Question (R4.3): *To what extent is the Iraqi Army apolitical? Do they have a political agenda or another desired end-state within Iraq? Could the Iraqi military be an effective catalyst for reconciliation between different groups in Iraqi society? Could conscription be an accelerant for reconciliation and if so how could it be implemented?[1]*

Contributors: Hala Abdulla (Marine Corps University); Dr. Elie Abouaoun (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Scott Atran (ARTIS Research); Zana Gulmohamad (University of Sheffield, UK); Yerevan Saeed (Arab Gulf States Institute); Dr. Muhanad Seloom (Iraqi Centre for Strategic Studies, ICSS, UK); Dr. Marcin Styszynski (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland); Dr. Shalini Venturelli (American University); Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute for Near East Policy); Wayne White (Middle East Institute).

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The subject of this report touches on a critical issue for the future of Iraq as a unified and stable state: To what degree will the Iraqi Armed Forces be able to serve as the vanguard for resurrection of national identity and tolerance? If the answer is not at all, Iraq as a single independent state is likely doomed.

To address the question posed, many of the expert contributors to this Reach-back report begin with an important observation: the Iraqi Army, like other public institutions around the world, is not a unitary actor with a single political orientation, agenda, or desired end-state. Like other militaries, it mirrors the social conditions and pressures of the population from which it comes. For the Iraqi Army, this means the ethno-sectarian divisions, pervasive corruption, and well-ensconced patronage and power networks that work around and despite military rank or process.

The army reflects the nation.

How did the Iraqi Armed Forces get to this point?

A number of the contributors point to the turbulent history of the Iraqi Armed Forces (IAF) as the foundation of its current condition. Hala Abdulla of the Marine Corps University dates the beginning of the deterioration of its professionalism and strength to the Saddam Hussein era, when Saddam assassinated senior leaders that he perceived as threats to his control. Over time, this practice meant that the cohort of professional leaders who might have enjoyed broad popular and military regard had been decimated. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by Coalition forces continued

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[1] **Related SMA Reach-back Report:** *Question (V4): Post-ISIL Iraq Scenarios. What are the most likely post-lSIL Iraq scenarios with regards to Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time (PMESII-PT)? Where are the main PMESII-PT friction points, which are most acute, and how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests?*
[Available at: http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell-v4-post-isil-iraq-scenarios/]

the weakening of the Army as an institution. Importantly, that invasion also had the critical effect of drastically changing the sectarian make-up of the Army leadership from Sunni to Shi'a-dominated; a process that was accelerated under the leadership of Nouri al Malaki. Abdulla argues that the post-2003 Army was weaker than the pre-2003 Army reflecting the fragmentation of society, along with rampant corruption and nepotism.

Does the Army have a political agenda? Not exactly.

The contributors to this report each argue that the Iraqi Army is far from apolitical, but importantly, that this fact is the result of the Army's demographics rather than its partisanship.[2] Dr. Elie Abouaoun of the US Institute of Peace cautions that we take care in thinking of the Army as a "monolith" with a single set of political views. It is because the force is overwhelmingly Shi'a that it naturally reflects the political and social concerns of the Shi'a-led government and communities.

The experts also agree that the Army does not have its own political agenda or cohesive image of the future of the Army or Iraq. Rather than any political orientation in fact, Middle East scholar Shalini Venturelli's (American University) research identifies the strongest guiding principle in the Army as preservation of individual and group power and influence. This is done in the Army via the same types of social and familial patronage and influence networks found in the rest of the country. It is this urge and the dynamics of competing hidden power networks *within* the Army that has stymied its re-professionalization and accounts for the corruption and nepotism with which it is plagued.

Could the Army or Special Forces serve as a force for national reconciliation? No way, unless …

There is wide agreement among the authors regarding the prospect that the Iraqi Army could be a catalyst for national reconciliation: they are dubious at best. Wayne White of the Middle East Institute points out that, in its current guise, the "largely Shi'a force sometimes [has been] in league with abusive militias" and, though the Iraqi Army that fought Iran was more than half Shi'a, the years of ethno-sectarian conflict have embittered many in the Army against Sunni, Turkoman, Kurdish, and other groups. Elie Abouaoun (USIP) explains that "solidarity" among some military units might develop, but "the institutional bonding is not strong enough to overcome the vertical divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines."

The two areas where the experts disagree are: 1) whether the Army's successful performance in Mosul has rehabilitated its reputation among minority populations; and relatedly, 2) the degree to which the US-trained Iraqi Special Forces (Golden Divisions) that make up a large part of the Mosul force might serve as a model for professionalizing the larger force and catalyzing national regard for the military. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute for Near East Policy) and Muhanad Seloom (ICSS, UK) believe that the "highly professionalized" Special Forces have "boosted a sense of nationalism" in Iraq and have significantly improved popular perception of forces that not too long ago were seen not as Golden, but as the "Dirty Division." Yerevan Saeed (Arab Gulf States Institute) and Macin Styszynski (Mickiewicz University, Poland) observe little change in Sunni or Kurdish views of the Iraqi Army, primarily they argue, because these populations observe little

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[2] Hana Abdulla puts a finer point on the question arguing that, while the Army is not particularly partisan, it has nevertheless been *politicized* in the sense that is it used for political purposes by civilian leaders and, as a result, is subject to "political wrangling" within the senior officer corps.

change in the Army—which looks very much like the organization until very recently responsible for "widespread abuse, violence and human rights abuses." Shalini Venturelli (American University) believes that even if there was improved popular regard for the Special Forces, the exceptionalism of the Golden Division is overstated, and that withdrawal of US trainers and support elements would rapidly show these units to be bound by the same corruption and competing power networks as the larger force.

Although highly skeptical of these occurring any time soon, the experts do offer conditions under which the Iraqi Army might eventually serve as an engine of national reconciliation. The most critical of these is (re)gaining popular trust in both the Government of Iraq and the military that serves it. The only way to overcome popular perception of the Army's Shi'a favoritism is through sincere political reform in which "Sunnis have a major strategic stake" and are convinced of the government's "enduring commitment to their security regardless of which party(ies) hold the reins of power" (Shalini Venturelli, American U.) Even if there were to be a professionalized, unified Iraqi Army some time in the future, Zana Gulmohamad of Sheffield University forecasts that "the reconciliation will be partial, and not include the entire country," but instead be limited to Iraqi Arabs (Shi'a and Sunni). The Kurds, he argues, have their own security forces that they will always trust more than the Iraqi Army.

Is conscription a good idea? Not likely.

None of the expert contributors to this report sees conscription into the Iraqi military as a viable path to reconciliation. In fact, some suggest under current conditions military conscription could very easily deepen rather than reduce the ethno-sectarian tensions that wrack the country. While he allows that, "enrolling in the army—including conscription—might ease up inter-personal relations somehow," Elie Abouaoun contends that the effect does not scale because Sunni "collective fears" of the Army remain. He points to Lebanon's experience with using compulsory military conscription to encourage national identity among its warring sectarian groups. The failure to enact political reforms, he says, was a major cause of the lackluster results: "failing to embrace an inclusive governance model undermined the possible—though highly unlikely—impact of such efforts. Iraq is not different, especially with the presence of tens of thousands of fighters now enrolled in militias."[3] Again, the military reflects the nation.

The point is this: prior political reform and social integration are not just important facilitators for development and professionalization of the Army and thus its value as a platform for national identity and reconciliation—they are required pre-conditions. Neither the current Government of Iraq nor the Army is likely to succeed in stabilizing the country until Sunni Arabs and other minority populations are integrated into the state's political, security and social institutions. As Wayne White of the Middle East Institute cautions, if this is ignored, Sunni resistance will persist. Finally,

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[3] It also may be instructive to recall the United States' own experience with racial integration in the military. While conventional wisdom often credits the military as the vanguard of racial integration in the US, in fact social and economic changes that began in the 1930's had produced a national opposition movement and changed ideas about racial equality across the country. This social movement predated and laid the groundwork for the political action that spurred change in the military. While it is true that the Army and Navy had adopted some racial integration policies in the aftermath of WWII, it took until President Truman's 1948 Executive Order (9981) for these to begin to be enforced and for more comprehensive programs for racial integration across the US armed forces to appear. Unlike the case of Lebanon, social and political change was underway for nearly two decades before the military effort.

Shalini Venturelli reminds us that, even if these reforms have been made, restoring the trust of Sunnis, Kurds, and other minority groups in the national Army is a decades-long process.

