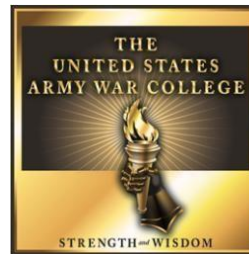


Rebuilding the Iraqi Army

by

Colonel William T. Nuckols Jr.
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United States Army War College
Class of 2015

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Abstract

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The Iraqi Army built by the United States from 2004 to 2012, at a cost of billions of dollars and thousands of service members lives' lost, has disintegrated under the onslaught of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS controls much of western Iraq, including its second largest city, Mosul. The Government of Iraq, with assistance from the U.S. and other allies, must build a small and professional Army. To re-establish a resilient and effective organization, the Iraqi Army (IA) must be massively reorganized and trained with an understanding that the effort will take years of persistent U.S. and allied presence. This has been proven to be effective in Columbia. The new IA will require long term U.S. (or NATO) advisors, to live with and train their Iraqi counterparts. Finally, the IA must be professionalized, with greater focus on selfless service and loyalty to the constitutionally appointed and elected leaders of Iraq. This will require a change in culture, which will include a level of accountability and discipline that has been generally absent from many of the members of the IA. This approach will also require a long term commitment from the United States, both in terms of military personnel and money.

Rebuilding the Iraqi Army

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.

—T. E. Lawrence¹

The Government of Iraq (GOI), with assistance from the United States and other allies, must build a small and professional Army. To establish a resilient and effective organization, the Iraqi Army must be reorganized and retrained with an understanding that the effort will take years of persistent U.S. and allied presence. This has been proven to be effective in Columbia. The new Iraqi Army will require long term U.S. (or NATO) advisors, to live with and train their Iraqi counterparts. Finally, the Iraqi Army must be professionalized, with greater focus on selfless service and loyalty to the constitutionally appointed and elected leaders of Iraq. This will require a change in culture, which includes a level of accountability and discipline that has been generally absent from many members of the Iraqi Army. This approach will also require a long term commitment from the United States, both in terms of military personnel and financing.

The Sectarian Divide

At the conclusion of the 2003 war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the United States made the fateful decision to completely disband the Iraqi security forces, effectively putting close to a half million militarily trained and unemployed men on the streets. On May 23, 2003, Mr. Paul Bremer, the Presidential Envoy to Iraq and head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, issued the order as a part of his de-Ba'athification agenda.² Astonishingly, the decision ran counter to the approved United States plan of using the

Iraqi military to secure and assist in rebuilding the country at the conclusion of hostilities.³ Mr. Bremer's policy also stripped Iraqi public service organizations of most of its bureaucrats and social services personnel. Removing security and social services from a society are two sure ways to create instability and set the conditions for insurgency.⁴

Disbanding the Iraqi military also served the purpose of getting rid of one of the only institutions in Iraq that served as a unifier of all Iraqis.⁵ Moreover, de-Ba'athification created the last necessary ingredient for an insurgency: a cause. Sunni disenfranchisement and neglect, coupled with the collapse in security and loss of public services, provided the spark that ignited sectarian violence and insurgency.⁶ It gave the Sunni population of Iraq a *cause*, one for which many of them were willing to fight and die.

The United States quickly found itself in a full-blown Iraqi insurgency and began the difficult task of building a new Iraqi Army from scratch, while simultaneously trying to defeat an insurgency and provide security to an occupied Iraq. From 2004 to 2012, the United States built the new Iraqi Army, at a cost of approximately 25 billion dollars and thousands of U.S. service member's lives.⁷ As recently as 2012, many U.S. military leaders believed that the mission to create a modern Iraqi military was a success. In 2011, LTG Michael Barbero, then the Commander of the NATO Training Mission – Iraq (NTM-I) and responsible for training Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), said “I see a force that is capable, that is out on the streets every day providing security. They are reliable. They are absolutely reliable. They are fearless.”⁸ LTG Barbero was not alone in his assessment.

