

A REVIEW OF THE IRAQI MILITARY'S READINESS AND CAPABILITIES IN LIGHT OF THE GROWING THREAT POSED BY ISIS

Noor Omer | August 18, 2024



Executive Summary

- The disbandment of the Iraqi Army after the 2003 US invasion created a power vacuum that was filled by Al-Qaeda and subsequently led to the creation of ISIS, leading to the group's rise and the need for international intervention in 2014.
- The US-led Coalition, Iraqi and Peshmerga Forces were able to defeat ISIS territorially in 2017, but the group has since experienced a resurgence and continues to carry out attacks in Iraq and Syria.
- Iraq's military strength is ranked 45th globally, and it faces challenges in terms of technology and force posture.
- To address these challenges and counter the threat of ISIS, Iraq needs to invest in advanced technologies and develop a stronger force posture, potentially through acquiring drones and other cutting-edge military technology.
- Iraqi Army needs a balanced leadership as well as a robust command and control structure away from sectarian influence and foreign interventions.

Introduction

In the backdrop of the prevailing security environment in the wider Middle East, Iraq once again is facing the renewed threat of terrorism. ISIS sleeper cells¹ have been actively engaged in attack and run missions, killing Iraqi security members as well as civilians. Inherent security vacuums in the disputed territories combined with the limited readiness and structural capabilities of the Iraqi Armed Forces (IAFs), as a result Iraq's exposure to threat of terrorism has exponentially increased.² The Israel-Gaza war has opened a security frontline towards Iraq as Tehran's missiles and kamikaze drones breach Iraqi defenses resulting in heightened security threats and the cancellation of international flights.³



Emblem of the Armed Forces of Iraq. Credit :Ministry of Defense/Iraq.

With the rising tensions in Gaza and spilling over the wider region, a spectrum of conventional and nonconventional threats emanating from state and non-state actors⁴ have come to surface. Developing and sustaining a requisite force posture is the ultimate solution for militaries of developing nations, in this case Iraq, to thwarting imminent threats from state and non-state actors. Given on-the ground security realities, it is questionable how the Iraqi Armed Forces (IAFs) would sustain a resilient force posture in the face of meager economic resources and limited industrial base. A much larger question concerns the withdrawal of the Coalition Forces in Iraq. Cognizant of Iraq's reliance on foreign militaries to contain ISIS since 2014, it is necessary to evaluate the force posture⁵ of the IAFs to understand the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the Iraqi Armed Forces, especially since its reestablishment after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, on August 18, 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) stipulated Order No.22⁶ to establish the New Iraqi Army. The new Iraqi Army, which was rebranded as the Iraqi Armed Forces (IAFs) under CPA⁷ on March 21, 2004, included the following: an Army (ground forces), Air Force, Coastal Defense Force, reserve forces, and other elements. Reestablishing the Iraqi forces meant a wave of changes in terms

of technology, industrial base, national resources, personnel, and overall military strength and readiness. However, considering the US with the technological edge across all domains⁸ the US invasion meant significant changes in the structural organization of the Iraqi forces. August 18, 2024, marks the 21st anniversary of the establishment of the New Iraqi Army by the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

This policy brief examines the historical trends of the Iraqi Army's force posture, weapons acquisition and development, as well as the Army's current defense industrial base and stance in the international arena. It also provides policy recommendations for enhancing Iraq's military force, particularly in its efforts to eradicate ISIS throughout the country.