SME Input

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Wayne White
The Middle East Institute

The current Iraqi Army's politics largely relate to its ethno-sectarian makeup. While regrouping and reconstituting itself in the face of the ISIS threat, the vast majority of army personnel are Shi'a. With nearly all Sunni Arab areas under ISIS control or isolated by ISIS from Baghdad, and with Kurdish combat personnel drawn almost exclusively to Kurdish regional military forces, recruitment could hardly have been anything but Shi'a. During the Iraq-Iran War, about 60% of the army was Shi'a, but the majority of its officer corps and elite units were Sunni Arab and the army's Shi'a majority therefore was far less dominant than it is now. Successive Shi'a-dominated governments in post-2003 Baghdad have dramatically reversed the army's national makeup—especially under Maliki's baleful rule—even purging many of the small numbers of Sunni Arab personnel.

As a largely Shi'a force sometimes in league with abusive Shi'a militias, it is highly unlikely that the Iraqi military could be a catalyst for reconciliation between Iraq's different ethno-sectarian communities. Moreover, the brutal struggle with ISIS and bitter disputes with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) over territory undoubtedly has embittered attitudes of many in the army's ranks against Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and Turcoman (the latter often siding with the Kurds and reaching out to Turkey for protection). Also, both the Iraqi Army and KRG Peshmerga have blatantly driven Sunni Arabs out of many of their towns and villages, laying claim to these Sunni Arab locales to be settled by the Shi'a and Kurds. Even Christian villages have been ethnically cleansed, so even liberation from ISIS rule has brought great suffering and grievances to Iraq's Sunni Arab and Christian communities—as have thousands of supporting Coalition air strikes.

Conscription that would bring Sunni Arabs and Christians back into the army to reduce Shi'a predominance would be somewhat helpful. However, given Shi'a attitudes now and probably for some years, non-Shi'a recruits would almost certainly be treated as 2nd class cadres to be mistreated and given reduced access to promotion.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Bilal Wahab
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The state of Iraqi nationalism is in flux, with recent opportunities to flourish. The Iraqi military's victories and sacrifices—notably Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) and Federal Police--against ISIS have boosted a sense of nationalism. Many militias seek to ride this tide to boost their legitimacy and political standing as elections approach. Another unifying factor is public grievances against ineffective governance, as manifest by insecurity, corruption and lack of public

services and economic opportunities. While an opportunity for nationalist platforms to emerge and lead such nationalist trends, vested partisan and sectarian interests on one hand, and weak state institutions on the other limit the possibility of seeing new national fronts leading Iraq toward more independence, especially from Iran.

In the current Iraqi political system, every political actor has an interest in the state's survival, but also in keeping it weak and fragile. This allows the parties in power to syphon off funds from the government to their respective parties, and build patronage networks through cronyism and mass employment. In effect, Iraqi politics operates in the middle ground between inclusiveness and competition. On the one hand, there is almost too much inclusion: due to the principle of governance by consensus (tawafuq), every political party in parliament controls a ministry or high-level government position. Yet there is fierce competition for such loots. Maintaining a weak state system allows the parties to secure funding and influence. This model leaves a state that is not rooted in rule of law, good governance, or service delivery; if the state could deliver these services to its people, the power of political parties would weaken as a result. Evidently, such a political system is only possible thanks to oil, a low cost and high yield commodity.

How can post-ISIS Iraq move beyond this system of sectarianism and patronage wielding toward Iraqi nationalism? The answer lies in re-conceptualizing state institutions and international support policies toward building a more inclusive and interconnected economy.

> "In the current Iraqi political system, every political actor has an interest in the state's survival, but also in keeping it weak and fragile. This allows the parties in power to syphon off funds from the government to their respective parties, and build patronage networks through cronyism and mass employment."

In addition to sectarianism, bad, as compared to good, governance weakens nationalism: insecurity, corruption and lack of economic opportunities. Sectarianism has served the political elite and guaranteed their tenure in power. The demand for Iraqi national government able to deliver good governance could be rising. Who can credibly supply it?

The demand for nationalism and nationalist agendas is on the rise. On the one hand, as recent public opinion research from Iraq shows, the Iraqi army fighting ISIS on behalf of all Iraqis has emerged as a symbol of cross-sectarian pride. The liberation of swathes of territory in Mosul and Anbar from ISIS brings a tempered sense of national unity. The professionalization of the Iraqi military and reducing corruption within its ranks are necessary measure for such optimism to take root.

Moreover, Iran and its mode of sectarian governance have failed to deliver. Despite record oil sales and revenues, the Iraqi economy and infrastructure suffer. Even the Shia majority feel let down by their government and its failure to deliver good governance. Grievances generated by such utter failure reflect in demonstrations in the Shia heartland, including Najaf and Basra.
Iran's patronage of the Shia politics has also failed to translate into more security and prosperity for Iraqis in general and the Shia communities in particular. Some have come to realize that Iran does not mean Iraq well. Anti-Iran voices remain faint but getting louder in the house of Shia. Iran's power stems partly from playing the role of power broker among the myriad of Shia factions. When at times too intrusive, like in Basra local politics, taking sides eventually backfires.

Moreover, despite being politically coopted by Iran, Iraq is Iran's economic and energy competitor. Iranian dumping of cheap and subsidized agriculture products into Iraqi market has hurt Iraqi farmers. To increase its quota at OPEC, Iran increased its oil reserves in recent years. Should international oil industry re-enter Iran's energy sector, the two countries will compete for investment capital.

It remains an open question whether Iraqi politics can meet such public *demands*. With elections scheduled for spring of 2018, Iraq's political parties and candidates would strive to appeal to the public's desire for a more unified and better governed Iraq. Iraqi nationalism would be defined in terms of a strong stand against corruption, improving the economy, and tackling poor public services and unemployment. Ironically, such grievances unite Iraqis, be they Sunni, Shia or Kurd. The way forward lies in professionalizing the Iraqi military and bringing them under state control. Accountability to a civilian government is of paramount importance in post-ISIS Iraq, as multiple militias have brought under the folds of Iraqi military. In addition to militia infiltration, there is the question of corruption, which undermines the institution's legitimacy as a national one. Such reforms are necessary, whether or not mandatory military service is adopted.

As for the economy, one cannot talk of a country without a national economy. Hence, investing in growth-inducing infrastructure and policies is key to address public grievances and promote a sense of nationhood. In other words, the nation needs to deliver. Toward that end, economic integration is necessary, where Iraqis cities and economic hubs are connected and interdependencies are created through highways, railroads, pipelines, and ports. Finally, Iraqis need to see their oil as theirs and account for its translation into growth rather than wasteful spending.

The Iraqi Army's Politicization, Organizational Capability & Unifying Potential[4]

Dr. Shalini Venturelli
Associate Professor, American University

The Iraqi Army's capability as a national Army is driven by the very same political, sociocultural and ethno-sectarian divisions currently tearing at the social fabric of Iraq's government, civilian environment and populations groups. As a result, the Iraqi Army does not possess a unifying but a multipolar political agenda, even less a cohesive nationalistic purpose. Instead, it is deeply and structurally encumbered by plural and fiercely competing embedded power networks that shape and determine the formation of interests, intent and behaviors of military decision-makers and the rank and file. While in any given context the precise nature and effects of this complex calculus and interactional outcome varies, nevertheless one may safely advance a set of high-confidence predictions for the Iraqi Army that are grounded in field study and identification of deep structures and systems driving its functional capabilities to mitigate the security and human environment.

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[4] © Shalini Venturelli, *"The Iraqi Army's Politicization, Organizational Capability & Unifying Potential."*

1. **The Iraqi Army's immediate-to-medium term, and possibly longer term capability is maintained within a highly-titrated relation to reliable provision of U.S. close-support and assistance on an operation-by-operation basis**. Consequently, its effectiveness as a national Army along critical measures--such as, for example, intelligence-driven operations, combined operations, multi-pillar cooperation and coordination, force recruitment-retention and morale, and effective leadership—will rapidly degrade with perception of any signals of reductions or withdrawal in U.S. active assistance to Iraqi troops. This suggests:

    i. Gains in capability are non-transferable to subsequent operations in the presence of any perceived or actual fluctuations in U.S. operational support.

    ii. Political and sociocultural fractures within the Iraqi Army are highly resilient structural pressures only temporarily mitigated by the partnered operational environment. These underlying divisions will become a dominant force and overtake the organization, from the highest strata of senior decision-makers down to subordinate units and the average soldier, as soon as the perception of fluctuating signals in reliability of U.S. military support starts to spread through the ranks.