Many in the U.S. military could clearly see the progress being made by the ISF, particularly the Iraqi Army. Another unnamed U.S. General Officer declared that many IA battalions were “as good as some American infantry battalions.”⁹ However, the ISF were created to combat a low grade insurgency, with the assumption of continued long term assistance from the United States.¹⁰ It was not prepared to deal with the battle hardened and ideologically driven forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Iraqi Army in 2011 clearly still had many deficiencies. The most obvious of these were a lack of national level logistical and intelligence capabilities.¹¹ Combined arms operations at any level were inadequate and organic fire support capability was nascent, with most artillery equipment being delivered to Iraqi units just prior to the United States departure in 2011.¹² However, poor personnel policies, cronyism and nepotism based on family and tribal relations, deep seated corruption, and misplaced loyalties all point to a lack of professionalism that outweighed any potential tactical skills and capabilities that the Iraqi Army possessed.

Mr. Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister (PM) from 2006 to 2014, built upon the de-Ba’athification foundation started by Mr. Bremer with years of his own anti-Sunni policies. It was only heavy United States political pressure that kept PM al-Maliki from going too far with his one-sided policies. When the United States and Iraq failed to agree to a new Status of Forces Agreement in 2011, the majority of the United States military was forced to depart Iraq.¹³ The exception was a very small Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) military advisory and training presence, which answers to the United States Ambassador to Iraq.¹⁴

The Iraqi military was essentially on its own, ready or not. Unsurprisingly, soon after the United States withdrawal, PM al-Maliki began to consolidate his grip on power, in a very sectarian way, arresting and intimidating his political rivals.¹⁵ Shia Iran and the Sunni Arab Gulf States continued their proxy war in Iraq.¹⁶ The pressure continued to build, resulting in a resurgent Al-Qaeda, supported by many of the Iraqi Sunni tribes, who were fed up with PM al-Maliki's policies and discriminatory actions.¹⁷ ISIS began taking western Iraqi territory, including Fallujah, in early 2014. Iraq futilely deployed its best units in an attempt to retake them.¹⁸ The conditions were almost perfect for ISIS to strike predominately Sunni Mosul when it did; ISIS timing and shaping operations were nearly flawless.¹⁹

In early June, 2014, ISIS took Mosul in a lightning strike. Four Iraqi Army Divisions disintegrated under the onslaught.²⁰ ISIS captured large amounts of IA equipment, including Iraqi military equipment provided by the United States.²¹ Photos and video of the U.S. equipment began to appear on social media and newscasts around the world, damaging the credibility and prestige of the United States. The Iraqi Army has reportedly lost almost half of the 140 M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tanks sold to them by the United States, most of them destroyed.²² ISIS now controls much of western Iraq, including its second largest city of Mosul, with a population of 1.5 million. How is it possible that an Islamic terrorist organization can so easily rout a substantial portion of a modern army trained by the greatest military in the world? The answer to this question will require the U.S. Army to figuratively look itself in the mirror and critically examine the assumptions and methodologies which underpinned the creation of the modern Iraqi Army.

A Long History of Sectarianism

Iraq is beset by a host of very serious issues and challenges that directly impact the ability of the Iraqi Army and other security forces to adequately perform their duties. Iraq is a country divided, with forces, both internal and external, seeking to tear it asunder. Iraqi's cultural heritage and religious undertones impact every aspect of society. Unemployment and an unequal distribution of oil income create conditions for criminal activity and further undermines rule of law and exacerbates a level of corruption that is one of the worst in the world.²³

Broadly speaking, three ethno-religious groups factor into the power and political struggles of Iraq. These are the minority Sunni, majority Shia, and minority Kurdish populations. The Sunni reside primarily in the north and west of Iraq and receive support and funding for anti-Shia/Iran activities from Arab Gulf States. Ironically, ISIS most likely has its origins from these same fund sources, created to fight a proxy war against Iran-backed Syria. The Sunni's have historically ruled Iraq and filled most senior government and military positions, in addition to many of the lower level bureaucratic civil service positions. This changed with the defeat of Iraq and Saddam Hussein in 2003, the subsequent De-Ba'athification initiatives of Mr. Bremer, and the election of the Shia PM al-Maliki in 2006.