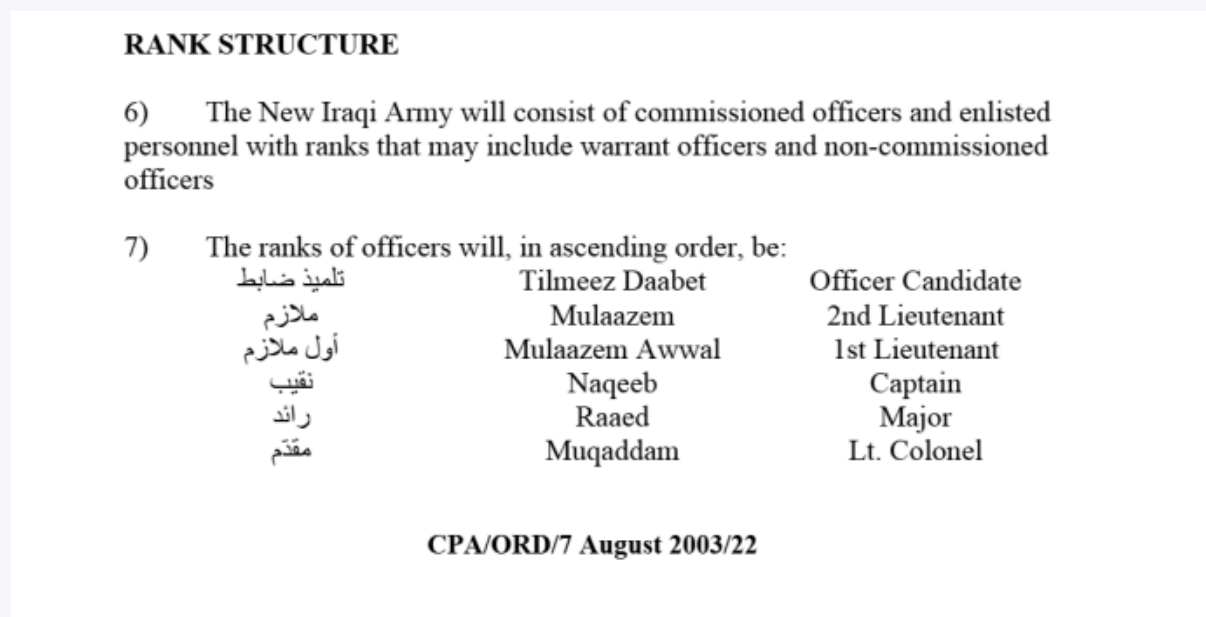


FIGURE 1:Photo of Coalition Provisional Authority Order no. 22 to reestablish the Iraqi Army on August 18, 2003. As indicated in Section 6 of the CPA Order no. 22, the rank structure of the New Iraqi Army is enlisted in ascending order in both English and Arabic alphabets. **Credit:** UNHCR.⁹

Brief History of the Iraqi Army

Part I:1921-2003

The Iraqi defense industrial base takes roots in the British doctrine of the 20th century. At a fundamental level, since the creation of the Iraqi Army, the army has been under the influence of British military doctrine. Established and formed by the United Kingdom, the Iraqi Army assumed control over Iraq after 1917. Along British lines, with British training and equipment, an army of 3,500 men grew to 11,500 from 1922 to 1932.¹⁰ As such, the army was considered as a modernizing influence in Iraq, which soon founded the first Iraqi Air Force in 1931. A conscription law was introduced to limit the influence of tribal leaders and thus strengthen the army.

