017, pp. 109, 112–113, 219, 421, 456; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, pp. 9, 15, 57, 97, 236, 332, 391; CIA, NESA M 82-10342, pp. 2–3; CIA, NESA M 85-10231, pp. 1–3; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp. 5, 42–44; Razoux, 2015, p. 472; Maull and Pick, 1989, Chapter Three; CIA, SNIE 34/36.2-86, p. 1, 2; CIA, NESA M-84-10255, pp. 3, 4; CIA, NESA 84-10027, pp. iii–18; Woods et al., 2009, pp. 28, 30, 35–37, 77; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, pp. 92–93, 146, 149; Pollack, 2002a, pp. 201, 207, 212, 189, 234; Pollack, 2019, pp. 24–25, 28, 29, 145, 147, 236–238, 241–243, 332–333, 372–374, 381, 383, 388–390, 416–437; Gabriel, 1983, pp. 71–72; CIA, NESA 84-10239C, pp. 3–4.

Table 3.4 depicts the unit-level factors from the RAND will-to-fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq War for both 1980 and 1988. As with the individual-level factors, there is an across-the-board bump to Iraqi Army will to fight at the unit level. This results primarily from improved unit training and the growth of relatively more competent combat leaders. It also reflects combat experience. This across-the-board improvement for the regular Iraqi Army was somewhat restrained because of the diversion of some of the best human and material capabilities to the Republican Guard Corps.

Table 3.4
Comparative Assessment of Unit Will-to-Fight Factors: Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988

Category	Factor	1980 Condition	1980 Influence	1988 Condition	1988 Influence
Unit Culture	Unit Cohesion				
	Unit Control				
	Unit Esprit de Corps				
Unit Capabilities	Unit Competence				
	Unit Support				
	Unit Leadership				
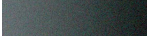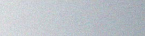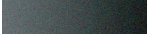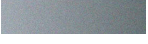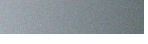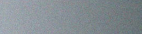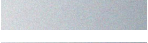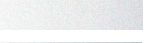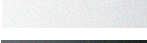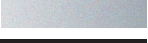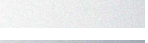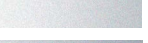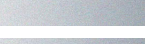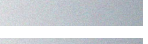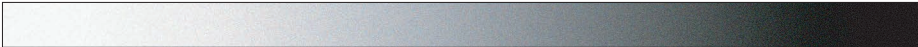
Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Pollack, 2002a, pp. 191–193, 201, 212, 206–207, 220; Gabriel, 1983, pp. 68–74, 76, 78–79; Pollack, 2019, pp. 24–25, 31–33, 145, 147, 157–157, 225, 244–245, 335–338, 375–380, 399–401; Kifner, 1986, p. 1; Talmadge, 2013, 192–193, 196–198, 210–211; Sassoon, 2012, pp. 95–108, 130–135; Gabriel, 1983, p. 79; SR 80-10157JX, p. 2; Khoury, 2013, pp. 102; Yousif, 2015, p. 53; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp. 42, 78–79, 124, 125, 220, 253, 353–355, 373, 374, 382, 452; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 47, 58, 60, 94, 96, 114, 115, 122, 136, 140, 142, 145, 173, 174, 179, 180, 203, 212, 246, 267, 296, 297, 302, 322, 325, 342; Razoux, 2015, pp. 8, 131, 137, 155, 185–187, 198–199, 213, 215, 237, 245, 252, 262, 266–267, 322, 354–356, 389, 391, 394, 437, 440; Malovany, 2017, pp. 86–87, 170, 172, 182, 183, 185, 189, 207, 211, 222–223, 227, 233, 235, 239, 240–243, 273, 276, 294, 295, 309, 319, 305, 325, 333–337, 344, 347, 382, 391, 413, 418, 400–402, 420–421, 444, 453; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 38–41; CIA, NESA M 82-10342, pp. 3, 5; SR 80-10157JX, p. 1, 2; CIA, NESA 84-10239C, p. 1, 3–4; CIA, NESA M-84-10255, p. 1; CIA, NI IIM 88-10004C, all; Woods et al., 2009, pp. 24, 26, 34, 37–38, 47–48, 58–61, 68–69, 81–82; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, pp. 53, 88–89, 94, 96–97, 99, 100, 116, 120–121, 126, 130–132, 142–145; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 161, 171; Hiro, 1989, p. 180, 256; CIA, July 1982b, p. 11; SR 80-10157JX, p. 13–14; CIA, NI IIM 88-10004C, all; CIA, SR 80-10157JX, p. 2; Johnson, 2011, p. 161; Pollack, 2018, pp. 147; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, p. 7; Sick, 1989, p. 234; CIA, NESA M 85-10231, pp. 1–3; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 138–139.

Table 3.5 depicts the organizational-level factors from the RAND will-to-fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq War for both 1980 and 1988. These improvements effectively mirror those at the unit level: Both the Iraqi Army and its subordinate units made at least modest improvements across the board between 1980 and 1988, and these improvements helped to raise the confidence and disposition to fight of the regular army forces.

Table 3.5
Comparative Assessment of Organizational Will-to-Fight Factors: Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988

Category	Factor	1980		1988	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Organizational Culture	Organizational Control				
	Organizational Esprit de Corps				
	Organizational Integrity				
Organizational Capabilities	Organizational Training				
	Organizational Support				
	Doctrine				
	Organizational Leadership				

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, p. 43, 60, 68, 79–80, 97, 110, 127, 156, 199, 204, 388, 412, 420, 424–425, 452; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 52, 54, 57–61, 64–65, 111, 118, 126, 146, 177, 183, 202, 216, 232, 261, 302–303, 310–311; Razoux, 2015, pp. 8, 32, 137–138, 143, 155, 186–187, 198–199, 252, 313, 366, 433, 440, 481; Johnson, 2011, pp. 57, 61, 62, 66, 76, 123, 124, 152; Hiro, 1989, pp. 3, 47, 109, 180; Malovany, 2017, pp. 86, 170, 172, 205, 209, 213, 222–223, 228, 240–241, 266, 347, 387, 400–402. 410, 418, 444, 453–454; Gabriel, 1983, p. 79; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, pp. 8, 19; Talmadge, 2013, pp. 207–208, 210–211; Pollak, 2019, pp. 375–380; Sassoon, 2012, pp. 95–108, 130–135, 137–159; Gabriel, 1983, p. 79; SR 80-10157JX, p. 2; Woods et al., 2009, pp. 35–37, 40, 48, 53, 55–61, 76; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 131–132, 143–146, 148, 166, 168–169, 171; Khoury, 2013, pp. 68–69, 73–77, 84, 106, 128–129, 167–172, 208, 212–213, 219–244; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 146–148, 160–162; Yousif, 2015, pp. 24–34, 39, 66–67; Pollack, 2002a, pp. 187, 191–192, 201, 206–208, 212, 217, 218, 220–221, 234; Pollack, 2019, pp. 33–34, 48–57, 144–145, 151, 153, 244–245, 335–338, 439–449; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 30–31; Gabriel, 1983, pp. 71–74, 76, 78, 80–82; CIA, NESA 84-10239C, pp. 1, 3–5; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, p. 97, 101–102, 114–116, 119–120, 130–132, 134–134–140, 142–145; Segal, 1988, pp. 951–952; CIA, July 1982b, p. 11; SR 80-10157JX, p. 13–14; CIA, NESA M-84-10255, p. 1; CIA, NI IIM 88-10004C, all; CIA, SR 80-10157JX, pp. 2–3; Pollack, 2018, pp. 156, 157; Woods, Murray, and Holaday, 2011, pp. 24, 33, 34, 37–38, 58–60, 61, 83.

Table 3.6 depicts the state-level factors from the RAND will-to-fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq War for both 1980 and 1988. Civil-military relations improved as Saddam consolidated the military leadership circle, but this evolutionary development had no appreciable impact on Iraqi Army will to fight. State integrity improved slightly as the state imposed increasingly harsh control measures on state functionaries, but this improvement also had little impact on military will to fight. Perhaps the most significant improvement in state factors was the major shift in Iraqi strategy from the vague and ineffectual 1980 invasion to the clear and well-justified counter-counter-offensive of the mid- to late-1980s. This had observable positive impact on the will to fight of regular Iraqi Army units.

Table 3.6
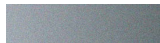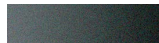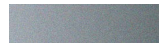**Comparative Assessment of State Will-to-Fight Factors: Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988**
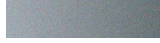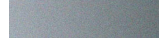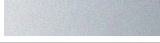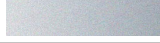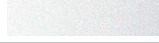
SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp. 42, 59, 68, 80, 108–109, 153, 169, 412, 420; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 19, 24, 52, 58, 60, 63, 108, 125, 130, 136, 224, 227, 270, 286, 342; Razoux, 2015, pp. 8, 16, 234, 250, 258, 313, 355, 452, 478, 481; Hiro, 1989, pp. 47, 60, 67–68, 110, 197, 257; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, p. 18; Pollack, 2019, pp. 29, 30, 115–126, 143–145, 148–151, 153; Sassoon, 2012, 42–47, 137–139, Chapter Five, Chapter Six; Woods et al., 2009, pp. 25, 32–34, 40–44, 53, 75, 76; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 56–57, 130, 134, 136, 138, 140, 142–143, 146, 153, 163, 165, 166, 168; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 132–138, 146–148, 156–160; Khoury, 2013, p. 72, 106, 126–127, 129, 181, 213, 219–244; Segal, 1988, pp. 951, 954, 956; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 29–32, 45; CIA, July 1982b, pp. 10–11; CIA, NESA M 85-10231, pp. 1–3; Blaydes, 2018, pp. 104–107; Malovany, 2017, pp. 152, 229, 342, 385, 397, 410, 427, 453; Pollack, 2002a, p. 230; Maull and Pick, 1989, pp. 49–51; CIA, SNIE 34/36.2-86, pp. 1, 5; CIA, SR 80-10157JX, introduction, p. 1; Sick, 1989, p. 234; CIA, NESA M-84-10255, pp. 3, 4; CIA, NESA 84-10027, pp. iii–18; Johnson, 2011, pp. 69, 70, 76; Talmadge, 2013, all; Kifner, 1986, p. 1; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, pp. 112, 114–116, 120, 123–125, 134–135, 142–145.

Table 3.7 depicts the societal-level factors from the RAND Will-to-Fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq War for both 1980 and 1988. The only significant shift at this level was in support from the society for the war and for the Army. Popular support for the war increased considerably through 1988, due both to the circumstances of the Iranian counteroffensive and the state's intensive messaging and other population influence measures. Much of this support manifested in increased nationalism across the Iraqi population, with sharply lessened support in the northern Kurdish areas that were in active or passive revolt against the state.

Table 3.7
Comparative Assessment of Societal Will-to-Fight Factors: Iran-Iraq War, 1980 and 1988

Category	Factor	1980		1988	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Societal Culture	Societal Identity				
	Societal Integrity				
Societal Capabilities	Societal Support				
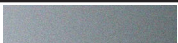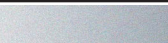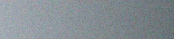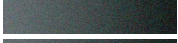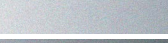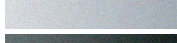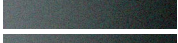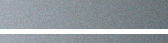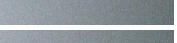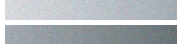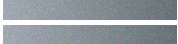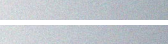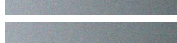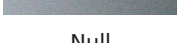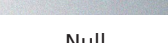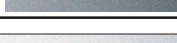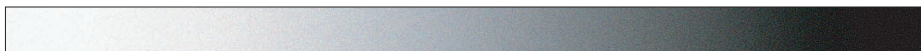
Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp., 43, 44, 498; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 66, 133, 189, 290, 297, 298, 308; Johnson, 2011, pp. 41, 54, 66–67, 68, 79, 85; Malovany, 2017, pp. 146, 241, 274, 313, 348, 456; Hiro, 1989, pp. 44, 45, 51, 61, 88, 89–90, 107, 110, 148, 149, 182, 188, 257; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, pp. 9, 15, 97; Pollack, 2019, pp. 381, 383, 407–412; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 71–72, Chapters Five and Six; Sassoon, 2012, Chapters 1, 6, and 7; Woods et al., 2009, p. 28; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, pp. 117, 149; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 134–135, 149, 150–152; Khoury, 2013, pp. 50, 73–77, 161, 167–172, 182–183, 185–195, 219–244; Blaydes, 2018, pp. 9–11, 69–73, 107–108, 274–278, Chapter Nine; Johnson, 2011, p. 130; Sassoon, 2012, Chapter Seven; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 146–148, 156–160; Yousif, 2015, p. 40; Razoux, 2015, pp. 311, 313, 394; Johnson, 2011, pp. 8, 66–67, 41, 54, 68, 70, 79, 111, 122–123, 130, 134, 184; CIA, NESA 84-10027, pp. 1–2; CIA, NESA M 85-10231, pp. 1–3.

Table 3.8 depicts the contextual factors from the RAND will-to-fight model assessed for the Iraqi Army in the Iran-Iraq War for both 1980 and 1988. Climate, weather, and terrain were less influential factors in the relatively fast-moving offensive actions of 1988 when compared with the dreariness of the defensive engagements of the early 1980s. Iraqi military officers became increasingly adept at using weather and terrain to their advantage. Fatigue had set in after eight years of war, and this certainly reduced will to fight in some units. Iraqis were increasingly enthusiastic about their operational missions, particularly given the opportunity to take back Iraqi land from Iranian invaders; this contrasts with the lack of focus in Khorramshahr and Abadan campaigns. Iraqi soldiers were less impressed with the Iranians toward the end of the war, particularly as Iranian equipment ground down and the human-wave attacks began to falter. Iraqi messaging was particularly effective, whereas Iranian messaging against the Iraqis decreased in effectiveness over time.

Table 3.8
Contextual Will-to-Fight Factors—1980 and 1988

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Murray and Woods, 2014, pp. 80, 176, 194, 197, 241–243, 268, 289, 316–317, 327; Razoux, 2015, pp. 88–112, 155, 312, 322, 359, 398, 421, 471; CIA, GIM 86-20277, all; Cordesman and Wagner, 1990, pp. 5, 18, 93, 104, 133, 135, 221, 355, 368, 374, 383, 396; Malovany, 2017, pp. 146, 193, 212, 310, 313, 393, 411, 421, 427, 430, 433, 444, 457, 459–160; Gabriel, 1983, p. 66; Segal, 1988, pp. 948–960; CIA, July 1982b, p. 10; Woods et al., 2009, pp. 27, 33–34, 65–69, 73–75, 87–88; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 135–136, 138, 141, 158, 162; Khoury, 2013, pp. 6–57, 86–94, 126–127, 132–133, 181, 185–195, 210–211, 215, 219–244; Maull and Pick, 1989, pp. 46–47, 49–51, Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine; Tahir-Kheli and Ayubi, 1983, pp. 5–9, 27, 32–35, 45, 46; CIA, NESA M 82-10342, p. 3, 5; CIA, ESA 84-10239C, pp. 3–4; CIA, SR 80-10157JX, pp. 1; Kifner, 1986, p. 1; CIA, NESA M 85-10231, pp. 1–3; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, pp. 108–109, 147; Johnson, 2011, pp. 41, 54, 61, 66–67, 70, 79, 90–106, 122–123, 124, 126; Hiro, 1989, pp. 108, 203, Chapter Three; Chubin and Tripp, 1991, p. 95, Chapter Ten; Talmadge, 2013, pp. 213–214; Pollack, 2019, 384–388, Sassoon, 2012, pp. 62–64, 67; Blaydes, 2018, pp. 104–107; CIA, SNIE 34/36.2-86, p. 11; Sick, 1989, pp. 239–240; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 129–132, 139–144.

Key Findings from the Iran-Iraq War Case

Each of these key findings reflects my interpretations as a subject-matter expert. They were derived from all of the cited evidence and from the structured case assessment process presented in Appendix A. I read and coded thousands of pages of secondary source material, read and coded hundreds of pages of primary source material, and conducted interviews with Iraqi military officers who fought in the Iran-Iraq War. Each of these findings is directly relevant to the Iraqi Army in 2021 in various ways. These long-term trends are described in Chapter Six.

Reliance on Special Soldiers Left Many Undependable Soldiers and Capability Gaps

In the American military, a relatively small number of special operations forces exist alongside excellent regular units. In the Iraqi Army in 1988 there were Special Forces, commandos, Special Republican Guard, Republican Guard, and then regular army units. The very size of the guard units required that considerable resources be diverted from the regulars. Recruiters for the guard units had first pick of the best soldiers. This left regular units with sometimes adequate, and sometimes inadequate, leftovers. More importantly, this approach to specialization necessarily affected the esprit de corps of the regular units. It also reinforced the use of ad hoc special teaming within regular units, creating yet another caste of top performers separate from the unprepared masses.

The central problem with this approach is that, as a whole, an army needs everyone to perform well. In large-scale combat, it cannot afford to have undependable units flanking its elite troops. Results can be seen in the battles of 1981, 1982, and on the Fao Peninsula in 1986. They can also be seen in the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 coalition invasion, and the 2014 debacles. Specialization emerged from necessity and from praetorianism, but it is not ideal for long-term success of the Iraqi Army.

Tight Cohesion Cut Both Ways

Many Iraqi Army units were cohesive throughout the war. Desertions were commonplace, but they seemed to have occurred mostly away from the battlefield, while soldiers were home on leave or in training. Strong social cohesion helped to overcome most concerns with ethno-sectarian division, it kept small tactical units together in the heat of battle, and it facilitated effective control.

Cohesion also held tactical units together as they collectively chose to flee the field of battle. When Iraqi Army units broke during combat, they broke together at the lowest tactical echelons: Team by team, squad by squad. After the decision to break and run, or surrender, was made, the situation often devolved toward individual survival. However, the Army was often able to reconstitute units that had fled. Many theories of will to fight center on the positive value of cohesion; a few acknowledge its potential downsides.[43] This case suggests caution in applying cohesion as a kind of unitary theory for will to fight. It also informs the Iraqi Army cases that follow. The pattern was consistently replicated.

Being Courageous Was Often Seen as More Important Than Winning

Building from the historical cases in Chapter Two, there is sufficient evidence to show that, in general, Iraqis were—at least from 1941 through 1988—culturally predisposed to place greater

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[43]   See Connable et al., 2018, Chapters One and Two, for an analysis of cohesion vis-à-vis will to fight.

value on genuine displays of physical courage in war than on the success or failure of the contest. Explicit focus on the Iran-Iraq War shows alignment between the cultural predisposition and recorded behavior: Greater value was placed on fighting than on winning.

A quote from Saddam Hussein from a 1987 staff meeting helps reinforce this conclusion. Here Saddam is describing the ways in which Western states had interpreted Iraqi performance on the battlefield: "They saw in Iraqis determination to stand firm and fight. Although we lost Fao, our insistence on fighting was always there."[44] He went on for some time, arguing that Western states must have been impressed with Iraqi willingness to fight, even as the Iraqi Army was suffering egregious defeats.

This is not to say that the Iraqis didn't care about succeeding in combat. As with the other findings in this section, overgeneralization is unhelpful. This is a matter of subtle but important emphasis rather than binary selection.

Resilience and Adaptability Were Inadequate in Too Many Cases

There were problems at the individual soldier level with resilience and adaptability. Resilience can generally be described as the ability to continue to perform in trying conditions, and to recover from setbacks. For every example of Iraqi Army soldiers toughing it out in brutal conditions there was another in which the conditions overwhelmed their will to fight. Acclimatized soldiers fought well in hot or cold conditions, but poorly acclimatized soldiers were sometimes quick to fold in unfamiliar and uncomfortable settings. Individual soldiers often fought hard and displayed courage, but they were overwhelmed by circumstances more often than appeared warranted.

Problems with adaptability closely mirror the kinds of challenges that Pollack suggests in *Armies of Sand*. Iraqi soldiers generally got the job done, but they were more obedient than free thinking; more passive than aggressive when faced with unexpected obstacles; more prone to rote behavior than creative problem solving; and particularly reluctant to accept responsibility for short-notice, high-risk decisionmaking.

To some extent the cultural emphasis on obedience, rote learning, and risk avoidance were probably at play.[45] Fear of retribution was also a central factor: When capital punishment is being meted out for bad tactical decisions, making any kind of tactical decision becomes a risky proposition. Deciding not to adapt when adaptation is called for might actually seem to be a safer bet than facing the wrath of a senior Army leader or Ba'ath Party commissar. This dynamic is directly related to the issue of centralized control.

Centralized Control Was Indeed a Problem

The evidence makes it clear that the Iraqi Army was a strict, top-down organization. Decisionmaking was always a centralized function. In most cases, general officers maintained control of battlefield decisions that might be made by a captain or major in a Western army. This sometimes was a major contributor to combat ineffectiveness. Specifically for will to fight, centralized control reduces adaptability, restricts the growth of junior leadership, and reduces

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[44] "Saddam and His Advisers Discussing the Importance of Morale, Mobilizing Popular Support, and Targeting Iranian Cities," History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Conflict Records Research Center, National Defense University, SH-SHTP-A-001-023, March 1, 1987, p. 15.

[45] Assessing *how much* this mattered is impossible. It is sufficient to identify it as one of the factors suggested by the evidence and by Pollack's well-cited research.

the resilience of soldiers who are almost completely dependent on direct control from senior officers. See the section on *brittleness*, below.

War is always a process of fluid adaptation.[46] No two combat situations are ever exactly alike. No precombat order or doctrinal template will ever be sufficient when people are trying to kill each other. Top-down control can be effective when the leader with decisionmaking power is immediately present and is quick-thinking. It begins to fall apart when there is a radio in between the decisionmaker and the tactical leader in the heat of combat. The tyranny of distance and the unreliability of the electromagnetic spectrum were too often fatal for junior Iraqi leaders and their soldiers. In other cases, a present but incompetent leader with absolute, top-down authority might have been the deciding factor in an Iraqi defeat. Neither situation improves will to fight.

However, if one accepts the existence of an Iraqi cultural predisposition to avoid risk-taking and to submit to hierarchical direction, centralized control was also a culturally congruent choice for the Iraqi Army. The primary alternative, decentralized control, would have placed authority and responsibility in the hands of junior leaders and soldiers unprepared for both. It would have required the Army to bend its organizational culture far away from Iraqi culture, an approach that would have been quite expensive, time consuming, and probably destined to fail. This feat would have been particularly difficult to achieve mid-campaign. While their application was far from perfect, Iraqi Army leaders were probably right to maintain centralized control to achieve combat effectiveness over the course of the war.

Nationalism Was Stronger Than Primordial Ethno-Sectarianism

It would be dangerous to underestimate the fear, anger, and long-term resentments associated with ethno-sectarian discord in Iraq. But, as this report argues in Chapter Two, it is also dangerous to overstate the primordial value of ethnic and sectarian identity. During the Iran-Iraq War, Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurd fought alongside each other throughout the war in direct support of unabashedly nationalist objectives. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis from every community voluntarily joined the armed forces and served alongside fellow Iraqis who hailed from places they had never seen, or perhaps never even heard of. Nationalism rose above ethno-sectarianism as the identity most relevant to Iraqi Army will to fight. Arguably, it also constituted a motivating ideology. National mobilization and national service during the Iran-Iraq War bonded Iraqis together and provided the basis for later resurgence of nationalist sentiment in the 2000s and 2010s.

The fact that tens of thousands of Kurdish Iraqis served honorably in the Iraqi Army during the war, even as their fellow Kurds were actively rebelling against the state, speaks volumes to the weakness of primordial arguments. We will never know if the will to fight of individual Kurdish soldiers suffered due to identity issues; some Kurds almost certainly had second thoughts, and some deserted. Wholesale enthusiasm for the war going into 1988 mattered more for combat effectiveness than idiosyncratic desertions.

Courage in Context: Brittleness

The overarching finding from this case wound up forming the basis for the study's key finding. In the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqi Army was brittle. Iraqi Army units fought well in ideal, or near-

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[46]   See Connable, 2016, Chapter One.

ideal conditions. When they had the advantage of surprise, mass, terrain, weather, training, equipment, tactics, and other factors, they fought effectively and bravely. When those conditions were flipped the Iraqis showed limited resilience and determination. Individual bravery would still be evident, but collective brittleness would quickly take hold. Iraqi Army units were particularly vulnerable to surprise night flanking attacks. Fast-moving, unexpected disadvantage almost guaranteed defeat and unit-level retreat or collapse.

On the surface this might appear to be a common-sense finding: Of course a military unit would fight well when conditions were good and fight poorly when conditions were bad. But that is not at all how military units are supposed to perform in war. Combat situations are almost never ideal. The only safe assumption is that things will go wrong and that, at some point, the unit will find itself at a significant disadvantage. This is where human factors come into play. Leadership training is specifically designed to prepare for the worst-case scenario. Leaders must keep soldiers fighting when the chips are down. Soldier-level training focuses on toughness: Soldiers must be able to endure hardship, suffer pain, feel fear, and keep fighting. Everyone has to be prepared to adapt to unexpected and changing situations. This is the essence of warfare.[47]

Which of these many factors caused brittleness? Certainly, leadership was a factor: If everything depends on the top-down control of the leader, and the leader is brittle, then the unit will probably be brittle as well. But this is not the whole story. Sometimes leaders break and units carry on quite effectively.[48] Cohesion was a factor as well. When the chips were down, entire units might collapse as a cohesive whole. But cohesion also lent considerable strength to Iraqi units. Lack of esprit de corps was an important factor in some cases. So was organizational control, and societal support, and desperation, and revenge, et al.

The following two cases continue to build on this finding. More analysis designed to help identify the causes of brittleness, and to find ways to alleviate it, are forthcoming.

Learning from the Iran-Iraq War Case: Lessons for Today

Overall, Iraqi Army will to fight improved considerably from 1980 through 1988. Nearly all factors improved for both condition and influence. It is important to note that no single factor stood out as causal in the Army's across-the-board improvement in performance. Concrete factors like improved Organizational Training may have been more, less, or of equal importance to harder-to-quantify factors like Desperation and Revenge.

This brings us to a longstanding debate over the causes of Iraqi success in 1988. Some, including Caitlin Talmadge, argue (or at least strongly suggest) that in the top-down world of Iraqi state control, Saddam Hussein had nearly absolute control over the shift in Iraqi Army performance. Others, including Cordesman and Woods, take a more holistic view and, in some cases, downplay Saddam's directive improvements. Returning to the six assumptions presented at the end of Chapter Two may provide some clarity on this issue, and particularly as it applies to will to fight.

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[47] See U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 1, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, April 4, 2018.

[48] See Connable et al., 2018, Chapters One and Two.

The widely shared analytic finding that Saddam Hussein was militarily incompetent is unfounded. This is relevant for will to fight because it removes one of the primary factors typically applied to Iraqi Army combat effectiveness in the war. If Saddam was at least moderately competent, then factors other than state leadership must have been at play every step of the way.

There is another side to this story, however. Saddam is often given far more credit—positive and negative—than he deserves for each and every event that transpired throughout the war. One might read some of the transcripts of the Saddam Tapes and the plentiful secondary-source descriptions of his iron-fisted control and conclude that all other Iraqis, including army generals, executed his every order like marionettes. That is simply not how governments or people function. Improved general officer leadership within the Ministry of Defense and the Iraqi Army played a significant role in the organizational improvements that emerged in 1988.

Saddam's orders were not always obeyed. A careful reading of the Saddam Tapes shows a leader who vacillated between a domineering and cajoling and, in a few cases, almost wheedling voice. He clearly understood the need to convince his senior leaders of his case, which means that he understood their individual force of will and the absence of totalitarian control. It is important to seek improved understanding of Saddam Hussein and his influence on will to fight but attributing the entire course of the war to his singular leadership and decisionmaking is unwise.

Returning to the Six Long-Standing Assumptions About the Iraqi Army

The six long-standing assumptions are (1) oppressive and stifling centralization, (2) the inability to execute combined-arms warfare, (3) a weak and politicized officer corps, (4) weak and ineffective junior leaders, (5) poor quality soldiers, and (6) lack of national identity. A deeper assessment of Iraqi will to fight in this case finds support for some of these assumptions but challenges others. The assessment suggests that the centralization in the Army was indeed oppressive and stifling. This contributed to the inability to successfully grow junior officers and NCOs in peacetime. In 1980, the officer class was a mess.

However, centralization can only go so far in massed conventional combat with hundreds of thousands of soldiers on each side. Some good tactical decisions were made without top-down orders in almost every battle; any kind of success would have been impossible without a modicum of adaptability. This means that quite a few junior officers and NCOs in the Iraqi Army successfully led their soldiers in combat. Many of these young men rose through the ranks to become general officers in later wars. Quite a few of these men had genuine, hard-earned combat experience. Many had fought for years in the most intensive conventional war of the latter part of the 20th century, and most have more combat experience than any contemporaneous Western military officer.

Army experience with combined-arms combat was indeed mixed both before and after the Iran-Iraq War. However, if combined-arms combat is the combined use of multiple types of weapons to achieve mutually complementary effects, then the Iraqis were at least basically competent at employing simple combined-arms tactics, even at the beginning of the war. Despite their ineffectual use of infantry, in 1980 they combined artillery fire, air support, and armor attacks to generate combined-arms effects. By 1988, they had advanced their skills a bit

more. While they were never on par with Western combined-arms standards, they did achieve some capability.[49]

Assumptions of poor soldier quality are the most difficult to either substantiate or refute. Arguments about the cultural influences on Arab soldier quality in general have considerable bearing on Iraqi performance. But no clear finding arises about general Iraqi soldier quality, at least not from the Iran-Iraq War case.

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[49] This point is disputed in the literature and by various experts on the Iraqi military. The term *combined arms* is, to some extent, a subjective one. One might interpret it to mean the basic application of fires to support infantry and armor movement, or to mean the orchestral synchronization of fires and maneuver to throw the enemy off balance. Canonical literature on the history of the Iraqi Army shows that it did routinely apply fires to support tactical movement, but did not achieve orchestral synchronization for combined-arms maneuver. An interesting examination of combined arms can be found in three related sources: Nathan B. Blood, *Musicians of Mars II*, Center for Army Lessons Learned, April 2016; Sebastian Langvad, "The Siren Song of the Symphony," *Stratagem*, February 16, 2019; and Center for Army Lessons Learned, *The Musicians of Mars: A Story of Synchronization for the Company/Team Commander*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., June 1990.

Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In the months following this aggression, the United States built a coalition to first defend Saudi Arabia from any further Iraqi aggression, and then to push Iraq out of Kuwait. Operation Desert Shield ran from August 7, 1990, through January 17, 1991. It gave official military purpose to the protective mission in Saudi Arabia, while at the same time allowing for the buildup of offensive combat power to eventually push Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait. Operation Desert Storm ran from January 17 through February 28, 1991. This phased campaign consisted of an intensive shaping operation followed by an approximately four-day ground assault.

President George H. W. Bush directed Desert Storm to achieve a range of complementary American political and military objectives, including to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, to restore Kuwait's legitimate government, to promote security and stability in the Persian Gulf, and to destroy Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear capabilities. Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this report, the President specifically directed the military to achieve these objectives in part by breaking the will to fight of Iraqi military forces.[1]

Will-to-Fight Assessment Approach for the Gulf War Case

This chapter presents my will-to-fight assessment of the Iraqi Army in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Findings account for the January 17 through February 24 shaping operations but focus on the will to fight of Iraq's Army from February 24 through February 28. Methodology for this assessment mirrors the methodology used for the assessment of the Iran-Iraq War. I read and coded a range of primary and secondary sources, conducted in-person interviews with key Iraqi military leaders, and then used the RAND will-to-fight model to provide a factor-by-factor assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight during this period. Assessment results in this chapter focus solely on the regular Iraqi Army and not on the Republican Guard. The purpose of this singular focus is to help develop the longitudinal assessment of regular army forces.

Figure 4.1 shows how this case fits in with the overall approach to building the longitudinal understanding of Iraqi Army will to fight and demonstrating the portability of the will-to-fight model for combat effectiveness assessment.

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[1] George H. W. Bush, *Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf*, National Security Directive 54, Washington, D.C.: The White House, January 15, 1991, p. 2.

Figure 4.1
Gulf War Assessment Case
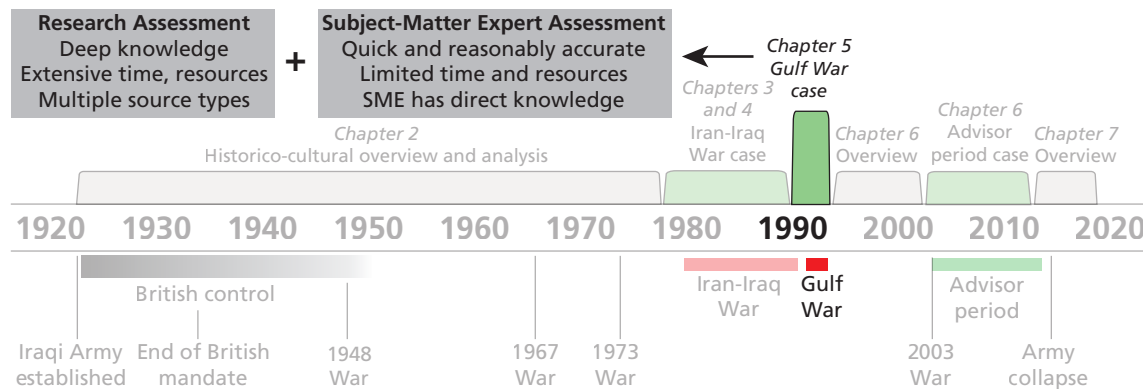
Gulf War Orientation and Overview

The Iran-Iraq War brought the Iraqi population to the point of collective exhaustion.[2] Iraq's coffers were drained, and the state was deep in debt accrued during intensive rearmament and mobilization necessitated by the Iranian counter-offensive. A major drawdown was inevitable. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqis demobilized hundreds of thousands of soldiers and militiamen. Core elements of the army, and particularly the Republican Guard, were reinforced with high-quality, experienced soldiers and new equipment. Other regular units were allowed to languish as the Iraqi government sought to pay off its many debts. But Saddam Hussein remained unsatisfied with the status quo ante in the Middle East.

Toward the middle of 1990, Saddam and senior leaders began to make a case for intervention in Kuwait.[3] Causes included Saddam's anger over Gulf State refusal to forgive war loans; some long-standing, if partly manufactured, disputes with Kuwait; and probably a desire to distract Iraqis from increasing internal turmoil.

The battle against the Kuwaiti Army was brief. Iraq achieved complete victory.[4] Special Forces and Republican Guard units led the initial invasion. Iraqi Army leaders then garrisoned Kuwait with regular units and ill-disciplined Popular Army forces while shifting the Republican Guard into reserve on Iraqi soil. The United States led the Desert Shield and Desert Storm coalition to prevent further Iraqi advances into Saudi Arabia, and then to expel Iraq

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[2]   Ali Al-Shamrani provides a good analysis of the state of the Iraqi population and, in particular, the various opposition movements in Iraq during the interregnum between the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War: Ali Al-Shamrani, *The Iraqi Opposition Movement in the Post Gulf War Era: 1990–1996*, doctoral thesis, London, UK: King's College London, 2001, Chapter Four.

[3]   There is a long, detailed geopolitical narrative relevant to this decision. See Woods, 2008, and Malovany, 2017. Also see a brief U.S. Department of State history: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The Gulf War, 1991," webpage, undated-a. Kevin M. Woods offers one of the best descriptions of this invasion, albeit primarily from the Iraqi perspective: Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008.