2. **Iran will use the Iraqi Army as a force multiplier in its strategic objectives to dominate the Middle East and beyond as regional security guarantor, a role till now played by the U.S.** The influence of Iran in shaping the sociopolitical and sociocultural functions of the Iraqi Army is an equally powerful underlying structural force that will dominate Iraq's military upon reduction or withdrawal of U.S. active support. While this factor is currently held to a tolerable threshold by U.S. partnering operations, it is also a resilient factor, permeating the majority of internal power networks functioning within the Iraqi Army, and extending to Shia paramilitary forces (PMF). Iran's influence on indigenous Iraqi forces is structural for the obvious reasons that Iran can and is exploiting Iraq's security and paramilitary organizations as a force multiplier in its goal for achieving long-term strategic transformation of the region. Moreover, unlike the organic sociocultural and political factors that drive internal fragmentation rather than cohesion within the military, Iran's influence in the Iraqi Army is qualitatively and diametrically the reverse. It's influence over the Iraqi Army, irrespective of adequate Sunni representation, resembles an *integrative* functional control-system embedded securely within and across inter and intra-organizational space, intended to generate operational and strategic outcomes. Iran's control system integrated within the Iraqi Army is a proto-system proven and tested within the Iranian military whose historical familiarity strongly resonates with the military organizational tradition of indigenous Iraqi forces. Since Iran's intent and capability is to repurpose the Iraqi Army for its regional aims, the outcome will directly and indirectly conflict with U.S. security interests for a unified and stable Iraq, and a wider MENA region.

3. **No matter what Sunni representatives in settlement negotiations with the Iraqi government eventually agree to, Iraq's Sunni populations in towns and villages will NOT accept the authority and legitimacy of the Iraqi Army as currently constituted --a political and sociocultural reality of certainty that will continue to fuel conflict conditions and hinder the Army's effectiveness.** As long as Sunni population groups in villages and towns across the central region *perceive* Iraq's Shia-dominated government retaining overt control over the military while unofficially permitting Iran indirect and embedded control of military and paramilitary organizations, Iraq's Sunnis will steadfastly

resist stabilization efforts. This perception is deeply held and shaped by experiences of persecution and constant threat from the Iraqi state and security forces since 2010. Change in government leaders will not restore that trust, nor the token inclusion of Sunnis in national governance. *In fact, the national government is no longer relevant to the Sunni population's deeper interests which are shaped by immediate and long-term security, autonomy to govern their own lives without interference from the state, and field their own security guarantees whether through permanent Army bases of Sunni units or through their tested system of alliances with armed jihadist and other militia networks*.

This problem defines the nucleus of the conflict and the core of the Army's difficulty. Contrary to conventional assessment, the underlying driver of the conflict is not ISIS which, instead, should be regarded a proximate cause and thus a downstream epiphenomenon of the evolving instability. The upstream and thus deeper cause is collapse of confidence and trust in Iraqi authorities and the national Army among Iraq's fear-driven Sunni population groups in the central region. This collapse has created a firmly entrenched and self-sustaining security marketplace where Sunnis 'shop' for their own armed militias which include violent extremist networks such as ISIS. As long as this marketplace exists owing to deep-seated and unresolved Sunni fears for their property and lives at the hands of government security forces and paramilitary groups, they will seek their own 'armies' or armed networks of different violent jihadist, ideological and warlord stripes. Once ISIS is routed in Iraq—which is highly unlikely since any remnant cells will propagate new networks spreading and recombining geographically over time--Sunni demand for their own protective forces will definitely not abate. Instead, intensity of Sunni intent to align with protective militia will generate new forms of supply in terror networks, militias, warlords and power networks attracted to the region prepared to prosecute the war against the Shia-dominated Iraqi state and Army. Sunnis will continue to fuel the demand for their own militias and will not withhold civilian sanctuary from favored armed militias and violent networks—whether ISIS, Al Qaeda, or other affiliate organizations—until their security demands are guaranteed and materially demonstrated on the ground over the medium term. The demands of local Sunni populations include, at the very least: a) First, Sunni populations in the central region demand nothing less than permanent Army bases in their home districts comprised of locally-recruited and led Sunni units of the Iraqi Army whose primary mission must be to protect them from Shia controlled units of the Iraqi Army, the Shia dominated government, and if necessary from Iranian-sponsored offensive operations. This model is analogous to provincially-based ethno-linguistic and ethno-sectarian military units common to the Indo-Eurasian military tradition of constituting homogenous units drawn from and operating within their historical/traditional population areas. b) Second, Sunni populations demand provincial autonomy (de facto or de jure) in any settlement that offers official or unofficial recognition to Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq. Finally, *an additional problem remains: even if all of the conditions set by the Sunni populations in the central region were to be met tomorrow, it will take decades for the Iraqi Army to generate self-sustaining momentum for building population confidence and trust, which is ultimately the sole factor with decisive power to stabilize the country, eliminate incentives for civilian sanctuary, destroy violent networks, and create conditions for the conflict to subside*. It takes decades to build confidence and trust, and only a few days and weeks to lose it. That, in essence, is the fundamental dilemma of the Iraqi Army for it bears the sole burden to deliver what Sunnis want most: a permanent security guarantee for their traditional and historical population habitats.

4. **Given the realities and projections outlined above, the U.S. will remain indefinitely engaged in partnered operations with the Iraqi military into the foreseeable future**. Iraqi Army's collapse means the collapse of the state, and exploitation of such a collapse by Iran to reshape the Middle East will generate multiple order effects of widening and uncontainable conflict. Given that a stabilized Iraq is central to U.S. security interests, given that the Iraqi Army whose functional capabilities tied to partnered operations with the U.S. is one of the principal means of ensuring a sustainable state, and given that Iran's control-system capability can be triggered to reassert dominance over the Iraqi Army upon cessation of U.S. partnered operations—the U.S. will have no option but to remain in an enduring role as the Iraqi Army's close partner in operations to eliminate violent networks, satisfy persistent and destabilizing fears of Sunni populations in Iraq, secure an independent Iraqi state, and contain Iran's unwavering hegemonic intent.

<u>Iraqi Army Politicization</u>: The deep politicization of the Iraqi Army is confirmed in the PI's ongoing field study of this U.S. security partner organization in the Middle East. The extent of political permeability is observed in the foundational social realities of how the Iraqi Army actually and not theoretically, functions. Behind the exterior façade of a modern military organization, the Iraqi Army is governed, even controlled, by a complex internal sociocultural system that is robustly conserved across regimes and governments, conflict conditions, external partnerships and even through the cycling of sectarian predominance swinging from Sunni to Shia, for instance. First-hand study of the Iraqi Army sociocultural system shows this internal system is repeatedly more determinative and predictive of the Army's decision-making and operational effectiveness than is years even decades of knowledge transfer through advising and training. This is because externally transferred knowledge, training and know-how have so far not been conserved across political, conflict and environmental conditions. Observation and study of the Iraqi Army allows identification of key sociocultural system-components, with just two key examples briefly outlined here:

    i.   <u>Formal Chain of Command vs. the Real Chain of Command</u>: The decision-making chain is systemically compromised from the penetration of competing ethno-sectarian and external power networks to which almost every officer down to the average soldier must belong for preservation of strategic interests, family-clan survival and security, and reliable access to material resources. In short, the external and densely networked traditional power system of social control, along with the conflict-generated human environment in which the military operates does not stop at its institutional boundary--as would be commonly expected of professional, largely Western, military organizations. Instead, the external political and sociocultural networks in reality are also the Iraqi Army's internal networks, and comprise its foundational control-system. The partnered environment of training and joint operational practice is simply layered on top of this indigenous military sociocultural foundation. This can be observed in the day-to-day functioning of the chain of command whereby the decision chain allows individuals to discard or ignore orders from superiors in favor of imperatives of traditional and power networks that continually assess the impact of specific orders on the network's political, strategic and material interests. *Allegiance of personnel are first and foremost to these enduring networks that ensure current and future survival extending across the sociocultural landscape.* The internal network system indicates that force identity and morale is built on shifting sand, and that indoctrination of force discipline is conducted in perpetual

rivalry with the more dominant political and sociocultural network allegiances. Furthermore, force loyalty to the partnered environment is transient at best since this environment is perceived unpredictable and unreliable which means it can be exploited for personal and internal network advantage while it lasts. Even less is the perceived obligation to the state whose nature and composition is rooted in uncertain current though not future conditions in the country and region when networks will prevail and dominate under the influence of strategic powers such as Iran.

ii. <u>Information Flow & Information Power</u>: Identification and mapping of the Iraqi Army's internal power networks and thus politicized decision-chain was undertaken in the ongoing study by means of determining critical pathways of the underlying organizational control system for regulating information flow, information sharing, and information production and diffusion within and across sociocultural and power networks. A key finding of this investigation revealed that each network is characterized by a specific information behavior and path-dependent signature that points both directly and indirectly to its corresponding decision-chain and influence capability. The functional information networks of the Army are thus effectively the key sources of information power cross-cutting the organization and comprising the true operating control system of Iraq's military. This is despite the human cost of intense rivalry between these internal power networks that deliver swift rewards and consequences for their respective membership. Power networks within the military tolerate a zero opt-out tradition, exacting lifetime if not intergenerational loyalty to the network. For these and other reasons further exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, power networks and their information control systems are regarded as life insurance, economic and security insurance by senior leaders, staff, and the rank and file. Accordingly, information power and social control generated by nascent networks function within a given range of volatility owing to robust survival-based loyalties enforced across their respective information and decision pathways.