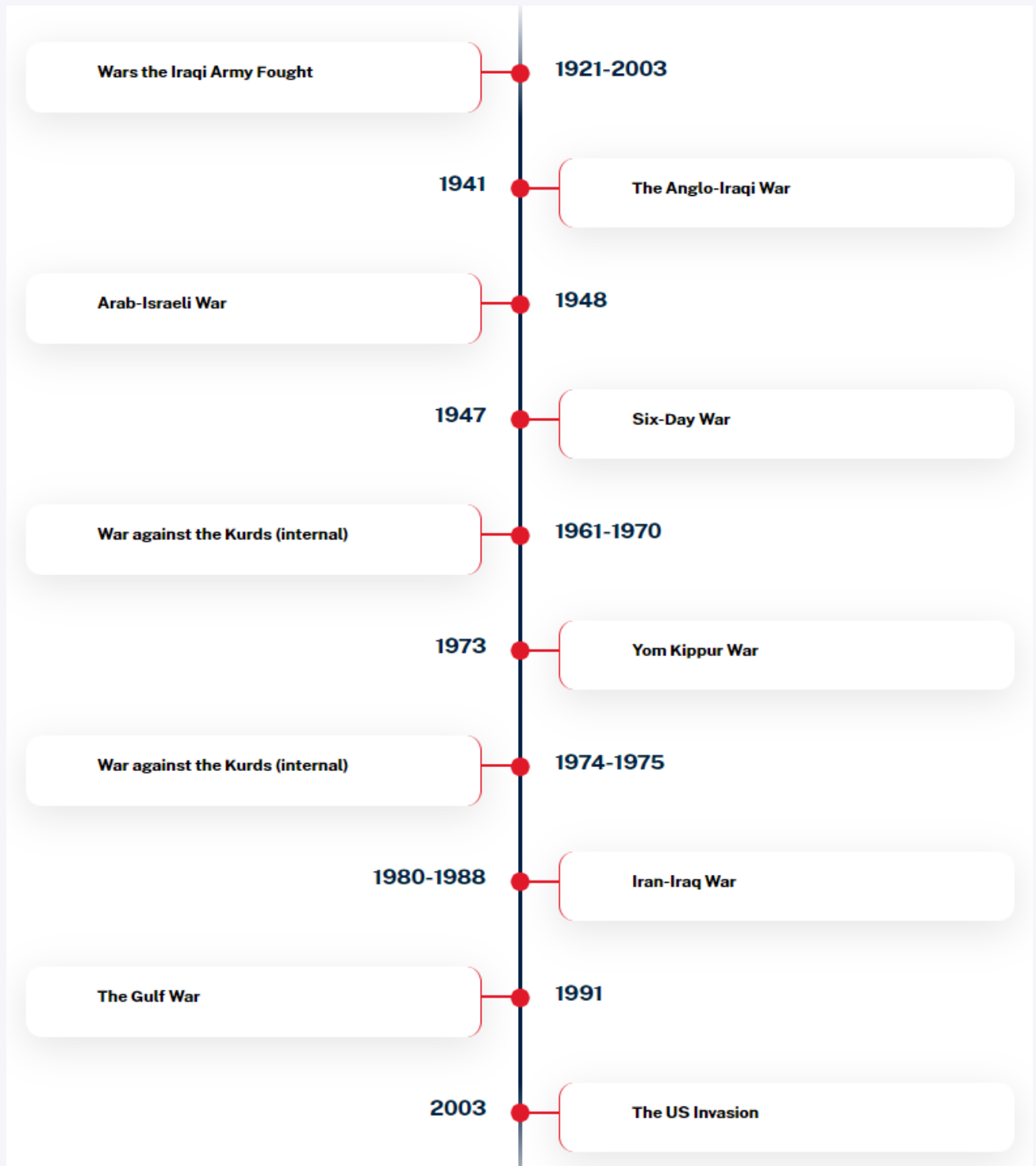
Quickly enough, the army became a political tool to launch six coup d'états from 1936 to 1941. As per then-King Ghazi's policy to encourage its union with Iraq, the Army was concentrated near the Kuwaiti border. Given the level of threat the Iraqi Army imposed along the Kuwaiti border, the British army confronted the army in May 1941 and defeated it during the WWII. Until 1958, the Iraqi Army relied on British aircraft and equipment for its military supplies. After the infamous 14th of July Revolution of 1958, the new government initiated diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and as a result, the Iraqi Air Force had the advantage of having both Soviet and British aircrafts throughout the 50s and 60s. The Iraqi Army's determination to invade and annex Kuwait for the second time was steadfast, and thus troops were amassed along the Kuwaiti border. However, the British army's Operation Vantage, by the deployment of troops, aircraft, and naval vessels, successfully thwarted the Iraqi army's attempt to cross the border.



Figure 2:standing behind, a historical photo of the first pilots of the Iraqi Air Force in 1931. **Credit:**
Old Iraqi Army Archive.