[4]   For a description of this invasion, see Anthony Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *Lessons of Modern Warfare, Volume IV: The Gulf War*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 47–54.

from Kuwait under United Nations Resolution 678.[5] Iraq mobilized its reserves and stood up new divisions to throw into the defensive perimeter in Kuwait and southern Iraq, but to no avail. The coalition defeated the Iraqi Army after a nearly month-long campaign, generating more than 100,000 air strike sorties and a brief but intense ground combat operation.[6] More than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers fled the front lines before the ground invasion, and approximately 80,000 surrendered to coalition forces.[7]

Figure 4.2 depicts the coalition ground invasion of Kuwait, including the large encircling operation that penetrated into southern Iraq. It describes the units, countries, and air assets involved in the war. It shows the two-pronged ground invasion of Kuwait and Iraq. In general, U.S. Marine Corps forces led a frontal assault to penetrate two Iraqi defensive lines along the Kuwaiti-Saudi Arabian border. Marine and special operations units pushed north through oil-fields to seize Kuwait City. An Arab coalition force paralleled the marines to the west, while a large U.S. Army-led, international force swept west to flank the defending Iraqi units and to take pressure off of the marine assault. American units conducted deep air assaults to facilitate this westward hook. Some Iraqi forces provided resistance, while others crumbled at first contact. In general, Republican Guard forces fought comparatively well and suffered far fewer ground combat losses than the regular Iraqi Army units.

A Condensed Timeline of the War

The Gulf War effectively ran from January 17 to February 28, 1991. The preceding events during Desert Shield helped to shape the Iraqi Army's disposition to fight. Table 4.1 presents a condensed timeline of events from August 2, 1990, through the end of the war. See the source listing below Table 4.1 to obtain greater detail.

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[5] Operation Desert Shield lasted from August 7, 1990, to January 15, 1991, when it transitioned to Operation Desert Storm, the operation to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

[6] Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, p. 441. For a phase-by-phase description of the ground war, see Richard M. Swain, *"Lucky War": Third Army in Desert Storm*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1994; Frank N. Schubert and Theresa L. Kraus, eds., *The Whirlwind War: The United States Army in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1995; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 587–650; and Paul W. Westermeyer, *Liberating Kuwait: U.S. Marines in the Gulf War, 1990–1991*, Quantico, Va.: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2014.

[7] Iraqi casualties were never accurately assessed. See Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 338–348.

Figure 4.2
Coalition Invasion of Kuwait and Iran—1991 Gulf War
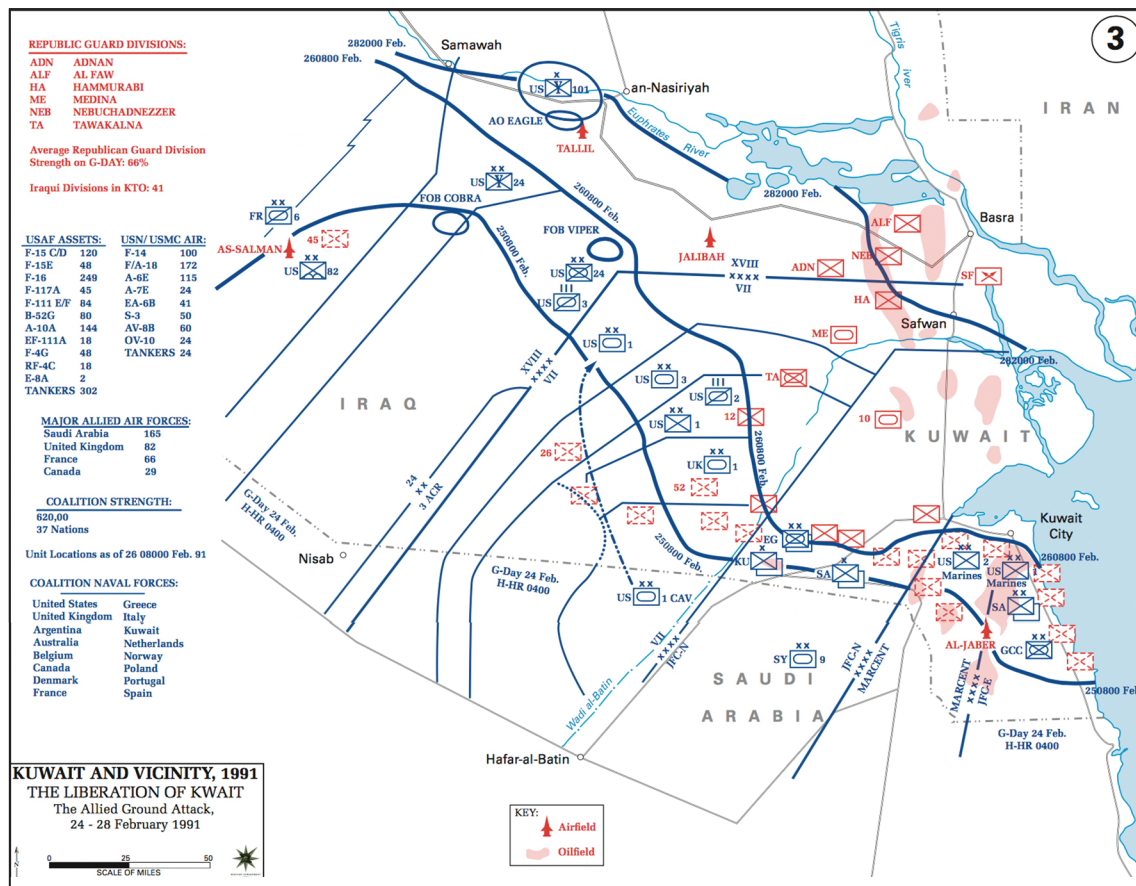
SOURCE: U.S. Military Academy, map of the 1991 Coalition invasion of Kuwait and Iran, undated-b.
NOTE: KTO = Kuwait Theater of Operations; MARCENT = Marine Forces Central Command; JFC-N = Joint Forces
Command–North; G-Day = day of invasion; H-HR = hour of invasion; FOB = forward operating base; AO = area of
operations; date-time groups are in military format, with the two-day date (e.g., 25) preceding the four digit
24-hour military time marker. For example, 250800 equates to 8:00 a.m. local time on February 25, 1991. For a
primer on military operational graphics, see U.S. Army, *Terms and Military Symbols*, Army Doctrine Publication
1-02, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 2018.

Table 4.1
Condensed Gulf War Events Timeline

Year	Month	Day	Event(s)
1990	August	2	Iraq invades Kuwait; United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 660 calling for withdrawal
		7	Operation Desert Shield begins, U.S. troops move to Saudi Arabia
	September	21	Saddam Hussein promises "mother of all battles" if attacked
	November	29	UNSCR 678 authorizes force unless Iraq withdraws by January 15, 1991
1991	January	17	Operation Desert Storm air and ground shaping operations begin
		29	Iraqis attack and seize Al-Khafji, Saudi Arabia, and are then forced back
	February	18	Skirmishes occur along the Saudi Arabia-Kuwait border
		24	Coalition ground operations begin against Iraqi forces in Kuwait and Iraq
		24	More than 5,000 Iraqi soldiers are captured on the first day of combat
		25	More than 25,000 Iraqis taken prisoner on D+1; over 97,000 air sorties
		26	Approximately 63,000 Iraqi prisoners of war; over 103,000 air sorties
		27	Kuwait City is liberated; offensive ground combat operations end
		28	Iraq accepts terms of a ceasefire, war effectively ends

SOURCES: Ronald N. Mazzia, "Tracking the Storm," *Military Review*, Vol. 71, No., 9, September 1991, pp. 64–78; Joseph P. Englehardt, *Desert Shield and Desert Storm: A Chronology and Troop List for the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf Crisis*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, March 25, 1991; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996; and Woods, 2008.

NOTE: Allied ground forces and special operations forces conducted artillery raids, ground strike operations, and reconnaissance operations against Iraqi ground forces for weeks prior to February 24.

Will-to-Fight Considerations for the 1991 Gulf War

Will to fight appears to be central to the Gulf War case. U.S. Army Colonel James W. Pardew, Jr., was the Director of Foreign Intelligence for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and during the Gulf War he was part of the team that produced the official assessments of the Iraqi Army. For Pardew, the lopsided results of the Gulf War boil down to the lack of Iraqi will to fight:[8]

> In the end, it was Iraq that lost its will. Although Saddam had early public support for the seizure of Kuwait, popular commitment deteriorated over time. As Iraq recognized its vulnerability to attack and the damage mounted from the air campaign, the Iraqi public lost enthusiasm for Saddam's Kuwait policy. *The loss of national commitment spread to the military and drained the Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait of their will to fight. This loss of will ultimately was devastating to Iraqi defenses.* As the air war continued, the commitment of the forces deteriorated further and Iraqi desertion rates climbed, leaving many units at low combat effectiveness because of serious personnel shortages.

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[8]   James W. Pardew, Jr., "The Iraqi Army's Defeat in Kuwait," *Parameters*, Vol. 21, Winter 1991–1992, pp. 17–23, p. 18, emphasis added.

There is considerable evidence to back this assessment. Up to 120,000 Iraqi Army soldiers deserted prior to the coalition ground invasion.[9] Entire regular divisions collapsed and surrendered in the initial hours after coalition forces crossed the line of departure. While many of these regular units had lost much of their equipment, they still had the means to fight when the soldiers decided to quit. Certainly, those who deserted prior to the ground invasion had made conscious choices to abandon an objectively viable ground defensive position: They decided not to fight, act, or persevere when needed. Major General William Keys, commander of the 2nd Marine Division in the Gulf War, stated after the war that "The Iraqis were not ready to die for what they believed in—whatever that was. And that's it in a nutshell."[10] Keys believed the Iraqis were technically capable of fighting, but that weak and abusive national leadership had undermined their commitment.

Interviews with Iraqi officers who were leading brigades and divisions during the Gulf War further reinforce Pardew's assessment that the lack of national commitment undermined Iraqi Army will to fight and then, for many, their decisions to fight.[11] All eight interviewees agreed that there was no enthusiasm for the war anywhere in the armed forces, and that many officers believed that Saddam was making a terrible mistake. His reported mismanagement of the war between the August 1990 invasion and the defeat in February 1991 made things worse. This collection of quotes from the interviews makes their views clear about the impact of Iraqi strategy on the war.

> I didn't believe in what we were doing. If we had a border problem with Kuwait we should have negotiated, not invaded.

> The whole Iraqi Army had no idea we were going to Kuwait. . . . We didn't understand the military objective. The design of the war from the beginning was not for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

> Before the war Saddam stated at the Arab League summit [probably May 1990] that the Kuwaitis were our brothers. We *believed* the Kuwaitis were our brothers. It is not easy to accept that in the next months they became our enemy.

> The first [most important] problem was the cause of the war, the lack of legitimacy . . . the injustice of the war.

> We [Iraqi Army generals] weren't part of the planning for the Kuwait war. We heard about it over television. It was Saddam and a small group of officers who made this decision.

> Ninety percent of the officers didn't believe in the war. There was no excuse, no reason for the invasion. The very top leaders of the Army didn't even believe in the war.[12]

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[9]   Keaney and Cohen, 1993, p. 107. Official estimates suggest that approximately 110,000 Iraqi Army soldiers deserted prior to the ground invasion on February 24, 1991.

[10]   Quoted in Westermeyer, 2014, p. 222.

[11]   Pollack did not have access to these interviews when he conducted his analysis for this case. Pardew's claim that Saddam had early public support for the war is debatable, no matter what contemporaneous news reporting from Iraq might suggest.

[12]   Interviews with senior Iraqi general officers, Amman, Jordan, aggregated from all eight interviews.

These generals also told us that coalition airpower, the desert terrain, a sense of isolation, and other immediate factors also played a powerful role in undermining the will to fight of the Iraqi Army. They also described the sheer exhaustion shared by most Iraqi Army soldiers and Iraqi civilians after eight years of war with Iran. Appetite for another major war was absent in 1990 and 1991.

However, all these insights bring forth something akin to a basic causality dilemma: Did Iraqi disposition to fight erode and crack before the fighting began—before the first bomb was dropped—and before Iraqi soldiers decided to quit? In that case, the coalition's attacks were less a causal factor than one of several functional mechanisms feeding an inexorable path to collapse. Or, on the other hand, did the coalition's overwhelming force and tactics erode otherwise passable Iraqi disposition to fight, pushing soldiers to act (to desert or surrender)?

This argument lies at the heart of the collective Western academic and military institutional memories of the Gulf War. Stephen Biddle describes a set of binary analytic camps, with one side arguing that airpower caused the Iraqis to collapse, and the other side arguing that airpower was one of many instruments of war that exposed systemic and contextual weaknesses in Iraqi Army will to fight, including lack of commitment to the war's strategic objectives.[13] Political scientist John Mueller's analysis of Iraqi Army performance in the Gulf War represents the latter camp. Emphasis at the end of the quote is added:[14]

> The lopsided outcome of the war was quite surprising: as [General Norman] Schwarzkopf put it, "We certainly did not expect it to go this way." It seems that this result was determined far more by the low state of Iraqi morale and by the remarkable inadequacy of the Iraqi leadership than by precise American firepower or by the exceptional cleverness and effectiveness of U.S. strategy and tactics. Essentially, the Iraqi forces seem mainly to have been going through the motions and had little or no real intention of fighting a war, and their will to fight, if any, had been substantially broken before a shot was fired *or a bomb dropped*.

This is a remarkable conclusion, and one that is quite different from both the wartime intelligence estimates and from many of the postmortems cited in this chapter. It speaks directly to the importance of assessing the disposition to fight in order to forecast combat decisionmaking. RAND's contemporaneous analyses of the Gulf War found that airpower was decisive in the moment.[15] In keeping with the explanatory nature of the will-to-fight model, the present analysis takes no firm position on causation. Instead, it is sufficient to (1) accept that will to

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[13] Stephen Biddle, "Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us about the Future of Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Fall 1996, pp. 13–179. Thomas Mahnken and Barry Watts published a scathing rebuttal to Biddle's article in 1997: Thomas G. Mahnken and Barry D. Watts, "What the Gulf War Can (and Cannot) Tell Us About the Future of Warfare," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Fall 1997, pp. 151–162. Despite their sharp divergence, both articles effectively dismiss the possibility that will to fight was the overarching factor in the conflict.

[14] John Mueller, "The Perfect Enemy: Assessing the Gulf War," *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Autumn 1995, p. 78. Schwarzkopf was the commander of all coalition forces in the Gulf War. His June 12, 1991, testimony on the war can be found on C-SPAN (Norman H. Schwarzkopf, "U.S. Conduct in the Persian Gulf War," video of testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, C-Span, June 12, 1991).

[15] James A. Winnefeld, Preston Niblack, and Dana J. Johnson, *A League of Airmen: U.S. Air Power in the Gulf War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-343-AF, 1994. Also see Benjamin Lambeth, *The Winning of Air Supremacy in Operation Desert Storm*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-7837, 1993a; Benjamin Lambeth, *Learning from the Persian Gulf War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-7850, 1993b.

fight was one of the most important factors in the outcome of the Gulf War, and that there is considerable evidence to suggest that it was the most important factor, and (2) to show that a structured, factor-by-factor analysis can help address the kinds of fundamental analytic disagreements that continue to shape the way Western leaders, and prospective adversaries such as China and Russia, learn lessons from the Gulf War.

With and Without Iraqi Army Will to Fight: What Might Have Been?

Thank God the North Vietnamese weren't here.

—MajGen Michael Myatt, USMC, 1st Marine Division, 1991[16]

What would have happened if the Iraqis had not broken? Prewar American analyses assessed that the Iraqi Army had amassed approximately 500,000 soldiers, more than 4,200 tanks, 2,800 armored personnel carriers, and over 3,000 artillery pieces in its defensive line across Kuwait and southern Iraq.[17] They also had approximately 700 combat aircraft that, if used intelligently, might have caused serious problems for the coalition.[18] A report from the U.S. Army War College in May of 1990—just months before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait—argued that the United States was unprepared to fight the Iraqi military.[19] Experts predicted serious combat.

As the coalition attack appeared more likely, Army historian Trevor N. Dupuy estimated that the United States would suffer 10,000 casualties in a ground war to retake Kuwait.[20] Other estimates ranged from 20,000 to 30,000 casualties. A U.S. Senator stated that the U.S. Army would be bled dry in weeks.[21] Some reports suggest an official Army war game forecasted 40,000 casualties.[22] The U.S. Army deployed nearly 30,000 medical soldiers to handle

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[16] Quote attributed to MajGen Michael Myatt by LtGen Paul Van Riper, USMC, in Woods, 2008, p. 12. Myatt is a Vietnam War veteran.

[17] See Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 86–87, 95, 97, 114, 116–118, 123–124, et al. Estimates of total available Iraqi ground forces at the beginning of the war vary from source to source. Some troop estimates suggest as few as 300,000 available soldiers in the theater of operations. However, the way one defines the word *troops* and the term *in the theater of operations* adds subjectivity to any estimate. It appears that 500,000 ground combat, combat support, and combat service support personnel is generally accepted in the secondary literature on the Gulf War. For more on the language and challenges of force estimates, see Ben Connable and Martin Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-965, 2010.

[18] Keaney and Cohen, 1993, p. 8. Also see U.S. Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress, Chapters I Through VIII*, Washington, D.C., April 1992. Saddam inexplicably flew his entire air force to Iran for safekeeping without first securing an agreement from the Iranians for their return. The planes were never returned.

[19] Stephen C. Pelletiere, Douglas V. Johnson II, and Leif R. Rosenberger, *Iraqi Power and U.S. Security in the Middle East*, Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, May 30, 1990, p. xi. Also see Stephen C. Pelletiere and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War*, Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, February 4, 1991.

[20] "Potential War Casualties Put at 100,000: Gulf Crisis: Fewer U.S. Troops Would Be Killed or Wounded Than Iraq Soldiers, Military Experts Predict," Reuters, September 5, 1990.

[21] Tom Mahnken, "The Gulf War in Retrospect," *Foreign Policy*, January 20, 2011. This includes the DuPuy estimate.

[22] Shawn Woodford, "Assessing the 1990–1991 Gulf War Forecasts," Dupuy Institute, May 17, 2016.

the expected flow of dead and wounded soldiers.[23] But only 148 American troops were killed in battle and fewer than 500 were wounded.[24]

Even with the nearly month-long air campaign that devastated so much of the Iraqi Army, the coalition was facing more than 200,000 entrenched soldiers backed by armor, rockets, and artillery. Many of the Iraqi defensive positions were well established. After the war, a Marine Corps sergeant who had helped breach the defensive line in Kuwait stated:[25]

> We were very much impressed with the defensive [positions] that the Iraqis had set up. If they had not withdrawn, it would have been very, very hard.

If all the available Iraqi Army soldiers had fought aggressively, the ultimate outcome might have been the same, but American casualties would have almost certainly been much higher. The war might have dragged on for weeks or months, putting coalition cohesion and American political will to fight at potentially greater risk over time. The coalition might simply have bombed longer to physically wear away Iraqi combat power before invading. Or perhaps the invasion might have moved more slowly and cautiously to prevent casualties. Either way, the war would possibly have had different influences on the many events that followed. If approximately 200,000 additional Iraqi Army soldiers had not deserted or surrendered, the U.S.-led coalition probably would have had a much tougher fight on its hands.

Some of the descriptions of the hard ground combat that did take place during the Gulf War offer a window into what might have happened on a larger scale. In one harrowing example from February 26, 1991, a U.S. Army cavalry unit in lightly armored M3 Bradley scout vehicles drove into one of the Republican Guard's fixed defensive positions.[26] A mixture of Tawakalna Division infantry armed with rocket-propelled grenades, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, and armored units manning T-72 main battle tanks, all supported by Iraqi heavy artillery, exchanged fire with Captain Gerald Davie's scouts in the open desert in southeastern Iraq.[27]

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[23] U.S. General Accounting Office, *Operation Desert Storm: Full Army Medical Capability Not Achieved*, Washington, D.C., August 18, 1992.

[24] These numbers vary. Other reports suggest more than 150 battle deaths. For a quick assessment, see the official Department of Veterans Affairs statistics: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "America's Wars," fact sheet, circa November 2019.

[25] U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War*, New York: Random House, Inc., 1992, p. 296.

[26] This section is drawn from U.S. News and World Report, 1992, pp. 351–356; Tony Wunderlich, "Lucky Scouts Dodge 'Big Bullets' That Ripped Their Bradley," *Armor*, Vol. 100, No. 3, May–June 1991, pp. 22–23; Stephen A. Bourque, "Correcting Myths About the Persian Gulf War: The Last Stand of the Tawakalna," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Autumn 1997, pp. 566–583. Also see descriptions of the larger battle near the 73 Easting, in Richard M. Bohannon, "Dragon's Roar: 1-37 Armor in the Battle of 73 Easting," *Armor*, Vol. 101, No. 3, May–June 1992, pp. 11–17; John Hillen, "2d Armored Cavalry: The Campaign to Liberate Kuwait," *Armor*, Vol. 100, No. 4, July–August 1991, pp. 8–13; Vince Crawley, "Ghost Troop's Battle at the 73 Easting," *Armor*, Vol. 100, No. 3, May–June 1991, pp. 7–13; Association of the United States Army, *Personal Perspectives on the Gulf War*, Arlington, Va.: Institute of Land Warfare, 1993, pp. 5–8, 15–23, 25–28, 32–38; G. Chesley Harris, "Operation Desert Storm: Armored Brigade in Combat," *Infantry*, Vol. 82, No. 3, pp. 13–19; Mike Guardia, *The Fires of Babylon: Eagle Troop and the Battle of 73 Easting*, Havertown, Pa.: Casemate Publishers, 2015; Jesse Orlansky and Jack Thorpe, eds., *73 Easting: Lessons Learned from Desert Storm Via Advanced Distributed Simulation Technology*, Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, April 1992.

[27] In many sources, BMP is transliterated as *Boyevaya Mshina Pekhoty*, which is generally translated as *infantry fighting vehicle*. The T-72 is a main battle tank with a 125-millimeter cannon capable of easily penetrating the Bradley's armor. Both vehicles are of Soviet design.

Figure 4.3 depicts this engagement, referred to in some references as the Battle of Phase Line Bullet. It shows three platoons (1, 2, and 3) of Davie's Alpha Troop, 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, driving their Bradley cavalry vehicles into what is commonly known as a kill sack, kill zone, or fire sack, a point at which defenders have prepared a concentrated ambush by fire. Davie's second and third platoons are taken under immediate heavy fire by T-72 main guns, BMP fighting vehicles heavy machineguns and cannons, and infantry armed with anti-armor, rocket-propelled grenades and machineguns. Bravo Section of the second platoon is out of position, leaving both sections exposed to Iraqi infantry attacks.

Davie's soldiers were effectively caught by surprise as they drove out of a heavy sandstorm that limited visibility to 200 or 300 meters. Bad weather had shorn away the American long-

Figure 4.3
American Scout Unit Engaged by the Iraqi Republican Guard on February 26, 1991
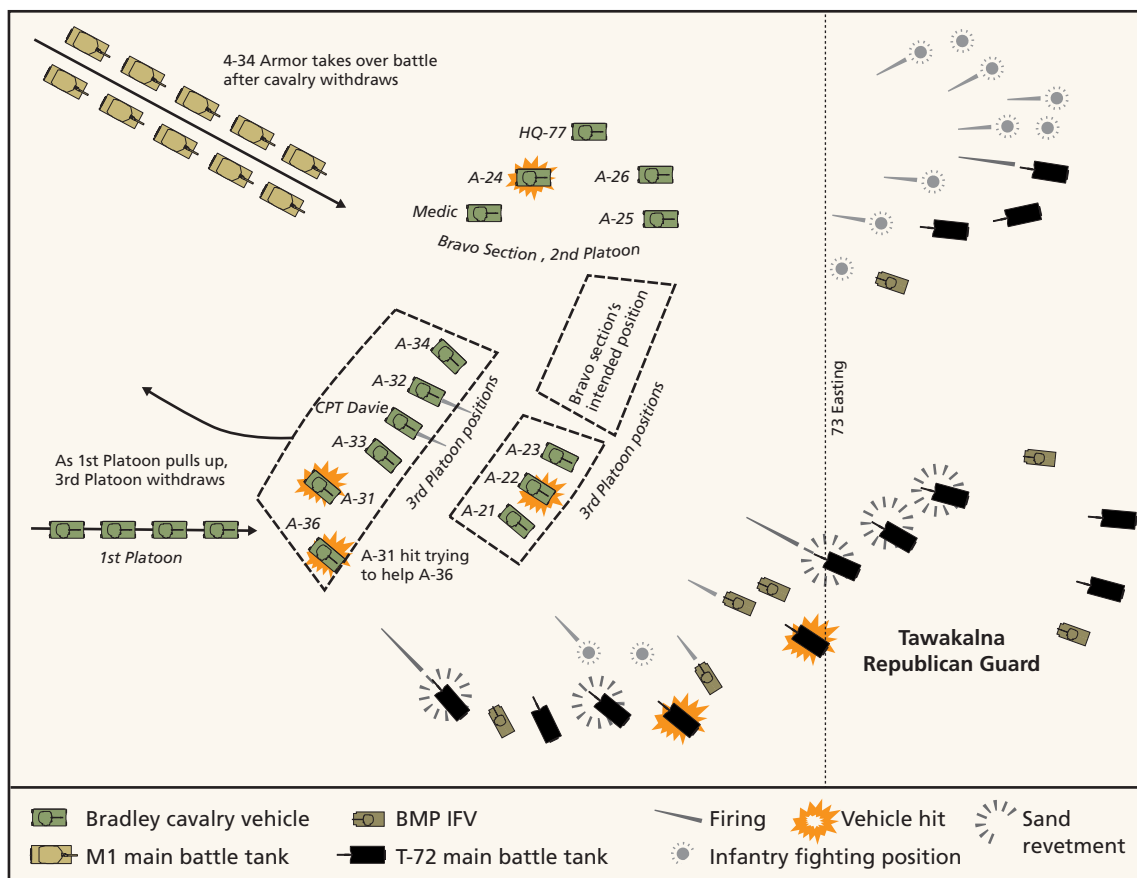
SOURCES: Derived from a sketch on page 353 of U.S. News and World Report, 1992, and from all the sources cited for this section
NOTE: IFV = infantry fighting vehicle; a revetment is a dug-in position for an armored vehicle; A- and HQ- are unit designators, with A standing for "Alpha" and HQ standing for "Headquarters," while the numbers that follow the designator are the individual vehicle numbers. 4-34 is a unit designator for an American tank unit. In this battle, the Iraqi vehicles were actually painted a similar sand camouflage color to that of the American vehicles. This graphic uses a darker color for the Iraqi vehicles in order to help differentiate them from the American vehicles. Engagement ranges are not represented on a 1:1 scale. Instead, they are condensed to allow for more efficient and effective visualization.

range technical advantage. In the confusion, darkness, and swirling sand, Davie did not even realize that his scouts were going head-to-head with Iraqi heavy tanks.[28]

> Suddenly, the enemy was everywhere. To the far left, there were Iraqi infantry as close as 75 meters away. Within 250 meters, there were armored vehicles. . . . Within seconds, the brief encounter had turned into a full-fledged firefight. Davie's soldiers had no place to retreat. Then enemy artillery started landing around them. . . . At that point, we were really just fighting for our lives.

Iraqi commanders combined all of their arms—main guns, heavy machine guns, infantry rockets, rifles, and then the artillery—to pin Davie's unit and begin to pick it apart. Four Bradleys were hit hard enough to be rendered combat-ineffective. Overall, the Americans were not faring well:[29]

> At this point it was not quite every vehicle for [itself] but it seemed that way. Over the radio it got very chaotic because people were calling for medics, and transmissions began to get garbled over the radio.

Davie's company took 14 casualties in the 75-minute engagement. Two soldiers were killed and another 12 were wounded. Davie lost four vehicles destroyed and had to leave another three immobilized in front of the Iraqi fighting positions. All accounts of this battle describe several near-miss shots from T-72 main gun rounds, any of which could have devastated more Bradley vehicles and killed and wounded more Americans.

Clearly, the sandstorm helped the Iraqis by putting them on a more even technical footing with the Americans. On a clear day, Davie's unit would probably have spotted the T-72s from beyond the range of the Iraqi tanks' main guns. He probably would have then called up 4-34 Armor to initiate the engagement rather than desperately handing it off to the American tanks after taking a close-range drubbing. But in war, chaos, uncertainty, dynamism, and friction reign supreme. Bad weather would have ensured that engagements like this would have occurred up and down the line. If every unit in the regular Iraqi Army had stood its ground and fought like the Tawakalna fought against Captain Davie's company on February 26, range and good gunnery would not have spared the American military from suffering many more casualties than it actually did in the 1991 Gulf War.

This returns the debate to Figure 1.1 in Chapter One: Will to fight is the most important factor in war; or it is of equal importance to physical and tactical capability; or it is less important. Perhaps given the combat imbalance in the Gulf War case, it was less important. Or, from another perspective, perhaps overwhelming combat power made the already tenuous Iraqi disposition to fight more important. Untangling this argument is counterproductive. The RAND model is predicated on the idea that physical power and human will are inextricably bound and constantly reciprocal. It all matters. How and why it all matters, collectively, is the key to understanding will to fight and to finding ways to shore up partner forces and break adversaries.

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[28]   U.S. News and World Report, 1992, p. 352.

[29]   U.S. News and World Report, 1992, p. 352.

Failure of Forecasting Will to Fight in the Gulf War

In combat, it is always desirable to have overwhelming force available to defeat enemy units. However, deploying hundreds of thousands of soldiers and their equipment to the Middle East for the Gulf War was an expensive proposition for the United States and for its allies. What if a better understanding of Iraqi combat effectiveness, rooted in both physical and human attributes, could have been achieved? Could fewer forces have been safely deployed? Or could different tactics have been applied?

In their nearly 1,000-page analysis of the Gulf War, Anthony Cordesman and Abraham Wagner identify a number of gaps in coalition intelligence and operations in the Gulf War. One of their major conclusions was that American intelligence organizations failed to understand Iraqi force quantity and quality:[30]

> It is not clear how much of the U.S. failure to properly assess the size and qualitative capability of the Iraqi forces was the product of inadequate prewar resources, the inherent difficulties in collecting the necessary data, or a lack of methodology. It is clear that the problem was serious.

They argue that American intelligence analysts continued to assess that regular Iraqi Army units maintained 100 percent of their manpower through the beginning of the ground war even when postmortem analyses showed lower than 60 percent manning after a month of aerial attacks. Lack of analytic methodology regarding force *quality* resulted in greatly exaggerated assessments of regular Iraqi Army will to fight. Cordesman and Wagner's critique of the American Intelligence Community and its Gulf War analyses continued:[31]

> It often arbitrarily used language that implied Iraq's military effectiveness was equal to that of the U.S. forces but did not supply supporting analytic methods and data. In spite of the lessons the intelligence community should have learned from covering eight years of fighting during the Iran-Iraq War, it repeatedly made force-wide generalizations about Iraqi units when it should have been able to provide far more precise pictures of their prior effectiveness in war, their strengths and weaknesses, and the quality of their readiness and commanders.

Major General Keys suggests that the effects of this intelligence failure had forcewide implications for (at least) the Marine Corps units on the ground. He stated that "I guess our biggest overall intelligence shortcoming was in building Saddam Hussein and his forces into a monster that just wasn't there. Going into battle, this made us more gun-shy than we

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[30]   Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, p. 298.

[31]   Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, p. 299. This perspective is backed by Schwarzkopf's various cited writings and testimonies. Intelligence community perspectives on their performance in the Gulf War tell a somewhat different story, leaning more toward positive accomplishments and less toward acknowledgements of shortfalls. For example, see U.S. Army, *Annual Historical Review: Fiscal Year 1989 (RCS-CSHIS-6 [R3])*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, 1991; John F. Stewart, Jr., *Operation Desert Storm, The Military Intelligence Story: A View from the G-2, 3d U.S. Army*, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, April 1991; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA Support to the U.S. Military During the Persian Gulf War," June 16, 1997; U.S. House of Representatives, *Intelligence Successes and Failures in Operations Desert Shield/Storm*, Report of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

should have been."[32] These comments offer two points of consideration for the analysis that follows in the remainder of this chapter. First, they emphasize the gap in combined qualitative-quantitative, human and material considerations in adversary intelligence analysis. The will-to-fight model is designed to help fill this gap. Second, it emphasizes the need for deep and tailored analyses for combat intelligence and combat planning. Assessments and findings in this report are generalized across many different Iraqi Army units. A similar assessment effort against a prospective adversary would require more detailed, unit-by-unit analyses to avoid the kind of excessive generalization Cordesman and Wagner warn against.

Saddam's Historic Will-to-Fight Miscalculation

Both sides in the Gulf War miscalculated the will to fight of their adversary. There is considerable, credible evidence suggesting that at least for some time prior to the coalition invasion, Saddam Hussein did not believe the United States had either the will to attack his forces in Kuwait or the will to sustain an offensive over time. Saddam repeatedly expressed his belief that the Americans, in particular, had little will to fight.[33] Norman Cigar, an expert on strategic center-of-gravity analysis, argues that Saddam believed he could exploit what he incorrectly perceived to be weak American national will to fight to get away with the Kuwait invasion unpunished. Together, the secondary literature on Saddam's prewar decisionmaking and his postwar perceptions of events suggests that he misread the historical record and only adjusted his thinking when it was too late.[34] He developed a belief that failure of American will to fight in the Vietnam War constituted a paradigm shift in American will. He followed this with a misreading of Arab coalition state will to fight, and then, after Iraq's violent ejection from Kuwait, a genuine belief that the Gulf War was both a tactical and a strategic victory. Kevin Woods and Mark Stout argue that this last perception directly led Saddam to underestimate American and coalition will to fight in 2003, this time with existential consequences.

Assessment: Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the Gulf War

This section presents a summary of my will-to-fight assessment of the Gulf War.[35] It aggregates key findings according to the five levels of guided assessment from the will-to-fight model:

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[32] Quoted in Westermeyer, 2014, p. 222.

[33] There is some question as to whether this was wishful thinking or perhaps morale-raising boastfulness. However, Saddam repeated some version of this belief many times in the months leading up to the onset of hostilities. His nervousness and self-doubt seem to have increased right before the war, and then evaporated when the ceasefire was agreed upon and it was clear that the coalition was not going to destroy his regime.

[34] This section refers to the detailed analyses of Saddam's mindset and perceptions in Kevin M. Woods and Mark E. Stout, "Saddam's Perceptions and Misperceptions: The Case of 'Desert Storm,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, February 2010, pp. 5–41; and Norman Cigar, "Iraq's Strategic Mindset and the Gulf War: Blueprint for Defeat," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1992, pp. 1–29. Also see Jerry M. Long, *Saddam's War of Words: Politics, Religion, and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004; and Con Caughlin, *Saddam: King of Terror*, New York: Harper Collins, 2002. Saddam fully articulates his thoughts in captured tape recordings. See Woods, Palkki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 175–176.

[35] Sources that informed this analysis include, but are not limited to the following, in five concurrent footnotes: Cordesman and Wagner, 1996; Malovany, 2017; Schubert and Kraus, 1995; Pollack, 2019, 2002a; Woods, 2008; Pardew, 1991–1992; Keaney and Cohen, 1993; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992; Pelletiere, Johnson, and Rosenberger, 1990; Jeffrey B. Jones and Jack N. Summe, *Psychological Operations in Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Urban Freedom*, Association of the

individual, unit, organizational, state, and societal.[36] It also presents general findings about Iraqi Army will to fight, drawing a thread of continuity between the previous and following chapters.[37] Appendix B contains the full source list and factor-by-factor citation and ratings used to inform this assessment.[38]

Iraq's Republican Guard—A Drain on the Regular Army's Will to Fight

Chapter Three described some of the disparities between the regular Iraqi Army and the Republican Guard. Those disparities evolved from 1980 through 1988 as Saddam grew the Guard from a Baghdad-centric regime protection force to a full armored-and-mechanized infantry corps. By 1990, that corps represented a force that was effectively separate from the Iraqi Army. It had its own command structure, recruiting process, logistics system, training bases, standards, and tactical methods.[39] Arguably, in practice the Republican Guard Corps constituted a separate military service. Its elite status in the ISF ensured that it received the newest and best equipment, the best enlisted soldiers and officers, the best training, and the most favorable service incentives from the Iraqi government.