The Shia were brutally suppressed by the Hussein regime. With the change in power from Sunni to Shia, many Shia welcomed the opportunity to even old scores. The sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia from 2004 to approximately 2008 was brutal. Whole neighborhoods were emptied, with extrajudicial killings, assassinations, and Sunni-Shia battles occurring daily in the streets of cities all over Iraq. Iran funneled money, resources, and some suspect even Quds Force fighters into Iraq to battle Sunni

militias and U.S. forces. This proxy war between Sunni and Shia is on-going and contributes greatly to the instability of Iraq and the region.

The Kurds are semi-autonomous and seek to become a separate country, independent from Arab Iraq. The Kurd's paramilitary force, the Peshmergha, fought against the Hussein regime with funding and support from the United States. Although primarily Sunni themselves, the Kurds were also brutally suppressed by Hussein. While the Kurdistan region is an island of relative stability in Iraq, and they tend to be friendly with both the U.S. and Iran, it is undeniable that the Kurds wish to be separate from Iraq, thus providing an additional source of instability for Iraqi sovereignty. An example of this schism in national unity was clearly seen in June 2013 when 1,000 career Kurdish Iraqi Army Soldiers defected to the Peshmergha rather than participate in an operation in an area claimed by both the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq.²⁴

Shame

The concept of "face", shame, and guilt are particularly powerful in Iraqi culture. Iraqis, and many Arab societies in general, are very reluctant to take any action which might fail if they are responsible in any way for the failure; their perceived failure causes them, and their family, shame and a loss of "face."²⁵ This obviously has a significant negative impact on initiative and risk taking, two key requirements for success on the modern battlefield.²⁶ This also stifles creativity, sharing of lessons learned, the concept of conducting after action reports (AAR), and constructive criticism such as that used by the U.S. Army for developmental counseling.

Information as Power

The holding, or withholding, of information is particularly acute in many Arab societies and cultures.²⁷ This phenomenon can be witnessed in many Arab armies, including the Iraqi Army, and manifests itself in ways that are baffling to Soldiers from western armies. A soldier or officer in an Arab army who attends a school for a particular skill will demonstrate his newfound ability, but will share the knowledge of how he does it only very reluctantly. This rather unique knowledge provides the soldier with a status and importance, which he will lose if others gain the same ability. Another striking example is that of an Arab army officer locking up technical manuals for military equipment, ensuring that he is the sole proprietor of the knowledge contained in the books.²⁸ U.S. and NATO military advisors witnessed similar events regularly in Iraq.²⁹ The effects of such behavior obviously inhibits any effort to create a professional army whose members are more concerned with the success and health of the bigger team than with themselves. This problem can manifest itself in many disruptive ways, including a reluctance to share lessons learned, and an unwillingness to train and mentor subordinates.

Family Primacy

Iraqi Arabs generally have a clearly defined hierarchy of loyalties.³⁰ This tendency has only been reinforced with the violence and destruction that has plagued Iraq for the last 11 years in particular, and since its inception as a nation in general. Iraqis place their families above all other considerations and concerns. Interaction with and care for families and extended families shape everyday life and are carefully considered in almost every decision made. This includes decisions on accepting bribes

and loyalty to nation. Accepting bribes is simply another way to further care for the requirements of family.³¹

Arab and Iraqi Military Culture

After the United States and NATO began the laborious task of creating a new Iraqi Army, many officers of the old Iraqi Army were given positions of leadership. This had the dual benefit of providing employment for those that might have otherwise pursued insurgent activity and of placing experienced, professional officers in positions to assist in the effort to build a new army. However, unforeseen and negative long-term impacts also resulted from this action. Officers in the old Iraqi Army rarely showed initiative, trust, or the willingness to delegate.