In an attempt to diversify arms and equipment, the Iraqi Army begun implementing structural changes in the army in the 70s. Iraqi policy at the time was focused on melding British and Soviet arms, mainly to avoid overreliance on British arms. Alas, many Western weapons were superior compared to Soviet counterparts and thus did not fully meet the demands of the Iraqi army. Eventually, the Iraqi Generals' strategy to implement a complete changeover, or equipment reversal in the Iraqi Army failed because of three main reasons: (1) Western countries' reluctance to sell large amounts of weaponry to Iraq, (2) Western equipment was expensive and (3) took longer to train personnel on.¹¹ The attempt, though, helped with the first batch of arms purchases, with a focus on Western equipment, as follows:¹²

- Soviet Union (1973-1990):large amounts of Soviet equipment, constituting the majority
- France (1976-77):64 Mirage F1 fighter-attack aircrafts and 200 AMX-30 tanks
- Italy (1977):10 frigates and corvette vessels
- Brazil (1978):200 Cascavel APCs
- Miscellaneous (1970s):2000 heavy equipment transporters



Iraq's Formerly Military Might

Iraqi industrial defense base in the 70s achieved the greatest milestone in the history of the army. Fueled by power rivalry with Iran, the Iraqi Army built state-of-the-art production facilities in Hillah (South of Baghdad): production of rocket propellant and Falluja (West of Baghdad): assembling missiles. In hopes of becoming a regional power, the Army developed mostly under Saddam Hussein's regime. The force posture of the Iraqi Army derived most of its strength from the defense industrial base by producing heavy weapons¹³ and small arms¹⁴ that were used in the many wars the army fought, especially in the Iran-Iraq War. The defense industry was run through different weapons programs for rocket artillery, missiles, remote-piloted drone aircraft...etc. The Iraqi arms production industry included, inter alia, the following.^{15 16}

1. Ground-to-ground missile with a 400-mile range (known as Husayn).¹⁷
2. Short-range ballistic missiles (known as Scuds)¹⁸
3. Rocket production with a 35-mile range designed after:
 - The Brazilian Astros 2
 - Soviet Frog 7
 - 55-mile range Liath capable of carrying chemical warheads
4. 30-mile range surface-to-surface rocket (known as Ababil)- designed to carry cluster-bomb warhead
5. Iraqi munitions projects produced
 - Lion of Babylon tanks
 - Infrared and television-guided bombs
 - Laser-guided missiles
6. Projects on naval mines and remote-piloted (drone) aircraft for battlefield surveillance (this project remained unfinished)

7. Production of indigenous radar planes (similar to the US airborne warning and control system- AWACS surveillance aircraft)
8. Project 395: a \$400 million program to produce solid-fuel surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, such as Al Hussein and Al-Samoud 2
9. Project Babylon: producing a series of “superguns” (this project remained unfinished)¹⁹
10. Production of Tabuk Sniper Rifle and Al-Fao self-propelled artillery system
11. Production of LUGM-145 naval moored contact mine
12. Biological weapons program (until the end of 1991 Gulf War): the Iraqi Army tested biological warheads, containing anthrax and botulinum toxin in Iraq’s deserts.

State of the Iraqi Army Under Saddam Hussein

Iraq had an advanced industrial defense base that was considered as the most effective military in the Gulf region.²⁰ However, the military was highly politicized and became a powerhouse for Saddam Hussein to achieve his political objectives, such as suppressing the Shia sect and the Kurds.²¹ Owing to a populist, self-described revolutionary political party,²² Saddam Hussein prioritized the military's allegiance to the Baath regime, reshaping it into a political instrument. Questionable military personnel in the army were purged and replaced with Baath loyalists. Officer promotions that were not merit-based but rather based on loyalty to Saddam Hussein as highest command of the Army²³ demonstrated military ineptitude, which led to professional shortcomings in the army's proficiency and ranking system, as evident in the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars.²⁴