United States Army Landpower Essay Series, No. 97-3, August 1997; Charles J. Quilter II, *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990–1991: With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

[36] Second set of sources for this section: Pelletiere and Johnson, 1991; Mahnken, 2011; Douglas W. Craft, *An Operational Analysis of the Persian Gulf War*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1992; U.S. Army Center of Military History, *War in the Persian Gulf: Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, August 1990–March 1991*, Washington, D.C., 2010; U.S. Central Command, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, Tampa, Fla., July 11, 1991; *Frontline*, oral history interview with Wafic Al Sammarai, former director of Iraqi Military Intelligence, undated; Jon F. Bilbo, *Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW) Operations During Operation Desert Storm*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1992; Collin A. Agee, *Peeling the Onion: The Iraqi Center of Gravity in Desert Storm*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1992; *Military Review*, special Operation Desert Storm edition, Vol. 71, No. 9, September 1991; Joseph P. Englehardt, *Desert Shield and Desert Storm: A Chronology and Troop List for the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf Crisis*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, March 25, 1991.

[37] Third set of sources for this section: Kenneth R. Walters, Sr., Kathleen M. Traxler, Michael T. Gilford, Richard D. Arnold, Richard C. Bonam, and Kenneth R. Gibson, *Gulf War Weather*, St. Clair County, Ill.: U.S. Air Force Air Weather Service, March 1992; Gary B. Griffin, *The Iraqi Way of War: An Operational Assessment*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991; Fred Frostic, *Air Campaign Against the Iraqi Army in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-357-AF, 1994; J. Michael Marcum and David W. Cline, "Combat Stress Reactions in Iraqi Enemy Prisoners of War," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, Vol. 57, No. 4, Fall 1993, pp. 479–491; Richard F. Rakos, "Propaganda as Stimulus Control: The Case of the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait," *Behavior and Social Issues*, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 [double issue], 1993, pp. 35–62; U.S. National Intelligence Council, *Iraq's Ground Forces: An Assessment*, declassified intelligence analysis, NIC M 91-10003, April 29, 1991; Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *Diplomacy and War in the New World Order*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993; Richard S. Lowry, *The Gulf War Chronicles: A Military History of the First War with Iraq*, Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse, 2003; Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: United States Army in the Gulf War*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

[38] Fourth set of sources for this section: Long, 2004; Mueller, 1995; Daryl G. Press, "The Myth of Air Power in the Persian Gulf War and the Future of Warfare," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 5–44; Stephen T. Hosmer, *Psychological Effects of U.S. Air Operations in Four Wars 1941–1991: Lessons for U.S. Commanders*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-576-AF, 1996; Al-Shamrani, 2001; Woods and Stout, 2010; Michael Kelly, *Martyr's Day: Chronicle of a Small War*, second edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1993; U.S. News and World Report, 1992.

[39] See Michael Eisenstadt, *Iraq's Republican Guard*, Policy Watch #62, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 28, 1991; William D. Huggins, "The Republican Guards and Saddam Hussein's Transformation of the Iraqi Army," *Arab Studies Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1994, pp. 31–35; Amatzia Baram, "The Republican Guard: Outgunned and Outnumbered, but They Never Surrender," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2003; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996.

No military organization in the world has a limitless budget or an unending selection of suitable recruits and officer candidates. In 1990, Iraq probably had fewer than 30 million citizens.[40] Therefore, it was fielding one of the largest armies in the world with a population that was quite modest in size compared with states fielding similarly sized forces. When the Republican Guard skimmed away the best and brightest of Iraq's servicemen, the regular army inevitably took those who were left with little recourse. When the state purchased modern T-72 main battle tanks for the Republican Guard, the rest of the army had to settle for far less capable tanks that had been in service for decades.[41] For the most part, this was an across-the-board policy: The Republican Guard got the best, and the regular army got the rest.

The collective evidence cited in this chapter shows that the disparity between the Republican Guard and the regular army undermined the will to fight of the regular units during both the air shaping phase and ground combat phase of the Gulf War. This dynamic generally aligns with the will-to-fight factors of individual quality, individual identity, individual competence, unit competence, unit esprit de corps, unit leadership, organizational training, organizational support, and state support. Proportionally lower quality and competence, worse leadership, worse training, worse material support, lower esprit de corps, and shaky identification with the regular army as an organization—coupled with the state and organizational leaders' tendency to use the lowest-quality regular units like disposable tissues—gave many regular army soldiers a sense of inferiority that undermined their will to fight.[42]

For the purposes of this assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight, the Republican Guard Corps should be considered a separate organization from the regular army. This chapter assesses *only* the regular Iraqi Army units that fought in the Gulf War.

Imbalanced Regular Army Forces, Imbalanced Will to Fight

A further imbalance *within* the regular army undermined or improved some units' will to fight. In 1992, then–Major General Douglas Lute described the varying capabilities of the divisions within the Iraqi Army during a postmortem analysis of the Battle of 73 Easting, the seminal tank battle of the Gulf War.[43] In that battle, fought just to the west of the Kuwaiti border in Iraq, the American VII Corps destroyed much of the Iraqi Tawakalna Republican Guard division and parts of the 12th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry Division.[44]

Lute described a "broad spectrum of enemy forces that ranged from very poor to the best they had" in the Iraqi defensive line at 73 Easting.[45] He rated the 26th Infantry Division—the same lineal division that had broken under Iranian pressure at the Battle of Fao in 1986—as being on the low end of the spectrum in terms of combat capability. Lute stated, "They were all conscripts. These guys essentially wanted to surrender; they wanted someone to drive up and take their surrender." He described the 12th Armored Division as "more capable" than the 26th Infantry Division, suggesting a distinct echelon of quality in the regular Iraqi Army that

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[40] Iraq has not had a viable census since at least the middle of the 20th century. See Robinson et al., Chapter Three.

[41] For accounts of Iraq's armored forces, see Cordesman and Wagner, 1996.

[42] See the ratings in Appendix D for more supporting information on this point.

[43] See Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, pp. I-99 to I-118.

[44] Various accounts, all cited herein, suggest that parts of other Iraqi divisions including the 10th Armored Division may have been involved in the defensive line at 73 Easting.

[45] All quotes by Douglas Lute in this section are from Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, p. I-108.

was clearly present in the Iran-Iraq War. Lute then describes the Republican Guard Tawakalna Division as "the cream of the crop." For Lute, equipment was a major discerning factor. The 26th had a few old T-55 tanks. The 12th had some T-55s, but also newer and more-capable T-62s. But the Tawakalna had then-state-of-the-art T-72 tanks and BMP infantry fighting vehicles.

Figure 4.4 is Lute's description of the enemy forces at 73 Easting. He notes the low morale of the 26th and the reportedly elite status of the Tawakalna. The 12th clearly falls somewhere in the middle.

This generally aligns with Iraqi Army officers' preferences for armored forces over infantry forces. Probably because of their experiences in, and institutional memory from, the 1973 and Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi Army officers have an extremely close attachment to armor and a barely hidden disdain for regular infantry. Preference for armor probably also stems from Soviet influence, regional cultural standards for combat power, the regional terrain, and the Iraqis' preference for entrenched defensive operations.[46]

Soviet advisors favored armor and artillery to infantry, and they often influenced partners toward a similar point of view.[47] Emphasis on large pieces of military rolling stock certainly helped to improve Soviet weapon sales. Middle Eastern leaders—most of whom were also

Figure 4.4
Quality Spread in the Iraqi Ground Forces, from Poor to Elite

ENEMY
VARYING CAPABILITIES

✔ **26 INF DIV**
- 34 T-55 TANKS
- CONSCRIPTS
- NEW C.O. -- 15 JAN
- LOW MORALE

✔ **12 ARM DIV, JIHAD CORPS**
- T-55, T-62
- REGULAR ARMY
- C-PEN MISSION
- GHQ CONTROL

✔ **TAWAKALNA DIV**
- T-72, BMP, WELL SUPPLIED
- ELITE (?)
- IN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

SOURCE: Orlansky and Thorpe, eds., 1992, p. I-108.
NOTES: New C.O. = new commanding officer arrives just before the war; C-PEN = counter-penetration mission; GHQ = under top-down general headquarters control; INF = infantry; ARM = Armored; DIV=division; T-55, T-62, and T-72 are models of Soviet-designed main battle tanks.

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[46] There is insufficient evidence in the literature to make a causal argument about these preferences. Analysis in this section is derived from my reading of all of the cited material, from direct interactions with Iraqi officers over 16 years, and from analysis of the battles in which Iraqi officers fought in both the 20th and 21st centuries.

[47] For more on this perspective, see Paul F. Gorman, *U.S. Intelligence and Soviet Armor*, declassified intelligence report, Langley, Va.: Central Intelligence Agency, undated; U.S. Army, *The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics*, Field Manual 100-2-1, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, July 16, 1984.

influenced by Soviet advisors, doctrine, and weapon sales—generally viewed armor as a sign of power and prestige.[48] There were local competitive aspects to this preference. Desert terrain clearly favors units capable of rapid advance and displacement and long-range firepower. Defense in the desert arguably favors survivability, and Iraq's armor was more survivable than its infantry against the Iranians.

Iraqi strong preference for armor and its accompanying organizational stratification undercut lower-echelon infantry performance in every war. Minimally effective and brittle infantry probably prevented Iraqi success in Abadan in 1980 and 1981; it routinely exposed the stronger armored forces to swarming enemy infantry penetrations; and, ultimately, it contributed to Iraqi defeat in both the Gulf War and the 2003 coalition invasion. It inadvertently weakened the will to fight *and* the overall combat effectiveness of the entire Iraqi Army.

Given this stratified approach to quality, support, training, esprit de corps, and leadership in the buildup to the Gulf War, it is difficult to imagine how the regular Iraqi Army could have successfully defended both Kuwait and the Iraqi-Saudi border from the massive coalition onslaught. Lower-level units like the 26th Infantry Division had such poor will to fight that they could not even have been considered reliable tripwires or speed bumps for the better-cared-for echelons to their rear. It is not at all clear that the commanders of conscript-heavy divisions stuck around long enough to report on coalition ground movements. Poor will to fight in these units left relatively more-reliable regular army units such as the 3rd Armored Division, the 12th Armored Division, and the 5th Armored Division exposed to surprise flanking attacks. Infantry collapses—failures of will to fight exacerbated by unequal investments in unit quality—left gaping holes in the Iraqis' operational defensive plan, granting the American-led coalition a freedom of movement almost unparalleled in conventional desert warfare.

Factor-by-Factor Analysis of Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the 1991 Persian Gulf War
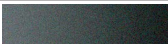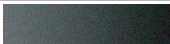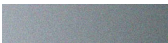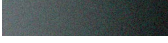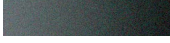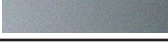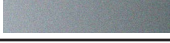
This section provides a summary assessment of regular Iraqi Army will to fight according to the five levels of analysis in the RAND will-to-fight model—individual, unit, organizational, state, societal—and the contextual factors relevant to the ground combat of the Gulf War. Appendix B provides further detail on how each of the factors from the will-to-fight model affected the will to fight of regular Iraqi Army units engaged in combat in the Gulf War.

Individual-Level Iraqi Army Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Individual factors are listed in Table 4.2. This table, and the tables below this one, depict, from left to right, the level or type of assessment from individual to conditional, the category of factors, the factors, the condition of the factors, and the impact of the factors on will to fight. For example, in this case, economics is an individual motivational factor rated at a 4 for condition and 4 for impact on will to fight. Economic conditions favored improved will to fight in the regular Iraqi Army. The rating legend at the bottom of each table provides a quick guide to understand the condition and influence of each factor.

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[48] This point is particularly difficult to prove. It is primarily my observation as a subject-matter expert. One could also explore the role of tanks in the Arab-Israeli wars; that exploration exceeds the scope of the present study. It is sufficient to consider the important role of both armor and infantry in all three of those wars, and also in the Israeli incursions in to Lebanon in the 1980s and 2000s. For more on Middle Eastern military forces and armored vehicles, see Michael Eisenstadt and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Armies of Snow and Armies of Sand: The Impact of Soviet Military Doctrine on Arab Militaries," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, Autumn 2001, pp. 549–578.

Table 4.2
Individual Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

Category	Factor	Condition	Influence
Individual Motivations	Desperation		
	Revenge	Null	Null
	Ideology		
	Economics		
	Individual Identity		
Individual Capabilities	Quality		
	Individual Competence		

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Woods, 2008, pp. 179–180; Press, 2001, pp. 14, 33–37, 168–171; Cigar, 1992, p. 16, Chapter Four; Kadhim, 2006, pp. 11–12, 14–15; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-043, pp. 5–6, 18–19; Kelly, 1993, pp. 158–159, 175, 234; Long, 2004, pp. 170–178; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 201–203; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, 35, 72–76, 119–123, 502–503; 571–573; Al-Marashi and Salama, pp. 177–178; Mueller, 1995, pp. 84, 107; Keaney and Cohen, 1993, p. 108; Jones and Summe, 1997, pp. 6–7; Marcum and Cline, pp. 482–488; Griffin, 1991, pp. 42–45; Al-Shamrani, 2001, Chapter Four; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-043, pp. 18–24; *Frontline*, undated; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, Chapter Nine; Pelletiere and Johnson, p. 67; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, pp. 94, 113; U.S. News and World Report, 1993, pp. 113, 404; Guardia, 2015, p. 146; Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, pp. I-108, I-109; U.S. Marine Corps, 2014, p. 24.

Of the five individual-level motivational factors, revenge was insufficiently cited in the source material to provide meaningful results. In general, regular Iraqi soldiers had mixed levels of quality and competence, but many—and perhaps most—were capable of executing basic military tasks. This was clearly insufficient for the operational task at hand, but most soldiers could draw some confidence from their basic abilities. Desperation was a key individual-level factor in late February 1991. Iraqi soldiers were desperate to avoid being killed by what many thought to be a dominant coalition military force. In some units, soldiers were also desperate for food and water, and some were desperate to avoid capital punishment that might be meted out by their own officers or military police. Individual identity and ideology neither undermined nor improved will to fight. In 1991, the army paid well in comparison to the rest of Iraqi society, and the loss of salary figured into soldiers' decisions regarding fight or flight.

This assessment, even though it looks quite critical at first glance, generally disagrees with the scathing characterizations of Iraqi soldiers in the canonical literature on the Gulf War. Collectively, analysts of the Gulf War describe Iraqi soldiers in regular units as functionally incompetent, terrified, and incapable of conducting all but the most basic military tasks. A few of the cited critics even begrudge the Iraqis that modest threshold of competence. In some units, this was undoubtably true. The 26th Infantry Division is probably a case in point. But the

most egregious examples of collapse—including terrified soldiers surrendering to unmanned aircraft—do not account for the basically functional units such as the 12th Armored Division, the 10th Armored Division, and the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division, or for the soldiers in those units. In a ratio-scale comparison against American soldiers, Iraqi soldiers' quality and competence were low. But on an ordinal scale, with baseline comparisons against absolute illiteracy and utter incompetence, things don't look quite so bad.

Most rudimentary military collective tasks require some basic level of quality and commitment. It is true that many conscripts were illiterate and unfit for service, but it is also true that many were literate and fit for service. It is true that many were technically and tactically incompetent, but it is also true that many were competent. Many more soldiers fell somewhere in the middle: They weren't great, but neither were they completely incapable of performing moderately complex military tasks.

In the absence of reliable individual-level performance data, competence has to be judged primarily by combat performance. Of the approximately 380,000 Iraqi soldiers still on duty at the beginning of the ground war, 80,000 surrendered.[49] There is no assessment of the individual quality or competence of those soldiers, so it cannot be said that all 80,000 were illiterate, unintelligent, or incompetent. Given the circumstances of their surrender, one might conclude that many of them were quite bright.

Approximately 300,000 Iraqi soldiers stayed on to perform their duties. That meant driving trucks, maintaining generators, loading and firing cannons, fighting from tanks and armored personnel carriers, and engaging coalition soldiers with individual weapons.[50] It is true that the counterattack of the 5th Mechanized Division was not particularly effective or well executed. But it is also true that simply getting hundreds of soldiers and vehicles moving in the same direction, without shooting each other or running over their own infantry, is an incredibly difficult task even under the best of circumstances. The central point of this argument about individual quality and competence is that while it was not great, it could not have been abysmal given the many basic demonstrations of military technical and tactical performance by the regular Iraqi Army during the war. Hence the ratings of 2 for quality and 3 for individual competence.
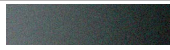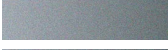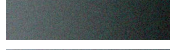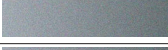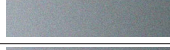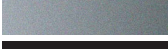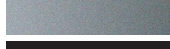
Unit-Level Iraqi Army Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Unit factor ratings are presented in Table 4.3. As with individual ratings, these scores represent an averaging of both condition and impact for higher- and lower-quality units across the Iraqi Army. Cohesion must account for the fact that 120,000, mostly regular, Iraqi Army soldiers deserted prior to the ground war. Desertion was mostly an individual act that represented a breaking of cohesion. However, incidents of desertion were uneven from unit to unit. Given that 80,000 Iraqis also surrendered to coalition forces, typically as part of a cohesive mass, it is clear that many units held together but ultimately to no useful end. Therefore, removing the comparisons to advanced Western military units, Iraqi Army cohesion was not great but not abysmal. It did help ensure that some units stuck together to fight against overwhelming odds, and at the same time it contributed to mass collapse on the front lines.

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[49] This assumes the high-end estimate of approximately 500,000 soldiers on duty in mid-1990.

[50] Although they did not do these jobs particularly well, it is important to place this performance in context: They did not do these jobs well after being bombed for a month, in the face of overwhelming odds, while badly fatigued and undernourished, at night, with relatively poor equipment, etc.

Table 4.3
Unit Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

Category	Factor	Condition	Influence
Unit Culture	Unit Cohesion		
	Unit Control		
	Unit Esprit de Corps		
Unit Capabilities	Unit Competence		
	Unit Support		
	Unit Leadership		

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 24, 119–123, 504, 571–573; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, p. 32–33, 93–94, 113, 115, 213; Mueller, 1995, pp. 84, 93, 107; Press, 2001, pp. 13–14, 29–30 33–37, 170–173; Keaney and Cohen, 1993, pp. 98–99, 108; Lowry, 2003, pp. 46, 68, 110, 113, 128–130,140–141, 151, 188; Woods, 2008, pp. 52, 60–61, 64, 88, 101–102, 128, 140, 174–175, 186, 202–203, 220, 229, 237, 267–268, 282–284; Al-Marshi and Salama, 2008, pp. 177–178; U.S. Marine Corps, 2014, pp. 24, 65, 112, 181; Kelly, 1993, pp. 156, 164, 175, 183–193, 223–234; Jones and Summe, 1997, pp. 6–7; Marcum and Cline, 1993, pp. 485–486; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, pp. 280–281; Malovany, 2017, pp. 567, 583–585; U.S. Central Command, 1991, p. 50, 64–65; Cigar, 1992, pp. 3–12, 14–16, 18–19, 22–23; Woods and Stout, 2010, pp. 11–12, 21–22; U.S. News and World Report, 1993, pp. 310, 326, 404; Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, pp. I-108, I-109; Hosmer, 1996, pp. 158, 169; Guardia, 2015, pp. 146, 170; *Frontline*, undated; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 194–195.

Many Iraqi front-line soldiers were not well informed about the coalition threat. Nonetheless, by the time the ground war began, it was clear to most of them that they were overmatched. Expectations for failure undermined many Iraqi soldiers' will to fight, and any lingering and then unmet expectations for success had the more immediate effect of generating heart-rending disappointment. Ruthless, top-down Iraqi control measures were generally appropriate for the regular Iraqi Army in 1991. Given the vast number of desertions and surrenders, they were also clearly inadequate. Fear-driven control is only effective when the coercive fear of punishment is greater than the fear of facing the enemy. Esprit de corps was generally good in the top-level regular armored units, but quite poor in the lower-level, conscript-heavy infantry units, so this factor balances out.

The previous section addressed individual competence, and the scores of 3 for unit competence for both condition and impact here represent the assessment that the Iraqi Army was basically competent, and that basic competence generated basic confidence at the unit level. Unit support was poor in the better units and awful in the worst units, and unit leaders were not able to offer up any kind of meaningful air defense, air support, medical support, or—on the forward-most lines—food or water. Many Iraqi soldiers were ravenously hungry when they were processed as enemy prisoners of war. Unit leadership also averages out: It wasn't of very

high quality in most regular army units but was better in the armored units. In those units, officers with extensive experience in the Iran-Iraq War helped to stiffen resolve when it was possible to do so. Some leaders abandoned their troops in the field, and many officers surrendered without putting up a fight. In a top-down organization in which good leadership is vital to unit success, poor leadership sharply undermined will to fight.

Organizational-Level Iraqi Army Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Table 4.4 presents the organizational-level factors. These also represent an aggregation across the regular elements of the Iraqi Army, focusing at the service level, where senior military leaders design and support the force, direct training, write doctrine, and dictate the collective approach to control and integrity.

Army-wide control measures generally carried over from the Iran-Iraq War. Top-down discipline centering on *targhib* and *tarhib*—roughly, a balance between encouragement and punishment, or carrot and stick—was backed up at the army-level by Ba'athist enforcers and

Table 4.4
Organizational Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

Category	Factor	Condition	Influence
Organizational Culture	Organizational Control		
	Organizational Esprit de Corps		
	Organizational Integrity		
Organizational Capabilities	Organizational Training		
	Organizational Support		
	Doctrine		
	Organizational Leadership		

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 24, 119–123, 266, 348, 381, 504, 571–573, 575–577; Woods, 2008, pp. 17, 25, 63–64, 78–79, 88, 101–102, 174–175, 202–203, 220, 229, 237, 267–268, 282–283; Malovany, 2017, pp. 32–37, 172–173, 563, 578, 584–585; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 177–178; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, pp. 32–33, 93–94, 112–113, 213; Swain, 1994, pp. 63, 66, 244; Mueller, 1995, pp. 84, 93–94, 100–102; Kelly, 1993, pp. 156, 170, 183–193, 223–237; Jones and Summe, pp. 6–7; Marcum and Cline, 1993, pp. 482–486; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 206, 211–213; Woods and Stout, 2010, pp. 13–14, 17–20, 27; Press, 2001, pp. 29–30, 114, 172; Hosmer, 1996, pp. 158, 169; Keaney and Cohen, 1993, pp. 98–99, 116–117; Griffin, 1991, pp. 42–45; Al-Shamrani, 2001, p. 179; U.S. News and World Report, 1993, pp. ix, 285, 296, 310, 326; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, pp. 278–281, 386–388, 390; Guardia, 2015, p. 146; U.S. Central Command, 1991, p. 67; Cigar, 1992, pp. 5, 14–15, 23–25; Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, pp. I-59 to I-60; U.S. Marine Corps, 2014, p. 24; Pelletiere and Johnson, 1991, p. 67.

roving disciplinary teams.[51] As army leaders discovered in the Gulf War, coercion in a top-down organization is only effective when combined with strong leadership and support: Paternalistic relationships are codependent. In the Gulf War, coercive measures were particularly ineffective when soldiers were away from their units and home on leave. This probably reflected an overall weakening in the Ba'athist control regime during the post-Iran-Iraq War budgetary restraints.

This low rating for organizational integrity derives primarily from the regular army's behavior during the occupation of Kuwait. By all accounts, many soldiers and officers in the regular army and in People's Army militias engaged in looting, rape, and, in some cases, torture and murder. These behaviors have a corrosive effect on military discipline, or control. Esprit de corps across the regular army was generally poor. Better units, such as the 12th Armored Division, were still held in lower regard than the worst unit in the Republican Guard. Hastily formed infantry divisions had almost no esprit de corps and little collective sense of worth. Training in these new units was particularly weak, though it was better in the armored units.

The army provided decent support to some units, but overall it failed to protect its lines of communication to the front. Lack of food and water were critical shortfalls in some units when the ground war commenced. This was a joint failure; some blame falls on the Iraqi Air Force. Some blame falls on state leadership for shipping Iraq's combat aircraft to Iran, thereby eliminating any possibility of protecting lines of communication within Iraq from the air. Organizational doctrine was perfectly reasonable for a static defense against the Iranian military in the 1980s. But it was poorly aligned with the need to defend against the coalition ground force in 1991, particularly given the vast disparity in supporting airpower. Moreover, many regular Iraqi units failed to fully apply their own doctrine, further weakening the already poorly aligned defensive scheme. Organizational leaders were generally experienced and fairly competent, but they were not enthusiastic about the Gulf War. Army emphasis on force preservation clashed with Saddam's directives to hold the line against the coalition assault. The result was a muddled tactical mess executed by officers whose hearts were not in the war.
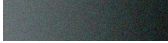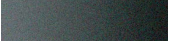
A holistic look at the organizational factor scores suggests that the regular army leadership generally failed to support the units engaged in combat. Their failure contributed to weakened will to fight, which in turn contributed to the desertions and surrenders that followed.

State-Level Iraqi Army Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Table 4.5 presents the state-level will-to-fight factors. These describe how the state as an institution, including its leadership, influenced the will to fight of the regular army and its units in the field. By early 1991, the relatively strong state of civil-military relations that Saddam had engineered during the Iran-Iraq War was degraded. His profligate spending during the 1980s and the budget cuts that ensued injured the state's relationship with the regular armed forces. Putting aside the well-funded Republican Guard, organizations that had come to expect almost limitless largesse were now forced to fight a massive coalition with cut-rate capabilities. Senior officers were frustrated with Saddam's strategic decisionmaking. But, in general, these high-level frictions had little observable direct effect on the will to fight of the forces in the

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[51]   From Arabic, *targhib* is transliterated as encouragement, and *tarhib* is transliterated as threat or warning. Al-targhib wa al-tarhib, roughly "the encouragement and the warning," is a Muslim hadith, or set of collective knowledge and instructions attributed to the Prophet Mohammed and passed down through learned scholars. This religious grounding gives the concept additional moral weight in Iraqi society.

Table 4.5
State Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

Category	Factor	Condition	Influence
State Culture	Civil-Military Relations		Null
	State Integrity		Null
State Capabilities	State Support		
	State Strategy		
	State Leadership		

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Woods, 2008, pp. 17, 52, 87–88, 101–102, 140, 202–203, 220, 229, 234; Pelletiere and Johnson, 1991, p. 67; Cigar, 1992, pp. 1–15, 23–25; Kadhim, 2006, pp. 11–12, 14–15; Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008, pp. 13–14, 27; *Frontline*, undated; Woods, Murray, et al., 2011b, pp. 170–175, 179–180, 188–191, 203–206, 211–213; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 96, 113, 119–123, 266, 348, 571–573; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, pp. 112–113, 213; Al-Shamrani, 2001, pp. 177–179; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, pp. 42–45, 93–94, 278–279, 280–281, 362, 386–388; U.S. Marine Corps, 2014, p. 66; Press, 2001, p. 14; Hosmer, 1996, p. 157; Kelly, 1993, pp. 158, 170; Lowry, 2003, p. 63; Malovany, 2017, pp. 563, 582; Mueller, 1995, p. 110; Griffin, 1991, pp. 42–45; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-042, p. 11; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, p. 38; Woods and Stout, 2010, pp. 11–12.

field. The same can be said of state integrity. Iraq remained a corrupt state, but the level of corruption appeared to be manageable in the presanctions era.[52]

The state still supported the Iraqi armed forces with modern equipment and supplies, but it did little to manage the disparity between the Republican Guard Corps and the regular army. In fact, state emphasis on the guard and relatively lower support to regular units contributed to lower confidence in regular units. State strategy in the Gulf War was disastrous. Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait was as ill-considered as his decision to invade Iran in 1980. His failure to build military support for his strategic decisions exacerbated the army's lack of confidence in the state's strategy. Many military officers remained fiercely loyal to Saddam, but his shaky strategic decisionmaking, followed by his even less surefooted diplomatic efforts to deter the coalition invasion, undermined overall military confidence in state leadership. This effect was exacerbated by Saddam's appointment of state cronies to lead the occupation of Kuwait, an effort largely seen as a criminal enterprise that undercut the integrity and societal good standing of the army. Whereas state leadership enhanced will to fight in the Iran-Iraq War, it weakened will to fight in the Gulf War.

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[52] For more on the impact of sanctions on the Iraqi military, see the following chapter.

Societal-Level Iraqi Army Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Table 4.6 presents the societal level will-to-fight factors. These describe the influence of Iraqi societal identity issues, societal integrity, and societal support on the regular Iraqi Army and its units. Ethno-sectarian friction was building by early 1991, particularly within the Kurdish and Shi'a Arab communities. This was evidenced by the uprisings that followed the end of the Gulf War in early 1991. However, there was almost no evidence to suggest that societal ten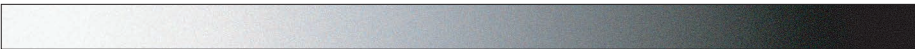sions significantly affected the will to fight of regular army units *during* the Gulf War. As with the Iraqi state, Iraqi society tolerated a fairly high level of corruption in 1991. However, societal corruption had no clear, discernable impact on Iraqi Army will to fight.

Societal support posed a bigger problem for the regular army units trying to maintain control and cohesion along the defensive front in southern Iraq and Kuwait. Public support for the Gulf War was initially high but faded quickly. Saddam was less aggressive in his pursuit of national unity in support of the Gulf War than he had been during the Iran-Iraq War. He struggled to find a convincing rallying cry to mobilize the public, and he spent less time personally engaged with the population than he had in the 1980s.[53] Lack of coherent and convincing state strategy exacerbated the weak messaging campaign. It led many Iraqis to question the purposes of the Gulf War. Collective exhaustion on the tail end of the Iran-Iraq War also contributed to the relative disinterest in defending Kuwait against the impending coalition onslaught. When soldiers went home for leave, friends and family often encouraged them to desert their units. Many did, and those who returned to the front did so knowing that the Iraqi people were generally unenthusiastic about the war.

Table 4.6
Societal Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

Category	Factor	Condition	Influence
Societal Culture	Societal Identity		Null
	Societal Integrity		Null
Societal Capabilities	Societal Support		

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Woods, 2008, pp. 101–102, 124–125, 179–180, 224, 229, 267, 283; Griffin, 1991, pp. 42–45; Cigar, 1992, p. 5; Al-Shamrani, 2001, Chapter Four; Kadhim, 2006, pp. 11–12, 14–15; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-042l, pp. 23–24; SH-SHTP-A-001-043, pp. 4–7, 10, 14, 18, 20; Long, 2004, pp. 170–178; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 201–206, 207–210; Woods and Stout, 2010, pp. 18–20; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, p. 113; Mueller, 1995, p. 104; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-042, p. 21; *Frontline*, undated; U.S. News and World Report, 1993, pp. 274–275; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, pp. 279, 325–326.

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[53] This may have been partly due to his increasing paranoia and regard for personal safety.

Contextual Will-to-Fight Factors in the Gulf War

Table 4.7 presents the contextual will-to-fight factors for the regular Iraqi Army in the Gulf War. These are the exogenous factors that may have directly influenced Iraqi Army will to fight during the ground war. Factor assessments take into account their prospective impact from the time the regular army units set into their defensive positions in August 1990 through late February 1991.

Most Iraqi soldiers were well acclimatized to desert conditions, although many Kurds from the cooler mountainous areas to the north suffered from the climate disparity. Acclimatization was less of an issue for will to fight than the accumulated impact of deadening heat and freezing nights over the course of the Iraqis' defensive campaign. Weather had a more direct, immediate effect on will to fight during the ground war. Coupled with dense smoke from

Table 4.7
Contextual Will-to-Fight Factors in the 1991 Persian Gulf War

| Condition: | Outstanding or elite | Good | Sufficient or moderate | Poor | Severely debilitating |
| Influence on will to fight: | Significantly improves | Improves | Neutral or minimal | Undermines | Severely undermines |

SOURCES: RAND interviews with eight Iraqi general officers, 2019; Cordesman and Wagner, 1996, pp. 58–61, 96, 119–123, 389–443, 508, 513, 571–573, 597–598, 700–701; Woods, 2008, pp. 22–23, 26, 75–76, 81, 104–113, 179–180, 186, 200–203, 208, 214–219, 232, 234–235, 240, 282, 284; U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, pp. 27–31, 32, 49–83, 85–86, 93–95, 113, 149–183, 186–187, 191, 196–197, 213, 414; U.S. Central Command, 1991, pp. 35–63, 64–65; Swain, 1994, pp. 116, 225, 241, 244; Keaney and Cohen, 1993, pp. 22, 98–99, 106–108, 116–117, 163–167, 170–173; Freedman and Karsh, 1993, pp. 19–20, 85–127, 325–326, 340–341, 362, 367, 390; Lowry, 2003, pp. 57, 89, 107, 111, 113, 142–143, 147; Orlansky and Thorpe, 1992, pp. I-39, I-60, I-93, I-102, I-106, I-107; Schubert and Kraus, 1995, pp. 28–33, 138–139, 174–205; Cigar, 1992, pp. 3–14, 16–18, 21–22; Al-Marashi and Salama, pp. 180–181, 177–181; Hosmer, 1996, pp. 142–152, 157–158, 160–170; Al-Shamrani, 2001, p. 179, Chapter Four; Frostic, 1994, p. 25; U.S. News and World Report, 1993, pp. 105–107, 274–275, 310; Marcum and Cline, 1993, pp. 482–488; Woods, Pallki, and Stout, 2011, pp. 95–98, 196–199, 206; Mueller, 1995, pp. 93, 104; Woods and Stout, 2010, pp. 21–22; Kelly, 1993, pp. 69, 158, 164; Jones and Summe, 1997, all; Malovany, 2017, pp. 567–568; Press, 2001, pp. 22, 27; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-042, pp. 6–7, 19–20, 27; CIA, SH-SHTP-A-001-043, pp. 10–14; Long, 2004, pp. 133–135, 139–160, 170–180, et al.; Guardia, 2015, pp. 137–138, 176; *Frontline*, undated.

the oil-well fires set by Saddam Hussein's forces, overcast skies and blowing sand generated sometimes-terrifying conditions of near or absolute blackout.[54] Against a less advanced force, this might have given the Iraqis some benefit. Against the coalition, the weather contributed to the Iraqis' sense of helplessness. Poor weather hindered some coalition aerial strikes and ground attacks, but not all.

As with climate and weather, most Iraqi Arabs and some Iraqi Kurds were well accustomed to the desert terrain in southern Iraq and in Kuwait. They were not accustomed to relentless observation and aerial attack from an adversary with a massive, advanced air fleet flying thousands of almost unopposed ground-attack sorties. Desert terrain offered little in the way of natural concealment from observation and very little natural cover from attack. As Iraqi tankers discovered during direct engagements with American tanks firing depleted-uranium sabot rounds, sand revetments did little to slow or divert the hyper-velocity sabots before they tore through—sometimes both sides of—the Iraqis' inadequately armored tank turrets.[55] In the Gulf War, there was no home field terrain advantage for the Iraqi Army. This was disheartening.

Soldiers sitting for months on end in sandy trenchworks, suffering from extreme temperature fluctuations, receiving sometimes-inadequate supplies of food and water, suffering under day and night bombing and propaganda messaging campaigns aimed at killing them or at least disrupting their sleep and mental states, and having little opportunity to visit with family members, inevitably felt fatigue. Fatigue was exacerbated by the lack of enthusiasm the average Iraqi regular soldier had for the mission. Here, mission and strategy differ somewhat. Missions are tactical. It clearly made sense to many Iraqis that they had to defend their positions, even if just to survive the coalition attacks: Many did fight. However, the regular army, front-line infantry division mission was clearly bullet-stopping.

By the onset of the air war, most Iraqis knew that they were at a significant military disadvantage. Some Iraqi soldiers believed that American soldiers were superhuman. Terrifying rumors about U.S. marines circulated throughout some of the lower-level infantry units. One rumor suggested that marines were seven feet tall and that they had to kill a member of their immediate family to join the Marine Corps.[56] When the coalition followed through with devastating air attacks, the power of adversary reputation was reinforced.

However, while the actual performance of the coalition in the Gulf War was devastating to the Iraqi Army, most Iraqis only experienced that performance a single time. Either they survived or they did not; few went on to retreat and fight again later. Therefore, the impact of the exceptionally deadly adversary performance in the Gulf War on will to fight is slightly less than the impact of adversary reputation.[57] Adversary equipment—in this case, coalition air-

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[54] I experienced these total blackout conditions while serving in a scout unit with the First Marine Division in the ground war. At some points, it was impossible to see anything at all. Advancing units ground to a halt, and the marines needed to keep one hand on a known point at all times to avoid becoming separated from their units. Anti-tank elements attached to the same scout unit were able to penetrate this absolute darkness with thermal imaging devices.