It did not pay to show initiative or assertiveness in Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army. Initiative, essential for a modern professional army today, is thus unfortunately lacking with most Iraqi officers. Lack of initiative is a deeply ingrained cultural issue with origins in Arab societal culture, but even more deeply ingrained by years of Saddam Hussein's ruthless and deadly punishment for many displays of initiative within his Iraqi Army.³²

Failure to delegate to subordinates is another characteristic often seen in the Iraqi Army.³³ It is based on a lack of trust and a fear that a subordinate will outshine a superior or even use their given authority to remove their superior by force. This trait is not seen as clearly in Arab countries that are more stable.³⁴ Leaders in stable Arab countries are less afraid to delegate authority to lower levels if they are less worried about threats to current organizational or political structures.³⁵ Delegation is key to decentralization, which generally fosters efficiency and effectiveness, and is a critical component of a modern army. An example of this can be seen in the difference between the quality of Egyptian officers and their peers in other Arab armies.³⁶

It is difficult for a modern army to be successful without initiative, trust, and delegation. Displaying these traits in the old Iraqi Army were dangerous. The senior officers of today's Iraqi Army were the junior officers of Saddam's Army, and they learned this lesson very well. Their lives, and the lives of their families, depended on it. With the premature departure of the United States from Iraq, the Iraqi Army has partially reverted back to its pre-U.S. cultural norms. It is now stuck halfway between the two.³⁷ This legacy also partially explains why the Iraqi army traditionally conducts little combined arms training, and conducts live fire training with ridiculously small amounts of allocated ammunition.³⁸ Leaders were fearful of subordinates who led competent combat formations and also possessed large amounts of ammunition.³⁹

The aforementioned cultural traits are being inculcated into new officers after graduation from the NATO-founded officer academies. It is possible to see this transformation occur over a few months' time after the arrival of a newly minted Iraqi Army 2LT to his first assignment. The new officer quickly learns not to show initiative and to do exactly as he is told, nothing more.⁴⁰ Because this is an Arab cultural trait at its core, made worse by years of Saddam's toxic leadership, it will be difficult to excise this trait without selectively pensioning the current batch of senior Iraqi officers in order to remove their negative influence. Even if this drastic action is taken, a change in military culture will likely be generational and will also require a resumption of durable U.S. or NATO training and advising programs.

Corruption

Unfortunately, Iraq suffers from one of the worst levels of corruption in the world. Transparency International ranked Iraq 169 out of 175 countries in terms of corruption.⁴¹ Nepotism and cronyism are common and occur throughout the Iraqi Government,

including in the Iraqi Army. This practice has led to the hiring of unqualified personnel to fill positions within the social services of the Iraqi Government, senior government finance, banking, electricity, and oil and gas sectors.⁴² However, the worst corruption reportedly occurs within the Iraqi defense and security ministries.⁴³ Prior to his departure, PM al-Maliki increasingly replaced senior officers with those loyal to him, but of dubious qualifications.⁴⁴ The PM was also responsible for the firing of competent Iraqi Army battalion and brigade commanders, simply because they were Sunni.⁴⁵

Assessing the New Iraqi Army

T. E. Lawrence's epigraph at the beginning of the paper became a central part of the U.S. Army counterinsurgency doctrine from 2004 to 2011; the Iraqi security forces were the ticket to allowing the U.S. Military to go home. However, either because of hubris, selfish careerism, or a misunderstanding of the long term nature of the problem and the mission, many U.S. Army commanders at all levels consistently disregarded Lawrence's warning. From 2004 to 2011, NATO and the United States spent an incredible amount of money, time, and energy to create a modern, professional military. When the last NATO advisors departed the country in late 2010, many of the metrics being used to measure the competence of the Iraqi military were trending upward. As stated earlier, many senior leaders within the U.S. Army believed the Iraqi Army was ready to stand on its own. This assessment may have even proven correct had NATO and U.S. military advisors and training teams been allowed to remain beyond 2011.