With a long history of heinous crimes committed by the Iraqi Army under Saddam Hussein, the army turned into a tool for political execution. The people of Iraq, who were supposed to be protected by the army, became one of its main targets. Like Nazi Germany, the Iraqi regime concealed its actions in euphemisms and employed “collective measures” with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as the Kurds.²⁵ Under the rule of the Iraqi Army, a population was silenced in its entirety.²⁶

Defense Spending & Vital Weaknesses²⁷

No other country in the world could even come close to the amount of money that Iraq spent on defense as a percentage of its total wealth. The International Institute for Strategic Studies in London estimated Iraq’s gross domestic product (GDP) at \$45 billion, of which \$12.9 billion--more than 25%--was spent on defense. According to Los Angeles Times, the Soviet Union spent between 15% and 20% of its economic output on arms; the United States devoted about 6% to the military, and Israel--Hussein’s sworn enemy--just under 15%.

The Iraqi Army’s long-lasting problems started with Saddam Hussein, who self-appointed himself as field marshal but never served in the army. Vital weaknesses in the Army include, inter alia, the following:

- Over-centralized command and control center
- Poor leadership on the battlefield
- Incompetence of officers (chosen for their allegiance not military professionalism)
- Inexperienced in frontline combat (only a third of the army was experienced in frontline combat by 1990)
- Lack of tactical flexibility and maneuverability

- Inept at maneuvering large numbers of troops and tanks when confronted with the unexpected
- Iraqi Air force was large but weak, its air defenses primitive by Western standards, its navy virtually non-existent.

Part II:2003-2024

The New Army:Post 2003 US Invasion

The invasion of Iraq called “Operation Iraqi Freedom” began with 295,000 US and allied troops marching from the south, crossing the Kuwaiti border on March 20, 2003. Alongside the US and allied troops, the Kurdish Peshmerga with 70,000 fighters fought the Iraqi forces from the north. The US and coalition forces launched the invasion as part of the (mostly US) strategic response to the terror attack of September 11, 2001.²⁸ The invasion was opposed by the majority of European and Middle Eastern countries, although a few demonstrated diplomatic support as indicated in the figures below. By May 2003, Saddam Hussein’s regime was overthrown and the Iraqi Army defeated. Despite the many efforts to substantiate the claim of WMDs owned by Iraq, no weapons of mass destruction were found. After the collapse of the Ba’ath regime sectarian violence engulfed the country as former loyalists to Saddam, including high ranking now-disbanded Iraqi army officers, launched insurgent attacks against US forces.

As sectarian civil war quickly precipitated, the terrorist group, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), sought to further the violence and continuously attacked the US forces.²⁹ Simultaneously, Iraq held a series of elections and voted for a new Constitution, an elected Parliament and government. Despite the sectarian strife, the wave of dissolution of entities under the CPA Orders

transformed the once dictatorship regime of Iraq. In 2008, the US and the Iraqi governments agreed to the withdrawal of US troops by December 2011. The United States would promptly launch a second military intervention in Iraq when AQI reemerged in 2014 under the name Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as ISIS.