[55] This observation occurred repeatedly in the cited works on the Battle of 73 Easting. See reference notes, above.

[56] My personal observation, Kuwait, 1991.

[57] There is no doubt that coalition airpower was brutally effective in many, and even most, sorties. One Iraqi survivor from the Battle of Al-Khafji stated that coalition airpower "imposed more damage on his brigade [of the 5th Mechanized Division] in half an hour than it had sustained in eight years of fighting against the Iranians" (quoted in Westermeyer, 2014, p. 132).

craft, intelligence platforms, long-range rockets, and accurate, long-range, direct-fire cannons and missiles—created a sense of helplessness among many Iraqi units. Imbalance in equipment capability is commonly listed as a critical factor in eroding Iraqi will to fight *during combat.*

Messaging is a two-sided coin in this case, and both sides undermined Iraqi Army will to fight. Coalition messaging was intensive, varied, and carefully targeted. There are many direct reports of Iraqi soldiers from regular army units surrendering at least in part because of psychological operations messages, and many images of Iraqis surrendering holding coalition leaflets. There is no clear cause and effect here: Iraqis did not necessarily surrender *because* of the messages, but it is clear that coalition messaging both exacerbated their fear and facilitated their capitulation. On the other hand, Iraqi messaging designed to reinforce army will to fight was generally weaker than it had been during the Iran-Iraq War, and was also generally less effective in shoring up Iraqi will to fight.

Not only did most of Iraq's traditional allies abandon it during the Gulf War, several fought against it on the side of the Americans. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Syria, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman all joined in to help defeat the Iraqi Army.[58] Iraq fought the Gulf War alone. Iraqi Army soldiers could not depend on anyone bailing them out. Isolation and a sense of abandonment helped to shave away the will to fight of soldiers and entire units on the front lines.

Key Findings from the Gulf War Case: Iraqi Regular Army Will to Fight

Two hundred thousand desertions and surrenders represent a catastrophic failure of Iraqi Army will to fight. As an organization, the regular Iraqi Army in 1991 effectively fell apart. The overarching narrative of the coalition Gulf War victory anchors in the images of woeful Iraqi prisoners trudging across the desert, arms aloft, waving tattered psychological operations leaflets bearing instructions for their surrender. Figure 4.5 depicts two leaflets dropped over Iraqi Army units during the air campaign. The top leaflet shows Iraqi soldiers how to surrender, with weapon slung and leaflet in hand. The bottom leaflet is effectively a letter of safe passage. Thousands of Iraqi soldiers surrendered carrying leaflets in their hands in accordance with these instructions.

But the predominant images of Iraqi prisoners from 1991 do not tell the whole story of the regular Iraqi Army in the Gulf War. Many Iraqis did fight, both individually in fatalistic expressions of courage, and as collective units in the face of overwhelming firepower.[59] Some infantry units collapsed, but others stood their ground. On February 25, a regular army mechanized and infantry brigade from the 7th Infantry Division and the 3rd Armored Division counterattacked—albeit with limited coordination and poor results—directly into the face of

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[58] Morocco provided some security forces to Saudi Arabia for a short period of time. It was pressured away from the coalition by major Moroccan civilian protests in support of Iraq. See Steven Greenhouse, "War in the Gulf: The Arabs; War Puts Strain on North Africa," *New York Times*, February 6, 1991.

[59] I personally observed a single Iraqi regular Iraqi Army infantryman attack a U.S. Marine Corps M-60 main battle tank with a rifle from a distance of approximately 50 meters. This act of incredible bravery ended in the soldier's death, and it did not reflect any type of collective, unit-level will to fight. As a whole, that soldier's unit did not fight.

Figure 4.5
Examples U.S. Psychological Operations Leaflets from the 1991 Gulf War

SOURCE: 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), *Leaflets of the Persian Gulf War*, Fort Bragg, N.C.: 1991, pp. 13 and 16.
NOTE: Arabic instructions on the back of the first leaflet translate as "The United States abides by the rules of the Geneva Convention. Ceasing fire will provide you the following: Humane Treatment; Food and Water; Medical Treatment; Shelter; Return to your homes after hostilities." Arabic instructions on the second leaflet translate as "If you want to save yourself, comply with the following: Remove the magazine from your weapon. Carry the weapon on your left shoulder, pointing the barrel downward. To assure us of your sincere desire to save yourself, please put both hands above your head. When approaching our locations, do so slowly, any person ahead of the group raises this leaflet above his head. This will affirm your desire for safety. You will be transferred into the hands of your Arab brothers as soon as possible. Welcome."

the 1st Marine Division.[60] On February 26, the American 24th Mechanized Infantry Division ran into the Iraqi 47th and 49th Infantry Divisions, both of which maintained their positions and fought as relatively cohesive units.[61] They used preregistered artillery in an ineffective but concerted effort to apply combined arms tactics in the defense. These regular units demonstrated notable will to fight given the circumstances.

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[60] Quilter II, 1993, pp. 91–92. Also see Dennis P. Mroczkowski, *With the 2d Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm: U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990–1991*, Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

[61] Scales, 1993, p. 257.

Figure 4.6 depicts a sketch of the Reveille Engagement counterattack by the brigades from the Iraqi 7th Infantry Division and 3rd Armored Division. It shows a column of Iraqi armor and mechanized infantry attacking through a sandstorm directly into the Marines' front lines. They were quickly crushed, but bad luck did play a role as well: They attacked into the only Marine Corps unit fielding advanced M1-variant Abrams main battle tanks.

This disparity in will to fight between units in the regular army frames the findings that follow. It suggests that while it is possible to assess the will to fight of an entire combat organization, such as the Iraqi Army, it would be wise to complement such an assessment with a closer look at individual units, or types of units within the organization. Elevating this approach to the entire Iraqi ground force in the Gulf War, it is possible to assess the Republican Guard and

Figure 4.6
Reveille Engagement on February 25, 1991, Gulf War
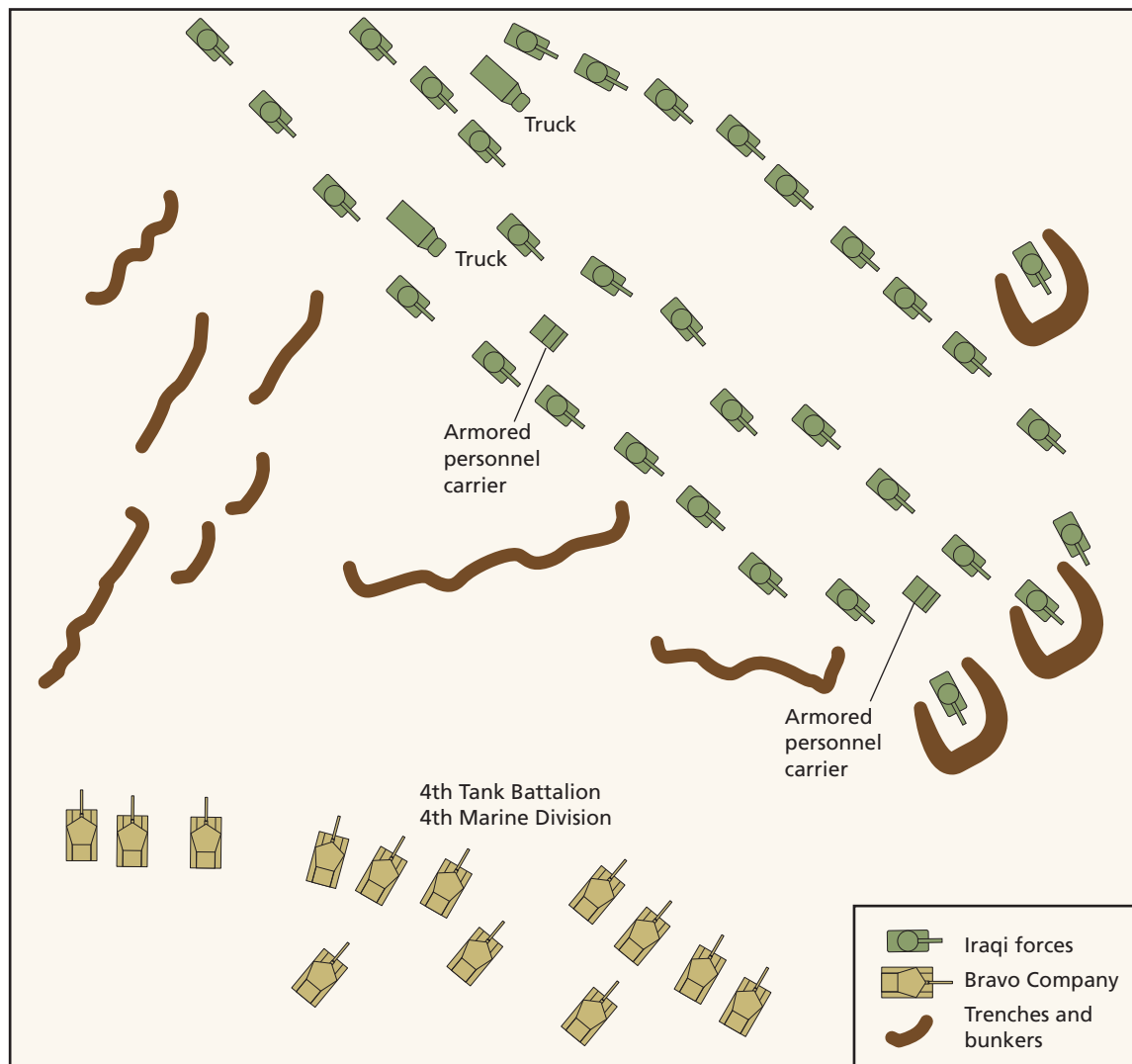
SOURCE: Adapted from "Bravo Company, 4th Tank Battalion: Operation Desert Storm," map journal, undated. Also see U.S. Marine Corps, Company "B" (Rein), 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Operation Desert Storm Command Chronology excerpt, undated.

regular army as a mass entity. Their will to fight, collectively, was mixed. But in this particular case, the disparity of force quality and will to fight also demands a closer look. The key findings that follow apply to the regular army as a whole, with necessary exceptions for force variations noted.

No Single Factor Explanation of Will to Fight in the Gulf War

In the case of the 1991 Gulf War, failure of Iraqi Army will to fight is most frequently attributed to the effectiveness of coalition airpower. Putting aside the questionable battle damage assessment claims made by contemporaneous observers of the air campaign cited above, at least three general counternarratives exist in the literature and interview evidence. Cited ground force officers and observers argue that coalition tanks, artillery, and infantry were the key to breaking the Iraqis' will to fight. Other analyses suggest that the low quality of Iraqi front-line infantry units was the key factor in their collapse. Interviews with senior Iraqi military leaders and other evidence suggests that the lack of belief in Iraq's war aims in Kuwait may have had the most deleterious impact on regular Iraqi Army will to fight.

Thorough analysis of the existing narratives and available evidence suggests that the real explanation is as complex as the historical problem: All these factors mattered. Airpower alone probably could not have caused mass surrenders if the soldiers on the front lines had believed in their cause. Low-quality soldiers who had not suffered from air attack might have been fresher and more confident in their ability to defend their positions against the coalition ground units. The Gulf War case reinforces the general finding from the original will-to-fight research, and findings from all other will-to-fight cases conducted by the RAND team thus far: There is no single factor explanation of will to fight. All factors in the model, and perhaps others, need to be considered.

Will to Fight Alone Does Not Equate to Combat Effectiveness

The Gulf War case highlights the challenge of understanding the *combat effectiveness* of a military organization or individual military units. Foundational RAND work on will to fight showed that the term *combat effectiveness* is, thus far, ill-defined for the U.S. military. However it might be defined and applied for different cases, it consists of some combination of will to fight and tangible capability. Those tangible capabilities include materiel, such as tanks and rifles, but also the qualitative aspects of doctrine, tactics, training, leadership, and other essential military capabilities.

All capability factors in the will-to-fight model have a will-to-fight and a tangible quality. For example, training is a subfactor in the will-to-fight model, and it is also a military capability. Training is relevant in two ways for combat effectiveness: It provides soldiers with confidence they need to improve their will to fight, and it provides soldiers with capabilities they need to apply their will effectively.

Combat effectiveness is also relative to the task and adversary at hand. Regular Iraqi Army units that did show some will to fight in the Gulf War were soundly defeated despite their willingness to fight. Showing up and fighting aggressively matters, but it is not enough. War is a contest of two opposing, independent, and hostile wills. Will is an absolutely necessary prerequisite for fighting. Stronger-willed armies can, and often do, defeat larger and better-equipped armies. But in all cases, technical and tactical capabilities matter to some degree.

Unpopular Strategic Purpose Weakened the Foundation of the Iraqi Army's Will-to-Fight

Armies can and do fight in the absence of clear and popular strategies.[62] Indeed, many Iraqi units fought in the Gulf War despite the widespread doubts about Iraq's strategic purpose in Kuwait. However, as our interviews with senior Iraqi general officers revealed, Saddam's ill-advised and poorly articulated Gulf War strategy, and the follow-on defensive mission it necessitated, directly undercut Iraqi Army will to fight. Both Pardew and Mueller argued that lack of enthusiasm for Iraq's strategic objectives was the decisive factor in breaking the will to fight of so many regular army units. To sum up their comments quoted at the beginning of this chapter, lack of national will for the war eroded military will to fight all before the first bomb was dropped in January 1991.

If this is true, then the coalition air and ground forces were effectively pushing on an open door during the early breaching phases of Operation Desert Storm. Few ground-combat soldiers have ever complained about too much air support, but it is distinctly possible that the intensive application of airpower on the frontline Iraqi infantry units was unnecessary, or at the very least excessive and unnecessarily costly. A better assessment of the will to fight of those conscript-heavy, front-line infantry units might have suggested a major targeting shift to higher-priority targets, such as the Republican Guard, earlier in the air campaign.

Given that some regular army units did fight, it must be true that the lack of enthusiasm for Saddam's strategy and the concomitant lack of popular support for the war had uneven impact on the regular army's will to fight. It is also not possible to rule out the collective impact of the many other salient factors on the weakened will to fight of the frontline forces. In other words, while Pardew's and Mueller's arguments are certainly viable, they are not sufficient to cancel out the general rule that the RAND team recommends for will-to-fight assessment: All factors must be considered, and single-factor causality is rarely, if ever, provable.

Generating Fear Was Particularly Effective Against Brittle Military Forces

Military brittleness, as defined in this report, describes an organization or unit that fights well when all factors are in its favor but fights poorly or collapses when factors turn against it. Lack of resilience and adaptability—two qualities that are highly sought after in ground combat forces—are the anemic hallmarks of brittleness. When all factors are positive for a brittle unit, confidence is high. The Iran-Iraq War case showed that generating surprise through night attacks and flanking maneuvers was an excellent way to generate uncertainty and fear in order to shatter that confidence. In the Gulf War, relentless precision bombardment from effectively untouchable coalition aircraft had the same effect. Every cited source that described Iraqi Army reactions to coalition bombing described the fear generated by that bombing, and the effects that fear had on will to fight.

Those same sources also described the combinatory effect that coalition psychological operations (messaging) had when they were delivered in concert with aerial attacks. Iraqi soldiers who had seen their friends killed in spectacular explosions, who had been showered with their blood and body parts, who had been repeatedly concussed by nearby attacks, and who had lived in fear for days or weeks that a bomb might drop on them without warning, at any time, often received invitations to surrender with enthusiasm. Airstrikes and messaging,

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[62] There has been no clear or popular American strategy in either Afghanistan or Iraq, yet American forces keep fighting in both war successfully. But the Vietnam War showed that the lack of a clear and popular strategy, coupled with high-intensity combat and heavy casualties, can lead to individual desertions and weaker will to fight at the unit level.

together, proved to be highly effective in hollowing out the Iraqi Army's defenses by eroding the will to fight of tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers. As with other factors, there is no claim of direct causation here: Some units that had suffered terrible bombing and aggressive messaging did, in fact, continue to fight, and there were many collective reasons for desertion and surrender. But this finding does support pursuing novel and aggressive ways to generate fear in brittle adversaries in the future.

Emphasis on Elite Forces Undermined the Will to Fight of Regular Forces
By 1990, the expediency of cherry-picking soldiers during the later years of the Iran-Iraq War had been cemented into a de facto military caste system. The Republican Guard Corps not only stripped away the best equipment and brightest leaders from the regular army, it also received favorable tactical placement. During the Gulf War, Saddam purposefully held the guard in reserve in order to prevent its decimation along the exposed front lines. Guard units were excused from the tedious and corruptive occupation duty in Kuwait. Regular armor units got some preferential placement, as well, but they were also used to help cover the flanks of guard units, or to act as speed bumps against onrushing coalition ground forces. Regular infantry units, some of which had been hastily compiled or reinforced with large numbers of conscripts, were exposed to the worst living conditions, the worst tactical positions, and the worst effects of coalition firepower.

Leaders and soldiers in these lowest-echelon units had terrible esprit de corps in part because of their placement in the Iraqi military pecking order. Even the dullest soldiers knows when they are being used as cannon fodder, and American interactions with Iraqi prisoners from those units suggested that more than a few of the poorly trained conscripts were in fact quite bright and all-too-clearly aware of their conditions and their placement in the Army's pecking order.[63]

There were also many serious, practical drawbacks to being a nonelite infantry unit with lower-quality assets and support. Lower-quality leaders practice lower-quality leadership, which translates into lower confidence in those leaders. Lower-quality equipment delivers lower-quality performance, which translates into lower confidence in that equipment. Each capabilities factor and many cultural factors in the will-to-fight model can be similarly traced to lower confidence, and therefore lower will to fight in the lower-echelon units.

Reliance on Top-Down Control Demands Relentless Top-Down Control
Throughout its approximately 100-year history, the Iraqi Army has been a primarily top-down organization dependent on strong leadership and an emphasis on coercion. While the Iraqis did continue to practice both *targhib* and *tarhib* in the Gulf War, the lessened emphasis on persuasion relative to the high points of the late Iran-Iraq War placed a higher premium on coercion. This was particularly true in conscript-heavy units. Leaders in these front-line divisions were less able to count on the learned personal discipline of their soldiers. Captured conscripts consistently and repeatedly stated to their captors and to media that they remained at their posts primarily out of fear of punishment.[64] So while the Iraqi Army was already a

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[63]   For example, Paul Richter and Edwin Chen, "POWs Begging Not to Be Sent Back to Hussein's Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1991; Richard H. P. Sia, "Iraqi POWs Say They Too Are Victims of Hussein War in the Gulf," *Baltimore Sun*, March 5, 1991; Association of the United States Army, 1993.

[64]   Richter and Chen, 1991; Sia, 1991; Association of the U.S. Army, 1993.

leader-centric, top-down, coercion-driven organization, even more leadership, centralization, and coercion were needed to hold weaker regular army units together during the Gulf War. Frontline infantry units with both poorly trained soldiers and weak leaders were therefore particularly susceptible to breaks in discipline, as evidenced by both desertions and surrenders.

Slapping Together New Units Weakens Their Unit-Level Will-to-Fight Characteristics
Defending both Kuwait and southern Iraq, while preserving forces to defend Baghdad and counterattack an expected coalition offensive, required Saddam Hussein and senior army leaders to quickly replenish and flesh out the existing army force structure. Units slapped together on short notice might have unfurled the heraldic colors of legendary Iraqi Army units, but that does not appear to be the case in the Gulf War.[65] Lack of collective unit history, coupled with a lack of extended training time resulted in a lack of unit esprit de corps, unit cohesion, and unit competence. In turn, lack of esprit de corps, cohesion, and competence translated into weakened will to fight for these units within the regular Iraqi Army.

Returning to the Six Basic Assumptions About Iraqi Army Will to Fight

The six long-standing assumptions about Iraqi Army will to fight are (1) oppressive and stifling centralization, (2) the inability to execute combined-arms warfare, (3) a weak and politicized officer corps, (4) weak and ineffective junior leaders, (5) poor-quality soldiers, and (6) lack of national identity. The next sections address each in turn as they apply to the 1991 Gulf War.

Centralization Remained Prevalent and Problematic
In 1991, the regular Iraqi Army was as highly centralized as it had been in 1980, and in 1988. While this centralized approach to control and leadership was congruent with Iraqi culture, it also contributed significantly to the brittleness of the force. This assumption bore out.

Iraqis Practiced Basic Combined-Arms Warfare, But Not Well Enough to Win
By 1988, the Iraqi ground forces had become basically adept and mixing together fires and movement, or direct and indirect fires, to gain advantage in both offensive and defensive missions. Arguably, by 1991, most of those capabilities had shifted to the Republican Guard, while the regular army units became less adept at combined-arms warfare. More importantly, the Iraqis' very basic combined-arms approach, including in Republican Guard forces, was wholly inadequate to counter the advanced combined-arms, fire-and-maneuver capabilities of the Western forces within the coalition. This is a mixed assessment: The Iraqis could execute basic combined-arms warfare, but they could not do it particularly well, and they were no match for the coalition's combined-arms offensive.

The Iraqi Officer Corps Was a Mixed Bag
There is insufficient evidence in the cited literature to show that the officer corps had been corrupted, or that all the valuable combat experience from the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War had been expunged from the force by 1991. While there may have been greater degradation in the

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[65]   Most of the front-line units did not have particularly legendary heraldry, if there were regular army units with such a thing in 1991.

quality of the regular army officer corps by 2003, there were still many well-qualified offi-cers at their posts, in combat, in 1991. There was, however, a quality spread. Some officers were indeed posted for questionable reasons, while others survived despite incompetent perfor-mance because of their connections. The English-language material on the reconstitution of conscript-heavy divisions in 1990 is sparse, but it is safe to assume that the vetting process for officers in these slapped-together units was not particularly rigorous. The general assumption about the Iraqi officer corps—that it is consistently weak and politicized—did not bear out in the Gulf War, but troubling signs were evident in the regular army.

Junior Leaders Were Not Effective

Top-down leadership continued to stunt the Iraqi NCO corps in the 1990s. While many NCOs had valuable combat experience from the Iran-Iraq War, they were still generally pre-vented from obtaining authority or exercising responsibility. As with many other factors in the Gulf War, the tens of thousands of desertions that occurred prior to the ground war indicate weak junior leadership. Competent, empowered junior leaders are generally able to identify potential problems and keep troops in line. Adaptable junior officers might have sought to change the leave policies of their units, perhaps sending an NCO back with groups of soldiers to different parts of the country to help prevent their desertion. Successful adaptability, how-ever, requires trust and latitude, neither of which were often granted by high- or mid-level Iraqi officers to their subordinates in 1990 or 1991.

Soldier Quality Was Probably Mixed

There is insufficient publicly available evidence to draw firm conclusions about regular Iraqi Army soldier quality during the Gulf War. However, there is enough material available on the conscript prisoners of war to suggest that force quality was mixed. This is generally true of conscript armies. College students served alongside blue-collar workers; literate and illiterate soldiers shared the same fighting holes; young athletes fought shoulder-to-shoulder with men who had long since left behind their athletic primes. Chapter Two described some of the chal-lenges with literacy, physicality, and mechanical competence in Iraqi culture. These general findings about the Iraqi population can generally be extrapolated to the Gulf War conscripts and professional soldiers. Quality was almost assuredly not up to Western standards, but the regular Iraqi Army soldiers in 1991 cannot be painted with a broad brush.

Iraqi Leaders Failed to Effectively Leverage Nationalism

This assessment showed that many, and perhaps even most, Iraqis did not believe in the politi-cal rationale for the Gulf War or in the need to fight against the coalition. Ethno-sectarian tensions were clearly rising during this period, culminating in the Shi'a and Kurdish uprisings that followed the establishment of the ceasefire agreement in late February 1991. Despite these rising tensions, the regular army continued to serve as a generally neutral space for Iraqis from different ethnic and sectarian groups. Army service continued to represent national purpose more than ethnic, sectarian, or regional purposes.

However, Saddam's aggressive propaganda campaign in 1990 and early 1991 did not do enough to rally Iraqis around nationalism or a nationalist military cause. Messaging during the Iran-Iraq War was generally focused down and in toward the Iraqi population. Particularly in the mid- to late-1980s, Saddam exerted considerable personal energy and influence to rally nationalist spirit and to coalesce national identity to help meet wartime objectives. His Gulf

War messaging campaign focused more on shaping decisionmaking in the international community. Saddam was less personally involved in rallying national support across Iraq, or within the army, than he had previously been. Given the considerable effort he had put into building a cult of personality, his lessened presence was keenly felt.

Nationalism was still a central and valued identity during the Gulf War, but it was insufficient to rally Iraqi society, the Iraqi state, the Iraqi Army, units, or individual soldiers to the cause of defending Kuwait. Failure in the Gulf War temporarily weakened Iraqi nationalism, feeding the various uprisings of the 1990s.[66]

Summary of the Gulf War Case

As a whole, Iraq's regular army had terrible will to fight in the Gulf War. Few armies could fight effectively after losing nearly half of their combat power to desertions and surrenders. The general narrative that emerged from the Gulf War is one of airpower breaking willpower. Breaking adversary will to fight is, after all, one of the central purposes of airpower.[67] The model-guided assessment in this chapter shows that airpower played an important but not necessarily dominant role in breaking Iraqi Army will to fight. Lack of national purpose, poor fighting conditions, weak leadership, messaging, insufficient esprit de corps, and many other factors both exacerbated the effects of airpower and were exacerbated by the effects of airpower.

Building from the Iran-Iraq War case, the Gulf War case reinforces the finding that the regular Iraqi Army forces are brittle, that they suffer from excessive use of coercion and control, and that they struggle to execute combined-arms combat tactics. But the Gulf War case also shows that Iraqis can and do fight successfully, even when the odds are against them. As with all generalized findings applied across an entire military organization, brittleness is uneven from unit to unit. Some units in the regular army were more resilient than others.

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[66] For more on this, see Robinson et al., 2018, Chapter Three.

[67] For example, Peter W. Gray, "The Contribution of Air Power to Manouvre Warfare," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 145, No. 3, 2000, pp. 60–62; Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Fusing Airpower and Land Power in the Twenty-First Century: Insights from the Army After Next," *Airpower Journal*, Fall 1999, pp. 66–74.

Iraqi Army Will to Fight in the Advisory Period: 2004–2011

In 2003, the United States led yet another coalition invasion of Iraq under the auspices of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Following the successful 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government, the coalition was reluctantly dragged into a nearly decade-long counterinsurgency operation. The Iraqi Army was disbanded in 2003 and reestablished in 2004. This final case in the three-case analysis of Iraqi Army will to fight covers the time from the reestablishment of the regular army in 2004 through the coalition military withdrawal from Iraq under the auspices of Operation New Dawn at the end of 2011.

This case is presented in two broad sections. First, it provides insights from more than 300 advisor interviews conducted by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). I read all the interviews and coded 120 of them to derive findings on Iraqi Army will to fight.[1] This advisor case is perhaps the most relevant of the three cases for the ongoing U.S. military advisory mission in Iraq. Therefore, while the RAND assessment of the Iraqi Army during this period is derived from multiple source types, this chapter dedicates additional space in the first sections to presenting interview quotes that are directly relevant to the current and prospective future security force assistance missions in Iraq.

The second part of this chapter builds from the interview assessment, adding in a wide array of historical evidence and additional interview data to provide the basis for a comparative assessment across this advisory period. I used the published RAND Will-to-Fight Model to guide my assessment of the regular Iraqi Army in 2004, 2008, and 2011 to help describe changes between the beginning of the advisory mission, the pinnacle of the advisory mission's capacity, and the moment just before the formal withdrawal of military forces from Iraq.

In addition to the 300 CALL interviews, I examined both interview transcripts and official records that were recently declassified by the U.S. Army as part of its historical analysis of

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[1] Each interview was conducted with U.S. military advisors who served from 2004 through 2010 in Iraq, at several different echelons of command from company to force level, and across all parts of Iraq. Their periods of service ranged from 2004 through 2010. The interviews were conducted from 2005 through 2011. Each interview consists of approximately 10–15 pages of text. My review of these interviews encompassed approximately 3,750 pages of interview transcripts, and the coding drew data from approximately 1,500 pages of interview transcripts. I used Microsoft Excel to extract interview quotes from those 1,500 pages that aligned with either specific factors in the RAND will-to-fight model or with key themes that emerged inductively during the review, or with key themes that had already emerged during the research process for the previous two cases. Because I did not conduct the interviews, the interview questions were not specifically designed to elicit data that aligned with the will-to-fight model. However, they provided considerable and relevant insight that generally coincided with the major themes in the will-to-fight model. All the interview transcripts are fully unclassified, without distribution restriction. All are available behind a firewall website run by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (Center for Army Lesson Learned, homepage, undated). The interview transcripts are wholly unclassified and unrestricted, but this part of the CALL website is accessible only to personnel authorized to review material that is restricted for official distribution by the U.S. military.

Army operations in Iraq leading up to and following the 2003 invasion. Approximately 200 out of the nearly 1,000 documents posted online by the U.S. Army Center of Military History were directly relevant to the present case assessment. I also accessed the center's Iraq and Afghanistan online database to identify unclassified documents that might provide useful insight.[2] This effort generated approximately 50 more relevant documents, including direct observation reports by coalition advisors, coalition assessments, and a range of documents relevant to Iraqi Army capabilities.

The Advisor was an official magazine published by the coalition throughout most of the post-2003 period. Each issue contains a wealth of primary-source information and interviews; all these articles were surveyed, and relevant material was included in the assessment. Our interviews with senior Iraqi general officers provided additional interview material for the assessment. Finally, I read and drew from a number of official reports and news reports generated between 2004 and 2011, including payroll figures, internal and external audits of the ISF, U.S. Department of Defense reports to Congress on the progress of the campaign in Iraq, and additional primary-source observations by senior leaders, NCOs, reporters, and ISF personnel.

Figure 5.1 depicts the advisor case as part of the longitudinal assessment of the Iraqi Army's will to fight.

The period leading up to the 2004–2011 period explains some significant changes in the Iraqi Army that would be destroyed and then reborn to fight against the Islamic State in 2014. The first section sets the stage for the advisory interview comment section and the assessment that follows.

March–April 2003: The United States Destroys the Iraqi Army, Again

On March 19, 2003, the United States led a coalition to invade Iraq.[3] While the Iraqi Army was able to survive and rebuild in and after the Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom eliminated the Iraqi Army as a combat force and as an organization. By the end of major combat opera-

Figure 5.1
Advisory Period Interview Assessment Case

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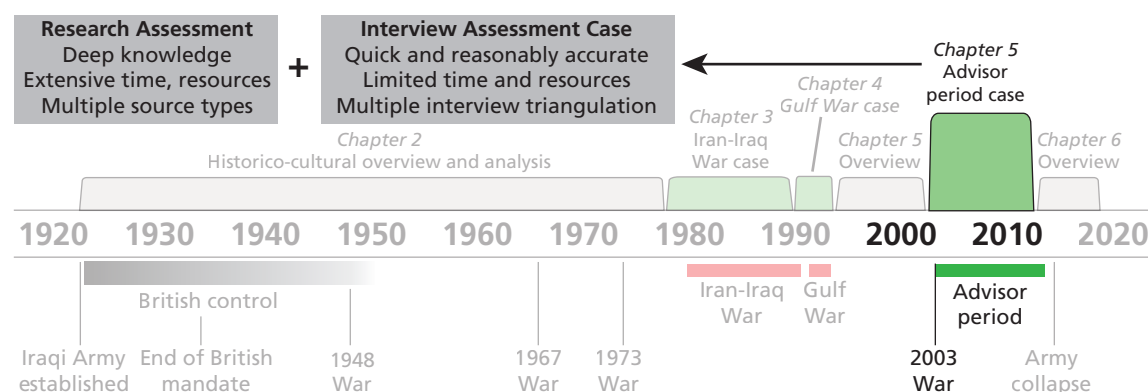
[2]   This database is restricted by the highest classification of documents in its holding, and it is not available to the general public. It contains a number of documents that are fully unclassified without restriction for distribution.

[3]   This report is not intended to provide a full background for the 2003 war. Interested readers should see Perry et al., 2015.

tions in April 2003, the Iraqi Army's 82-year run was temporarily over. This chapter focuses on the rebuilding effort that followed, but the army's collapse during the invasion sets an important backdrop.

Figure 5.2 depicts the progress of the coalition invasion through April 7, two days before the war ended. It shows U.S. Army units sweeping west as the marines pressed north on their right flank in a reprisal of their 1991 roles. Baghdad was the culminating fight, though there were continued clearing operations to the north after the capital fell.

"A Long, Slow Collapse"—1991 to 2003

After the 1991 Gulf War, the Iraqis turned their military inward to put down Kurdish and Shi'a Arab revolts.[4] Brutal force was applied to both militias and civilians. This was a return to

Figure 5.2
Operation Iraqi Freedom March–April 2003
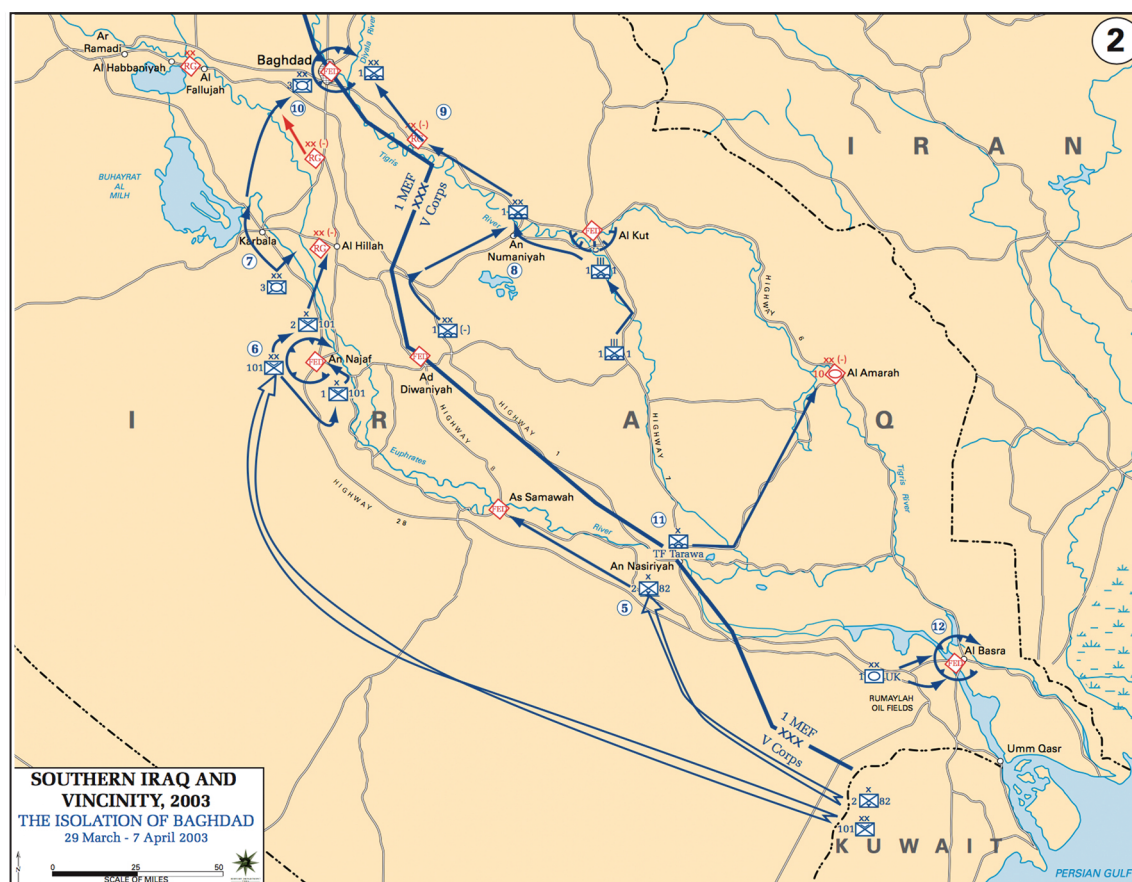
SOURCE: U.S. Military Academy, map of Operation Iraqi Freedom, undated-c.
NOTES: MEF = Marine Expeditionary Force; RG = Republican Guard; FED = Saddam Fedayeen militia.