Iraqi Army's Desired End-State for Iraq: The underlying code of decision-making in the Iraqi Army is not native to the official chain of command, but organic to the information network in the decision-chain of rival power allegiances. Competing interests are resolved through informal *'alijtimaeat'* (meetings) among decision-chain leaders and their representatives. It is this practice which reveals the most about the behaviors and intent of the overall organization as a human system of intertwined power networks, allowing assessment of its desired end-state. At first glance, the hidden code of decision-making seems chaotic, ineffective, even irrational to the Western observer. But in-depth functional analysis over extended periods shows decision-making behaviors are entirely rational to the long-term strategic interests of the power networks embedded in the organization. Even in instances where no decision appears to have been taken, in reality it has, and the decoded process allows for reliable predictions of behavior, intent, priorities and objectives. Only when strategic-interests of internal networks within the Army converge across the power systems as negotiated in unofficial face-to-face meetings, do informal agreements arise to pursue a common course of action—generally in the face of perceived common threats. More often, however, the diversification of core interests in the ongoing regional conflict produce blame and finger-pointing in various directions towards different elements and leaders of the Army and/or security organizations, suggesting deep-seated lack of

cohesion. However, these protestations and the blame-game are part of the code of avoidance in assuming risks for the network unless rivals are willing to share the risk and potential blame for failure and collapse of influence. Thus, protecting one's network from unnecessary risk and failure is critical to the decision-making process which outwardly appears dysfunctional though in reality remains highly effective in conserving the underlying power and control systems. *Based on this assessment, one may predict that the desired end-state of the Iraqi Army is a product of convergence of strategic interests across the internal power networks: namely, to preserve, sustain and grow their influence over the security landscape in ways that advantage the networks individually and in aggregate for power over populations, territory and resource flows. And since Sunnis within the Army currently find themselves locked out of the internal power networks, the desired end-state for the Iraqi Army is to accelerate the power positioning of internal competing Iraqi Shia-affiliated networks, and multiple power networks supported and resourced by Iran*.

Iraqi Army's Potential as a Catalyst for Societal Reconciliation: The Iraqi Army's potential to serve as a catalyst for societal reconciliation is path-dependent on achieving each of the elements in the security cordon framework required by Sunnis, namely: the Army's ability to stabilize the conflict; secure the central region comprised of Sunni communities; operate permanent bases with units whose composition and leadership is drawn from local population groups and whose mission is to protect Sunni civilians from Shia- and Iranian-led threats; and build trust and confidence of Sunni communities over time with effective operations and a security guarantees. Interactions with elements of the Sunni population and their leaders in the central region indicate that compromise options such as assigning Sunni security to Iraqi Special Forces might be the solution. But this idea is viewed just as unfavorably as working with regular army, in some cases even more so. Using special components of the Army, such as Special Forces, as a model Sunnis will accept is not borne out in the population's threat-perception. This is because the issue of local Sunni composition and local commanders of special units would still remain unresolved regardless of type of military component in play. Sunni populations are worried that Special Forces whose composition is derived from other provinces such as Shia dominated areas, may serve as stealth mechanisms to collect information and intelligence on their communities for use in subsequent reprisal campaigns. They also regard special forces of the Iraqi Army as Iranian-trained and influenced elite units for future activation in Iranian-led operations to dominate their areas through population control.

However, all this is itself conditional on the actions and signaling of the Shia-dominated Iraqi government which is inherently and structurally constrained by the underlying interests of the Shia population and its closest regional ally, Iran. The prospects of all conditionalities lining up smoothly are highly unlikely, especially given the inherent politicization of the Army as addressed above.

Conscription as an Avenue for Reconciliation: Conscription can indeed serve as powerful mechanism for national unity and reconciliation, for it offers broad-based representation of the interests of diverse population groups within the military. This is a long-term strategy achievable only over a decade or more of demonstrated effectiveness. The key benchmarks expected of a conscription system by Iraq's population groups would be: weakening if not eliminating outright the hold of power networks within the Army (highly improbable in this sociocultural context); creating a cohesive force identity centered on the will to fight and defend the borders and territorial integrity of the Iraqi state; building an Army whose leaders and soldiers are capable of gaining the trust and confidence of the country's diverse population groups; government

restructuring in which Sunnis have a major strategic stake for enduring commitment to their security regardless of which party(ies) hold the reins of power; indefinite continuity in U.S. partnering operations that yield progressive professionalization of the military over time; the Army's resolve to contain, if not deter Iranian influence and intervention in Iraqi affairs; and a standardized conscription model that with robust population outreach infrastructure spread widely across the ethno-sectarian landscape, and deep down to the community level in order to socialize, educate, train and inspire youth of all social classes into the excellence and heroism of a professional national military; among several other essential elements. Conscription can be effective if these elements are in place to shape an environment where all Iraqis can feel deep national pride in their military. In other countries, for instance, militaries are a critical unifying catalyst of national identity and pride—independent of functional performance of political institutions. This is certainly the case in functional democratic states such as India, but even in dysfunctional states such as Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan, Turkey, among others. A similar role for the Iraqi Army in creating national unity and national identity, irrespective of national politics, is indeed achievable with the determined and long-term commitment of a restructured government, its external partners such as the U.S., and the growing support and confidence of Iraq's population groups as they rally around future dramatic gains in the Army's security effectiveness generated over the course of a decade or more.

Additional Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Shalini Venturelli
American University

My assessment based on numerous interactions with elements of the Sunni population and their leaders in the central region is that Special Forces are viewed just as unfavorably as the regular army, in some cases even more so. This is because the issue of local Sunni composition and local commanders of these units remains unaddressed regardless of type of military component in play. Moreover, the population is worried that Special Forces whose composition is derived from other provinces such as Shia dominated areas, may serve as stealth mechanisms to collect information and intel on Sunni communities and individuals for later coordinated campaigns of reprisal. Finally, they are concerned these elite units are trained and influenced by Iranian special forces and may again be serving Iranian future operations planning to dominate their areas through population control. So, I would probably disagree with some of the responses you have received arguing for the Special Forces model, and instead support … information flowing from the field which I am able to cross-confirm from my own investigations and that of my graduate team.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Marcin Styszynski
Mickiewicz University, Poland

The Iraqi crisis demonstrates tragic consequences regarding the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, including the Arab spring in 2011. Lack of one leader's domination (Saddam Hussein) as well as destruction of state apparatus and oppressive institutions such as secret police erupted unrest and intensified activities of different ideological, sectarian, religious and political forces. It is evident in the case of Sunni-Shi'a conflict, tribal influences in particular regions or jihadist threats. In fact, Arab-Muslim societies were not used to pluralism, transparency, freedom

and democratic forms of power. The power was usually attributed to certain rulers or leaders (called *Zaim* in Arabic) who exploited their positions and state institutions and gathered the rest of society around particular ideas and objectives. The situation can be compared to the Balkan crisis in 1990's when the collapse of the communist regime affected unrest, nationalism and finally civil wars. Besides, societies in Central European countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary have cultivated civil and democratic values despite oppressive policies of governments.