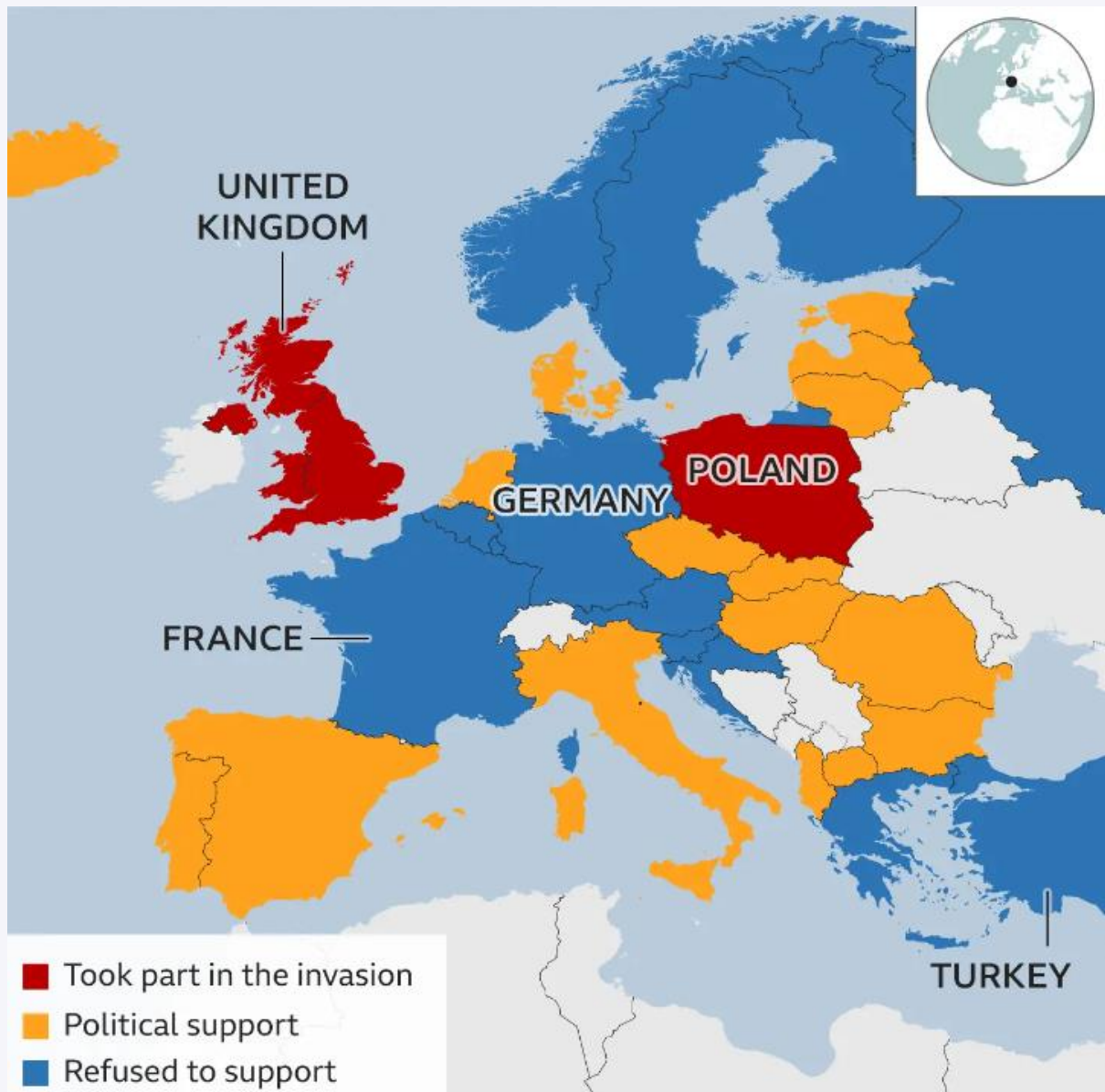


Figure 3: Most of US allies in Europe opposed the war against Saddam Hussein's regime, except for the UK and Poland. **Credit:** BBC



Figure 4: Except for Kuwait, which allowed the US to use its land and air to launch attacks into Iraq, most Middle Eastern countries refused to support the war. **Credit:** BBC.

The Coalition Provisional Authority a couple months after the invasion, quickly disbanded the Iraqi Army under the CPA Order No.2 on “The Dissolution of Entities”³⁰ as follows:

- The Army
- The Air Force
- The Navy
- The Air Defense Force

- The Republican Guard
- The Directorate of Military Intelligence
- The Al Quds Force
- The Quwat al Tawair
- Saddam Fedayeen
- Ba'ath Party Militia
- Friends of Saddam
- Saddam's Lion Cubs (Ashbal Saddam)

The creation of the New Army called Iraqi Armed Forces (IAFs) focused on the national self-defense capabilities of the Army for a free Iraq at the conclusion of the authority of the CPA, as explicitly mentioned in the preamble of the CPA Order No. 22. Citing relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1483 (2003),³¹ for the purpose of the creation of the new army, the CPA Order No. 22 promulgated the tasks of the new army and of the national defense forces of Iraq. According to the text of the Order, after the conclusion of the CPA's tenure, the Iraqi Army shall be able to provide the basis for militarily effective, professional, and non-political armed forces for the military defense of the nation.