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[4]   The phrase "a long, slow, collapse" in reference to this period is quoted from retired Iraqi Lieutenant General Ra'ad al-Hamdani in Woods, Murray, et al., 2011, p. 84.

the Iraqi Army's praetorian upbringing under the British.[5] While combat standards were generally upheld in the Republican Guard, regular units already thinned from drawdowns shifted into a garrison and security mode.[6]

In the decade after the Gulf War, the United States and allies applied rigorous sanctions against the Iraqi regime to curtail the government's development of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.[7] No-fly zones prevented the Iraqi military from using aircraft to attack its own citizens. Saddam found himself increasingly boxed in, and the military was starved of resources. One of the most significant developments of the sanctions period was the explosive growth of both societal and military corruption. Economic considerations began to undercut professional military behavior. Table 5.1 provides a sampling of quotes from the interviews with Iraqi Army generals, focusing specifically on their insights of the impact of corruption—the organizational integrity and state integrity factors in the RAND will-to-fight model—leading up to the 2003 war.[8]

Table 5.1
Interview Quotes on Iraqi Army Will to Fight in 2003

Factors	Quotes from Iraqi General Officers
• Economics • Unit Support • Unit Control • Unit Cohesion • Unit Leadership • Organizational Integrity • Organizational Support	Corruption was one of the main diseases going through the body of the Army.
	Corruption emerged in the military before the 2003 war because of the sanctions. The sanctions affected the currency, the Iraqi *dinar*, and our salaries became nothing.
	Between the Gulf War and the 2003 war you would find many soldiers begging for food. Rich soldiers would buy their way out of service when they realized that a military salary would not cover their expenses.
	Corruption really affected the regular army, but less so the Republican Guard. They always got extra money.
	Corruption led to loss of discipline . . . this led to loss of cohesion in the units. And this affects your job, your duty.
	One of my soldiers worked as a taxi driver to make ends meet.
	If I am a thief then you will be a thief. If a commander takes one cent from the unit, the soldier can take whatever he wants.

SOURCE: Interviews with former Iraqi general officers, Amman, Jordan, 2019.

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[5]   Also see Faleh A. Jabar, "Chapter 6: The Iraqi Army and Anti-Army: Some Reflections on the Role of the Military," *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 43, No. 354, 2003, pp. 115–130.

[6]   There are several good overview analyses of the Iraqi armed forces during this period. For example, Michael Eisenstadt, *Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? The Future of Iraqi Military Power*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993; Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's Military Forces: 1988–1993*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 1994. Also see Amatzia Baram, "An Iraqi General Defects," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1995, pp. 25–32; and Abbas Alnasrawi, "Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990–2000," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2001, pp. 205–218.

[7]   For the best perspective on the socio-political impact of sanctions, see Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018, Chapter Three. See Perry et al., 2015, for a cited analysis of this time period. Also see Alfred B. Prados, *Iraqi Challenges and U.S. Responses: March 1991 Through October 2002*, Congressional Research Service, November 20, 2002.

[8]   Interviews with senior Iraqi general officers, Amman, Jordan, March 2019, various.

Several officers talked about the draining fatigue of constant warfare. Most of the officers we interviewed had served in the Iran-Iraq War, during or in the Gulf War, and then in the 2003 war. Several had also fought internal wars against well-armed Kurdish or Shi'a militias. One general described the impact of this constant warfare:

> Whoever was involved in the wars we would say, "he's crazy." People who fight a lot go crazy. You see the Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 war, then the 2003 war, you go crazy. . . . When I graduated military academy I didn't have a beard to shave. Until I retired I was involved in war.[9]

This officer went on to describe his lack of belief in Saddam's justification for fighting the Americans in 2003 rather than submitting to another weapon inspection regime. There was a general consensus in the Iraqi general officer corps in 2003 that they could not defeat the Americans and that the outcome of the contest was all but inevitable.[10] Ra'ad al-Hamdani reports that, at the same time, Saddam was delusional about his chances of victory. At least by al-Hamdani's account, Saddam had fully absorbed his own propaganda about the Gulf War: He believed he had defeated the United States and could do so again.[11] What were perceived as Saddam's increasingly delusional rantings further demoralized the senior Iraqi Army leaders.

Another retired general, Ghanem al-Azawi, lamented the military's failure to rebuild air defenses after 1991. He described government propaganda about robust defenses as "lies, all lies. . . . Even Saddam Hussein was lying to himself." Putting aside the coalition's overwhelming firepower during the war, it was clear that the events from 1991 to 2003 had eroded Iraqi will to fight down to a new low. As in 1991, in 2003 the Iraqi Army's soldiers had trouble buying into the strategy and mission: "The army didn't believe in it because it wasn't a war, it was suicide. . . . That's why most of the commanders told their soldiers not to fight, just withdraw."[12] Some officers prepared to desert before the war started, even going so far as to have soldiers paint their military vehicles in nonmilitary colors so they could be safely used to desert.[13] Most regular units collapsed before the war or on contact. Some Republican Guard units fought, but their hearts were not fully in the fight.

Five Will-to-Fight Reasons for Defeat in 2003: Stephen T. Hosmer

By April 9, 2003, the war was over. The total cost in U.S. casualties to defeat an Iraqi military force of perhaps 400,000 troops was 109 killed and 542 wounded in action.[14] Building from his 1996 assessment of the psychological impacts of bombing in war, Stephen T. Hosmer proposed five reasons for the near-total collapse of the Iraqi Army: (1) the poor morale that existed prior to the outbreak of hostilities, (2) the widespread conviction that resistance was futile,

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[9]   Interviews with senior Iraqi general officers, Amman, Jordan, March 2019.

[10]   This assessment is nonscientific in that it does not reflect findings from a random stratified sample of contemporaneously serving officers. It does reflect the majority of interviews and debriefings with general officers after the war.

[11]   Woods et al., 2011, p. 67.

[12]   Ghanem al-Azawi, quoted in William Branigin, "A Brief, Bitter War for Iraq's Military Officers," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2003.

[13]   Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Invasion Was So Weak*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-544-AF, 2007, p. 79.

[14]   Perry et al., 2015, p. 2003.

(3) the absence of belief in the cause, (4) the erosion of the previous barriers to desertion, and (5) the effects of U.S. air attacks.[15]

Hosmer's analysis is perhaps the only detailed, published research report focused solely on Iraqi Army will to fight in the 2003 war.[16] It provides an important transitional analysis from the pre-2003 period to the post-2003 advisory period. At this critical juncture, the Iraqi Army ceased to exist. While Hosmer's findings should not be woven into the advisory period assessment, they do provide an important baseline for the advisory period assessment that follows. Moreover, they inform the longitudinal analysis of Iraqi Army will to fight from 1921 through mid-2020.

Hosmer listed a host of material, strategic, and tactical factors that fed into the Iraqi defeat. Many of these closely align with the will-to-fight factors in the RAND model. Poor training undermined individual competence, unit competence, and general confidence. Poor doctrine and tactics led to casualties, which undermined will to fight. Support systems had collapsed or were destroyed, and equipment was inadequate. Leadership standards had eroded to the point that the bonds between soldiers and officers in regular units were tenuous at best. Malaise spread to the Republican Guard, where one brigade commander was ordered to abandon his tanks and have his men change into civilian clothes. They all "simply quit and went home."[17]

In Hosmer's final accounting, the Iraqis were completely defeated at exceptionally low cost primarily because they had poor will to fight. Hosmer's first factor, morale, equates to poor collective disposition to fight.[18] His second factor equates to an expectation for defeat, lack of esprit de corps, poor vertical cohesion with Iraqi leadership, and a host of other failings. The absence of belief in a cause directly correlates to strategy and mission, as well as a lack of motivating ideology, identity, desperation, revenge, economics, or any other substantial motivator. Erosion of barriers to desertion suggests a facilitation of collapse.

Effects of air attacks were both physical and moral. One Iraqi captain described the impact of coalition airpower on his soldiers. He lamented the fact that even the combination of darkness, a sandstorm, and tree cover could not conceal his troops from enemy bombs. When six soldiers were killed and their equipment destroyed out of nowhere, will to fight plummeted:

> This affected the morale of the soldiers, because they were hiding and thought nobody could find them. Some soldiers left their positions and ran away.[19]

Another commander described soldiers frozen by fear of "modern war." He stated that "even the lowest soldier knew we couldn't stop the Americans."[20] Coalition combat power physically destroyed some Iraqis and eroded the will to fight of others as part of the invisible— but nonetheless quite tangible—battle damage effects.

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[15] Hosmer, 1996; Hosmer, 2007, p. 90.

[16] Some shorter and less detailed journal articles are cited here. Leonard Wong and colleagues address American will to fight (Leonard Wong, Thomas A. Kolditz, Raymond A. Millen, and Terrence M. Potter, *Why they Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War*, Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003).

[17] Hosmer, 2007, p. 90.

[18] See Connable et al., 2018, for an explanation of the term *morale* in the context of will to fight.

[19] Branigin, 2003.

[20] Hosmer, 2007, p. 92.

Rebuilding the Iraqi Army

The war ended in April with no Iraqi Army formations left standing. The American-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) officially disbanded the Iraqi Army in May 2003.[21] This was broadly seen as a calamitous decision.[22] While the army existed only on paper after its destruction in the invasion, it still represented the central pillar of the state. Even after the war, army identity was still one of the strongest identities in the broad Iraqi culture. This centralizing identity was critically important for reducing ethno-sectarian tensions; army membership was generally seen as an equalizing opportunity for young Iraqi men. In place of the Iraqi Army, the CPA established the New Iraqi Army, a name designed to create a clean break with the past. In parallel, the coalition military created the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC), a border force, and a federal police force to help fill the gaps in security as American forces tried to draw down and while the New Iraqi Army stutter-stepped its way toward initial operational capability.[23] But military and police training were pathetically brief and ineffective, and none of these forces were prepared for battle with Iraqi insurgents.[24]

To compound the security crisis, the New Iraqi Army never made it out of the gate. Political pressure mounted on the CPA and on coalition military leaders to ramp up production of new units. Training was rushed and pay was low.[25] Inductees did not expect to have to fight outside their home areas. So when the order came for a battalion of the New Iraqi Army from the Kurdish north to fight against Sunni extremists in Fallujah, the soldiers had mixed feelings. When they were ambushed en route to the fight, they balked, and many ran away.[26]

Beginning in mid-2004, the coalition strategy shifted. As the Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq (MNSTC-I) was established, the word "New" was dropped and the Iraqi Army was reestablished. American and coalition military advisors were sent in to help train and develop the Iraqi Army at all levels, and the largest security force assistance command network since Military Assistance Command—Vietnam was stood up to accelerate transition to Iraqi control. A National Guard was temporarily established (and later folded into the Army) in an effort to fill security gaps. Over the next several years, the Iraqi Army developed into a reasonably competent internal security organization armed with heavy weapons and advanced American tanks and artillery.

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[21]   Coalition Provisional Authority, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2: Dissolution of Entities," May 2003. For a full accounting of this decision and its aftermath, see James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Benjamin Runkle, and Siddharth Mohandas, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-847-CC, 2009, Chapter Four.

[22]   See James P. Pfiffner, "U.S. Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Iraqi Army," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2010, pp. 76–85.

[23]   See Dobbins et al., 2009; Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume 1: Invasion—Insurgency—Civil War, 2003–2006*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Press, 2019; Sharon Otterman, "Iraq: Security Forces," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 16, 2005.

[24]   See Dobbins et al., 2009; Kenneth M. Pollack, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction," Brookings Institution, December 1, 2006.

[25]   Dobbins et al., 2009, Chapter Four.

[26]   The story behind this seminal event in early 2004 is far more complex than the many surface-level descriptions in recent history books suggest. Interviews with the advisors who were with that battalion describe a unit that was highly motivated but poorly handled by both the military command in Baghdad and by the advisory system. See interview with Colonel Toby Hale, January 24, 2006, by the Center for Army Lessons Learned.

After eight years of brutal and tumultuous fighting and uneven progress toward security objectives, the Title 10 security force assistance mission effectively ended in December 2011.[27] The Iraqi Army had approximately 200,000 soldiers on the books toward the end of 2011, though it is not clear how many of those were ghost soldiers.[28] On paper, the American security force assistance mission in Iraq sought to provide the Iraqi Army with what it called minimum essential capabilities to defend itself against external aggression, and to keep this capability beyond American withdrawal. General George Casey, commander of the coalition mission in Iraq in 2005, stated, "It's not a 'get-out-of-Dodge' plan, it's to sustain them over the long run."[29] Ideally, the Iraqis would have been capable of participating in regional security partnerships and providing the United States with an enduring regional security partner; these objectives were spelled out in the 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq and reiterated in objective statements in command plans through the end of the mission in 2011.[30]

In practice, even the most optimistic assessments suggested that by late 2011 the Iraqis had progressed only partway toward the minimal goal of providing defense against internal attack.[31] In September 2010, one American general impressed with improvement in Iraqi police performance stated, "This will allow the Iraqi Army to begin focusing on its external security requirements and I'm very optimistic they will be able to do that over the course of the next 16 months."[32] These kinds of enthusiastic statements about Iraqi Army growth were commonplace through the last two years of American operations.

Despite this official, externally directed optimism, actual progress lagged. Figure 5.3 shows the projections for the ISF by the staffs of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn approximately one year before the withdrawal.[33] They determined that by the end of 2011 the Iraqi Army would be only partially capable of maintaining internal security, and that it would effectively have no capability to defend its own borders.

This stark assessment brings into question all the contemporaneous official statements suggesting that the Iraqi Army would be ready to take control of the nation's security by the end of 2011.[34] It clearly shows that the U.S. military forecasted that the Iraqi Army would not be ready to defend the borders from external aggression by the time the American military

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[27]   See Richard R. Brennan, Jr., Charles P. Ries, Larry Hanauer, Ben Connable, Terrence K. Kelly, Michael J. McNerney, Stephanie Young, Jason Campbell, and K. Scott McMahon, *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces—Iraq*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-232-USFI, 2013.

[28]   Brennan et al., 2013, p. 172. A ghost soldier is a soldier whose name is listed on a unit roster but who never actually serves in the unit. In some cases, commanders pocket the nonexistent soldier's pay, and in other cases the commander might split the pay with a soldier who does not wish to serve.

[29]   Quoted in Jim Garamone, "Casey Speaks of Improvements in Iraqi Forces," *The Advisor*, Vol. 2, No. 5, January 29, 2005.

[30]   U.S. National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2005; Brennan et al., 2013.

[31]   See cited remarks in Chapter One.

[32]   Then–Brigadier General Jeffrey J. Snow, quoted in Wayne V. Hall, "Operation New Dawn Kicks Off with Clear Focus," *The Advisor*, Vol. 7, No. 9, September 2010, p. 4.

[33]   Brennan et al., 2013, p. 161.

[34]   See Brennan et al., 2013, for a range of these statements from coalition officials. Also see Ann Scott Tyson, "Iraq May Need Military Help for Years, Officials Say," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2008.

Figure 5.3
Minimum Essential Capabilities for Iraqi Security Forces—2010 Estimate
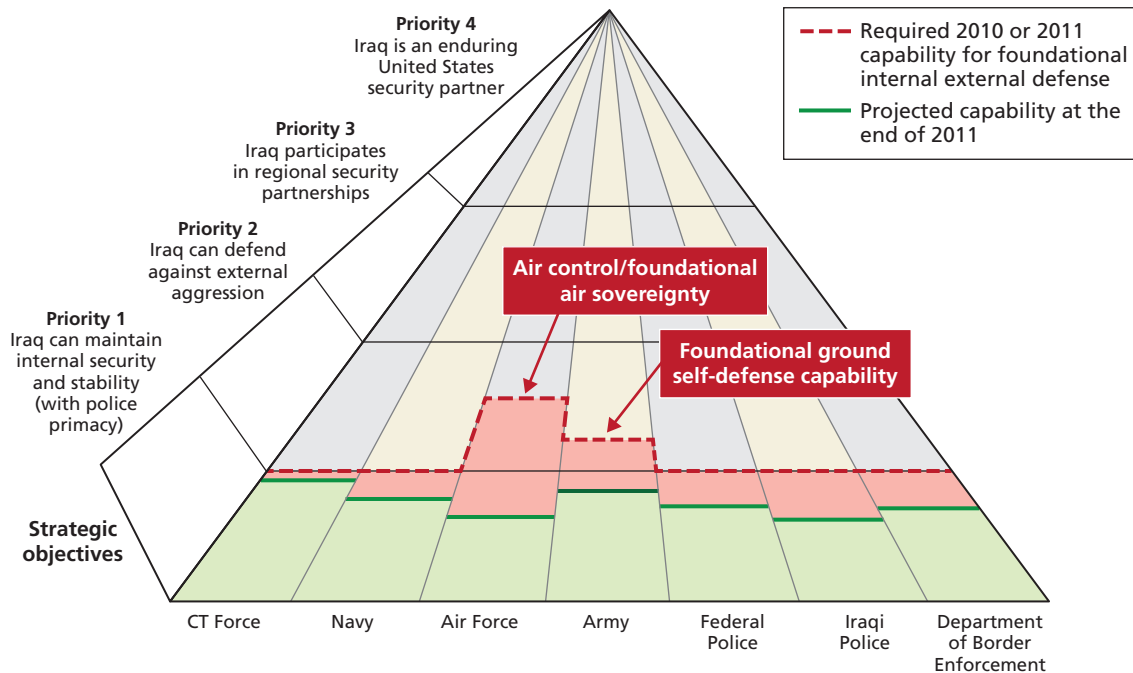
SOURCE: Brennan et al., 2013. This is an official graphic from an unclassified U.S. military briefing provided by Operation New Dawn staff to the RAND Corporation as part of a U.S. Army–funded research effort.

withdrew. This circa-2010 assessment was compounded by the continuous drawdown of coalition advisory capability in Iraqi from 2010 through the end of 2011.

Given this assessment, as well as the 2011 assessment by Iraqi Army Chief of Staff Babaker Zebari that the Iraqi Army was far from ready to take control of the nation's security, it should have surprised no close observer that the Iraqi Army failed to defend the country in 2014. Iraqi Army failure to fight, act, or persevere when needed reflected the army's lack of capability, lack of confidence, and a whole host of other problems. While the individual leaders and soldiers involved in the coalition advisory effort may have performed quite well, the security force assistance strategy in Iraq failed: National strategic objectives spelled out in the 2005 strategy were unmet even in late 2011. The force that was being assisted collapsed on first contact in 2014. By 2015, American advisors were back in Iraq to start again.

Understanding What Happened Between 2004 and 2011: Advisor Insights

There are many reasons why the Iraqi Army failed in 2014. Considering the preceding events, including the complete destruction of the Army in 2003, the issuance of CPA Order Number 2, and the mercurial American strategies in the interregnum, the United States and its allies must be held responsible for much of what transpired in 2014. However, some things are beyond the control of security force assistance to fix or improve, at least in the short term. Determining which factors can and cannot, or should or should not, be invested in and changed is one of the most difficult parts of the security force assistance mission. Identifying factors that might be critical to combat effectiveness, but that can only be changed over the course of many years

or decades, is essential to policy decisionmaking for security force assistance in general, and for Iraq in particular.

Assessment of Iraqi Army Will to Fight: Advisor Period

The assessment that follows seeks to help support this kind of triage. It centers on the analysis of extant interviews with U.S. military advisors to the Iraqi Army. These advisors had supported Iraqi Army infantry, armored, logistics, engineer, communications, and headquarters units across Iraq. In some cases, they served two or more tours. Some of them fought alongside the Iraqis in combat, and almost all of them lived with the Iraqis and observed their behavior for months on end.[35]

CALL personnel conducted these interviews in the United States between 2005 and 2011.[36] I applied an inductive approach to coding 120 of the more than 300 interviews examined. I read each of the 120 transcripts of approximately 10–15 pages in length once for context and to determine whether the interview had relevant information. I applied a rough, first-cut coding to each of these 120 interviews to check for matches with the factors in the will-to-fight model. This process resulted in 20 interviews being discarded. I read again the remaining 100 for formal, recorded coding.[37] I earmarked and wrote into an Excel spreadsheet, in verbatim text, each reference to one of the factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. Once the transcripts were coded, the RAND team organized the information by factor to identify trends.[38]

This coded interview analysis stands on its own as an example of a portable application of the will-to-fight model as a guide for assessment. Findings from the interview analysis were also informed by a broader literature. This included a review of available Transition Readiness Assessment (TRA) forms that had been used to assess the capabilities of Iraqi units; many of these were available on a U.S. Army Center for Military History database, which also included a range of other official documents and informal assessments of the Iraqi Army from 2002 through 2019.[39] Additional sources include individual biographies written by advisors; the 2005 through 2011 archives of *The Advisor*, a command journal published by the Multi-National Security Transition Command; official and academic histories of the war cited in this report; professional journal articles written by advisors in *Military Review*, the *Marine*

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[35] Tours ranged from approximately four to 15 months, with an average Marine Corps tour of about seven months and an average Army tour of approximately one year in theater, with somewhat less time directly embedded.

[36] These interviews were not applied with the RAND will-to-fight factors, and most questions do not explicitly address will to fight. Questions asked also changed over time, undermining the consistency of the responses and the longitudinal value of the data. Therefore, this is a decidedly indirect effort to help understand the more tangible parts of Iraqi combat effectiveness and confidence to help round out a clearer picture of will to fight. Some explicit evidence on means of control and examples of desertion were directly applicable.

[37] This is an estimated average. Some interviews were shorter and some longer.

[38] Additional information recorded included (1) a code reference number from 1 to 120, (2) first and last name of the interviewee, (3) rank of the interviewee at the time of the interview, (4) dates of deployment as an advisor, and (5) date of the CALL interview. This spreadsheet will be made available to the sponsor.

[39] Many of the documents in this database are unclassified, but the database is restricted and not available for public access.

Corps Gazette, and *Parameters*; and interviews with Iraqi general officers.[40] Finally, I accessed the declassified intelligence reports and interview transcripts from the United Kingdom's Iraq Inquiry, better known as the Chilcot Report.[41] Much of this information dealt directly with the development of the ISF.[42] Declassified intelligence reports in this holding were particularly useful.

Following the interview transcript coding assessment, I used the information from the coding process and all the additional sources cited in this chapter to conduct a three-part model-guided assessment of regular Iraqi Army will to fight at three key points in time during the advisory period. The first point, 2004, sets a benchmark for the following two assessments. This was the year in which the Iraqi Army was reestablished after it had been disbanded in 2003. The second point, 2008, reflects my subject-matter expert assessment of the zenith of coalition security force assistance activities in Iraq. The third and final point, 2011, reflects the culmination of the military-led, Title 10 advisory mission in Iraq during the 2004–2011 period.

Interview-Driven Assessment of Iraqi Army Will to Fight, 2004–2011

One of the purposes of this chapter is to provide a set of organized, primary source quotes to support future research into Iraqi Army will to fight. These quotes are important for the current assessment both because they drive home key points in ways I could not and because they reveal the nuance inherent in the development of the Iraqi Army during this period. The advi-

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[40] See the list of references for these various sources. All back issues of *The Advisor* can be found at the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries website at https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061469/00001/allvolumes.

[41] UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry*, July 2016.

[42] Chilcot Report transcripts and declassified documents are all available at http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/. Reports accessed for this will-to-fight assessment include, but are not limited to, UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, interview with Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, February 1, 2010; UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, interview with Sir William Patey, January 5, 2010; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq Security Forces: More Able, Less Challenged*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, June 4, 2008c; Chilcot Report, witness statement by Michael John Colbourne, June 14, 2010; Joint Intelligence Committee, *The Iraqi Security Forces*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, May 11, 2005; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraqi Security Forces: Mixed Abilities*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, December 17, 2008; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq Security: Prospects*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, March 31, 2004; Commander's Intelligence Group, *Iraqi Security Forces Performance in MND (SE)*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, April 14, 2008; UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, interview with General Sir Mike Jackson, undated; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: Risk of Deepening Sectarian Division*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, November 15, 2006; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: The Security Situation in the South*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, September 28, 2005; UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, evidence of Douglas Brand, undated; UK Government, Iraq Inquiry, testimony of Edward Chaplin, Dominic Asquith, and Christopher Prentice, June 15, 2010; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq Security: The Impact of Fallujah*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, December 8, 2004; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraqi Security Forces: Two Steps Forward*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, December 20, 2007; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: The Charge of the Knights*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, May 14, 2008; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: The Struggle for Anbar*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, February 23, 2007; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: State of the Insurgency*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, July 14, 2005; Joint Intelligence Committee, *The Iraqi Security Forces: Very Slow Progress*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, October 12, 2005; Joint Intelligence Committee, *The Iraqi Security Forces: Fit for Duty?* declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, June 9, 2006; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq: Political & Security Trends*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, July 8, 2009; Joint Intelligence Committee, *Iraq's Development: Expectations and Delivery in 2006*, declassified intelligence report as part of the UK Iraq Inquiry, February 15, 2006.

sors' years of observation are in brackets at the end of each quote. RAND's assessment of the interview quotes is presented at the head of each section and also in the section that follows.

These quotes represent the opinions of the interviewees and not necessarily the opinions of RAND, the RAND research team, or the U.S. Army.

Responsibility Was Rarely Given to Subordinate Leaders, Particularly Noncommissioned Officers

Most of the interviewees discussed some aspect of junior leadership. For the most part, Iraqi officers rarely delegated responsibility, and they often acted in roles suited to subordinates three or four ranks beneath them. In one of the strongest findings from the coded data, the

Table 5.2
Interview Quotes Junior Leadership in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Individual Quality • Individual Competence • Unit Leadership • Unit Competence • Unit Control • Unit Leadership • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Control • Organizational Training • Organizational Doctrine	You have junior officers doing squad leader jobs. [2007–2008] There wasn't that level of trust and there wasn't that level of confidence for delegation to NCOs. [2004] Building an NCO corps isn't going to happen. It's really against their culture and it's against individual officers to be proactive and [build one]. [2005–2006] Basically a senior sergeant, someone who's got 20 years of experience, is really a senior private because they don't have an NCO corps and everything revolves around the officer's discipline. [2005–2006] They viewed NCOs as privates and used them as privates. [2007–2008] The layer between the sergeant major and the individual soldiers was fairly nonexistent. They didn't have that noncommissioned officer corps that carries our Army and really is the impetus of daily operations. [2005–2006] You can't make the Iraqi Army look like the American Army. They're setting up NCO academies over there and all these NCO schools, and I just sit here and roll my eyes to the back of my head and say, "What a waste of time, energy, and effort." [2005–2006] Some company commanders were being heralded as excellent leaders, but what it came down to was that he took seven or eight guys and he was first in line as he led them into the building to kill terrorists. So the company commander acted as an excellent squad leader. That's great, but he needs to operate at a much higher level than that. [2005–2006]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

advisors generally agreed that the Iraqi Army had no effective junior leadership to speak of from 2004 through 2010. There were exceptions. One advisor argued that "the NCOs were actually the ones who were up to par with doing the missions . . ." and another gave them high marks for low-level tactical training.[43] Some units had a solid corps of corporals and sergeants. But most interviews were critical. Table 5.2 provides selected quotes.[44]

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[43] CALL interviews.

[44] CALL interviews.

Ethno-Sectarian Discord Had Limited Impact on Iraqi Army Cohesion or Overall Will to Fight

Most units the advisors were supporting were mixed, with some having dominant Kurdish or dominant Shi'a Arab populations. In a few cases, there were problems between the ethnic and sectarian groups, but for the most part the advisors characterized these problems as personality driven or chalked them up to language or even tribal differences.

Table 5.3 provides selected quotes. The first quote speaks directly to the advisor-advisee relationship and the influence of American policy on the development of the Iraqi Army from 2004 to 2011.[45]

Table 5.3
Interview Quotes on Ethno-Sectarian Discord in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
Individual Identity • Individual Ideology • Unit Cohesion • Unit Esprit de Corps • Unit Leadership • Organizational Leadership • Societal Identity • Societal Integrity	[It] was the American officers and their thumbnail understanding of Islamic culture that projected that onto them, through our forced affirmative action of assuring that there was a Sunni in this position, a Shi'ite in that position and a Kurd in another position. Our insistence on this schism is what exacerbated the situation. I would submit to you that there were many Iraqi professional officers from the former army who were not sectarian at all. We, on the other hand, have chosen to use the bumper sticker of sectarian violence to analyze everything that goes on, to include the structure of the army. What you really see is tribalism and patron-client relationships. [2004] I didn't see a lot of cultural issues. . . . I don't think it was a big issue. [2005–2006] Unfortunately, there was some infighting between Kurds and Sunnis. My counterpart was Sunni, he wasn't getting promoted for that reason I think, and the regimental commander was Kurdish, along with a lot of the other officers. There was some infighting. It wasn't really obvious; you could just tell that there was some underlying tension there. [2006–2007] There was no issue with the senior leadership I always dealt with. These people would tell you that they were Iraqis first before they were Sunni or Shi'a or whatever. In fact, most people did not like to tell you whether they were Sunni or Shi'a because they felt they were Iraqis first and wondered why you were even asking. [2005–2006] Sure, there was still infighting, there were still challenges with that—and my Kurdish officers always felt downtrodden—but they were dedicated to staying the course because this was their hope for a new future for them. [2004] It was about half Sunni, half Shi'a. The commander was Sunni and his executive officer was Shi'a. It was pretty mixed. There were also a couple Kurdish guys in there as well. . . . I didn't see a single Sunni-Shi'a fight. [2006]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[45] CALL interviews.

Many Iraqis Were Competent in Small Units, and Many Were Individually Courageous

Advisors found that the Iraqi Army soldiers who chose to remain in their units were generally competent at the squad and platoon levels, and sometimes at higher echelons. They described the individual Iraqi soldiers as basically competent and almost always courageous. They were concerned at the lack of marksmanship ability across the board—the soldiers they advised were terrible shots—and also the literacy rate at the enlisted levels. It took a long time to teach basic skills such as driving trucks and operating heavy equipment. Initiative and adaptability were in short supply across the board. However, in general, the Iraqis could fight the tactical fight against the insurgents in the 2004–2010 time frame. Soldiers generally followed orders once they were in combat, and they generally stood firm while receiving fire and taking casualties.[46] Table 5.4 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.4
Interview Quotes on Individual Competence in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Desperation • Economics • Individual Quality • Individual Competence • Individual Identity • Individual Ideology • Unit Competence • Unit Cohesion • Unit Leadership • Unit Control • Organizational Control • Societal Identity	[A regular army battalion] was commanded by a Shi'a Arab from the Basra region. He was an excellent officer and that was an excellent battalion. You could tell a soldier or unit from that battalion at a glance. They wore, sometimes, ironed uniforms. On an operation, you could see them do precombat checks, precombat inspections, a quick leader's brief, their version of an operations order. Everybody had their body armor on, web gear, helmet, chinstrap buckled, their vehicles were immaculate and their weapons were clean. They were just a very, very disciplined group . . . [2007–2008] My personal experience with the Iraqis under fire is that they are very brave and they're not afraid to fight. . . . They're a very fatalistic society and culture. When they say "God willing" they truly believe that God directs everything. When they go into combat, they go in with that attitude. "If God wants me to die, I'll die. If he wants me to live, I'll live." It's a very liberating philosophy when you think about it. You tend to find that they're willing to take risks and do things that American soldiers would never do. . . . My experience is that they didn't shirk from combat. [2005–2006] They were competent, they were smart, and they sacrificed much more than any of the Americans over there did. They had higher casualty rates. They couldn't count on getting their life insurance, they couldn't count on getting paid, and I think even the food was bad by Iraqi standards, which says a lot. . . . They really were much better than I think we give them credit for, and they were much more dedicated to the mission than we give them credit for. And oh by the way, picture this: their families were in danger as well. They really, really stepped up to the plate as far as I'm concerned. I have nothing but good things to say about them. [2009–2010] We fired over one million rounds in training with them. Whereas individual marksmanship may not have been at the level we'd hoped for, their ability to conduct squad battle drills, react to contact, conduct squad battle drill attacks and platoon battle drill attacks with some coaching was sufficient. Their ability to react to contact when mounted and conduct a convoy battle drill was adequate. [2004]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[46] CALL interviews.

Officer Leadership Was a Mixed Bag

In an army with top-down leadership and a vacuum at the junior leader level, officer competence is extraordinarily important. The interviewees repeatedly emphasized the personal nature of unit success or failure in the Iraqi Army during this period. If the commander was solid, then the unit would often be quite effective. Poor commanders tended to lead weak units. A change in command could turn a unit around very quickly, for better or for worse. Advisors observed that officers from the Saddam period tended to be rigid and fixed on pre-2003 methods and doctrine, while junior officers were more open to learning and changing the army's culture.[47] Table 5.5 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.5
Interview Quotes on Officer Leadership in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Individual Quality • Individual Competence • Individual Identity • Unit Leadership • Unit Control • Unit Competence • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Training • Organizational Control • Doctrine	It was everything from total slugs to good soldiers with combat experience. We had one company commander who was former Peshmerga and a very strong leader. . . . The soldiers would follow him anywhere. . . . We also had other officers who were pretty lazy and not well respected. They didn't treat their soldiers well. [2004–2005] We constantly had to put pressure on Colonel [name removed] to be proactive. His focus seemed to be more on acquiring material items, like refrigerators and computers. He wasn't big on training soldiers. Maybe that goes back to the Saddam-era army where they didn't empower their junior leaders and subordinates. We told them that part of generating a unit is training soldiers, but we had to go behind his back to get soldiers on the list to go to training. It wasn't the preferred method and eventually he was replaced. He ended up being fired due to incompetence and went to work on some division staff. [2006] It was difficult with the colonels from the previous regime. They had their ways and they were stuck in their ways. There were some good leaders from the old regime. They'd been trained in Britain at the British [version] of Command and General Staff College (CGSC) [Sandhurst]. Talking to that individual doctrinally [was one thing] but application wise it was different. There were guys who were just young, about my age at the time—around 28 or so—and they were just extremely smart. They were originally interpreters and extremely smart and ready to go out there and make a difference. Those are the guys we really relied upon were the younger group who really wanted to make a change and make things better. Those are the ones we relied upon a lot. [2004–2005] There were officers whose sole focus in life was not to leave the air-conditioned building. [2004] Their commander was well respected among the troops. He was hard but he was fair. He wasn't corrupt and he was out there on the street and living in the same crap they were living in. [2009]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[47] CALL interviews.

Most Army Units Concentrated Their Best Soldiers in Tailored Frontline Units

As they did in previous wars, Iraqi officers concentrated their best soldiers or best subordinate units to form a reliable frontline force. This put one platoon in a company or one company in a battalion into almost constant rotation for tough duty. This might have been necessary, as the army simultaneously grew from scratch and fought an insurgency, but one can assume that the effects were no less harmful for the remaining forces as they were in the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. One interviewee noted that this approach hid the fact that the rest of the battalion was poorly trained; see below. Table 5.6 provides selected quotes.

One of the additional considerations in the 2004–2010 period is that some advisors put extra effort into building these spear point units, perhaps exacerbating the gap between top-tier and lower-tier units and soldiers.[48]

Table 5.6
Interview Quotes on Tiered Competence in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Economics • Individual Quality • Individual Competence • Individual Identity • Unit Competence • Unit Esprit de Corps • Unit Leadership • Unit Control • Organizational Training • Societal Identity	For example, [the general] had a Commando company and it had been established about three months before that because a previous general had seen another general in a different brigade stand [one up] and he wanted the same capacity in his own formation. So, he took a platoon out of every battalion and he had a Commando company all of a sudden. [2009–2010] Of course, everyone wants to keep their key players with them so they would pass off their troublemakers. We had some really big discipline problems within the Iraqi battalion as well as some motivation problems with people who didn't want to train or do anything. They were just there to draw a paycheck and send it home to their families. [2009] We had our reconnaissance company that was formed from the brigade who were the elite guys of the Iraqi brigade. A lot of them spoke English, a lot of them had experience in either infantry or Special Forces kind of stuff, so they were well trained guys and we did a train the trainer concept. We taught and coached them on how to train the tasks the way we thought they should be trained. [2005–2006] It seemed that in most of the Iraqi battalions had one platoon that was a bit larger than most. Instead of having 40 guys, they had 50 or 60 and they were identified as the smart guys. Within our battalion, they were referred to as the strike platoon . . . everyone else was inner and outer cordon. [2005–2006] They had a core group of soldiers that would always be the ones to do the missions. The main effort would always go to that same company commander who had the 20 good guys, many of whom were former Peshmerga or his family members. We relied a lot on the Iraqi leadership to handpick their guys for the main efforts, which had the effect of hiding the lack of training for the rest of the battalion. [2004–2005]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[48] CALL interviews.