Abdul Qadar Obeidi, Iraq's former Defense Minister, recently said that NATO needed to continue its training and advising mission until at least 2020.⁴⁶ A more realistic assessment is probably 2030 or beyond. However, as it stands, the biggest mistake NATO and the U.S. Army made in creating the modern Iraqi Army was to

impose our culture on this new Army. The United States disregarded the spirit of T. E. Lawrence's famous tenet, tried to create an Iraqi Army which mirrors the U.S. Army, and failed.⁴⁷

Sectarian Military Leaders

Sectarianism and loyalty to a particular ethnic group or religion, over that of loyalty to constitutionally elected leaders and the nation, are perhaps the greatest contributors to destabilization and a lack of resiliency within the Iraqi military.⁴⁸ NATO and the United States went to great pains to ensure the Iraqi military was built along very strict non-sectarian lines.⁴⁹ The numbering of Iraqi Army divisions had significant meaning. The even numbered divisions were raised from the local populace with the intent that they become a type of regional National Guard. The odd numbered divisions were nationally recruited with the intention of making them representative of all Iraq.⁵⁰ Military training teams carefully monitored and assessed Iraqi military leaders for indications of sectarian behavior and many Iraqi military leaders were moved out of their positions because of their sectarian behavior and actions.⁵¹

However, enforcement of non-sectarianism only occurred because of the behind-the-scenes work done by the United States and NATO, using meticulously detailed information provided by both training teams and partnered NATO forces. Unfortunately, much of this work was very quickly undone by PM al-Maliki starting in 2010 once he realized the NATO presence would be coming to an end. The creation of an Iraqi military culture that is inclusive of all ethnicities and religions will take at least a generation to achieve, but the Iraqi's themselves have to desire it. Even then, it will most certainly require continued partnership with western military advisors.

Corruption

As indicated earlier in a broader cultural sense, issues of corruption were commonplace in Iraqi military units. NATO military training teams and partnered units knew about much of the corruption and could probably prove portions of it.⁵² However, in modern Iraq, much of the corruption was just business as usual. The challenge for NATO forces was to understand the culturally acceptable levels of corruption in Iraq and to resist applying western ethical standards to the conduct. As an example, in 2010, Iraqi Army units were given minimal amounts of money for maintenance and operations. At least one Iraqi Army Division Commander sold portions of his fuel allocation in order to be able to purchase needed repair parts from the black market to pay for repairs and maintenance of troop barracks, and for supplemental rations to improve the quality of food being served to his Soldiers. In the division commander's mind, this was the only way to maintain his unit's fighting ability and moral.⁵³ Low-level and culturally-accepted corruption such as this is not a significant driver of Iraqi unit instability. However, corruption can undermine the creation of a professional military. Corruption in the Iraqi Army will have to be reduced over time and finally eliminated. Again, this will require a generational solution, and most importantly, the Iraqis have to want it.

Quantity over Quality

NATO and the United States trained, organized, and equipped the Iraqi Army to be a counter insurgency (COIN) force.⁵⁴ This focus on a COIN-centric capability is yet another explanation as to why the Iraqi Army has fared so poorly against the very aggressive hybrid tactics of ISIS. Hybrid tactics are simply an effective mix of conventional and unconventional (or guerilla) tactics. Because the United States organized and equipped the Iraqi Army to be a COIN force, there was a deliberate effort

to train very large numbers of Iraqis and get them out into battlespace as quickly as possible.⁵⁵ This was very much a *quantity over quality* endeavor.⁵⁶ According to General James Dubik (Ret.), commander of Multi National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTCI) from 2007 to 2008, “Quantity has a quality of its own.”⁵⁷ The plan in 2007 was for the U.S. to provide long term enabler support to the Iraqi Army and to *iteratively* improve the quality of the force over time.⁵⁸ Obviously, because of the failure to agree on a SOFA, the United States ran out of time to finish the iterative training process started in 2008 and the Iraqi Army subsequently lost access to the immense enabler capabilities of the U.S. Military. In retrospect and after reflection, the collapse of the Iraqi Army should come as no surprise.

The Iraqi’s Must Take the Lead

In any future effort to assist the government of Iraq in the creation of a professional army, the United States must identify and include future Iraqi Army leaders in the critical decisions that must be made with regard to this army. Decisions include: the size of the force; the focus of the force (COIN or conventional, or both); the nature of the command and control (centralized or decentralized); the training standards and selection criteria of recruits; pay and benefits; and basing locations. These decisions will determine the near and far term success or failure of this daunting endeavor. Lack of Iraqi Army leadership buy-in will undoubtedly doom any effort, regardless of the enthusiasm and resources poured into it.