In this regard, it will be very hard to unite state institutions including the military or security forces under one certain idea or common approach such as patriotism or history. Consider for instance, Shi'a militias from Hashd Shabi which recaptured Iraqi territories from ISIS and emphasized in their flags Shia symbolism such as Imam Hussein's martyrdom, the Battle of Karbala or Imam Ali's leadership. Besides, local Sunni communities are focused on tribal and clan traditions and relationships. In fact, decentralization and transition of power to local communities and representatives has become a relevant solution for the future. However, separatism and division of the country may be a side-effect of these tendencies.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Muhanad Seloom
Iraqi Centre for Strategic Studies (ICSS), UK

The majority of the officers and recruits who joined the post-Saddam Iraqi Army were from the Arab Shia community. The numbers of officers and recruits from other minorities have been both opaque and shifting. Furthermore, the political identity of the new Iraqi Army went through different stages. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the new Iraqi army was initially formed by recruiting officers from the anti-Saddam opposition groups and militiamen who were exiled outside Iraq (Allawi, 2007). This structure, however, has changed since to include more Arab Sunnis and Kurds. During the two terms in office of the former Prime Minister Maliki, the number of Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the Iraqi Army has decreased (Dodge, 2012). The deterioration of ethno-sectarian representation in the Iraqi Army continued up to the rise of ISIL in June 2014.

> "The Iraqi Army and military conscription can act as a catalyst to facilitate reconciliation in Iraq provided that the Iraqi Army becomes the main and only force tasked with the protection of the Iraqi state. The main challenge will be Shia militias after the defeat of ISIL."

The post-ISIL Iraqi Army has two main components: the Special Forces/Counter-Terrorism force (Golden Brigade) and the Shia militias under the Hashd (PMUs). The Golden Brigade, which was trained and equipped by the United States Army, is largely apolitical. It has been spearheading the fight against ISIL in Iraq since June 2014. There have been virtually no abuses registered against the Golden Brigade units which led the Sunni community to welcome it forces to liberate their cities.[5] Consequently, it is argued here that the Iraqi Army has various political allegiances. Yet, the successful example of the Golden Brigade (Special Forces) can be used as the foundation to create an apolitical nationalist Iraqi Army.

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[5] http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/559041/Golden-Division-Special-Forces-ISIS-Iraq-Mosul-Liberation-Skull-Masked-Commandos

The Iraqi Army and military conscription can act as a catalyst to facilitate reconciliation in Iraq provided that the Iraqi Army becomes the main and only force tasked with the protection of the Iraqi state. The main challenge will be Shia militias after the defeat of ISIL. The Shia-led Iraqi government passed a law last November 2016 legalizing Shia militias under the Popular Mobilization Units Law arguing that the law will bring militant groups under some form of government control. However, Sunni Arabs argue that these militias are following the same path of the IRGC which started as PMUs (*Pazdaran* in Persian) but evolved overtime to become a parallel force in the hands of a supreme religious leader. The major Shia militias answer to Iran rather than to Prime Minister Abadi. There are numerous examples supporting this argument. The latest release of the royal Qatari hunting party revealed the extent of Iranian influence over Shia militias in Iraq.[6]

In order for the Iraqi Army to become an effective catalyst for nationalism in Iraq, the post-ISIL era has to witness inclusive political reforms with the aim to win the trust of marginalized communities. It will be impossible to apply conscription in cities where people consider the Iraqi Army nothing but a group of Shia militias who seek revenge against Sunni Arabs. The successful example of the Golden Brigade units and genuine political reforms can help the Iraqi army become the main catalyst of nationalism in Iraq to minimize external influences in Iraq.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Yerevan Saeed
Arab Gulf States Institute

Iraqi army is not apolitical. It is largely made of Shia population of the country. Kurds and Sunni populations were largely purged during Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. This has led to wide distrust between Iraqi army and Sunni and Kurdish populations. While the Iraqi army is under control of Iraqi prime minister Nuri- al-Maliki, its largely Shia militia forces that control the security of the country in particular in most conflict sensitive areas of Iraq- Sunni dominated areas. Widespread abuse, violence and human rights violations by the Iraqi army and Shia militia forces in the Sunni areas of Iraq has further widened distrust Baghdad and the Sunnis. Iraqi army has been flying sectarian flags in Sunni areas, further adding to distrust between the army and the newly liberated areas from ISIS. Conscription with the current way of affairs in Iraq appears a daunting if not an impossible task. First, it's very unlikely Kurdish and Sunni population would agree to be commanded by Baghdad because of the past experience. However, it is possible that conscription to be conducted within each community similar to the current recruitment of Sunni fighters in Iraq in order to be trained and equipped, followed by an incremental integration into the Iraqi army. In my view, Iraqi army could be further crippled with the new coming of the Iranian ambassador to Iraq. He was one of the architect and backers of Shia militia forces in Iraq. Iran support expected to continue for them.

In addition, the new appointed ambassador has over 30 years of experience in dealing with Iraqi leaders, political and security issues. The new ambassador was at Iranian revolutionary guards of Quds force section for 30 years. He was also an advisor for Qassim Suleimani. It's his pick for the

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[6] http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/qatari-hunters-kidnapped-iraq-freed-15-months-170421124508279.html

new post in Iraq. The new Ambassador expected to work closely with Iraqi Shia militia force as well as Iraqi politicians in order to further enhance and empower the Shia paramilitary forces in Iraq. With the two new Iraqi elections are coming, it would not be a surprise if the leaders of the Shia militia forces to run for office. They are highly popular among Shia populations. If they win elections, this will translate into further political influence and capital of Tehran in Iraq.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Zana Gulmohamad
Research Fellow at the American University of Kurdistan
Sheffield University, UK

There is no formal percentage of Shias in the Iraqi Army (IA). However, according to various reports, they are estimated to make up more than 75%.[7] In the process of building the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) post-2003, for example in 2005 some of the Shia militias such as the Badr Organization and Mahdi Army have tacitly and informally infiltrated or been brought in by officials into the ISF and the military, police, security and intelligence agencies. Post-2003, the IA was composed of a considerable number of Iraqi Kurds, around 20%, now there are around 1% according to a Kurdish lawmaker.[8] Although there is unprecedented cooperation between the IA and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Peshmerga forces to fight IS in Mosul, earlier the ISF were not welcomed in the KRG's territories. The cooperation is only tactical; it does not represent any kind of long-term political affinity or reconciliation.

Post-2003 the ISF, including the IA, have suffered from: overlapping and often rival bodies; many unqualified people recruited based on sects; high desertion rates; lack of loyalty among ranks; infiltration by Shia militias and criminals; the unchecked expansion eased corruption among the military and security ranks, on November 30th, 2014, PM Haider al-Abadi announced that the IA included 50,000 "ghost soldiers"; and people joining the security forces to earn money to "survive" and those are some of the reasons why the ISF collapsed facing IS in 2014.

The IA might be effective if its development has been checked and pro-Iranian elements in it are reduced or neutralized. If there is a professional IA in the future, it might be a catalyst for reconciliation for Iraqi Arabs including the Shia and Sunnis, but not the Kurds; the Kurds do not see the IA as their protector, they have their own forces (Peshmerga), which they trust in. Therefore, the reconciliation will be partial, and not include the entire country.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Elie Abouaoun
US Institute of Peace

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[7] Florence Gaub, "An unhappy marriage: Civil-Military relations in post-Saddam," Carnegie Europe, January 13, 2016: Ummar Ali, "Iraqi Army: the journey from the military of Umma to sectarian Army," Al-Taqreer, 2015.
[8] Rudaw (2016) "Lawmaker: Kurds make up only 1 percent of Iraqi army",
(http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/170120161)

The Iraqi army reflects the state of the society. It is not monolithic and so far, there are no signs that the Army has one agenda like in Egypt for example. While "solidarity" among military personnel might show up in certain cases, the institutional bonding is not strong enough to overcome the vertical divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines. While enrolling in the army – including conscription- might ease up inter-personal relations somehow, the collective fears remain intact in general. The Lebanese experience is a good lesson how such efforts can bring only low scale and short lived results at this level. After the Taif agreement in 1990, the government imposed a conscription for more than a decade with the aim of fostering a "stronger national identity". The result, as seen today, is not conducive. Failing to embrace an inclusive governance model undermined the possible – though highly unlikely- impact of such efforts. Iraq is not different, especially with the presence of tens of thousands of fighters now enrolled in militias.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Dr. Scott Atran
Artis Research

It depends on what portion of the Iraqi army you are talking about. Shi'ite commanders want Iraq to be Shi'a led, Sunni militia want Iraq to be Sunni led, or separate, and Kurds in the Iraqi army want Kurdistan to have autonomy, at the very least. For the most part, no one trusts anyone. Even the former Peshmerga who have been integrated into the Iraqi army don't trust it (and the KDP/PUK Peshmerga, who don't trust each other, don't trust Kurdish commanders in the Iraqi army, much less the Sunni or Shi'a). At least this was what we saw and tested on the Makhmour-Qayarah front last year.