The mission and command structure of the Army, Military Code of Discipline, and Promotion of Officers are stipulated in the Order. Section 9 of the Order explicitly prohibits political activity or any opinion of a political nature to be held or exercised by members of the New Iraqi Army. Contrary to what the US had hoped for, Iranian expansion in the Middle East has continued since Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown, largely because Iran's geopolitical goals in the region were impeded by Saddam's regime. Consequently, Iran took the opportunity to install its power bases in Iraq and has successfully inserted its Shia militias

into the fabric of Iraq's security establishment, and its allies have a powerful voice in parliament.³²

Notably, the most colossal mistake was leaving 400,000 disgruntled and combat-trained Iraqi men with no income or profession which helped fuel the insurgency and eventually led to the rise of ISIS,³³ or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).³⁴



Figure 5: A member of the Iraqi security forces fires artillery during clashes with ISIS militants near Falluja, Iraq, May 29, 2016. **Credit:** CBS News.

Iraqi Army During the ISIS War 2014-2017

The ISIS onslaught in 2014 is a reminder of how the decision to disband the Iraqi Army in 2003 backfired. The thousands of disbanded officers joined the ranks of ISIS and exploited the fragile security vacuum in Iraq. Estimates in 2014 indicated that more than 25 of ISIS's top 40 leaders once served in the former Iraqi military.³⁵ Shaping the New Iraqi Army along with relevant security forces without seasoned Iraqi commanders and officers from 2003-2011

perhaps was an impossible task, given the fragile command structure of the Iraqi Army. The Problem? The US struggled to impose too many of its own military doctrine and development on an Iraqi structure that had no internal checks and balances to make them function once US advisors left in 2011.³⁶ As a result of a flawed command structure, over-centralization for power gains by the then-Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, in the fight against heavily armed terrorist groups, namely ISIS, the Iraqi Army was quickly overwhelmed and defeated. As ISIS militants marched forward in 2014, the group seized a large amount of heavy artillery from Iraqi forces during the surprise assault on Mosul.³⁷ Besides capabilities shortcomings, Iraq's once vibrant military industrial resources were soon exhausted in the fight against ISIS. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Iraq's force capabilities in 2014 included:

- 270,000 troops (Army)
- 550,000 armed police and special forces
- 340 tanks (M1 Abrams tanks from the United States and old Soviet T-55s)
- Combat helicopters for air attacks



Figure 6: The Maydan area of Mosul's Old City, where the last Islamic State militants were corralled and eventually killed by Iraqi security forces. **Credit:** Ivor Prickett, The New York Times.

On September 10, 2014, the US announced the creation of a broad-based international coalition to defeat ISIS in Iraq. Notable institutions included NATO, the European Union, and the Arab League. The coalition forces supported the war against ISIS through contributions of warplanes for aerial strikes, logistical support, and trainers. By the end of 2014, Iraq signed a strategic deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to share the country's oil and military resources to defeat ISIS. The most important dates of the War against ISIS start in March 2015 when Iraq deployed 30,000 forces in a major offensive to recapture Tikrit from ISIS. However, on May 17 of the same year ISIS took over Ramadi. The Islamic State ruled over 88,000 sq km (34,000 sq miles) at its height,³⁸ stretching the border between Syria and Iraq. The timeline of the war³⁹ until December 2017, when ISIS was declared territorially defeated, is as follows:

2015

- October 15, 2015: Iraq recaptured the Baiji refinery, the country's largest oil refinery, from ISIS.
- October 22, 2015: A member of a US special operations force was killed during an ISIS hostage rescue mission in northern Iraq. He was the first American to die in ground combat with ISIS.
- November 13: Kurdish forces, backed by coalition air cover, liberated Sinjar from ISIS. On December 27, Iraqi military forces liberated Ramadi from ISIS.
- December 10: US officials announced that airstrikes killed ISIS Finance Minister Abu Saleh and two other senior leaders in Tal Afar.