National Political Situation

Clearly, the single most important element of creating a professional Iraqi Army that is loyal to the nation’s constitutionally elected leaders, rather than to a particular sect or religion, is the presence of a legitimate Iraqi government that truly represents all

Iraqis. The greatest contributing factor to the collapse of the Iraqi Army in 2014 under the ISIS onslaught was the political and ethnic divisions that PM al-Maliki had created.⁵⁹ National reconciliation must be the first step.⁶⁰ Without this precondition, it is very doubtful that any effort to create a modern, professional, national Iraqi Army will be successful.

Defining a Professional Iraqi Army

Iraqi leaders, including senior Iraqi Army leaders, must determine how they will define what it means to have a professional army. This is a concept that the United States Army continues to wrangle with and which bubbles to the top every few years for re-examination. That it does become a focus of U.S. Army senior leaders is, in itself, a sign of a professional organization; one that is reflective and self-examining. Developing this level of organizational professionalism takes generations and a continual focus on standards, conduct, competency, introspection, and self-regulation.⁶¹ Developing a similar level of professionalism in the Iraqi Army will require leaders of the Iraqi Army to work towards it with passion and energy for many years. It will also require a long term commitment from the United States to provide advisors and mentors for the Iraqi Army leaders.

Nationalism and the Will to Fight

It is difficult to comprehend how less than 10,000 ISIS fighters decisively defeated four Iraqi Army Divisions and overran the vast majority of the western part of Iraq. The simple explanation is that the Iraqi Army never even put up a fight. Although provided with fairly modern equipment, the Iraqi Army is a sick and hollow fighting force, corrupt from top to bottom, lacking in training, unable to adequately maintain its equipment, and divided both internally and nationally. In retrospect, the outcome of the

ISIS attack should not have surprised anyone. The Iraqi Army will be capable of developing its will to fight only after the political and sectarian divisions within the country are resolved and the Army develops an identity and starts the journey toward professionalization.

Determining Iraqi Army Capability Gaps

Iraq requires a professional army that is capable of providing internal security and external defense. Determining the tasks required to properly train, organize, and equip the Iraqi Army is a three step process: 1) Identification of the capabilities required to adequately provide internal security and external defense (*Requirements*); 2) A top to bottom analysis of the current Iraqi Army capabilities (*Capabilities*); and 3) A comparison of the requirements with the current capabilities to identify capability gaps (*Gaps*). The doctrine, organization, training, leader development, material, personnel, and facilities (DOTLMPF) framework can be used to frame the approach. Facilities will not be included in this analysis. However, none of the recommendations listed below will work without Iraqi acceptance of ownership of the challenges.

Doctrine

Iraqi Army doctrine must differ in a very important way from United States Army doctrine. Whereas U.S. Army doctrine is very descriptive, or general in nature, Iraqi Army doctrine must be more explicit, or prescriptive. The U.S. Army has an abundance of multi-generational leaders that have a thorough and deep understanding of our doctrine. The U.S. military also requires minimum civilian education levels for entry and a formal, structured military education system. In part, it is this emphasis on education that allows U.S. Army doctrine to be descriptive, thus taking advantage of our history and culture of decentralization, creativity, and initiative. This approach simply will not

work with the Iraqi Army because of the reasons listed earlier. In addition to being very prescriptive, Iraqi Army doctrine must be very simple and straightforward, to account for the wide variance in education and reading levels. Finally, Iraqi Army doctrine must be widely available, in print, for leaders at every level.

Organization - Quality Does Matter

Similar to Doctrine, the theme should be one of simplicity. The Iraqi Army should minimize the number of different types of required organizations. Additionally, the size and scale of the Iraqi Army should be carefully considered. The earlier methodology of quantity over quality simply did not work. In contrast, the Iraqi Special Forces Brigades are small, well trained organizations that are performing very well against ISIS.⁶² They trained constantly with U.S. Special Operations Forces for several years, conducting partnered operations and polishing the effectiveness of the organizations. The Iraqi Soldiers assigned to these organizations were also carefully vetted and screened to ensure they were not members of sectarian militias attempting to infiltrate the Iraqi Army for nefarious purposes.