Comments on Political Agenda of Iraqi Army

Hala Abdulla
Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University

To what extent is the Iraqi Army apolitical?

When it comes to Iraq, it is indeed difficult to assume that we know all the answers, and even worse, that we can predict the course of events, or what will unfold or happen in the future. However, to answer the above question, we need to examine history and the current evidences we have at hand. Everything suggests, that it is safe to assume that the age of the Iraqi Army's Coup d'états and political involvement is not the danger it once was. A quick review of the Iraqi Army history, we find that Iraq had witnessed several Coup d'états, and the last one, led by army officers in 1960s, brought in the Ba'ath regime. Following that juncture in Iraq's history, the Iraqi Army witnesses a drastic change within its leadership and military ideology. The army that was once perceived as one of the most experienced and professional armies in the region, had moved in the 1970s from an army that led several Coup d'états which brought in political change, to one that responded to the orders and desires of its commander in chief, Saddam Hussein. The army was a mere tool in the hands of Iraq's former president Hussein. In fact, Hussein made sure that the Iraqi Army had no rising leadership with power-craving intentions or political ambitions,

by simply targeting respectful military leaders. One example, was the assassination of his own cousin and brother-in-law General Adnan Khairallah in 1989, Saddam's Defense Minister, who was very popular and highly admired personality among the officer corps and the public as well. It was believed that Saddam had suspected that Khairallah was planning a coup to overthrow him.[9]

Before I initiate my brief examination of the current Iraqi Army and its intentions, political desires if any, and future goals, it is only fair to purposely distinguish between the army that collapsed in 2014, and the one that is leading the fight against ISIS in Mosul's most dangerous neighborhoods today. Since the beginning of the military operations to liberate Mosul and other provinces held by ISIS, there has been a serious and important turning point in how the army is performing and how its perceived by the public.

The army formed following the 2003 invasion was similar to the former. While former army answered to one authoritarian regime, today's army answers to whomever occupies Iraq's premiership, whether Allawi, al-Maliki, and most recently al-Abadi. However, post-2003 army is even weaker, simply because its leadership, structure, and foundation reflects the fragmented political environment in Iraq today, which is built on the U.S. designed ethnic/religious/sectarian basis where each group is guaranteed a share. Additionally, the army, like other sectors in Iraq, is plagued by corruption and nepotism. It also lacks a unified national identity, cohesion, and to some extent loyalty.[10]

Like its predecessor, the post-2003 army is weary and suffering from exhaustion. While Saddam threw the army into three wars, the current has been fighting al-Qaida and most recently ISIS for almost thirteen years. The former broke down with little resistance when the U.S. forces approached Baghdad in 2003, and the current army did the same in Mosul in 2014.[11] All this suggest that the Iraqi Army even if it had political agendas, it is too weak to impose their will. I would suggest that the question here should read "is the Iraqi Army politicized? Is it being used by the political elite and to what extent?"

Given Iraq's status today, particularly as the Iraqi Army is facing some of the most brutal urban warfare against ISIS in Mosul, and in fact managed to retake and liberate about 60% of territory once controlled by ISIS,[12] its total involvement in the war against ISIS have obscured their political leanings and there is not an absolute answer even to this question.

Had this question of whether the Iraqi army is politicized or not, been asked several years ago, specifically back in 2014, when the Iraqi Army was facing its most tragic breakdown since its withdrawal from Kuwait in 1991, the answer would've undoubtedly been, a very loud and definite YES, the Iraqi Army is deeply politicized, sectarian, corrupt and unprofessional.

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[9] http://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/518406/iraqs-mosul-battle-of-psychological-war/

[10] http://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/518406/iraqs-mosul-battle-of-psychological-war/

[11] http://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/518406/iraqs-mosul-battle-of-psychological-war/

[12] https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43612.pdf

Following the quick and shocking fall of Mosul back in June 2014, and the devastating retreat of the Iraqi Army in the face of a couple thousands of ISIS fighters back then,[13] the Iraqi government headed by newly appointed Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi took some serious and crucial measures to examine the root causes of this devastating collapse. Although these measures did not hold any of those responsible for this catastrophic and shameful collapse accountable, it did however highlight some of the most salient factors that led to this tragic failure. In an attempt to reform the Iraqi military institution, one of these measures was the uncovering and revelation, by the Prime Minister himself, of what is known as the "ghost army" or the "ghost soldiers." A phenomenon where thousands of soldiers were registered on the Army's payroll but in fact were physically absent, by simply paying bribes to their commanders to evade military duty. Some military experts from inside Iraq believed that the "ghost soldiers" was one of the main factors for the army's collapse in Mosul, as many of these soldiers were physically absent and there were no adequate number of soldiers available to fight an approaching vicious and well-motivated ISIS. Another factor of corruption and politicization was the trading of military officers' positions among politicians and military personnel, where each rank had its own price tag. For example, a Divisional commander's position was priced at $2 million.[14] What made this position the most expensive among others was the fact that Division Commanders had to be voted and approved by the Iraqi parliament, and these positions often fall within the Iraqi sectarian quota, opening widely the door for the trading of such lucrative slots among corrupt politicians. Knowing that Division commanders are assigned based on political affiliation and endorsements, while Brigade commanders are known to be directly assigned by the Prime Minister, it is safe to assume that the Iraqi Army was deeply politicized during that time. In a culture where Face-Saving is a common aspect, and self-criticism and admitting to one's own mistakes are not common practices, credit and acknowledgment must be given to Al-Abadi for initiating such reform to fight corruption and nepotism within the Iraqi military institution. Perhaps a good example of such measures was the discharge of Baghdad's Green Zone Special Forces Commander General Mohammed Ridha back in May 2016. This came following the incident when Gen. Ridha kissed the hand of Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr while the latter was entering the Green Zone for a sit-in protest, and allegedly allowing his followers and protesters to breach the fortified Green Zone, home of the Iraqi government and U.S. Embassy.[15] Despite these reforms, the army is still influenced to a certain degree by political wrangling, particularly its senior leadership. An example of such was the impeachment of the former Iraqi Defense Minister Khalid al-Obaidi in August 2016, over allegation of corruption, where he was discharged during a critical time, few months before the Battle to liberate Mosul. Some military experts from inside Iraq believed that the reason behind such move was that al-Obaidi was popular among the officer corps, which alarmed some political elites.

Could the Iraqi military be an effective catalyst for reconciliation between different groups in Iraqi society?

While there remain some major issues within the Iraqi army which requires serious attention and reform, the beginning of the military operations within Iraq to retake ISIS-held territory, particularly the Battle of Mosul (October 15, 2016), had initiated a new chapter and phase for the

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[13] http://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/518406/iraqs-mosul-battle-of-psychological-war/

[14] http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2014/12/10/you-too-can-command-an-iraqi-army-division-for-only-2-million/

[15] http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/05/05/iraq-pm-replaces-military-commander-over-green-zone-breach.html

army and its image among Iraqis. It is the phase that brought in the much-needed Face-saving for the army, it brought back its prestige and along with it, preserved its image and dignity among the public in Iraq. However, to be more specific, most of this recently earned respect and newly-shaped positive image is mainly because of the relentlessness, fierce-fighting, and professionalism of the semi-independent, quasi-ministerial, U.S trained, Iraqi Special Forces ISOF and Counter Terrorism Services ICTS (the "Golden Division"). Iraq has proved to have one serious, experienced, and reliable force which is the ISOF/ICTF. "The ISOF include Iraqis from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Maintaining a sole Iraqi identity with no religious or ethnic affiliation, the unit has spearheaded almost all of the battles against ISIS and won with minimal causalities. It proved its effectiveness at the time when the Iraqi army and other divisions lost credibility among the Iraqi people."[16]

Once dubbed as the 'Dirty Division' under the premiership of Nouri al-Maliki, today with a clean record of no human-right violations in the Mosul operations, and other provinces they liberated, the "ISOF/ICTS/Golden Division" managed to earn not only people's respect but affection at the same time. Aside from the embedded journalists covering "ISOF/ICTS/Golden Division" operations in the frontlines which shows people's interaction, warm welcoming, and positive sentiment towards the soldiers, this sentiment is evident via the countless, and spontaneous social media fan pages of the ISOF/ICTS, and its celebrity-like officers and soldiers. What made this ISOF/ICTS-public bond even more effective and strong was the usage of smart phones held by soldiers where they broadcast live short videos from the frontlines within Mosul and during some of the fiercest fighting, or often during the rescuing of civilians caught in the crossfire, turning these soldiers into real-life heroes for Iraqis. The amount of positive sentiment and reaction is often overwhelming to experts covering this topic and monitoring these local social media outlets. Example of this, hundreds if not thousands of comments and questions posted by young men of different backgrounds asking and wanting to joint ISOF/ICTS.