Pay Was a Central Motivator in the Early Years of This Period: 2004–2006

Advisors who served primarily in the early years, from 2004 to 2006, found that enlisted soldiers in the Iraqi Army were primarily motivated by financial incentives. Pay was so important during this period that soldiers would desert their units if they went unpaid. This could become a serious problem in an organization notoriously incapable of providing consistent administrative support. Pay was often manipulated by officers, a problem addressed further in the section on corruption, below. Analysis of the Iraqi pay scales during this period shows that enlisted soldiers were paid quite generously when compared with their peers in the society at large. Fewer comments touched on pay issues between 2007 and 2010.[49] Table 5.7 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.7
Interview Quotes on Salary in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Desperation • Economics • Individual Quality • Individual Ideology • Individual Identity • Individual Competence • Unit Leadership • Unit Control • Unit Support • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Control • Organizational Support • State Strategy • State Support • Societal Identity • Mission	To be very upfront, an Iraqi soldier, regardless of rank, regardless of experience, is there primarily because it's a job in a country that the unemployment rate is running, at that time, at about 40 percent. Yes, they are dedicated. Yes, they want the war to be over. Yes, they want things to settle down. But if you're not paying them every month, that's a huge negative issue and we shouldn't be surprised when an Iraqi soldier, NCO or officer, doesn't come back after not being paid. [2004] As a result of activities like that, I think a lot of the soldiers who signed up to be in the Army merely because there was a paycheck there left. They went to go find something else. They were going to go work in one of the brick factories. They were going to go do whatever. So the soldiers who were left were folks who really believed in the mission and were willing to put the sacrifice into it. [2004] So pay was huge. And also trust. I know the Army is going to put money into my account on the last day of the month. That's going to go in there. There's no mystery about it. For the Iraqis, though, if the convoy was running late, which often occurred, they're working on good faith now. "Where's my money for my work?" "Well, you're going to get paid." Well, if you don't have that trust from the past, and if the Iraqi government in the past used to not pay their soldiers, there's that level of, "Well, I'm going to stay around here and you're not going to pay me, and then you're going to tell me to go home and I'm going to get screwed out of a month's worth of pay." So that was a huge issue. [2004] They responded well to being put into operations. That's what they joined the army to do, mostly. There were guys who joined just for the paycheck. As long as they were fed and were provided adequate protection—we weren't going to send our guys out there in those little pickup trucks once we got the [armored vehicles] and all that stuff. We made sure they rode in armored vehicles and they had enough ammunition to protect themselves, and they were fine. [2005–2006] [Question: What were their range of motivations for joining the Army?] For the most part it was because of money. It's a fixed income. You knew when you would have guys quit or desert: It was right after payday. They were smart. Nobody quit the day before payday. You get the money and then they all want to quit. [2004] Some were patriots and saw this as a way for a new Iraq. Some of them, it was a means of living. It was the only choice that they had, just like we see even in our Army. [2004]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[49] CALL interviews.

Coalition Security Force Assistance Created a Lingering Dependence on Allied Support

An ongoing concern in 2020 is the degree to which the Iraqi Army is dependent on coalition support. Defeating the various incarnations of Al Qaida in Iraq, nationalist Sunni insurgencies, and Shi'a militias from 2004 to 2010 required extensive coalition support to the Iraqi Army. As the previous section showed, by 2011 the army was ill-prepared to defend Iraq without coalition support. Advisors serving from 2004 to 2010 identified this trend and noted how serious it might become over time.[50] Table 5.8 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.8
Interview Quotes on Dependence in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year(s) of Observation
• Individual Competence • Unit Support • Unit Competence • Unit Leadership • Organizational Support • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Training • Doctrine • State Strategy • State Support • Allies	Ultimately, if someone needed to be air MEDEVACed [medically evacuated] out of there, the coalition was going to do it. The Iraqis had no way of air evacuating a serious injury. They'd just let the guy die. If they wanted help they needed the coalition forces. [2007–2008] [Our senior American general] threw out that entire planning initiative from the Iraqis and said he didn't care how they made it happen but they needed to make it happen right now. . . . So, all we did was instill a cultural dependency on the U.S. forces. We made it happen, sure enough, and that plan that the Iraqis had to use their own money and resources and make something happen for the long term was completely scuttled. That is how we continued to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory and inculcate a culture of dependence in the Iraqi Army. We utterly fail to understand their roles or allow them to execute their mission within those roles, again and again and again. [2006–2007] They failed to be proactive without coalition or U.S. involvement. It was very hard to get them to do Iraqi-pure operations. [2006–2007] When we were going down there and doing the assessments, maintenance sucked. . . . Their state of motor maintenance was horrible. Stuff was constantly breaking down. They had good mechanics but the supply system that backed it up was not kept in check. It was basically American dollars helping to buy spare parts that they would bring in and put on the vehicles. [2005–2006] They said, "We don't need your help, we need your money." [2005–2006]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[50] CALL interviews.

Iraqis Would Not Act in the Absence of Senior Officer Orders

The previous section on weak junior leadership showed that Iraqi officers were loath to allow subordinates to develop and take ownership of their units. In turn, subordinates were generally unwilling to take risks by making decisions or acting in the absence of clear, direct, top-down orders.[51] Table 5.9 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.9
Interview Quotes on Top-Down Control in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Individual Identity • Individual Competence • Unit Competence • Unit Leadership • Unit Control • Organizational Control • Organizational Training • Organizational Leadership • Doctrine • State Leadership	What didn't change was their culture. It was senior leader led. If you weren't in charge of something you didn't really make a decision. Higher headquarters made the decision for you. You were limited in what decisions you could make. [2008] Officers are the only ones given any type of responsibility. NCOs are expected to give orders to *jundi* but in turn they need to be given orders by the officers. There's no initiative allowed. It's culturally not allowed. If you do it you're going to get reprimanded for it so no one does it at all. [2007–2008] The new officers didn't necessarily have the preconceived ideas, but if you told them to do something or you told them a different way to do it, they wouldn't do it without their boss' approval and the boss telling them, and that boss isn't going to change unless his boss is going to change. It's an institutional system and it was the same challenge whether they were old or new. The bottom line is that any change in that army has to be driven from the Ministry of Defense. [2007–2008] When you're on a patrol and if the officer doesn't say for something to happen, it isn't going to happen. You don't have NCOs out there making decisions and taking initiative for themselves. . . . You have to be willing to accept that. [2005–2006] But when the mission came from division or higher, they did not allow a lot of initiative, and the brigade commander and the battalion commanders knew it. When it came from division or higher, you have to do it exactly like this or, "We'll get thrown in jail" is a thing I heard a lot. It was a little frustrating. [2007–2008] They never had the freedom to take initiative because if they were wrong, they were going to pay dearly – and honest to God, it was just like that, so they didn't take initiative. [2005–2006] You know the Iraqi mentality—whatever higher headquarters says is law, so they just do it. [2006–2007]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[51] CALL interviews.

Lack of Adaptability and Initiative Were Sometimes Debilitating

Top-down control and inert junior leadership resulted in a general absence of adaptability and initiative in the junior ranks. In some cases it resulted in outright lethargy. One gets the sense from reading these narratives that the units in question were lucky they never had to face a dedicated foe like the Iranian Pasdaran.[52] Table 5.10 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.10
Interview Quotes on Initiative and Adaptability in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Individual Quality • Individual Competence • Unit Competence • Unit Leadership • Organizational Training • Organizational Leadership	You couldn't just hand them a set of specified tasks and have them roll with it. They liked maintaining a certain status or a certain level of operation. They were not comfortable changing. Once you finally got them to change, they would quickly reach a level of comfort again. They'd stay there and then they wouldn't want to change again. [2005–2006] Keep in mind that initiative and leadership were not traits that Saddam thought favorably of because the army was always a potential threat. In our Army, we reward flexible, adaptable, decisive and creative leaders. The higher-level Iraqi Army felt threatened by that to some degree. [2005–2006] They don't show initiative on anything unless it's something that they will directly benefit from. We would ask these guys if they had any ideas for missions they wanted to do, and if they did we wanted them to let us know and we'd try to plan them. [2005–2006] The Iraqi soldiers, you show them how to do something and they'll do it. . . . They were going to do it and they were going to do it fast and quick. . . . [But] they'll just keep doing it. For example, we taught them combatives [hand-to-hand combat training]. They just did whatever we did but they kind of half-assed it. They did the general movements but if you did something different to them they would only do what you showed them. If you do something different they're all screwed up. [2003–2004, and 2009–2010]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[52] CALL interviews.

Organic Logistics Capabilities Were Weak

In all previous eras, the Iraqi Army demonstrated good, and often excellent logistics capability. Officers and soldiers in the logistics and supply fields were generally adept and confident in their abilities. In the post-2004 army, those capabilities were generally absent. Structured logistics systems are difficult to develop, and particularly difficult to develop during an ongoing war. The constant, heavy presence of American logistics support teams and advisors seems to have slowed Iraqi efforts to rebuild this capability. The result was a lack of organic logistics capability and a general poor level of noncoalition support for the Iraqi Army. However, some of the advisors suggest from their observations that the Iraqis are not generally capable of developing effective logistics capabilities. Previous cases showed that observation to be inaccurate.[53] Table 5.11 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.11
Interview Quotes on Logistics in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Unit Support • Unit Competence • Unit Leadership • Unit Cohesion • Organizational Support • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Training • State Support • Allies • Expectation	I would say that logistics is probably the main detractor the Iraqis face. They're not adept at maintenance and logistics and supply efforts. It's not in their way of thinking or planning. They really look to the coalition forces to be that logistical support and supply arm to support their operational efforts. They don't plan for it. [2004–2005] Logistics was our biggest fight from day one. How does the Iraqi Army get into the trucks and do patrols when they have fuel to last maybe two days and 50 rounds per soldier at most? They can't even train with their weapons. They can barely afford the food they have. The logistics support was so horrible and there was nothing we could do . . . [2007–2008] Their logistics was very, very poor. It was hard to make them understand that if a mission went bad or was going to last longer than six hours, they needed to make plans for food and water. They didn't think anything bad was ever going to happen. [2005–2006] It kind of humbles you a little bit when you see what kind of food they are eating and you wouldn't serve it to your worst enemy on his best day. During the winter they didn't have a heater. They had to bundle up and get under the sheets. The only thing they had at night sometimes was a hot plate to make their tea. They turned it up and huddled around it. [2007–2008] Their supply system was really nonexistent. They relied on American money for a lot of their supplies. [2005–2006] They didn't do a lot of support because they didn't have the equipment or the expertise. The Iraqi mindset is that if they give someone a piece of equipment to fix, they may never get it back, so they were very reluctant to give a tank to the support battalion to let them work on it. It was hard to get the battalion commander to release supplies out of his warehouse. His whole thought process was, "Yes, I have it, but if I give it away then I won't have it to give away." [2006]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[53] CALL interviews.

Corruption Was Omnipresent but May Have Fallen Within Culturally Appropriate Boundaries

Organizational integrity was a serious problem for the Iraqi Army throughout this period, but the challenges filtered down to the unit level in different ways. In some cases, the unit commanders stole soldiers' pay or unit equipment or engaged in illicit activity on the side. In other cases, though, the officers tried to manipulate an ineffective and corrupt system by using corruption to their advantage. It is not clear to what degree officers claiming justified corruption were covering up for their own behavior, but their explanations are interesting and provide nuance to what sometimes looks like a cut-and-dried issue for institutional security force assistance programs. In general, the advisors observed that—with some egregious exceptions—army corruption fell generally within Iraqi cultural norms.[54] Table 5.12 provides selected quotes.

Table 5.12
Interview Quotes on Corruption in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Economics • Individual Quality • Unit Leadership • Unit Support • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Support • Organizational Integrity • Organizational Control • State Support • State Integrity • Societal Integrity	[The commander] had 10 ghost soldiers on his roster. As we proceeded to start into an ethical discussion on it he said, "Look. Let me explain to you what I do with that money before you judge me. I use that money because I get no money to support my soldiers. Anything to take care of them comes out of their paycheck and I have to pull money out for that . . . " He had a ledger that kept track of where the money was going, "Here's where I'm putting in to build a dining facility (DFAC) for my troops. Here's where I'm buying sheets and blankets." All the things that were logistic shortfalls to take care of his men. [2008] The legendary corruption among the Iraqi logistics system was difficult for us as well but they basically decided to undercut some of the middlemen and just go right to the source. They were smart, too. Like us, they found out who the power players were in the logistics structure above them and they would leverage personal relationships with those people to get things they needed. They weren't trying to circumvent the system necessarily but rather trying to make sure the system actually worked as designed. [2009–2010] One of the other things is that what we consider corruption runs pretty much rampant throughout the entire Iraqi Army and security forces. I heard somebody once say, "You just have to assume that 10 percent of whatever resources are provided is going to be taken by the commander." To them that's not corruption; that's the cost of doing business. [2005–2006] The biggest issue I see with the Iraqi Army is the corruption that makes the average soldier think it doesn't matter what he does, it's still going to be screwed up there. [2005–2006] We had one battalion that had almost 1,200 soldiers on the payroll, but the reality was that they had no more than 400 or 500 soldiers actually on the ground. That battalion commander picked up the payroll in cash. . . . I figured he was probably skimming off the top about $100,000 a month based on his inflated numbers. [2008–2009] I wouldn't say corruption as they say it. It was a way of life. It was extra income. When the commander is driving around in a Mercedes, you pretty much knew how much money that the Army was giving him and there was no way he could afford such . . . [2005–2006] Once you got a closer look at the way that they did business and the way they operated, you realized what essentially was a criminal enterprise. Everybody from the division commander to the brigade commanders to the battalion commanders were on the take. . . . It was the mafia. [2006–2007]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

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[54] CALL interviews.

Leave Policy Undermines Unit Readiness But Is Probably Necessary

Leave policies have always plagued combat effectiveness in the Iraqi Army. In the case of the 2004–2011 period, army leaders were trying to recruit soldiers at a furious pace to meet American demands for growth. This often required promises for ample leave, typically one week out of every month for many soldiers. Again, there were compounding factors. The lack of a mobile banking system meant that soldiers had to receive salaries in cash and then take that cash home on leave each month to their families. This made the leave period critical for the soldiers, their families, and for the units. Any break in pay could lead to desertions, which effectively amounted to a break in will to fight. Abuses of the leave program made matters worse. In one case the unit had an A and a B staff team rotating on and off leave, meaning that the army was significantly more or less capable during the various periods of the rotation. Table 5.13 provides selected quotes.

While the leave program is problematic and opens the door for desertion, it is also a long-standing expectation for soldiers and their families. It should be considered a cultural expectation. Weaning soldiers from the generous leave program might create serious problems for recruiting and retention, even in the officer corps. In all likelihood, this is a challenging

Table 5.13
Interview Quotes on Leave Policy in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Economics • Unit Control • Unit Leadership • Unit Competence • Organizational Control • Organizational Integrity • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Training • Organizational Integrity • Societal Integrity • Societal Support	I broke down what the Iraqis will and won't do by what you can change as an advisor and what you cannot change, and one of the things you cannot change is the leave cycle. [2005–2006] Officially, their policy was to do a rotation with three weeks on and one week of leave. What we saw practiced, however, was more like two weeks on and two weeks of leave. [2006–2007] They would quit because they didn't get their leave or they would go on leave anyway because they had to bring their families their money. They got paid in dinars, they were handed this four-inch stack of bills and they had to get it home to their families. [2006] You need to think of them like a national guard unit. When we first got on the ground they were essentially doing an A team and a B team. . . . That was challenging but I eventually learned just to wait until the A team came back. The B team was just treading water until the A team came back. [2007–2008] In Iraq, leave is a major emotional event. What happened is leave would have to be cycled over a four-week period. So when the soldiers signed up to be in the Iraqi Army, they signed up for three weeks of work and then one week of leave. . . . The problem with that—you can kind of guess this—is we can't say the whole battalion gets to go home. And ultimately this is part of the conflict that occurs. [2004] The standard . . . no more than 20 percent on leave at a time and leave was 21 days on and seven days off. Did they violate that? Yes, they did. It also depended upon the battalion. We had a battalion where the battalion commander was taking money to allow soldiers to stay home longer. . . . So was it violated brigade-wide? Yes. Blatantly violated? No. I think the worst we ever saw at the brigade level was 24 or 25 percent on leave . . . [2004–2005] They were always taking extra leave and you would always have guys show up five or 10 days late. . . . We set up a unit rotation and they wound up taking two weeks of leave per month. [2004–2005] Some officers took off 10 days instead of just a week. [2009]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

artifact of Iraqi Army culture that will have to be accepted and accommodated for some time. Abuses of the leave policy can and should be addressed by Iraqi leadership.[55]

Lack of a Structured Code of Standards and Conduct Affected Control, Will to Fight

Confusing approaches to control undermined Iraqi discipline. American advisors were necessarily restricted from supporting the development of a control system that relied on corporal punishment: Americans could not (and, given American moral, ethical, and legal approaches to control, should not) encourage Iraqi leaders to beat their soldiers. But this approach to discipline was culturally expected based on long-standing practice in the pre-2003 Iraqi Army. The CPA and, later, the Government of Iraq promulgated military justice systems, but they were never fully enforced through 2011.[56]

Interview comments give the impression that there was no unified approach to control in the Army during this period. Some commanders believed they could not discipline their soldiers at all. Some officers from the former regime may have been at a loss without the option to apply physical violence. In some cases they simply allowed soldiers to desert their units. Whether or not a more coercive approach to control was warranted, the lack of an agreed-upon system was dangerous.[57] Table 5.14 provides selected quotes.

Additional Insights: Contemporaneous Reporting from 2003 to 2011

Analysis of contemporaneous press reports, think tank analyses, research reports, and official reports from the Army's Center of Military History Iraq and Afghanistan database helped to situated and reinforce the insights from the advisor interviews.[58] Press reports from 2004 through 2011 were prolific; a sample of available material used to inform this analysis is cited here.[59] Officially published journal articles from publications such as *Military Review* provided

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[55]   CALL interviews.

[56]   For example, see discussions about Iraqi military justice orders in U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: March 2007*, report to Congress in accordance with Section 9010 of Public Law 109-289, Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007, Washington, D.C., March 2007.

[57]   CALL interviews.

[58]   Release of declassified reports and interviews in support of the publication of the U.S. Army's official history of the Iraq war allowed for extraordinary insight into the planning and thinking of top U.S. military leaders in Iraq. I screened 803 declassified reports to identify sources of information to support the present assessment. Approximately 100 of these reports contained information relevant to the Iraqi Army. The most useful sources were interviews with advisors and transcripts from general officer meetings. These include, but are not limited to, Multi-National Force–Iraq, declassified meeting notes for a meeting between General Keane, Ambassador Matthew Tueller, and MG Bergner; July 11, 2008b; Multi-National Corps–Iraq, "MNCI-Operations Through Iraqi Elections (for Planner's Conference)," declassified briefing, December 11, 2008; "Notes from General Abizaid's Trip to Iraqi (4–8 NOV)," declassified memorandum, November 10, 2003; "MNFI Senior Leader Forum," declassified memorandum, November 15, 2008; Center for Army Lessons Learned interviews with LTG Raymond Odierno, February 13, 2008; BGEN Michael J. Terry, July 19, 2007; MGEN James Simmons, USA, January 2, 2008; BGEN James McDonald, USA, February 1, 2008; BGEN Barry N. McManus, USA, January 25, 2008; MGEN Michael D. Jones, USA, July 8, 2008; BGen. Robert R. Allardice, USAF, January 25, 2008; BGEN David D. Phillips, USA, January 23, 2008; BGen Carew L. Wilks, UK Army, May 8, 2008; BGen. Jeffery J. Sengelman, Australian Army, May 8, 2008; MajGen. Winfield W. Scott, III, USAF, January 26, 2008; MajGen Darryl A. Scott, USAF, January 15, 2008; 13 additional interviews with names redacted and are listed in the References.

[59]   Other reports not specifically cited in the following sections but reviewed for this analysis include, but were not limited to, Tina Susman, "U.S. Pins Hopes on Iraqi Army to Maintain Gains in Security," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 2008; Sam Dagher, "U.S. Faced with Iraqi Army Turncoats," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 10, 2007; Michael Knights, *Setting Realistic Expectations for Iraq's Security Forces*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 8, 2004; Michael Knights, *The Iraqi Security Forces: Local Context and U.S. Assistance*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy,

Table 5.14
Interview Quotes on Control in the Iraqi Army, 2004–2011

Factors	Quotes from American Advisors and Year of Observation
• Economics • Individual Identity • Unit Control • Unit Esprit de Corps • Unit Competence • Unit Cohesion • Unit Leadership • Organizational Training • Organizational Control • Organizational Leadership • Organizational Integrity	There is no enlistment contract. They're not obligated. It's not like, "If you don't show up to work you're going to jail." They could just come and go as they pleased, so they had high desertion rates, especially when operations got really bad. Fifty to 75 percent of the companies would just evaporate. They always had manning problems. Trying to take units that have 25 to 30 percent of their people on leave at any given time made it impossible to pull units off the line to spend three days training them because you'd leave a gap in their coverage in their sector. You can't do it and it made training very difficult. [2006] There was no equivalent of UCMJ, no legal code. The *jundis* would just decide they'd had enough of this and they'd just take off. Sometimes they'd take their weapons, sometimes they wouldn't. [2006–2007] You try to talk to the leadership and tell them they can't desert but the leadership is like, "What do we do? The soldiers leave. We can't stop them." From things I've read, the way they operated under Saddam, they could stop that stuff by beating the soldiers up or killing them. Now, this whole idea of democracy is so new to them, they don't know what it is. How does that translate into what we're doing? The tools they were able to use to control situations like this in the past, they didn't know how to use them in the current environment. [2004] There was also a lack of any kind of Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and that really tied the hands of the Iraqi commanders, because they didn't have any way to punish soldiers. I think we're still seeing some remnants of that today. An Iraqi soldier can go AWOL and all that happens is that he loses pay. What an absurd system! [2003–2004] I saw one guy come in with a bloody nose, but that was because he didn't listen to his sergeant and so he popped him in the nose. It wasn't a sectarian thing; it was just their form of discipline: "If you don't do what I say, I'm going to hit you." [2006]

SOURCES: CALL interviews.

June 2011; Knights, 2015; Michael Eisenstadt, *The Iraqi Security Forces (Part I) Background and Current Status*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 26, 2004a; Michael Eisenstadt, *The Iraqi Security Forces (Part II) Challenges and Concerns*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 29, 2004b; Tina Susman and Garrett Therolf, "Generals Fault Iraqi Security Forces," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2007; Joshua Partlow, "Maliki's Office Is Seen Behind Purge in Forces," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2007; Nancy Trejos, "'About Five Minutes into It, We Had to Take Over,'" *Washington Post*, December 3, 2006; Anthony Cordesman, *Iraqi Force Development: Summer 2006 Update*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 23, 2006; Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman, "Officials Grapple with Ethnic Split in Iraqi Forces," *Boston Globe*, April 11, 2006; Steve Negus, "Far-Flung Deployment Saps the Morale of Iraqi Soldiers," *Financial Times*, March 29, 2006; Mark John, "New Iraq Officers on Sharp Learning Curve," Reuters, February 1, 2006; Antonio Castanada, "Iraqi Desertions Complicate U.S. Mission," Associated Press, January 31, 2006; Anthony Shadid and Steve Fainaru, "Building Iraq's Army: Mission Improbable," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2005; Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Training Skills of U.S. General Sought After Poor Performance by Some Iraqi Forces," *New York Times*, April 15, 2004; Eric Schmitt, "Many Iraqi Troops Not Fully Trained, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, February 4, 2005; Damien Cave, "In Iraq, It's Hard to Trust Anyone in Uniform," *New York Times*, August 3, 2006; Michael R. Gordon, "An Army of Some," *New York Times*, August 20, 2006; Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iraqi Force Development," congressional testimony, March 14, 2005; Erica Goode, "U.S. Military Joins Iraqi Army in Basra Assault," *New York Times*, March 28, 2008; Timothy Williams and Omar Al-Jawoshy, "Drug and Alcohol Abuse Growing in Iraqi Forces," *New York Times*, October 24, 2010; Tim Arango, "Anxiety Hovers Over Iraqi Commandos," *New York Times*, July 13, 2011; Eric Hamilton, "The Fight for Mosul," *Iraq Report*, Institute for the Study of War and the *Weekly Standard*, March 2008, pp. 1–28; Ramzy Mardini, "Iraq's Post-Withdrawal Crisis, Update 1, December 15–19, 2011," Institute for the Study of War, December 19, 2011; and Solomon Moore, "Tracking a Reborn Iraqi Army," *New York Times*, March 19, 2008.

a range of on-the-ground insights.[60] Official documents included contemporaneous lessons-learned papers written by American officers and NCOs who worked alongside the Iraqi Army; assessment of units called "subjective assessments," which amounted to guided narrative observations; unit after-action reports; Iraqi Army pay scales; and doctrinal publications.[61] The following two sections provide a sample of quotes describing expectations for Iraqi performance and then observations of Iraqi Army performance by Americans in Iraq.

Assessment of Iraqi Army Will to Fight 2004–2011

The trends in the interviews generally followed the trends in the contemporaneous official reporting, including the official reports from theater and by theater staffs to Congress. Some broader perspective is needed to help align these insights with will-to-fight assessment. It is important to keep in mind that the Iraqi Army from 2004 through 2011 was under almost complete control of the coalition occupying force. Americans and allied officers and NCOs were omnipresent at the Ministry of Defense, Iraqi Army headquarters, and at almost every unit staff through at least late 2009. Even as their presence tapered off at the lower levels through late 2011, it remained steady or increased at the institutional level as the coalition shifted efforts toward training development and institutional capacity.

Many American advisors were critical of the lack of Iraqi motivation and initiative. At least in the first years after the shift from the New Iraqi Army to the Iraqi Army in 2004, too many Iraqi soldiers were motivated by pay incentive and too few had more enduring motivations, such as nationalism. Desertions—a clear indicator of a lack of will to fight—followed. But this speaks directly to the constant trade-off inherent in security force assistance. The very presence of the advising force necessarily means that the host government and the supported military are incapable of fully independent development and operations. This leads to fundamental questions of strategy: How long does the advising force need to stay, and how long should it stay to avoid creating enduring dependencies? If it leaves too soon, will the sup-

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[60] For example, Joshua J. Potter, *American Advisors: Security Force Assistance Model in the Long War*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011; Kenneth W. Estes, *Into the Fray: U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2004–2005*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps History Division, 2011; John E. Bilas, *Developing the Iraqi Army: The Long Fight in the Long War*, thesis, Quantico, Va.: U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2008; Laura Landes, "Follow the Money: The Army Finance Corps and Iraqi Financial Independence," *Military Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2, March–April 2008, pp. 85–91; Carl D. Grunow, "Advising Iraqis: Building the Iraqi Army," *Military Review*, July–August 2006, pp. 8–17; Daniel P. Bolger, "So You Want to Be An Adviser," *Military Review*, March–April 2006, pp. 70–76; Thomas A. Seagrist, "Combat Advising in Iraq: Getting Your Advice Accepted," *Military Review*, May–June 2010, pp. 65–72; Timothy Deady, "A Year with the Best Division in the Iraqi Army," *Military Review*, November–December 2009, pp. 43–56; Steven M. Miska, "Growing the Iraqi Security Forces," *Military Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, July–August 2005, pp. 64–69; and F. J. Bing West, "Waiting for Godot in Iraq," *Military Review*, January–February 2007, pp. 2–12. A search of the *Marine Corps Gazette* online archive revealed no good sources of information, though challenges with the new *Gazette* search engine may have prevented access.

[61] There are several million documents available in the CMH database, many of which are classified. I have restricted analysis to unclassified documents. A sample of these documents includes John E. Reinburg, *The Noncommissioned Officer Education System—Iraqi Style*, 4th Infantry Division, U.S. Division—North, Iraq, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, *Training in the Iraqi Army*, training manual, January 2006; Coalition Military Assistance Training Team, "Iraqi Army (IA) Overview Brief," briefing, undated; Richard T. Feltzer, Team #11595 After Action Report, official memorandum, Kirkush, Iraq, January 18, 2009; and Blaise Cornell-d'Echert, "Officer and NCO Development Needs for the New Iraqi Army," official memorandum, October 5, 2003.

ported military force collapse? What can the advisors control, and which factors are beyond their immediate control?

It is important to keep in mind that in Iraq, the advising force was under constant physical and propaganda attack by Iraqis who claimed nationalist bona fides. A few Americans made the whole American presence even more unpopular by torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison.[62] Iraqi national leadership was mercurial, prone to ethno-sectarian bias, and generally ineffective through at least 2008.[63] For those who depended on American support, the equally mercurial American commitment to Iraq was confusing and frightening. Insurgent threats and attacks were brutal, and Al Qaida–affiliated insurgents made a special effort to terrorize Iraqi soldiers and their families. Given the conditions present from 2004 to 2011, it is somewhat remarkable that the Iraqi Army was able to generate any kind of will to fight. The critical comments in the interviews should be viewed through an objective lens.

Comparative Factor-by-Factor Assessment of Iraqi Army Will to Fight: 2004–2008–2011

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the factor-by-factor assessment of the regular Iraqi Army's will to fight in 2004, 2008, and at the end of 2011, as well as providing additional insights and trend analysis. The sheer number of sources accessed for this assessment—more than 1,000, only a representative sampling of which are cited here—coupled with limited research resources precluded both recording and producing the same level of page-by-page coding provided in the previous two cases. All the accessed sources were read once for relevance. Sources that had no relevance to the assessment were discarded and are not cited here. Sources that were relevant to the assessment were read a second time for content and are cited here.[64]

These assessments draw heavily on my detailed reading and line-by-line coding of the approximately 1,500 pages of CALL interview transcripts; analysis of the other cited key leader interviews; interviews with Iraqi general officers cited throughout this report; and two readings each of the declassified intelligence analyses, advisor after-action reports, relevant articles from *The Advisor*, official reports to Congress on the progress of the Iraq campaign, news articles, military masters theses, declassified operational briefings, and other cited material. Some additional citation is provided in each section to provide additional evidentiary anchoring in the absence of page-by-page coding and citation for the factor assessments.

Individual Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.15 presents my subject-matter-expert- and evidence-informed, model-guided individual-level assessment ratings for these three periods. In the aftermath of the coalition invasion and the CPA's general order disbanding the Iraqi Army, soldiers protested but otherwise went to the winds. Many joined the insurgency.[65] Iraq's economy had effectively collapsed, propped

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[62] "Chronology of Abu Ghraib," *Washington Post*, undated.

[63] Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki was generally more effective than his predecessors, and he showed the first indications of independent Iraqi leadership in the so-called Charge of the Knights in 2008. See Richard Iron, "The Charge of the Knights," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 1, 2013, pp. 54–62.

[64] Available resources also prevented the creation of a separate appendix with all three of the detailed ratings for the 2004–2011 case.

[65] See all cited intelligence reports from the 2003–2004 period cited in this section.

up only by coalition spending and anemic jobs programs.[66] When the regular Iraqi Army was reestablished in 2004, some soldiers returned, but many of the new recruits had no military experience. There was no standing junior officer or NCO corps to help select and build the new Army units, only coalition advisors, who typically did not speak any Arabic.[67] Some members of the disbanded Iraqi National Guard and New Iraqi Army shipped over to the regular army, while others left.

The quality of the force in 2004 was, therefore, a mixed bag at best. As the previous section conveyed, many soldiers serving in 2004 were there primarily for pay. Iraqi nationalism was at a low ebb. Ideological divisions, primarily ethno-sectarian divisions, were undermining perceptions of fairness and equal opportunity within the ISF. Individuals in the army did not necessarily identify as soldiers first, a crippling factor in will to fight. Competence was awful in 2004.

Intensive coalition efforts to support Iraqi recruiting, training, equipping, planning, and operational development paid significant dividends by 2008. Although the Iraqi Army was still worse off in 2008 than it had been in 1988, and its will to fight was still uneven, improvements were tangible. The 2008 Charge of the Knights, in which Iraqi Army forces drove into Basra to reclaim control of the province for the government, confirmed the army's willingness to fight even against co-sectarianists.[68] Although the Charge of the Knights operation was tactically ineffective, the individual soldiers in the army showed a willingness to leave their home stations—a major shift in an army built around regional and local stationing and homeporting—deploy within Iraq, and to take the fight to the adversary. They were far less desperate than they had been in 2004, when Iraq looked to be collapsing.[69] The army paid well, and soldiers could get money more efficiently to their families. Enough soldiers had seen family members killed by insurgents or militiamen to have a desire for revenge, a potentially powerful motivator for will to fight.

After the Charge of the Knights and the success of the Anbar Awakening, the coalition had started to retract some of its advisory teams from the field.[70] While the full drawdown would not take place until the end of 2011, the Iraqis clearly saw the writing on the wall by early 2009. Ethno-sectarian discord started to creep back into the army as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his key leaders doled out positions for political gain. Neither a sense of desperation nor a desire for revenge drove individual soldiers by late 2011: The insurgency had faded, and daily threats to Iraqi soldiers were significantly reduced. Routine security operations became the norm, and complacency began to creep back in to the Army as sharp-eyed coalition advisors departed. By the end of 2011, individual soldiers in the Iraqi Army were

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[66] Dobbins et al., 2009.
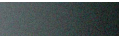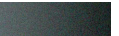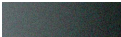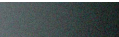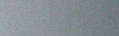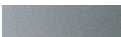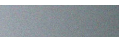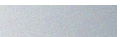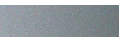
[67] See cited reports on early Iraqi Army training activities and related issues. For example, Peter W. Rodman, *Disbanding the Iraqi Army*, declassified memorandum to the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 24, 2006; Knights, 2004; and all cited Joint Intelligence Committee reports from 2004.
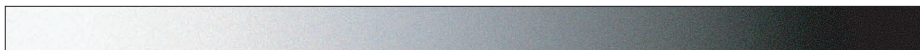
[68] For more on Charge of the Knights, see Joint Intelligence Committee, 2008a; and Iron, 2013.

[69] *Homeporting* is a military term describing the stationing of soldiers in one area so that they have time to focus on a specific job for an extended period of time. It can also be used to describe the policy of stationing soldiers near their personal homes of record.

[70] For more on the Awakening, see Timothy S. McWilliams and Kurtis P. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume I: American Perspectives, U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University, 2009.

Table 5.15
Comparative Assessment of Individual Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Category	Factor	2004		2008		2011	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Individual Motivations	Desperation						
	Revenge						
	Ideology						
	Economics						
	Individual Identity				Null	Null	Null
Individual Capabilities	Quality					Null	Null
	Individual Competence						

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, "'Posturing for the Long War': Potential Course of Action for the Drawdown of U.S. Forces," declassified briefing, Baghdad, Iraq: MNCI-C3 Force Gen, December 18, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, "Enclosure 5: MND-B Assessment," declassified annex to the 2005 Multi-National Corps–Iraq operations assessment, Baghdad, Iraq: MND-B, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, "Enclosure 8: MND-C Assessment," declassified annex to the 2005 Multi-National Corps–Iraq operations assessment, location not specified, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, "Enclosure 9: MND (SE) Assessment," declassified annex to the 2005 Multi-National Corps–Iraq operations assessment, location not specified, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, "MNF-I BUA Compilation (MNF-W, MND-C—Early 2007)," declassified briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, "MAT/PAT/SPAT," declassified briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, December 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, *The Changing Nature of the Fight in Iraq*, declassified intelligence analysis, Baghdad, Iraq: Combined Intelligence Operations Center, April 30, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, "Iraq Update: SecDef," declassified briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, June 21, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, *Iraq's Sunni Arabs After Saddam: The View from Ramadi*, declassified intelligence report, Baghdad, Iraq, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, February 13, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, "Interview with [first name redacted] Allmon, MNSTC-I J-3," declassified interview transcript, Baghdad, Iraq, July 9, 2008a; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments, series of 34 separate reports from July 12, 2010 through November 20, 2011; Rodman, 2006; David Voorhies, *MiTT Happens: Insight into Advising the Iraqi Army*, Ft. Benning, Georgia: U.S. Army, April 20, 2007; all iterations of the U.S. Department of Defense's *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* reports to Congress, mandated by Section 9010 of Public Law 109-289, Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 and available at U.S. Department of Defense, archive webpage, undated; all editions of *The Advisor*, all issues from 2005 through 2011; Gary Schreckengost, *80th Division in Iraq: Iraqi Army Advisors in Action, 2005–2006*, Middletown, Del.: 80th Division, undated; Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Reinburg, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, undated; Feltzer, 2009; Cornell-d'Echert, 2003; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

less engaged, less motivated, and probably a bit less sure about their roles than they had been at the height of the counterinsurgency campaign in 2008. Individual will to fight suffered accordingly.