Similarly, the Iraqi regular army units should be created slowly and carefully, with the goals of long-term capability and resiliency as key considerations. It simply will not work to cobble together a division's worth of personnel and equipment and expect it to function adequately after a few years of U.S. Army partnering and advisory efforts. If the platoons, companies, and battalions are not sound, the brigades and divisions are irrelevant. And, as mentioned previously, being sound does not refer exclusively to tactical capability. Tactical capability means little without the will to fight and a professionalism that results in loyalty to and belief in the nation.

Any future advisory effort should focus initially on instilling spirit, teamwork, and a willingness to fight; on ensuring loyalties of the Iraqi soldiers are not divided; and on instilling a cultural commitment to something bigger than family, tribe, and sect.⁶³ These are very difficult tasks to achieve, but are critical to creating a long term professional Iraqi Army.

Soldier vetting and selection are key components of this effort. Likewise, it will require recurring and continuous counter intelligence (CI) efforts to prevent Iraqi soldiers from being turned by sectarian militias or foreign agents. Results from similar CI efforts in Afghanistan may be relevant and instructive in this effort. With the advice and assistance of advisors, the Afghan Army's 201st Corps implemented a focused CI policy in 2012, dramatically cutting the number of "green on blue" and "green on green" incidents.⁶⁴ Every Afghan soldier that returned from leave, or returned after being absent without leave (AWOL), was required to spend several days in the 201st Corps' reintegration program. The program served the dual purpose of CI screening and "loyalty" training. One of the Corps' Imams also talked to returning soldiers to remind them of the Islamic correctness in their choice to be Afghan Soldiers.⁶⁵ Similar approaches should be considered for the Iraqi Army.

Training

The primary training hurdles to overcome are cultural and Iraqi military cultural ones. Emphasis on quality over quantity will assist in overcoming this cultural obstacle, as will consistent and long-term advising from U.S. advisors. However, understanding the need for recurring training and making it a part of the Iraqi Army culture should be a long term objective, one that is likely to take a generation of emphasis and advisory effort to achieve. The NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) must be reestablished and

work closely with the Iraqi Army to continue the effort to inculcate the concept of training into the Iraqi culture. Again however, the Iraqis must want these to happen.

Leadership

Creating effective leaders for the Iraqi Army is a critical task. A first step is the non-sectarian GOI vetting and selection of potential candidates. Even during the height of the NTM-I effort, the selection and training of qualified officers at all levels was insufficient to fill the required positions.⁶⁶ It will take several (more) years for leaders to develop into proficient operational leaders. Taken as a whole, the current crop of Iraqi Army senior leaders contribute to the challenges facing the Iraqi Army today. Most of them are reluctant to change and as a result, fall back on the habits they learned under the many years of Saddam Hussein's brutal rule.

The United States should become more active in persuading the Iraqi Government to send Iraqi Army officers to U.S. Army and NATO schools, particularly for lieutenants, captains, and majors. Simultaneously, we must reinvigorate Iraqi Army officer leadership training institutions with the assistance of the NTM-I. These are the keys to the future success of the Iraqi Army. Finally, we should not try to force the Iraqi Army culture to accept the western concept of the Non-commissioned officer (NCO).⁶⁷ There may come a point in the future when the Iraqi Army culture will embrace the western version of the NCO, but it is at least several years in the future.

Material

Before the conflict with ISIS, the Iraqi Army had a wide variety of different types of equipment, adding an immense amount of strain on the already incapable Iraqi Army sustainment and training systems.⁶⁸ As an example, in 2013, the Iraqi Army possessed three different types of tanks, ten different types of armored personnel carriers, and nine

different types of artillery.⁶⁹ Taking the point of view of quality over quantity, the newly created units must be as homogeneous as possible in their material equipping. This will greatly ease training and sustainment efforts. Undeniably, the Iraqi Government determines what equipment is purchased for the Iraqi armed forces. However, the U.S should encourage as much commonality of equipment, systems, and components as possible, and can use its foreign military sales and foreign military financing programs to influence the outcome.