A good analogy would be comparing the "ISOF/ICTS/Golden Division" to Iraq's national soccer team. Both are recruited from Iraq's different and vibrant ethnic and religious backgrounds and both maintain a national Iraqi identity with no religious or ethnic affiliation. The Iraqi National Soccer team has always been an effective and powerful unifying factor among people. Iraqis are known for their serious passion for soccer, and during soccer events and international and regional matches where the country's national team is playing, people, enthusiastically would sit together, regardless of their backgrounds or political affiliations, cheering and celebrating for their national soccer team playing abroad. Also, ISOF/ICTS officers' like Gen. Talib al-Kinani, Gen. Abdulwahab al-Saaidi, Col. Haidar al-Obaidi, LtCol Muhanad al-Tamimi, and LtCol Salam al-Obaidi became public figures and are currently admired and seen as celebrities and heroes, similar to soccer players within the national team such as Younis Mahmoud, Ali Adnan, and Nashaat Akram. People exchange and talk about their heroic actions, stories, speeches, and humanity in saving civilians' lives.

It is worth noting that as a militarized society, Iraqis have serious passion and respect for the military, and the power and prestige that comes with it. Regardless of the country's brutal history, every family has at least one member in the military. Although the military was once viewed and perceived with suspension by the majority Shi'a during Saddam's ruling, and the opposite

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[16] http://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/V4-Report-Final-Update-7Nov16.pdf

happened post 2003, where the Sunnis viewed the military with suspicion, there remains a certain degree of respect and admiration towards men in uniform, particularly officers among people.

One might wonder, if the army is the same, and the people are the same, what have changed or led to this change? And what made the same soldiers that were once viewed with suspicion and hate, now being hailed and welcomed with hugs and sweets. This could be credited to the leadership, to the strict instructions given to soldiers on how to deal with civilians, not to display sectarian signs, securing civilians lives first in an attempt for minimal causalities among the innocent people held by ISIS, and offering them medical aid, and oftentimes food. It is indeed an Iraqi-Iraqi campaign of winning the hearts and minds. On the other end, people held under ISIS, experienced a brutal rule and most had lost loved ones. A tragic and hard experience that made them realize and view the army as heroes and saviors.

All this information might be micro-level details; however, it provides a clear image on how Iraqis think, and perceive the military at this current stage. It suggests that it is indeed beneficial for the Iraqi government and the U.S. to capitalize on this momentum and utilize the Iraqi military, particularly ISOF/ICTS' current role and achievements, as an effective catalyst in unifying the different Iraqi factions within Iraq. Most of the above mentioned social media pages as well as the organic, grassroots campaigns are created by people, therefore the roots for a good and effective unity government-sponsored campaign is already there, initiated by the people themselves.

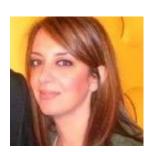**Could conscription be an accelerant for reconciliation and if so how could it be implemented?**

While the concept of conscription could ease, and end the sectarian fear and mistrust among the minorities and competing Iraqi factions, it could open the door for more corruption and nepotism. The idea that the Iraqi military has more Shi'a personnel than other groups is true, basically because the Shi'a are in fact majority within Iraq. Plus, for years following the 2003 invasion, young Sunni men were discouraged, prevented and targeted by insurgencies for attempting to join the military. As the image of the military has changed among Iraqis toward a positive one, and young men from Sunni background and other minorities are eager to join the service, the idea for an imposed conscription is less needed for that purpose at present. Moreover, the concept of a conscription, is forever tied in the minds of Iraqis, to the era of the Ba'ath and its non-ending wars. Again, there is no right or wrong answers for this question, however, the facts suggest that, this idea could be perceived as another law imposed by the government which leads to more corruption.

One might ask, why would the conscription be a bad idea, when a *fatwa*, a religious verdict, by the Pope-like Shi'a figure Grand Ayatollah Sistani following the fall of Mosul in 2014, managed to mobilize thousands of hundreds of young and old men to carry arms and fight ISIS, most without compensation, in what is known today as the Hashd al-Sha'abi or the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)? The answer would be the PMF units are fighting on an ideological basis, and survival-mode against apocalyptic enemy,[17] and not on nationalistic motives, which what the conscription could possibly provide.

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[17] http://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/V4-Report-Final-Update-7Nov16.pdf

In conclusion, the U.S. government should continue promoting measures for a stable Iraq, by supporting the country, particularly through the support it provides to its military in their fight against terrorism. The creation, training and equipping of Iraq's elite ISOF/ICTS is a great example. A modest investment in military equipment and especially, training, provides the U.S. a reliable regional force and an ally in that troubled region. In terms of domestic stability, the Iraqi army exists as a counterweight to the various Shi'a militias originally promoted by al-Sistani in an emergency situation and now has largely formed a separate military force with some U.S. military observers viewing some of their factions as an instrument of Iranian influence in Iraq. Iraqi people are very cynical about almost all governmental institutions, but the army despite its less than sterling reputation in violently putting down Shi'a and minority community rebellions remains a generally respected institution.

Author Biographies

Hala Abdulla

Hala Abdulla joined USMC Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) in September 2010 as the CENTCOM regional researcher and Subject Matter Expert under the Regional Cultural Language Familiarization (RCLF) team. Prior to 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), she worked for al-Arab daily International Newspaper in Baghdad office. Following OIF, she worked for four years as a journalist and cultural advisor with the U.S. Army Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) in Baghdad's Green Zone. Since coming to the United States ten years ago, she has worked from (2007-2009) as an online Content Manager and team leader for Iraqi/Arab journalists and reporters under a CENTCOM-sponsored Transregional Web Initiative (TRWI), an Iraq-focused website. Hala also worked from (2009-2010) as a Social Media Analyst under USSTRATCOM's 'Foreign Media Analysis' initiative. Hala was born and raised in Baghdad, and is a native Arabic speaker, fluent in five regional dialects. She holds a B.A in English Language and Literature from al-Ma'amun University in Baghdad (1996), and an M.A. in Strategic Communications from American University in Washington D.C. (2013). She authored 'Iraq's Mosul: Battle of Psychological War. Quantico Sentry, June 2014, and Co-authored 'The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq: from the inside looking out,' American Diplomacy, April, 2010.

Dr. Elie Abouaoun

Dr. Elie Abouaoun is the director of Middle East Programs with the Center for Middle East and Africa at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Elie served until recently as a senior program officer for the Middle East and North Africa programs and the acting director for North Africa programs. Previously, he held the position of Executive Director at the Arab Human Rights Fund after an assignment as a Senior Program Officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace – Iraq program.

Prior to 2011, Dr. Abouaoun managed the Iraq program of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and worked as the program coordinator for Ockenden International-Iraq. He is a senior trainer and consultant with several local, regional and international organizations on topics such as human rights, program development/management, displacement and relief, capacity development, Euro Mediterranean cooperation; and is a member of the pool of trainers of the Council of Europe since 2000. Dr. Abouaoun regularly contributes to publications related to the above mentioned topics. In 2001, he was appointed a member of the Reference Group established by the Directorate of Education-Council of Europe to supervise the drafting of COMPASS, a manual for human rights education. He further supervised the adaptation and the translation of COMPASS into Arabic and its subsequent diffusion in the Arab region in 2003. He regularly writes articles for the French speaking Lebanese daily newspaper L'Orient du Jour as well other publications in the Arab region. He is a visiting lecturer at Notre Dame University-Lebanon on the subjects of human rights, civil society, advocacy and at Saint Joseph University-Lebanon on the subjects of human rights and citizenship. Dr. Abouaoun serves as a member of the Board of Directors of several organizations in the Arab region.

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.

Dr. Scott Atran

Scott Atran received his B.A. and Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University (and an M.A. in social relations from Johns Hopkins). He is tenured as Research Director in Anthropology at France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Institut Jean Nicod – Ecole Normale Supérieure, in Paris. He is a founding fellow of the Centre for Resolution of Intractable Conflict, Harris Manchester College, and Department of Politics and International Relations and School of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford. Scott also holds positions as Research Professor of Public Policy and Psychology, University of Michigan; and he is Director of Research, ARTIS Research.