Unit Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.16 presents the model-guided unit-level assessment ratings for these three periods. In mid-2004, when the Iraqi Army was reestablished, all of its units were effectively new. Some had lineal histories, but it is unclear whether those histories—typically passed down in unit-specific ceremonies, in written texts, in battle streamers, and, perhaps most importantly, in oral tradition—still existed in any tangible form, or whether there was any serious effort to convey those histories to the new members of the units.[71] Taken together with the near-complete absence of starting-point social or task cohesion (other than what was generated in the few shipped-over, still-fledgling Iraqi National Guard and New Iraqi Army units); no real starting competence in collective unit tasks; almost no starting-point Iraqi unit-level support mechanisms; near-total dependence on coalition advising, logistics, and firepower; and a scattershot, take-what-you-can-get approach to recruiting new unit leaders, the just-out-of-the-gates regular Iraqi Army of 2004 was in understandably bad shape. While some former Iraqi Army leaders were able to put together new units together fairly quickly, the general lack of confidence and collective social identity and bonding at the unit level gutted the will to fight of some units and undermined it in others. Iraqi soldiers generally expected to lose tactical actions to insurgents, particularly in the absence of direct coalition support. Fear generated by these expectations was met by reality all too often.
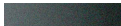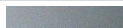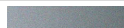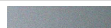
By 2008, regular army commanders had been able to shake loose some of their poor-performing leaders. Advisors helped facilitate both the transition of these ineffective unit-level leaders, and the development of new, more effective leaders. Soldiers had served together for several years, and in some cases for longer periods of time, than U.S. soldiers typically serve together. Iraqi logistics were still a weak echo of the exemplary 20th century logistics organization, but they were getting better. Units were trained in basic collective skills, and, as the interviewees described, many regular units were quite capable in tactical combat. Control measures were still unclear and only partly effective because of the dissonance between advisor-imposed restrictions on corporal punishment and the inclination of Iraqi leaders to physically discipline their soldiers, but desertions were more manageable than they had been in previous post-invasion years. Soldiers expected to have basic support and to have a decent chance of success in combat, and their expectations were often met in the field. Units were starting to coalesce around social and task cohesion, and around a budding, if uneven, esprit de corps.

There were no major changes in unit competence, cohesion, control, esprit, expectation, or support by the end of 2011. However, by this point in time Maliki had accelerated his unhelpful efforts to micromanage and politicize the Iraqi officer corps.[72] Competent leaders who might have had opportunities for meritocratic promotion in 2008 were stymied by fiat-style appointments designed to shore up the political influence of Maliki's political allies.

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[71]   There were no indications in the cited literature that unit history was leveraged to build esprit de corps, though it might have been in some areas.

[72]   Remarks on Maliki's meddling in the officer corps date back to at least 2007. For example, see Partlow, 2007. Also see Joshua Keating, "Iraq's Built-to-Fail Military," *Slate*, June 19, 2014; "Why Iraq's Army Crumbled," *The Economist*, June 19, 2014; and Zaid al-Ali, "How Maliki Ruined Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, June 19, 2014.

Table 5.16
Comparative Assessment of Unit Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Category	Factor	2004		2008		2011	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Unit Culture	Unit Cohesion						
	Unit Control						
	Unit Esprit de Corps						
Unit Capabilities	Unit Competence						
	Unit Support						
	Unit Leadership						

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2008; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments; Rodman, 2006; Voorhies, 2007; U.S. Department of Defense, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; *The Advisor*, from 2005 through 2011; Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Reinburg, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, undated; Feltzer, 2009; Cornell-d'Echert, 2003; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

Several observers cited in this chapter directly attribute Maliki's meddling in the regular Iraqi Army officer corps to the collapse of regular army will to fight in the face of the Islamic State offensive in 2014. Given the available evidence, this is a plausible conclusion. However, as detrimental as Maliki's actions may have been, many other factors assessed in this chapter also played an important role in the 2014 collapse.

Organizational Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.17 presents the model-guided organizational-level assessment ratings for these three periods. When the regular army was disbanded in 2003, tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers protested.[73] They wanted their paychecks, but the army also provided a home to hundreds of

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[73]   For more on this issue, see Dobbins et al., 2009; Michael R. Gordon, "Debate Lingering on Decision to Dissolve the Iraqi Military," *New York Times*, October 21, 2004; Azadeh Moaveni, "Thousands of Ex-Soldiers in Iraq Demand to Be Paid," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2003.

Table 5.17
Comparative Assessment of Organizational Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Category	Factor	2004		2008		2011	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Org. Culture	Org. Control						
	Org. Esprit de Corps						
	Org. Integrity						
Org. Capabilities	Org. Training						
	Org. Support						
	Doctrine						
	Org. Leadership						

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2008; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments; Rodman, 2006; Voorhies, 2007; U.S. Department of Defense, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; *The Advisor*, all issues from 2005 through 2011 Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Reinburg, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, undated; Feltzer, 2009; Cornell-d'Echert, 2003; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

thousands of young Iraqi men. Although its combat record was quite bad in the years after 1988, the army was still a well-respected organization in Iraqi society. As an organization, the army was able to generate significant esprit de corps. In 2004, its institutions were gone, along with its ability to control, train, support, and lead forces in the field. Iraqi doctrine was effectively nonexistent, although the lack of doctrine did not appear to have much appreciable effect on will to fight. At the organizational level, political maneuvering, greed, corruption, and self-dealing sapped soldiers' confidence in army integrity. There was not much to inspire or sustain will to fight at the organizational level of the Iraqi Army in 2004.

By 2008, intensive efforts by coalition advisors and Iraqi leaders led to substantial, across-the-board improvements. Control became more effective as the army at least tried to imple-

ment some consistent standards and tracking mechanisms.[74] Army esprit de corps was being revived, and pride in service was beginning to return to the force. More confident and effective organizational leaders were better able to clamp down on corruption, with at least middling success. Training bases had been established and were generating thousands of new soldiers per year. These bases, with advisor support, were also providing some advanced collective skills training necessary for operations beyond basic counterinsurgency security.[75]

At the end of 2011, Iraq's regular army was functioning fairly well for a military organization with a practical pedigree of less than a decade. However, some cracks were already showing. Primarily, the political meddling in organizational leadership undermined the army's overall integrity and the soldiers' perceptions of institutional leadership. In the absence of an intensive enemy threat, and with advisors on the way out the door, the pressure for army institutional leaders to sustain force-wide motivation and esprit de corps waned.[76]

State Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.18 presents the model-guided state-level assessment ratings for these three periods. An Iraqi state had technically existed for approximately one year prior to the reestablishment of the regular Iraqi Army. However, in 2004 the Iraqi government was a government in name only. The coalition was still viewed as an occupying power, and for all intents and purposes coalition officials and support organizations were propping up nearly the entire state apparatus. Civil-military relations were almost entirely politicized where they did exist; coalition advisors unintentionally stunted the growth of Iraqi civil-military relations by their very presence, even as they officially tried to build relations as part of the then-nascent defense institution building process in Iraq.[77] State institutions were generally corrupt. Government strategy for dealing with the insurgency was flimsy and, arguably, nonexistent. In 2004, the coalition was in charge of counterinsurgency operational planning and execution. State leadership was in constant flux, deeply politicized, and generally ineffective. The state was able to provide some support to the Iraqi Army through general procurement and distribution processes, but only with significant assistance from the coalition. In 2004, Iraqi Army soldiers could not count on the stability, integrity, or capabilities of their state.

In 2008, the Iraqi state was still in poor condition. Institutions were still flimsy and heavily dependent on support from, primarily, the United States. However, there were modest across-the-board improvements in the state-level will-to-fight factors that in part contributed

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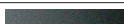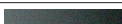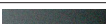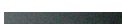
[74] As the interviewees pointed out (quoted above), the Army never fully established a clear set of control guidelines.
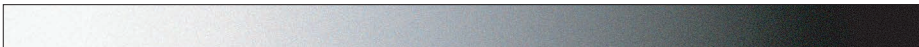
[75] Tens of articles in *The Advisor* series from this period describe improvements in training facilities, training capabilities, and in collective task accomplishment. While these articles are necessarily somewhat biased as part of the military public affairs activity in Iraq, they do provide extensive quotation and imagery to help confirm some of the claims made by the articles' authors.

[76] There is no polling data or other scientific evidence showing soldier perception of Iraqi Army institutional leadership in 2011. However, there were sufficient indications that soldiers were afraid that the end of the advisory mission would leave them vulnerable. There were also indications in many of the cited reports that Army institutions were beginning to turn inward as they politicized.

[77] See Dobbins et al., 2009; and Andrew Rathmell, Olga Oliker, Terrence Kelly, David Brannan, and Keith Crane, *Developing Iraq's Security Sector: The Coalition Provisional Authority's Experience*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-365-OSD, 2005.

Table 5.18
Comparative Assessment of State Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Category	Factor	2004		2008		2011	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
State Culture	Civil-Military Relations	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
	State Integrity	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
State Capabilities	State Support	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
	State Strategy	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
	State Leadership	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2008; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments; Rodman, 2006; Voorhies, 2007; U.S. Department of Defense, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; *The Advisor*, all issues from 2005 through 2011 Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Reinburg, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, undated; Feltzer, 2009; Cornell-d'Echert, 2003; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

to generally greater confidence in the state in comparison to the 2004 period.[78] Specifically for the army, the Charge of the Knights—while operationally unsound from a purely objective standpoint—helped to both galvanize the state and to convey to the Iraqi military that it was ready to break out and stand on its own.[79] Maliki was already undermining the Iraqi Army

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[78] Polling of the Iraqi population in general showed increased confidence in the Iraqi state in 2005 as compared to previous years, but then a sharp drop in confidence through 2007. By 2008, confidence had improved considerably. While these polls do not specifically call out soldiers' opinions, they can be used as a reasonable proxy for regular Iraqi Army soldiers' opinions of the Iraqi government. For example, "Iraq Poll March 2007: In Graphics," BBC, March 19, 2007; "Iraq Survey: Key Results in Graphics," BBC, March 17, 2008. The 2007 poll presents some longitudinal trends dating back to 2005. Polling can be challenging in places like Iraq. For more information on challenges with Iraq polling data, see Thomas M. Cioppa, "Operation Iraqi Freedom Strategic Communication Analysis and Assessment," *Media, War, and Conflict*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2009, pp. 25–45.

[79] In fact, the operation showed the continuing dependence on the coalition. Some of the cited authors believe that Maliki intended it as a show of force that would inevitably draw in coalition military units.
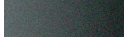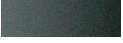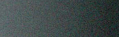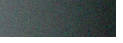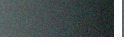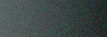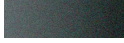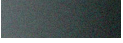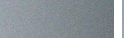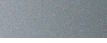
through politicization, but at least for a moment in time he was a national hero. State will-to-fight factors helped to improve Iraqi Army will to fight in 2008.

At the end of 2011, Maliki had already ruined the progress made toward improving civil-military relations and the integrity of the state. He did not do this alone: Collectively, Iraqi political leaders failed to sustain the modest but real improvements in state cohesion and state capability that had been achieved in the first half-decade of the post-invasion period. Impacts on will to fight were most evident in the failures of civil-military relations and integrity. They directly harmed the capabilities and integrity of the regular Iraqi Army officer corps, which in turn fed directly into the collapse of Iraqi Army will to fight in 2014.

Societal Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.19 presents the model-guided societal-level assessment ratings for these three periods. Iraq was riven by ethno-sectarian discord from 2004 through late 2007. Even though the army had long been an institution generally removed from Iraq's societal identity problems, spillover was unavoidable in 2004. Soldiers were affected by societal identity issues both in the army and at home, as their families were caught up in tribal, regional, ethnic, and sectarian divisiveness and violence. Nationalism was temporarily eroded as primary identities—also temporarily—

Table 5.19
Comparative Assessment of Societal Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Category	Factor	2004		2008		2011	
		Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Societal Culture	Societal Identity						
	Societal Integrity						
Soc. Capabilities	Societal Support						

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2008; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments; Rodman, 2006; Voorhies, 2007; U.S. Department of Defense, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; *The Advisor*, all issues from 2005 through 2011 Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; Reinburg, undated; Iraqi Ground Forces, undated; Feltzer, 2009; Cornell-d'Echert, 2003; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

devolved. Corruption was not necessarily worse in 2004 than it had been during the last months of Saddam Hussein's regime, but it was not much better. Survival needs, coupled with the onerous presence of the cash-flush coalition occupation force, led to a range of unsavory behaviors across Iraqi society.[80] This kind of widespread corruption inevitably affected the Iraqi Army, both the soldiers in uniform and the Iraqi civilian workers and contractors responsible for helping to keep the army running. Support for the army in Iraqi society, typically quite high, was at a nadir in 2003 and was still low in 2004.[81] Lack of popular support for an army almost always undermines will to fight, and in Iraq in 2004 this lack of support was almost certainly articulated by some young men through antigovernment violence.[82]

Nationalism had risen significantly between 2004 and 2008. Some of the ethno-sectarian identity problems that fed the civil violence of 2006 and 2007 were fading by 2008. The Iraqi Army was earning back the place of respect and honor it had long held in Iraqi society. Many Iraqis were tired of competing militias, corrupt local police, and other official and semi-official security services meddling in their daily lives.[83] The army had serious problems, but it still managed to rise above much of the local turmoil that marred the other security forces' reputations. Support for the army jumped not only in polling, but also in recruiting and in public displays. This increased support correlated with stronger will to fight in the Iraqi Army. Societal integrity did not change much during the entire occupation; ratings remain the same across all three assessment periods.

Societal identity and integrity generally remained consistent from 2008 through 2011, both in quality and impact on regular Iraqi Army will to fight. Societal support for the army was also sustained in polling, but it did not significantly increase. The slightly lower scores here represent more a loss of momentum and enthusiasm from the 2008 period than a significant decrease in quality of support or of the impact on will to fight.

Contextual Will-to-Fight Ratings: 2004–2008–2011

Table 5.20 presents the model-guided contextual assessment ratings for these three periods. Because the Iraqi Army was primarily training to defeat, and operating against insurgent forces, some of the contextual factors that are typically critical in conventional war are less important or not at all important for will to fight during the 2004–2011 advisory period. Climate, weather, and terrain are rated as null across the board, not because they were irrelevant but because they appeared to have no significant relevance to Iraqi Army will to fight. Further,

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[80] For example, Alex Cooper, "Graft Took $320 Billion from Iraq's Economy Since 2003," Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, May 10, 2018; U.S. Senate, *Iraq Report: Political Fragmentation and Corruption Stymie Economic Growth and Political Progress*, minority staff trip report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, April 30, 2012; Martin Chulov, "Post-War Iraq: 'Everybody is Corrupt, from Top to Bottom. Including Me,'" *The Guardian*, February 19, 2016.

[81] Polls show that support for the Army as an institution was at 38 percent in 2003; between 56 and 63 percent in 2004; consistently at 65 percent in 2008; and 68.7 percent in 2012, right after the coalition withdrawal. See Arab Barometer, Middle East poll waves, multiple years; Al Mustakilla for Research, "Iraq 16 Years Later . . . Is the Country Still at War with Itself?" poll results, April 2019; 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, "Results of a Nationwide Public Opinion Poll on Iraq's Upcoming Parliamentary Election," March 26, 2018; D3 Systems and KA Research Ltd., "Iraq Poll March 2008," conducted for ABC, BBC, ARD, and NHK, March 2008.

[82] See the collective cited Joint Intelligence Committee reports on Iraq from the 2003 to 2004 time frame, as well as other declassified intelligence reports from the same time period, to better understand how anti-government and anti-military antipathy fed the violent insurgency in the 2004 period.

[83] See the detailed questions in the polling data cited above for more on Iraqi perspectives of other security services.

Table 5.20
Comparative Assessment of Contextual Will-to-Fight Factors: Advisory Period

Factor	2004		2008		2011	
	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence	Condition	Influence
Climate and Weather	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null
Terrain	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null
Fatigue	Null	Null				
Mission						
Adversary Reputation					Null	Null
Adversary Performance					Null	Null
Adversary Equipment					Null	Null
Messaging						
Allies						

Condition:	Outstanding or elite	Good	Sufficient or moderate	Poor	Severely debilitating
Influence on will to fight:	Significantly improves	Improves	Neutral or minimal	Undermines	Severely undermines

SOURCES: CALL interviews; declassified official reports from Multi-National Force–Iraq and Multi-National Corps—Iraq, including but not limited to Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2005; Multi-National Division–Baghdad, 2005; Multi-National Division–Central, 2005; Multi-National Division–South East, 2005; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2007; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2004; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006a; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2006b; Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003; CALL, Odierno interview, 2008; Multi-National Force–Iraq, 2008; U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) Commander's Weekly Assessments; Rodman, 2006; Voorhies, 2007; U.S. Department of Defense, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; *The Advisor*, all issues from 2005 through 2011 Susman, 2008; Dagher, 2007; Knights, 2004; Knights, 2011; Knights, 2015; Eisenstadt, 2004a; Eisenstadt, 2004b; Susman Therolf, 2007; Partlow, 2007; Trejos, 2006; Cordesman, 2005, 2006; Bender Stockman, 2006; Negus, 2006; John, 2006; Castenada, 2006; Shadid and Fainaru, 2005; Schmitt and Shanker, 2004; Schmitt, 2005; Cave, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Goode, 2008; Williams Al-Jawoshy, 2010; Arango, 2011; Hamilton, 2008; Mardini, 2011; Moore, 2008; Bilas, 2008; Landes, 2008, pp. 85–91; Grunow, 2006; Bolger, 2006; Seagrist, 2010; Deady, 2009; Miska, 2005; all cited evidence and declassified reporting from the Chilcot Report, and specifically reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

given the countrywide nature of the counterinsurgency operation, an averaged rating here would be difficult to justify.

In 2004, fatigue was not a relevant factor in will to fight: The army had just been reestablished, and even those with recent experience in the Iraqi National Guard, Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, and New Iraqi Army were relatively fresh. The army's mission reflected a somewhat-perverse return to its praetorian roots. Ill-prepared soldiers conducted checkpoint operations and limited patrolling to fend off insurgents with whom they might have empathized, or even sympathized. Many expert soldiers chose to join the insurgency in 2003 and 2004, giving them a significant military edge over the shaky new Iraqi Army units. Insurgents were torturing and brutally murdering Iraqi soldiers. Improvised explosive devices were extraordinarily

effective against unarmored Iraqi Army transport trucks. Insurgent attacks against the Iraqi Army were particularly effective.[84] Therefore, in 2004, adversary reputation, performance, and equipment all dragged down the army's will to fight.

There were no effective Iraqi government messaging programs in 2004, and coalition programs simply did not resonate the same way that Iraqi messaging might have. In contrast, various insurgent groups—and particularly those associated with al Qaida—messaged aggressively and effectively to instill fear into the Iraqi population and into the hearts of Iraqi soldiers. Perhaps the only thing Iraqi Army soldiers could truly count on in 2004 was the plentiful and direct material, training, fires, and ground combat support from the coalition. Allies provided the most tangible and most powerful enhancement to will to fight in 2004, even as they reluctantly created dependencies that would later undermine Iraqi Army will to fight in 2014.

In 2008, fatigue was a factor, but there were no indications that the Iraqi Army was suffering from war fatigue as it had in the late 1980s, or during the 1991 Gulf War. Instead, generous home leave policies and absentee forgiveness helped to ensure a constant refreshing of the force. Fatigue was actually a positive factor for regular Iraqi Army will to fight in 2008. Mission requirements were far clearer in 2008 than they had been in 2004. The insurgency was still a potent threat in 2008, but most soldiers knew that they could find and kill insurgents, and that they could count on the coalition counterbalance insurgent performance and equipment. Adversary reputation, performance, and equipment all had less negative impact in 2008. At this point in time, both coalition and Iraqi government messaging had become far more effective. Particular attention was paid to Iraqi Army recruiting messaging and messaging encouraging Iraqi nationalism. Newly designed Iraqi national flags appeared everywhere.[85] Meanwhile, insurgent messaging was doing as much, and perhaps more, to alienate the population and the army than to break them or win them over.[86] The coalition surge had clearly demonstrated allied intent to support the Iraqi government, and particularly the Iraqi Army. Iraqi soldiers continued to heavily depend on coalition support, and that support continued to enhance their will to fight.

In 2011, fatigue was no longer a positive factor for the Iraqi Army. However, there are no indications in the cited documents that it significantly undermined Iraqi Army will to fight during the last year of the coalition's Title 10 operation. Mission focus remained fairly consistent at the tactical level for day-to-day operations. Given the sharp decline in the insurgency's presence on the battlefield, adversary factors are not rated for 2011. Iraqi nationalist sentiment was still strong across the Iraqi population in 2011, but government messaging was less engaging than it had been at the high-water mark in 2008 and 2009. At the same time, popular disenfranchisement with the Maliki administration was beginning to generate antigovernment messaging that resonated with large segments of the population, including soldiers and their families.[87] Perhaps the most important contextual change to the will-to-fight influencing

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[84] Reference to attacks on Iraqi Army units can be found in most of the cited official reporting from Multi-National Force–Iraq, Multi-National Corps–Iraq, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Joint Intelligence Committee.

[85] For example, Peter Smith, "Iraq's Flag Redesign Erases One of the Last Public Symbols of the Hussein Regime," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 23, 2008; Johan Franzén, "The Problem of Iraqi Nationalism," *National Identities*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2011, pp. 217–234; Bob Dreyfuss, "Iraq's Resurgent Nationalism," *The Nation*, February 18, 2009.

[86] McWilliams and Wheeler, 2009; Mohammed M. Hafez, "Al-Qa'ida Losing Ground in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2007, page numbers not listed.

[87] See Connable, 2017, for various references to Iraqi protest activities during this period.

factors was the impending disappearance of the American-led allied military coalition. Iraqi Army dependencies on allied support were considerable, and many—including the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff—viewed the departure as a serious blow. Absence of American and other allied support certainly contributed in some complex ways to the 2014 collapse of regular Iraqi Army will to fight.

Additional Insights and Trends from the 2004–2011 Advisor Period
This section presents additional insights, and then an analysis of trends across the three cases and specific to this case. Some of the more consistent trends from the interviews and other cited sources reflect a thread of continuity through all the cases in this report. Others appear to be one-off insights or inconsistent trends that might mislead advisors or strategists into believing that some viable approaches to security force assistance in Iraq might not work. A section on trends follows the first two sections on expectations and official observations.

Expectations for Independence and Adaptability: Worthy Goals, Mostly Unmet
When the United States military withdrew combat forces from Iraq in 2011, it did so knowing that the Iraqi Army was not fully prepared for conventional combat. However, that capability was the stated objective of the U.S. military and the Iraqi Army. A training order ghost-written for the Iraqis by an advisor presented the role of the Iraqi Army and its primary tasks:

> The role of the Iraqi Army is to fight and win in combat operations on land. The Army is the central component of Iraq's defense and security strategy, and as such it provides the critical security force elements necessary to achieve national security objectives in the near-term and beyond. . . . [It must be able to] conduct counter-insurgency and conventional land defense operations.[88]

This manual set guidelines for Iraqi leadership training, emphasizing competence and confidence and centering on adaptability. Leaders should be "adaptive, capable of sensing their environment, adjusting the plan when appropriate, and properly applying the proficiency acquired through training."[89] Sergeants are envisioned to be central to the army and its approach to leadership, and officers should delegate authority to adaptable NCOs. Adaptability comes up again and again. In a section entitled "Train to Adapt," the manual states:

> Commanders train and develop adaptive leaders and units, and prepare their subordinates to operate in positions of increased responsibility. Repetitive, standards-based training provides relevant experience. Commanders intensify training experiences by varying training conditions. . . . Competence, confidence, and discipline promote initiative and enable leaders to adapt to changing situations and conditions. They improvise with the resources at hand, exploit opportunities and accomplish their assigned mission in the absence of orders. Commanders at every echelon integrate training events in their training plans to develop and train imaginative, adaptive leaders and units.[90]

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[88] Iraqi Ground Forces, 2006, p. 5.

[89] Iraqi Ground Forces, 2006, p. 9.

[90] Iraqi Ground Forces, 2006, p. 18.

This was an optimistic document when written, but it accurately identified the existing challenges and sought to correct them: The Iraqi Army was too rigid, so it should be trained for greater adaptability and more distributed operations. This manual could be read in one of two ways: (1) It was overly optimistic and it should have focused more on basic competence within the top-down system that existed, or (2) it set difficult, long-term standards that might have never been fully met, but were necessary and worthwhile. In any event, only uneven basic competence was achieved.

Official Observations of the Iraqi Army from 2004–2011: Limited Progress from a Slow Start

Mandated reports to Congress from the U.S. Department of Defense generally consisted of statistics and basic data on the Iraqi military. Some reports briefly noted gaps in capability, focusing on the lack of support structure and institutional capacity. A review of a sample of reports from 2006 through 2010 revealed no focus on the human aspects relevant to the Iraqi Army's development or will to fight.[91] There were no mentions of morale, cohesion, or will to fight in relation to the Iraqi Army. Official observation reports from inside Iraq were more direct and more human-centric. They build on the narratives from the advisor interviews.

Soldier quality was an issue rarely addressed in top-level reporting. A U.S. Army sergeant major commented on Iraqi physical fitness in an official report from the Iraqi Non-Commissioned Officer Academy. He described one specific training period:

> During this period, 30 students failed the entrance requirements to the Iraqi NCO Academy due to their physical fitness [or their literacy rate] and were sent back to their parent unit. . . . The "Physical Fitness" portion [of the course] is a step-by-step process to build up the Iraqi soldier's stamina and fitness level. The cadre and students conducted a limited amount of physical fitness, conducting basic stretching exercises coupled with short runs and foot marches. Neither the cadre nor students that I observed appeared to be physically fit.[92]

His observations carried over to the general capabilities of the NCOs and their lack of authority and initiative. The sergeant major's comments closely mirror those of the advisor interviewees:

> I observed routinely that Iraqi NCOs became lethargic when one of their officers was in the area. The lack of leadership skills and ownership of the Iraqi NCO is disturbingly obvious. Iraqi NCOs will rarely take charge or initiative if their officers are around. The officer is the one who barks the orders and calls the shots, so to speak. . . . The Iraqi Army is a very officer-oriented organization.

This trend repeated in after-action reports and in subjective assessments. Here, a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel describes the cultural challenges inherent in the top-down Iraqi Army:

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[91] U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, reports to Congress in accordance with Section 9010 of Public Law 109-289, Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007, Washington, D.C., from November 2006, March 2007, September 2008, December 2009, and June 2010.

[92] Reinburg, undated, pp. 4–5.

> We have seen . . . a general resistance of the NCO ranks to take charge and a general tendency of the officers to do all of the yelling. This in spite of the role-modeling and instruction they witnessed or participated in for two months [in training]. It is likely we are asking too much for such a short time. . . . Mission command and mission orders are concepts are concepts completely alien to their style of leadership and even when taught are highly unlikely to be implemented.[93]

Unfortunately, there were few specific assessments of will to fight. These were mostly oblique references within larger reports. Indirectly, the observed lack of trust, adaptability, and initiative feeds the key finding in this report; see below.

Enduring Trend #1: Top-Down Control Stifles Junior Leadership, Adaptability, and Initiative

This is probably the single most consistent finding through all three cases. Cultural predisposition to patrimonial leadership and followership, personalist domination of subordinates, and centralized command and control left almost no room for responsibility, authority, initiative, adaptability, or growth at the junior leadership levels. The result was a rigidity that reduced the combat effectiveness of the Iraqi units. Lack of initiative and adaptability and the lack of confidence of junior leaders fed directly into individual soldier decisions to desert their units. It often left entire Army units sitting still, lethargically anticipating orders from very senior officers that might or might not arrive.

There are two sides to this trend, and one suggests opportunity. Top-down control is stifling, and it sharply exacerbates the negative influence of bad leadership. However, it can also sharply accentuate the positive influence of good leadership. Each case—and this case in particular—showed that good, aggressive Iraqi leaders almost always had good, aggressive units. Near-complete dependence on leadership is dangerous, but perhaps there are ways to turn this cultural idiosyncrasy to an advantage.

Enduring Trend #2: Ethno-Sectarianism Was Not Debilitating

It would be a stretch to say that there were no ethno-sectarian issues in the Iraqi Army from 2004 to 2011. However, none of the advisors suggested these issues undermined will to fight or—with one or two exceptions—that they even significantly undermined unit cohesion. In general, it can be said that ethno-sectarian identity issues did not undercut Iraqi Army will to fight. Given the same trend in the previous cases, this is a clear refutation of primordialism as a useful lens for assessing the Iraqi Army's combat effectiveness.

Enduring Trend #3: Iraqi Soldiers Can Be Trained, and They Fight Hard

Several advisors complained about poor marksmanship and lethargy at the junior soldier level, but for the most part Iraqi soldiers performed ably at the tactical level. Iraqi soldiers fought bravely and hard in almost every instance of combat referred to by the advisors. This is also consistent with the previous cases: In general, Iraqis are fairly tough. Desertion took place primarily when the soldiers were on leave and, in one complicated case, en masse during combat.[94] For security force assistance, this is a force that has the basic ability to fight.

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[93] Blaise Cornell-d'Echert, 2003, p. 2.

[94] The case of the New Iraqi Army unit that dissolved on contact en route to Fallujah in 2004 was prominent in several interviews. At the time it happened, it appeared to observers that the Iraqis had broken and could not—or would not—fight. But several of the advisors were present for the events before, during, and after this incident. Without recounting the

Enduring Trend #4: Special Soldiers Leave Behind Lots of Not-So-Special Soldiers

Iraqi leaders continued to separate their best soldiers to form ad hoc units for high-pressure missions and combat. In the 2004–2011 period, it was clear from the interviews that a primary motivator was the desire to avoid embarrassment: Commanders did not want to trust questionable units with high-visibility operations, so they simply formed the best possible units from the soldiers they had on hand. There was also a predilection to form "commando" units within otherwise regular infantry organizations. This worked well for the generally low-tempo combat operations in counterinsurgency, but it left behind average and below-average forces with lessened competence and esprit de corps. Generating an unbalanced force was expedient, but it is a trend that carries over into 2021 and continues to undermine the overall health and combat effectiveness of the force.

Inconsistent Trend #1: Corruption Undermined Will to Fight

During the Iran-Iraq War, senior Iraqi Army leaders worked hard to reduce corruption across the army. By 1988, the Iraqis could rightly pride themselves on having controlled corruption and reduced its impact on combat effectiveness. Corruption was not a major factor in the 1991 Gulf War case. Sanctions in the post-1991 period did, however, make corruption relevant for the 2003 invasion and also for the 2004–2011 advisory period. But, as some of the advisors made clear, good leaders did their best to work through issues of poor organizational and state integrity. Even omnipresent corruption had mixed impact on will to fight. The Iraqi Army has been culturally inclined to reduce corruption in the past, and it can probably be so inclined in the future.

Inconsistent Trend #2: Pay Was a Primary Motivator for Service

From 2004 through at least 2007, pay appeared to be a primary motivator for service in the Iraqi Army. Fewer comments about pay emerged after 2007, but it is not clear whether the trend changed. What is clear is that pay was one of many motivators during the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf War, but that it was not dominant. Nationalism and desperation took on greater importance toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and various factors, including organizational esprit de corps, motivated soldiers to serve during the Gulf War. Pay mattered from 2004 through 2011, and it might matter as much in 2021, but it does not have to be the primary motivator for service going forward. See Chapter Six.

Inconsistent Trend #3: Advising Created Inescapable Dependency

From its inception in the early 1920s through the late 1940s, the Iraqi Army was heavily dependent on the British Army. Even after the British faded from Iraq, other advisors stepped in. There has always been some mixture of foreign influence and support. But foreign support ebbed from 1979 through 2003. Iraq could claim that its army was mostly independent through the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the 2003 coalition invasion. By destroying the Iraqi Army, disbanding its formations, and then rebuilding it from scratch, the United States generated purpose-built dependency that it simultaneously—and arguably, counterintuitively—sought to reduce.

By the time the United States military withdrew from Iraq in late 2011, it had established a veneer of independence. It will never be known how much lingering dependency fed into the

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entire narrative here, it is sufficient to say that the reasons for the en masse collapse are more complicated than they appear on the surface. Also, this was a New Iraqi Army unit and not an Iraqi Army unit.

2014 collapse, but it is plain that in 2020 much of the original advisor period dependency had been reestablished. This is an ebb-and-flow factor that must be addressed, but should not be assumed as, an omnipresent hurdle to independent—or at least semi-independent—combat effectiveness.

Using This Assessment to Help Improve the Iraqi Army

As this report went to publication, in mid-2021, the United States had a few thousand advisors in Iraq providing direct support to the Iraqi Army. American policymakers might decide to reduce or completely remove this force. If that happens, this report can inform other American security force assistance missions. If the U.S. military continues to support the development of the Iraqi Army, this report can help to tailor investments and to better forecast requirements and timelines for the constant push for independent operations.

This chapter extends beyond the cases and provides some insight into the current situation in Iraq circa mid-2021. Findings and recommendations to help improve security force assistance in Iraq follow.

Questions for the Future of the Iraqi Army

With the Islamic State currently broken and scattered, there may be a sense that the Iraqi Army is prepared to stand on its own. This is an enticing but dangerous thought. First, the Islamic State is broken but not dead. In mid-February 2020, the Prime Minister and security chief of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq noted that the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, did not portend the group's comprehensive defeat. Barzani stated "His killing has not weakened the ability of ISIS to operate. They have not stopped recruiting more people, they have not stopped attacking."[1] Almost total failure to address the underlying issues that gave rise to Sunni extremism in Iraq portends a potential resurgence. The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) poses a direct challenge to the role of the Iraqi Army as the primary security organization of the state. After several years of intensive combat, Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) has proven its worth but is insufficient, in terms of numbers and broader combat capability, to secure all of Iraq. Regular units have shown basic competence, but their ability to operate independently under national command—and without direct American support—is unproven.

How long, then, will American security force assistance advisors have to stay in Iraq? What level of commitment will be required over time, and how should it be ramped down? Will there ever be a point at which the Iraqi Army can again operate independently, or has the United States created permanent dependency? What advantages and disadvantages are there to staying? In any event, if the United States does continue to support the Iraqi Army, how can

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[1] Loveday Morris and Louisa Loveluck, "Killing of ISIS Leader Has Not Hurt Group's Operations, says Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2020. *ISIS*, which stands for *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria*, is one of several common acronyms for the Islamic State.

it improve the Army's will to fight and overall combat effectiveness? The findings and recommendations that follow seek to help answer these questions.

Findings on Iraqi Army Will to Fight

These findings are derived from the three cases above and from all the literature cited throughout the report. Some provide important cultural insights to inform current planning, while others are immediately practical. Some offer opportunity, while others suggest refinements in security force assistance investment.