Personnel

Adjustments to personnel policies can contribute significantly to the professionalization of the Iraqi Army in several ways.⁷⁰ First, the GOI can make military service attractive to the population, thus making it easier to be more selective in recruitment. This can be achieved through a combination of effective strategic communication, pay and benefits, and funding for education. Second, assignment and promotion policies must be seen as fair and free of corruption. Third, junior officers must see that upward mobility is possible through their hard work, initiative, and skill. Maintaining senior officers who no longer add value to the organization and stifle upward mobility of junior officers will cause morale issues and stagnation of army-wide improvement.⁷¹ Once again, this is a generational challenge and will require the full buy-in of Iraqi Army senior leaders.

Combat Advisors – A Key Long Term Solution

In almost each of the DOTLMPF elements, a critical part of the solution is the long-term presence of U.S. military combat advisors.⁷² Combat advisory work, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, is very dangerous, exhausting, and time consuming. It is also extremely effective under most circumstances, if properly

resourced.⁷³ Partnering can also be effective, but far less so without the constant presence of dedicated military advisors.⁷⁴ To have truly effective long term effects, military advising should be consistently present at the battalion level and higher.⁷⁵

A striking example of the effectiveness of long term advising is clearly seen in Columbia. The United States began a training, education, and support program for the Columbian military in the 1970s. Participants of this program became the leaders of Columbia two decades later and implemented very positive changes to their government and country.⁷⁶ In the words of a U.S. military officer who worked in the program, “Our assistance has been effective because it has been year round. Providing six weeks of training and then going home is not enough.”⁷⁷ Other benefits that resulted from twenty-plus years of persistent U.S. advisory presence are the growing empowerment of Columbian Army NCOs, improved operational and strategic thinking, detailed planning methods, independent and creative thinking, the embrace of human rights, and the growth of a professional Columbian military.⁷⁸ Columbia’s stabilization operations, made possible by long-term U.S. advisory efforts, are being held up as models for South America and Africa.⁷⁹

Implications for the U.S. Army beyond Iraq

The U.S. Army should relook how it sources advisors. The requirement for combat advisors, beyond those provided by U.S. Special Operations Forces, has been constant since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was also a significant requirement during the Vietnam conflict. The U.S. Army forgot many of the important lessons it learned during the Vietnam conflict, and we are in danger of doing so again.

A professional U.S. Army Advisory Corps should be created and assigned to each division with a focus on the division’s expected area of operations. This concept

would nest very well with the Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) model and would provide a long-term interface with regional Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Military (JIIM) partners. Reduced resources and the downsizing of the Army would make this difficult, but the benefits would outweigh the cost. The numbers would not need to be large, with somewhere between 50 and 60 advisors assigned to each division.

Advisors should be selected after company command, with immediate utilization. Officers should continue in their operational track and serve in key and developmental field grade positions, typically as battalion S3 or XO, and make the permanent transition to the Advisory Corps once branch qualified as a major. Other educational and training requirements would need to be formulated, primarily to ensure the combat advisors were qualified and competent to advise their foreign counterparts.

Conclusion

There is simply no quick, easy, or cheap solution to the very complex problem of rebuilding the Iraqi Army. If the United States Army is directed to finish the job of creating a professional, or at least durable, Iraqi Army, it will take a moderate amount of resources, persistent presence, and patience. The effort must take into account the strong Arab, Iraqi and Iraqi military cultures and resist the urge to make the Iraqi Army into something that it just cannot be. The effort must focus on quality over quantity, including careful vetting and personnel selection; an indoctrination program that teaches loyalty to nation; and support for the growth of a professional organization which has the resiliency to stand up to internal ethnic, tribal, and religious strife. Finally, a successful Iraqi Army will require both a strong Iraqi desire and our continued support, the key to which is a long term advisory effort.

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