Previously, Scott was assistant to Dr. Margaret Mead at the American Museum of Natural History; Coordinator "Animal and Human Communication Program," Royaumont Center for a Science of Man, Paris (Jacques Monod, Dir.); member of the Conseil Scientifique, Laboratoire

d'Ethnobiologie-Biogéographie, Museum National D'Historie Naturelle, Paris; Visiting Lecturer, Dept. Social Anthropology, Cambridge Univ.; Chargé de Conférence, Collège International de Philosophie; member of the Centre de Recherche en Epistémologie Appliquée, Ecole Polytechnique, Paris; Visiting Prof., Truman Institute, Hebrew Univ., Jerusalem; Leverhulme Distinguished Visiting Prof. of Anthropology, Univ. of London-Goldsmiths.; Presidential Scholar, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Scott has experimented extensively on the ways scientists and ordinary people categorize and reason about nature, on the cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion, and on the limits of rational choice in political and cultural conflict. He has repeatedly briefed NATO, HMG and members of the U.S. Congress and the National Security Council staff at the White House on the Devoted Actor versus the Rational Actor in Managing World Conflict, on the Comparative Anatomy and Evolution of Global Network Terrorism, and on Pathways to and from Violent Extremism. He has addressed the United Nations Security Council on problems of youth and violent extremism and currently serves in advisory capacity to the Security Council and Secretary General on combatting terrorism and on ways to implement UN Resolution 2250 to engage and empower youth in the promotion of peace. He has been engaged in conflict negotiations in the Middle East, and in the establishment of indigenously managed forest reserves for Native American peoples.

Scott is a recurrent contributor to The New York Times, The Guardian and Foreign Policy, as well as to professional journals such as Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, and Behavioral and Brain Sciences. His publications include Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science (Cambridge Univ. Press), In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion (Oxford Univ. Press), The Native Mind and the Cultural Construction of Nature (MIT Press, with Doug Medin), and Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human (Penguin). His work and life have been spotlighted around the world on television and radio and in the popular and scientific press, including feature and cover stories of the New York Times Magazine, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Nature and Science News.

Zana Gulmohamad
In February 2013 I began my PhD at the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, UK and am currently teaching in the political science department there. My research title is: "Iraq's foreign policy post-2003". I am a Research Fellow at the American University of Kurdistan. I have an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Sulymania - Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council - Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

I had substantial responsibilities as executive manager and a security analyst in matters related to security, intelligence, data analysis, security technology, foreign relations (receiving delegations and official trips abroad) and teaching staff. My capabilities have built up over years

of training and interaction with security and intelligence corporations, governments and their security and intelligence services. They include states such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

My articles have been published by journals and think tanks such as Jamestown Foundation "Terrorism Monitor', The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, The New Arab, and Middle East online. I have presented conference papers in the UK, the US and the Middle East. Please go to my website to view the links to my articles www.zanagul.com

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Yerevan Saeed

Yerevan Saeed is a research associate at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. He is an analyst who researches and writes on security, political, and energy issues in the Middle East, focusing on Iraq, Turkey, Iran, the Gulf, and the Levant. He has served as White House correspondent for the Kurdish Rudaw TV and his work has been published in the Washington Institute's Fikra Forum, the Diplomatic Courier, The New York Times, the London based Majalla magazine, Rudaw, Global Politician, and several Kurdish newspapers. In addition, he has been interviewed by Voice of America, NPR, CNN, Voice of Russia, and Kurdish television programs and newspapers. From 2009-13, Saeed worked with STARTFOR as Middle East specialist. He then joined NOVETTA as media analyst for Iraq from 2014 and 2015; additionally, he worked for several media outlets, including The New York Times, NPR, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, BBC, and The Guardian, as a journalist and translator in Iraq from 2003-07.

Saeed holds a bachelor's degree in government from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree from Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, with a focus on Middle East studies and international negotiation and conflict resolution. He is a PhD student at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. He speaks Kurdish, Arabic, and has a command of Farsi.

Muhanad Seloom
Muhanad Seloom is the director of the Iraqi Centre for Strategic Studies (ICSS). He is a linguist [Arabic, English, and Kurdish] with BA in Translation & Linguistics and a criminologist with MA in Comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice. His expertise includes ethno-sectarian conflicts in the Middle East, terrorism, politics of designation, and mechanisms of securitisation. His PhD research examined the relationship between designating groups "terrorist" and the wider supportive community's choice to adopt violence. His most recent publications address the prospects of conflict transformation and political settlement in Iraq.

Dr. Marcin Styszynski

Marcin Styszynski (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. He also served as the cultural and scientific attaché in the Embassy of Poland in Egypt (2009-2012) and the second secretary in the Embassy of Poland in Algeria (2012-2014). In 2016 he started the new duties of Consul in the Embassy of Poland in Riyadh.

Dr. Shalini Venturelli

Dr. Shalini Venturelli is Associate Professor of International Communication and International Relations, in the School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC. She conducts international sociocultural field research and multidisciplinary complex analysis of human systems and information environments of conflict regions, including: sociocultural drivers of instability and international security, and asymmetric information capabilities of strategic competitors. She investigates, regional stability systems, ideology & influence production, population and social order control-mechanisms, enhancement of partner security capabilities, strategic communication, evolutionary capabilities of violent extremist networks, social unrest and global social media networks, and assessments of governance, security and stabilization in volatile world regions.

Current projects include:

- Sociocultural analysis support to the Warfighter in conflict regions.
- Evolutionary capabilities and strategic impacts of violent terrorist networks, including ISIL, Al Qaeda and their affiliates within and across strategic regions.
- Design and application of evolutionary models of information dynamics to identify and predict unstable human ecosystems in trans-regional environments.
- Identification of critical drivers of human ecosystem volatility across diverse security and information orders aimed at advancing capabilities in detection, deterrence and information engagement.
- Control systems mechanisms of asymmetric information and influence capabilities of geopolitical power actors Russia, China, Iran and their non-state proxies across transregional land and maritime domains in MENA, Southwest Asia, Euro-Asia and East Asia.

Prof. Venturelli was awarded the U.S. Army Commander's Medal for Civilian Service for her front-line research support to U.S. forces in Southwest Asia and the Middle East with field investigation and analysis of the strategic information environment and sociocultural drivers of conflict. She is also a recipient of the Secretary of Defense Medal for the Global War on Terrorism for her efforts in support of the Warfighter's mission through enhanced awareness of complex human environments.

Dr. Venturelli has multidisciplinary-multiregional expertise, and is multilingual She is the author of numerous studies, publications and reports on information and communication environments, information networks, the global communication and knowledge revolution, and culture, media

and international security. Professor Venturelli received a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder in International Communication & International Relations, an M.A. from the University of Chicago in Interdisciplinary Social Science, and a B.S. from Illinois State University in Economics. She conducts graduate seminars, courses and leadership training in intercultural and cross-cultural communication, culture and international security, sociocultural field research in conflict zones, strategic communication in war and peace, among other programs.   Contact: sventur@american.edu

Dr. Bilal Wahab

Bilal Wahab is a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on governance in the Iraqi Kurdish region and in Iraq as a whole. He has taught at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani, where he established the Center for Development and Natural Resources, a research program on oil and development. He earned his Ph.D. from George Mason University; his M.A. from American University, where he was among the first Iraqis awarded a Fulbright scholarship; and his B.A. from Salahaddin University in Erbil. Along with numerous scholarly articles, he has written extensively in the Arabic and Kurdish media.

Wayne White

Wayne White is a Policy Expert with Washington's Middle East Policy Council. He was formerly the Deputy Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia (INR/NESA) and senior regional analyst. He also served as Principal Iraq analyst and head of INR/NESA's Iraq team.

White was Chief of INR's Maghreb, Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq division and State Department representative to NATO Middle East working groups.

He served as the State Department's intelligence briefer on Iran and Iraq for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and Jordanian cabinet-level officials, and on Iraq, Iran, and Syria for senior Israeli defense and military officials. He was a Political Officer at the US Interests Section in Baghdad, US Sinai Field Mission peacekeeper, and in various capacities as an Embassy Officer in Niger during the Sahel Drought Emergency.

Education
B.A. at Pennsylvania State University; M.A. at Pennsylvania State University

Countries of Expertise
Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen
Issues of Expertise
U.S.-Arab Relations, Persian Gulf Affairs, U.S. Foreign Policy, Regional Security, Peace Process, Military & Defense, Democratization, Conflict Resolution, Arab-Israeli Relations