Key Finding: The Iraqi Army Is Brittle

Many Iraqi soldiers are brave and many have demonstrated professional military competence. Since 1980, quite a few Iraqi units have fought hard and won in combat. When many factors in the RAND will-to-fight model align in a unit's favor—and when very few are lined up against it—Iraqi units can and do fight competently. But far too often, Iraqis desert, or their units break en masse. Desertions typically occur out of combat and over time. Collapse during combat occurs quickly and has immediate and catastrophic results. In many cases from 1980 through the 2000s, regular Iraqi Army will to fight has shattered with surprising rapidity as fully armed units in solid combat formation collapsed. In almost every case, the units that have broken were fatigued. They may have been uncertain of their mission and the national strategy for victory. They were on the defensive, and their tactical position was tenuous. They felt isolated. Adversary units had caught them by surprise and, in many cases, enveloped them from unexpected directions. Help was not on its way or was not immediately obvious to the soldiers on the front line. Other factors in the RAND will-to-fight model were aligned in their favor, but some critical threshold had been crossed, and the unit could no longer carry on.

No Single-Factor Explanation

It was impossible to isolate and identify a single factor that determined whether an Iraqi Army unit would fight or not fight. Clearly it was not cohesion, since cohesion cut both ways— a cohesive unit could be one in which soldiers fought together but also broke together. Leadership mattered a great deal, but even units with excellent leadership broke. This was true of the Iraqi Army 3rd Armored Division in 1981 and 1982. Material support mattered but was not clearly decisive. Belief in the national strategy and the mission were quite important as well, but units evincing strong identity with the national objectives still broke and ran as late as 1986 in the Iran-Iraq War.

Brittleness as a Cultural Phenomenon

If no single factor from the RAND will-to-fight model can be isolated as causative, how can Iraqi Army will to fight be understood? Based on the analysis in this report, it seems clear that brittleness is a collective cultural phenomenon in the Iraqi Army.

Brittleness is the result of the holistic accumulation of cultural factors that dominate this report. Patrimonialism contributes to generate a system of top-down control. Top-down control contributes to a vacuum of leadership and decisionmaking at the bottom. Soldiers and junior leaders come to depend almost completely on the presence, decisionmaking, and competence of their leaders. Whether or not the individual soldiers are culturally attuned to be

adaptable in the Iraqi school system, they are sharply discouraged from adapting within the confines of the army.

Lack of adaptability makes Iraqi Army soldiers exceptionally vulnerable to unexpected change, and particularly to unexpected threats. Expectation—the one factor that did not appear in the will-to-fight literature—*may* be the most important factor in Iraqi Army will to fight.

Brittleness in the Defense

Two phenomena occur as a result of Iraqi Army brittleness, one in the defense and one in the offense. While it is impossible to know what the exact thought patterns of any individual Iraqi soldier in any battle, previous battle histories and personal descriptions of defensive combat—including those by Iraqis, cited in this report—allow for a general description of the process that likely occurred at the Battle of Abadan in 1981, in the oilfields of Kuwait in 1991, and in the battles south and east of Baghdad in 2003.[2] This interpretive description is reinforced by my direct observation of Iraqi soldiers fighting, and then fleeing and surrendering, in the 1991 Gulf War and in the 2003 invasion.

When Iraqi soldiers sat in the defense awaiting an attack, their sheer lack of situational awareness began to gnaw at them. Fatigue, darkness, and an aggressive adversary compounded their fear. Soldiers at the lowest levels took on a pod mentality in the absence of strong junior leadership. In a Western army, strong junior leaders would have worked to keep the soldiers tuned in and focused on the mission and constantly aware of their responsibilities. That junior leadership was absent in the Iraqi Army, or at the very least the junior leaders were unprepared to generate will to fight.

Together in the dark, but isolated from other units and their senior commanders, soldiers began to take on a wait-and-see mentality. Cohesion became a factor for collective preservation rather than a contributing factor toward the disposition to fight. Confidence in individual and collective training, esprit de corps, logistics support, corruption, societal support for the war, the quality of the soldiers' weapons, and the availability of food and water were all meaningful contributing factors as the soldiers found themselves in a terrifying situation that demanded adaptation and required strong junior leadership. When the adversary's trap was sprung, the soldiers realize that their commanders have allowed them to be surprised and surrounded. They made a collective decision to break.

Brittleness in the Attack

Something similar probably happened in the cases where Iraqi soldiers refused to attack. However, these decisions appeared to be far more logical and practical than panicky. The case of the New Iraqi Army at the battle of Fallujah in 2004 is instructive. At least one battalion fell apart when it was ambushed en route to Fallujah. After that battalion broke, another battalion was formed up at the Taji airfield to conduct an air movement to the city.[3] The Iraqis had never been aboard helicopters before. It was nighttime, and the city of Fallujah had taken on a terrifying reputation. Soldiers refused to board the helicopters and went back to their barracks. Several hundred soldiers deserted that night. They refused to fight, act, or persevere because—in the words of the advisors with direct observation of the events—they were asked to do two

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[2] Considerable citation on this subject can be found in Connable et al., 2018. Also specifically see Watson, 1997.

[3] CALL interviews 8 and 15.

things they had not specifically prepared to do: board helicopters and attack an Iraqi city. A top-down order was refused in great part because it did not align with expectations.

Brittleness and Expectation

Expectation is one of 29 factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. If one were forced to deliver a formula for brittleness, it would be

Expectation x [the other 28 factors in the RAND will-to-fight model].

This is a conceptual formula, not a practical, computational formula. But it helps emphasize the value of expectation *and* the collective value of all 28 other factors in the will-to-fight model. Iraqi culture does not effectively prepare Iraqis for uncertainty and psychological resilience. When their expectations for combat are met, they generally perform well. When their expectations for combat are unmet—and particularly when they are unmet in poor conditions—they often break. All the other factors influence this decision point in different ways in different situations.

Figure 6.1 shows this conceptual integration of the 28 factors and expectation. The 28 factors form the general disposition to fight. Expectations are set for the battlefield situation. Contextual factors, such as weather, terrain, fatigue, adversary performance, and messaging, combine to test Iraqi Army disposition to fight and expectations. Iraqi soldiers then make decisions to fight, act, persevere, or perform some action that undermines the mission.

Figure 6.1
Factors, Disposition to Fight, Expectation, and Combat Decisions
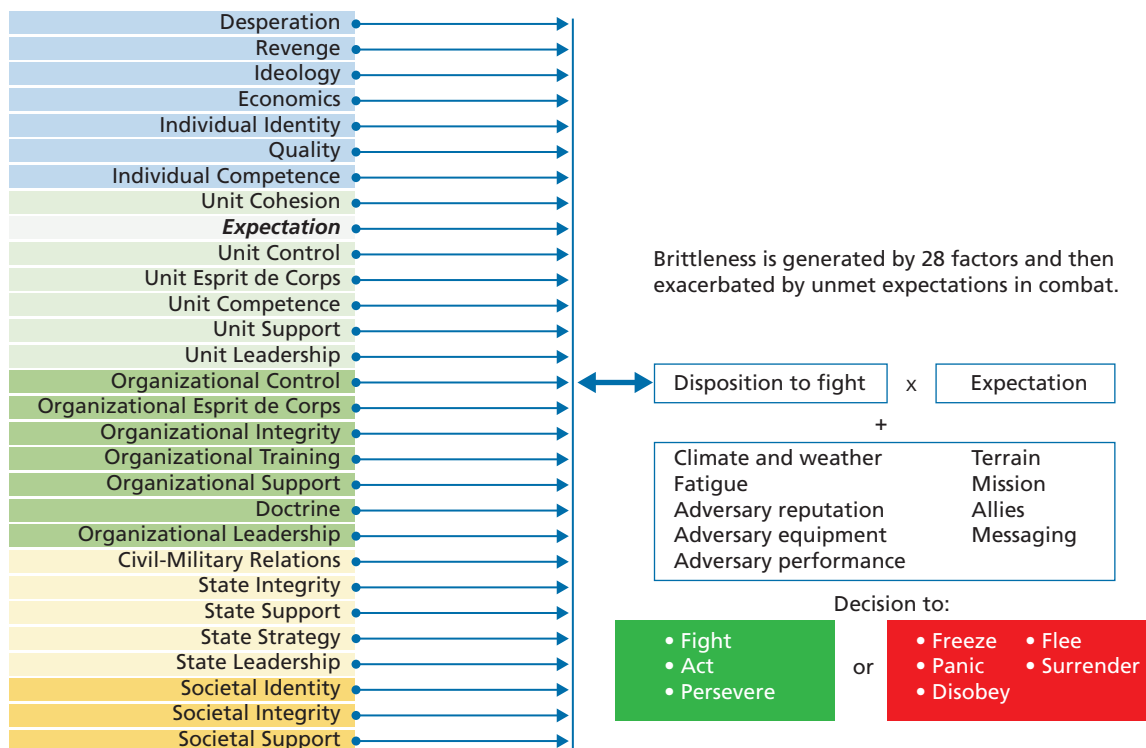
Brittleness: So What?

What does this mean for security force assistance? It suggests both a limitation and an opportunity. Until something changes, Iraqi Army units should not be put into situations that require significant amounts of adaptability and resilience. Units will be particularly vulnerable in the defense when they are isolated from other units and from senior commanders. As tempting as it might be to send Iraqi Army units out into the hinterlands to conducted distributed operations in dangerous conditions, that approach carries the greatest inherent risk of failure absent dedicated coalition intelligence, aviation, medical, and other support.

Opportunity also presents itself. Security force assistance cannot completely change Iraqi culture, or the culture of the army, but it can help to mitigate for existing cultural challenges. The section on recommendations, below, proposes some approaches.

What About the Other Factors?

Understanding will to fight requires a holistic assessment of all 29 factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. Expectation is important, but this one factor alone does not—and *cannot*—explain Iraqi will to fight. It matters quite a bit in most cases, but any single factor can take on different meaning in different situations. In some cases during the Iran-Iraq War, desperation may have been the most important factor. RAND interviews with Iraqi general officers showed that, by 2003, almost total loss of trust in Saddam Hussein (state leadership factor) severely undercut Iraqi Army will to fight. In 2014, poor organizational leadership seems to have been a dominant factor in the Army's collapse. A central argument in RAND's work on will to fight is that reductionism is counterproductive. Anyone seeking to understand will to fight will have to accept complexity and reject the temptation of simple answers.

Iraqis Can Learn and Fight, But Long-Term Support is Probably Necessary

Many Iraqi Army soldiers have deserted, broken, or surrendered to adversary forces over the past century. But combat records show that when they are placed in straightforward, head-to-head combat, the average Iraqi is personally courageous. Iraqis accept casualties when the will-to-fight factors are aligned in their favor. Moreover, although the average Iraqi may suffer from poor literacy and a lack of basic mechanical capability, advisors and Iraqi leaders have repeatedly proven that Iraqis can be trained to fight as a modern combat force.

However, the degree to which the Iraqi Army will be able to operate independently to secure Iraq's borders and population is another matter. The Iraqi Army has never been tremendously successful against internal, regional, or global adversaries. It has always relied on external financial, training, leadership, and materiel support to some degree. Previous evidence of Iraqi Army success with external support shows that security force assistance in Iraq can be productive. Progress can be made. But while the Iraqi Army can certainly improve both its will to fight and overall combat effectiveness, it will probably remain dependent on external support for many years.

Imbalance Between Special and Not-So-Special Units Undermines Army Will to Fight

Praetorianism, personalist leadership, and the fear of failure appear to drive Iraqi Army leaders to organize and rely on special units to fight their wars. The immediate practicality of this approach is outweighed by its prospective costs.

Averaging combat effectiveness is probably not a good way to assess an Army's capabilities, but it is a useful exercise here. One expert division of fewer than 10,000 soldiers does not

balance out the inexpert qualities and poor will to fight of the remaining 190,000 soldiers. There cannot be a Golden Division sitting in every Iraqi city ready to fight off the next version of the Islamic State. The competence caste system that has existed and exists today in the Iraqi Army undercuts the disposition to fight of all nonspecial units. It reduces the overall combat effectiveness of the Iraqi Army and increases the likelihood of strategic failure in the future.

Cohesion Can Undermine Iraqi Army Will to Fight

Iraqi culture can help to generate strong social bonds at the soldier level. These horizontal bonds are almost always stronger than the vertical bonds formed between the soldiers and their leaders, particularly at the junior officer and NCO levels. Soldiers are more likely to associate leadership with their battalion commander than their platoon commander, but a battalion commander cannot be everywhere at once. When the chips are down, horizontal social and task cohesion are as likely to generate group collapse as they are to generate will to fight.

Staff Planning and Combined Arms Operations Are Possible

Recent advisor experience suggests that Iraqi officers are poor and inattentive planners, and that they are generally incapable of coordinating combined-arms operations. This may be true of the Iraqi Army in the post-2003 period, but it certainly was not true of the Iraqi Army in the later parts of the Iran-Iraq War. There is no inherent cultural barrier to Iraqi staff and operational competence. American military leaders should frequently remind themselves that in its current incarnation the Iraqi Army is approximately 16 years old and that it was designed to fight a counterinsurgency. Perceived limits should be reassessed.

Individual Courage Is a Useful Cultural Value and Narrative

Iraqi culture places great value on individual courage, and particularly on displays of courage. The outcome of combat is perceived in some cases as less important than the performance of combat. There is opportunity here. Like most other young men around the world, young Iraqi men want to prove themselves. Many of those who joined the army want to prove themselves in combat. Individual will to fight is there and it can be harnessed. See recommendations, below.

Top-Down Control Should Be Gradually Modified over Time

The phenomenon of lieutenant colonels directing fireteams—see any video of the Golden Division in action in Iraq—is not going away soon. Top-down control is a deep cultural phenomenon in Iraq, and particularly in the Iraqi Army. However, culture is dynamic. Many of the younger officers and NCOs in the Iraqi Army are hungry for opportunities to lead. They are also increasingly capable, and in many cases better educated than many of the former regime officers who are gradually retiring. Any effort to develop effective junior leadership in the Iraqi Army will be a very long-term effort, but it will not necessarily be a wasted effort. Developing junior leadership will go a long way toward reducing brittleness.

Ethnicity and Sectarianism Generally Do Not Undermine Iraqi Army Will to Fight

Iraq is a heterogenous society made up of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Assyrians; Sunni and Shi'a Muslims; Christians, Yazidis, and Zoroastrians; and others. These different identities have undermined Iraqi unity in various ways during various periods in Iraqi history. Differences have created friction within the Iraqi Army and have sometimes undermined unit-level

cohesion. However, no Iraqi has a singular identity. The history of the Iraqi Army shows clearly that ethno-sectarianism rarely predominated and never led to a general breakdown of military order. Neither sectarianism nor ethnicity are primary drivers of Iraqi will to fight, or lack thereof.

Iraqi Nationalism Is Real but Requires Constant Reinforcement to Enhance Will to Fight

Many critics of the various coalition operations in Iraq argue that Iraqi nationalism is a 20th century fabrication and that it is practically useless as a unifying identity for the heterogenous Iraqi population. It is true that the post-Ottoman Iraqi state did not exist until the 1920s. It may or may not be accurate to describe post-Ottoman Iraqi nationalism as a fabricated identity. But even if one believes that Iraqi nationalism is fabricated—that it does not emerge naturally from such a seemingly fragmented society—it is incorrect to assume that Iraqi nationalism is a *useless* fabrication.

Whether it is fabricated or organic, Iraqi nationalism is real and it is a useful motivator for Iraqi Army recruiting and will to fight. Saddam Hussein used every means at his disposal to build and shape Iraqi nationalism to successfully motivate Iraqis to fight during the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout post-colonial Iraqi history—and particularly in the modern era—nationalism has been generated and used to ramp up military recruiting, to reduce ethno-sectarian discord, to motivate individual soldiers, and to help improve unit will to fight. Contemporary Iraqi leaders recognize the value of nationalism and seek to leverage it to build national unity and to support military operations. National identity and nationalist ideology present opportunities to enhance Iraqi Army will to fight.

Recommendations for Security Force Assistance in Iraq

> Armies do not win wars by means of a few super-soldiers, but by the average quality of their standard units.

> —Field Marshal William Slim, 1956[4]

These recommendations are designed to inform both security force assistance policy and advisor actions in Iraq. They are predicated on the assumption that the United States and its allies will continue to invest in the development of the Iraqi Army over time. There are trade-offs between long-term presence and dependency. This is unavoidable. Continual reassessment of objectives, investments, and progress will be needed to fine-tune implementation over time.

Balance the Force to Improve Will to Fight and Combat Effectiveness

Regular Iraqi Army units often have poor disposition to fight because of the current imbalance in manpower quality, resources, and training across the ISF. Golden Division recruiters and PMF leaders hoard capabilities that should be divided more equally across the force. Now that the Islamic State is reduced to guerrilla attacks, U.S. Army leaders should refocus assistance

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[4]   William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, London, UK: Cassell, 1956, p. 547.

toward the Iraqi Army, Federal Police, and local police.[5] CTS can then return to smaller-scale counterterrorism operations. As of mid-2021, the PMF pose a special and separate challenge to American policy and security force effectiveness; recommendations for addressing the PMF fall outside the bounds of this report.

Train Up and Down to Improve Junior Leadership and Unit Flexibility
Training junior leaders should continue apace, even if the results are frustratingly limited and slow. Reinforcing total dependence on competent senior leadership will simply exacerbate the Iraqi Army's vulnerability to politicization and individual incompetence. Junior leaders should be trained to assume increasing levels of authority and responsibility, even if neither is immediately forthcoming. Simultaneously, mid-level leaders should be educated and trained to supervise junior leaders. This will also be a gradual, frustrating process, but it is a reasonable objective short of expecting decentralized operations. Getting a battalion commander to supervise a captain or lieutenant will help improve unit adaptability and reduce brittleness.

Expand Efforts to Build Iraqi Nationalism as an Organizing Ideology and Identity
Security force assistance programs should be examined to identify ways they can help support both civil and military education in national identity, and to explicitly reinforce national identity in military training, ceremonies, and cultural activities. Some approaches include, but are not limited to, increased display of the Iraqi national flag, including increasing integration of the flag and its colors into Army imagery; increasing the amount of time dedicated to teaching national identity in military classes; production of literature and videos that reinforce national identity and, where appropriate, nationalist ideology; and instituting policies designed to minimize ethno-sectarian favoritism within the Ministry of Defense and the Army. National leaders, Ministry of Defense leaders, and Iraqi Army leaders are already applying many of these approaches, so improvement may just require additional resources and reinforcement.

Developing national identity and nationalist ideology are related but practicably distinct efforts. A unifying identity is generally useful, but it has a few obvious drawbacks. While it can be a powerful motivator for will to fight, a unifying national identity can also unintentionally reinforce extreme beliefs and behaviors. Coalition support to Iraqi efforts to build nationalism should be carefully considered and applied.

Critics of continued American engagement efforts in Iraq might question the feasibility of this recommendation. Several well-informed experts believe that the United States should withdraw from the Middle East.[6] Some experts specifically believe that Iraqi nationalism is a 20th century fabrication that has no basis in the ground truth of what they perceive to be a

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[5]   Also see recommendations in David M. Witty's October 2018 report on CTS: David M. Witty, *Iraq's Post-2014 Counter Terrorism Service*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 2018.

[6]   Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, "America's Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019. A preview of these painful and ugly consequences was had in Syria in October 2019; Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War For The Greater Middle East: A Military History*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2016; Mohammed Ayoob, "It's Time for America to Disengage from the Middle East," *The National Interest*, June 30, 2016; Jeffrey D. Sachs, "US Military Should Get Out of the Middle East," *Boston Globe*, April 2, 2017; Toby C. Jones, "Don't Stop at Iraq: Why the U.S. Should Withdraw from the Entire Persian Gulf," *The Atlantic*, December 22, 2011; and Emma Ashford, "Unbalanced: Rethinking America's Commitment to the Middle East," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2018, pp. 127–148.

primordial ethno-sectarian conflict.[7] However, the analysis in this report, as well as the cited RAND reports on Iraq policy, show that Iraqi nationalism is real, viable, and practical when properly reinforced with thoughtful policy initiatives.[8]

Country-wide protests in Iraq between October and November of 2019—ongoing as of the drafting of this report—center on the desire of young Iraqis to jettison ethno-sectarian identities and to create a viable sense of national unity across Iraq. The regular Iraqi Army recruits heavily from this age cohort, and eventually some of these young Iraqis will be the leaders of the regular army. Efforts to leverage nationalism in the regular army will be all the more effective if the emerging army leaders believe in a heterogenous, unified Iraqi state.

Keep the Troops Informed

Brittleness appears to be reinforced by a lack of situational awareness. Surprise can be sharply exacerbated when soldiers do not have any cognizance of the tactical situation, and Iraqi Army units are particularly vulnerable to surprise. Keeping troops informed of the evolving combat situation is a general military principle applied by many Western forces. It would be particularly useful for building and sustaining Iraqi Army will to fight by increasing the confidence of individual soldiers and reducing collective fear. Advisors should work to incorporate situational awareness into training and into operations.

Practice Adaptability and Resilience

Adaptability and personal resilience are often lacking in the Iraqi Army, but they are both qualities that can be improved upon. Although it is difficult to do so, adaptability can be trained. Training programs should routinely incorporate reactions to unexpected situations, and advisors should mentor for adaptability. Chapter Five of this report cites a 2006 Iraqi Army training manual—drafted by advisors—that emphasizes adaptability as a central objective of Iraqi Army training. That manual can and should serve as a continuing guide for current training programs. Iraqi officers should be educated in both adaptability and resilience concepts and provided with the technical means to train their soldiers. Resilience can be similarly developed by routinely placing soldiers in unexpected positions and allowing them to react in a safe environment.

Operate with Constant Mutual Support

Iraqi commanders should avoid placing their regular army units in isolated defensive positions and should work constantly to assure that their units are mutually supported. Distributed operations, including checkpoint operations, should be avoided at all costs. Night combat positions should be established only with mutually supporting physical connectivity to adjacent units, interlocking fires, and continuous intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance for situational awareness.

Expect Long-Term Dependency and Use It to Advantage

Given that in its current incarnation the Iraqi Army is relatively new, and given that it has effectively been rebuilt after its will to fight collapsed, American policymakers should assume

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[7]   See Chapter Two for citation and analysis of this issue.

[8]   Connable, 2016, 2017.

that the Iraqi Army will remain dependent on American support for many years, and perhaps decades. Setting expectations for long-term security force assistance in Iraq is an important first step toward assessing requirements for advisors and materiel.

It is worth keeping in mind that the Army, CTS, and the small Iraqi Air Force and Navy are probably the only remaining institutions in the Iraqi government that are generally welcoming of American presence. It is the only organization that has built-in dependence on American support, and it is probably the best lever the United States has to influence events on the ground in Iraq. There is more opportunity than cost in the American relationship with the Iraqi Army.

Rebuild Regular Army Esprit de Corps and Emphasize Individual Courage

Before the Iran-Iraq War, regular units, such as the 3rd Armored Division, were considered the elite forces of the Iraqi Army. They had good, if sometimes embellished, reputations that gave soldiers confidence and improved their will to fight. By 1988, the Republican Guard had effectively appropriated the esprit de corps of the entire force. With some noted exceptions, regular units went into supporting roles. That legacy carries over today. Esprit de corps can be a strong reinforcing factor for will to fight. The lack of esprit de corps in regular units is telling in performance.

Ideally, units would build esprit de corps from successful combat experiences. In the absence of meaningful success, some creativity is required and appropriate. Most military units embellish their records to some extent. However, it is sufficient to find the heroes and dramatic battles in each unit's history and bring these to the fore. These can be found with some basic historical investigation, interviews, and records analysis. Iraqi soldiers joining every division should have many opportunities to know their units' histories. Money should be directly invested in memorials to fallen heroes; commemorations of key battles; detailed recounting of individual heroic acts; new unit ceremonies; and the creation of high-quality unit insignia, flags, and other unique markings.

This approach should be applied to the army at the organizational level as well. Iraqi leaders have already made progress here: Identity with the army has improved significantly since 2014. But much more can and should be done.

Why Not Invest Everything in Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service?

Given the brittleness and historically mixed performance of the regular Iraqi Army, a deeper investment in special Iraqi security services such as CTS might be more appealing than investing in the regular Iraqi Army.[9] CTS has certainly performed well in some cases. It represents the cream of the crop of Iraqi paramilitary leadership, and it fields the best equipment in the Iraqi security services. Iraqi leaders have previously considered plans to expand the CTS from approximately 20,000 personnel to approximately 40,000 personnel.[10] Given the exist-

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[9]   For more information on CTS, see Knights, 2015; Witty, 2018; David M. Witty, *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, undated; Michael Knights and Alex Mello, "The Best Thing America Built in Iraq: Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service and the Long War Against Militancy," *War on the Rocks*, July 19, 2017.

[10]   Witty, 2018, p. 64.

ing American relationship with CTS leadership, such an expansion would generate significant opportunities for American-led security force assistance investment.

However, this approach would reinforce the likelihood of a continual cycle of 2014-like collapses in the regular Iraqi Army, with similarly dangerous consequences for the Iraqi state. Focusing investment on CTS would effectively double down on the Iraqi predilection to concentrate talent and high-end materiel in specialized units at the expense of regular units. Even if Iraq were able to expand CTS to nearly 40,000 troops, this would be an insufficient force to defend the nearly 440,000 square kilometers of Iraq's interior, its nearly 4,000-kilometer border, or its nearly 40 million people.[11] Many critical parts of Iraq would inevitably have to be secured by ISF deprived of even more human capital and high-quality equipment. Iraq needs sufficient mass of at least reasonably competent forces to reach what the Operation New Dawn staff described in 2010 as minimum essential capability to defend the state from internal and external threats.

Refashioning CTS as the premier, go-to ground combat arm of the Iraqi state would represent a potentially dangerous step for the future integrity and stability of the Iraqi state. Iraq's Golden Division and its peer and subordinate units are not part of the Iraqi Army. They instead constitute a separate security service that reports directly to Iraqi national leadership, bypassing the Minister of Defense and the Minister of the Interior. Iraq has all-too-recent experience with paramilitary force abuses.[12] While CTS presently has solid combat record, and while its current personnel appear to behave with mostly high ethical and moral standards, future behavior cannot be guaranteed.[13] In a country historically wracked by coups, and currently struggling to build democratic institutions and to maintain a monopoly over the use of force, the empowerment of an elite, black-clad paramilitary force responsible only to the state's leader would arguably represent retrenchment rather than progress.[14]

Placing a preponderance of Iraqi and international investment into CTS would also endanger CTS. David Witty, one of the foremost experts on CTS, made this argument in his 2018 paper on the subject.[15] While the current surface-level narrative of CTS performance against the Islamic State is one of unmarred performance, courage, and exceptional competence, the organization has had taken extraordinarily high casualties. The force is designed from the ground up for counterterror activities, such as high-value target acquisition, kill, or capture. In

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[11]   Area measurements are drawn from the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook's Iraq page (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Iraq, webpage, undated, accessed August 22, 2019). The precise numbers are 438,317 square kilometers; 3,809 kilometers; 1,599 kilometers; and 599 kilometers. The population estimate is also drawn from the CIA World Factbook. Previous RAND research shows that there are no contemporary, accurate counts or estimates of Iraq's population. See Robinson et al., 2018, Chapter Three.

[12]   See Paul S. Fredericksen, Emily J. Fall, and Patrick B. Baetjer, *Iraqi Security and Military Force Developments: A Chronology*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 26, 2006; Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 26, 2006; Kirk Semple, "Basra Raid Finds Dozens Detained by Iraq Spy Unit," *New York Times*, March 5, 2007; et al.

[13]   For a reported exception, see Ned Parker, Ahmed Rasheed, and Suadad Al-Salhy, "Special Report: Iraqi Forces, Images Testify to Atrocities in New Fighting," Reuters, March 20, 2014.

[14]   CTS is only one of many competing security services in Iraq. This report does not focus on the challenges of the PMF; a forthcoming RAND report will address that subject. CTS prides itself on its black uniforms and black equipment. Black is traditionally the color preferred by elite Western counterterror units. Black uniforms also separate CTS from the traditional armed forces, unhelpfully suggesting an elite praetorian guard rather than a tactical combat organization.

[15]   Witty, 2018.

the past several years, it has had to reshape itself into a ground combat force. Officers trained for a full year by Iraq's best organizational training teams are tasked with missions typically given to junior regular army officers. Soldiers with six months of intensive training are put on sentry duty typically assigned to the lowest-level *jundi*, or soldier in the regular army.[16] Far too many of these elite, exquisitely expensive counterterror experts have been maimed or killed doing jobs more suitable to regular infantry combat units.

Finally, focused investment on CTS or similar units would have a high likelihood of further weakening the regular army. Arguably, this dynamic already exists, with CTS recruiters skimming away some of the best candidates for both officer and enlisted positions.[17] Expanding CTS—a prerequisite for using it to solve the country's security challenges—would exacerbate this dynamic. Army esprit de corps, already damaged by the 2014 collapse, would probably stagnate or even degrade over time. This report has already described the trends that occur in the regular army when it is relegated to dull, unglamorous security duties in remote parts of Iraq: Competence erodes, abuses increase, and brittleness worsens.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the Republican Guard Corps drew the attention of senior Iraqi leaders. It represented an aggregation of all that was good in Iraqi military capability, an approach to force development that came at the high cost of generating the flimsy regular divisions that later collapsed during the subsequent 1991 Gulf War. The Republican Guard was too small and too precious to defend Iraq's border against the coalition invasion in 1991, and also in 2003. Elitism in Iraq's security services has historically led to an abandonment of the periphery in favor of securing Baghdad with the only units that could be counted on to sustain will to fight. Security force advising and assistance can help the Iraqi government shift away from Iraq's praetorian past toward a more sustainable security future. Reasonable investment in CTS can be sustained while investment in Iraq's Army is accelerated and enhanced.

Using This Assessment to Improve Coalition Security Force Assistance Activities in Iraq

This assessment offers practical value for internal coalition security force assistance process to provide greater understanding of the security force to be assisted.

Improving Understanding of Iraqi Army Combat Effectiveness

Will to fight is one important component of combat effectiveness. The information and findings in this report can be combined with other data to generate an even more holistic assessment of Iraqi Army combat effectiveness. This can and should include the information that is already being collected on manpower, equipment, training, leadership development, and logistics capabilities.

Figure 6.2 depicts a broad conceptual approach to building a holistic combat effectiveness assessment from the RAND will-to-fight model and other sources of information. Will-to-fight factors should be aligned with sources of data and integrated with other, existing

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[16]   For more information on CTS training, see Witty, 2018; Witty, undated; and Shawn Snow, "Iraq's Elite Counter-Terrorism Force Looks to Rebuild After Mosul," *Military Times*, August 11, 2017. See Witty, 2018, for some of the assignment challenges.

[17]   This skimming was described to me by a senior Iraqi official in a discussion in Baghdad, Iraq, in 2016.

Figure 6.2
Recommended Approach to Integrate Combat Effectiveness Assessment

RAND Will-to-Fight Model

+ Integrate with:

- Training reports and milestones
- Equipment on-hand reporting
- Equipment combat effectiveness evaluations
- Weapons combat effectiveness evaluations
- Logistics support data-delivery statistics
- Personnel on-hand reporting
- Desertion rates and return-from-desertion rates
- Disciplinary statistics
- Combined-arms exercise evaluations
- Written testing results from promotion boards
- Force-on-force war game analyses
- Force-on-force simulation analyses
- Recruiting objectives and benchmarks
- Doctrinal review and evaluations
- Educational programs and graduation statistics
- Small unit training evaluations
- Non-commissioned office development evaluations
- Junior officer leadership evaluations
- Combat performance reviews
- **Combat results: Did they win? Why or why not?**

SOURCES: Connable et al., 2018; and multiple sources cited in this report.

assessments to generate a holistic understanding of the unit's combat effectiveness. Assessment should seek holistic integration to the greatest extent possible.

However, holism should not be equated with reductionism. At no point should the will-to-fight factors be averaged, or integrated with other combat effectiveness inputs and then averaged. Averaging is a sure way to bury critical information and to generate misleadingly precise results with false accuracy. All factors should be considered and then reconsidered over time. See Connable, 2012, for further discussion on the dangers of averaging in complex assessment.

Examples of additional sources of combat effectiveness information include training reports and milestones from organizational records; advisor observations and evaluations of combat-training exercises; logistical records; educational records; personnel reporting; equipment and weapons evaluations; war gaming and simulation; doctrinal reviews; junior leader development evaluations, and perhaps most importantly, combat evaluations. Did the unit succeed in combat? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Practical Application: Improving Conditions to Improve Will to Fight

Figure 6.3 depicts a range of possible actions that might be taken to improve the conditions associated with the factors in the RAND will-to-fight model. Of the 29 major factors, 22 provide immediate opportunities for influence. Primary recommendations were presented above. Additional possible approaches include the following:

- Given that nationalism is an important unifying ideology and identity for Iraq, and for army service, military education programs could be enhanced to increase Iraqi nationalism.
- All training, logistics, and leadership programs can be continually improved.
- Control—discipline—can be more clearly defined and regulated.
- Positive unit cohesion can be improved through increased emphasis on unit sporting events and other exercises familiar to Western military advisors.
- Advisors probably cannot directly influence desperation, revenge, most state-level factors, or any of the societal factors, but these should all be monitored.

Continually Reassess Iraqi Army Will to Fight

This report presents a baseline assessment of Iraqi Army will to fight. It can and should be continually improved upon. The will-to-fight model is amenable to modification: It is explanatory, exploratory, and portable, not fixed. Continual assessment will help keep assumptions and findings up to date and help to ensure that the American security force assistance in Iraq is optimized at all times.

Figure 6.3
Possible Actions to Improve Will-to-Fight Conditions

Condition	Action
Desperation	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
Revenge	
Ideology	Nationalism-patriotism education
Economics	Improved pay and benefits
Individual Identity	National identity education
Quality	Recruiting improvements, pre-training preparation
Individual Competence	Individual training improvements
Unit Cohesion	Task performance exercises and organized competitions
Expectation	Improved information flow to junior soldiers
Unit Control	Clear guidance from Army staff
Unit Esprit de Corps	Enhanced unit pride activities
Unit Competence	Continual improvement to unit training
Unit Support	Continual improvement to unit logistics
Unit Leadership	Training on and for junior leadership
Organizational Control	Clear guidance on disciplinary rules and measures
Organizational Esprit de Corps	Enhanced Army pride activities
Organizational Integrity	Command influence and inspector general actions
Organizational Training	Continual improvement to organizational training
Organizational Support	Continual improvement to organizational logistics
Doctrine	Formal periodic review of Army doctrine
Organizational Leadership	Continual improvement to leadership training
Civil-Military Relations	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
State Integrity	
State Support	Institutional improvements at Ministry of Defense
State Strategy	
State Leadership	
Societal Identity	*Monitor and seek opportunities to influence*
Societal Integrity	
Societal Support	

Abbreviations

CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CTS	Counter Terrorism Service
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
NCO	noncommissioned officer
PDF	Portable Document Format
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces

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Unless otherwise specifically noted, all declassified intelligence analysis reports cited in this report can be found using the search function on the Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room webpage at https://www.cia.gov. For reports in which intelligence report numbers (e.g., NESA 84-10027) have not been redacted, we have included the original intelligence report numbers to facilitate follow-on research.

Some of the reports listed in this reference section were not directly cited in the main body of the report. Of these, some are cited in the appendixes. Reports not directly cited are listed here as additional reference material for interested readers and scholars.

This report cites analysis of 120 Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) interview reports. These reports are unclassified and have unlimited distribution. However, they can only be obtained from CALL (https://usacac.army.mil/organizations/mccoe/call). Selected interviews are listed below under "Center for Army Lessons Learned."

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n summer 2014, less than three years after the United States withdrew its military forces from Iraq, the Iraqi Army imploded, breaking and scattering in the face of attacks from Islamic State fighters. A consensus emerged that the Iraqi Army collapsed because it had no will to fight. But *why* did the Iraqi Army lack will to fight? And, going forward, what can U.S. advisors do to help strengthen Iraqi Army will to fight and overall combat effectiveness?

In this report, Ben Connable applies RAND's analytic model of will to fight to the regular Iraqi Army, conducting three historical case studies: the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2004–2011 military advisory period. A main finding is that the Iraqi Army units tend to be *brittle*: They are capable of fighting effectively, but they are inflexible and break too easily. There is no single-factor explanation for this brittleness. Efforts to change it will need to focus on numerous underlying factors, and Connable provides specific recommendations for the U.S. security force assistance mission in Iraq.

This report also serves an example of how the RAND will-to-fight model, detailed in *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units* (Connable et al., 2018), can be tailored to specific cases and improved upon.

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