2016

- June 26: the Iraqi army liberated Fallujah.
- October 22: Iraqi forces liberated Qaraqosh, a Christian area southeast of Mosul, which had been under ISIS rule since 2014.
- October 25: ISIS took control of half of the western Iraqi town of Rutba, located near the Syrian and Jordanian borders.
- October 28: ISIS fighters used tens of thousands of men, women and children as human shields in Mosul to prevent Iraqi troops from advancing.
- November 26: Iraq's Parliament recognized the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) as a legal component of the Iraqi Security Forces. These armed groups emerged after ISIS seized territory in 2014.

2017

- January 23-24: Government forces took complete control of eastern Mosul from ISIS, 100 days after the campaign started.
- February 24: Iraq launched air strikes against ISIS targets inside Syria for the first time after coordinating with Damascus.
- November 17: Iraqi forces captured the border town of Rawa, the last remaining town under ISIS control in Iraq.
- December 9: Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State.

2019

- October 26: The leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was killed by a U.S. special forces air raid in Idlib in northwest Syria.

Five Vital Weaknesses of the Iraqi Forces During ISIS War

1. **Iraqi Army disbandment:** the US-led decision to dissolve the Iraqi army following the 2003 invasion resulted in the removal of experienced commanders and troops, which in turn created a power vacuum that ISIS subsequently exploited.
2. **Sectarian influence:** the Iraqi army was weakened by the removal of Sunni commanders by former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, who replaced them with less competent Shi'ite loyalists. This action transformed the Army into a sectarian force.
3. **Lack of cohesion:** the Iraqi army's abrupt dissolution disrupted its structure, resulting in challenges in reestablishing a cohesive and

effective force capable of combating insurgencies such as ISIS.

4. Delayed reform in Iraq's security apparatus: insurgent groups, such as ISIS, were able to expand their territory and strength during the period of instability as a result of the slow and poorly managed process of rebuilding the Iraqi security forces.

5. Loss of experienced personnel: the leadership and combat effectiveness of insurgent groups, such as ISIS, were significantly enhanced by the recruitment of many of the dismissed Sunni military officers and soldiers, who were left unemployed following the disbandment.

How Much of a Threat is ISIS in 2024?

10 years after the ISIS declared the establishment of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the extremist jihadist group claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks throughout the world, most notably the attack on a concert hall in Moscow by ISIS gunmen in March 2024 killing at least 60 people and injuring 145.⁴⁰ ISIS's war of attrition started after it lost its strongholds in Iraq's second largest city Mosul and in Raqqa, Syria. Although the biggest single trend indicated ISIS pivoting towards Africa⁴¹, the group has carried out several major suicide attacks in the disputed territories in Iraq, targeting both civilians and Iraqi security forces.

Currently, despite losing its Middle East bases, ISIS group is currently operating again on a global scale. Following several years of decreased capability, ISIS was behind 121 attacks in Syria and Iraq in 2023 and claimed 153 attacks in both Iraq and Syria in the first six months of 2024, according to statements by CENTCOM and US officials.⁴² The increase of the number

of attacks by ISIS demonstrates the group’s capability to exploit the existing security vacuum in its birthplace, Iraq and Syria. ISIS is significantly increasing its force capabilities and manpower by training children and training recruits to become suicide bombers, according to Wall Street Journal reports in mid-August 2024. ISIS is reportedly attempting to revive its Islamist Caliphate and regaining strength in the North Arabian Desert, also known as the Jordanian steppe.⁴³ Most alarmingly, ISIS’s resurgence will be on a global scale as its subgroups have already carried out terrorist attacks in Europe and Asia, as evident in the Moscow concert massacre.



Figure 7: A convoy of trucks carrying people to detention camps on November 2, 2019, after they had fled areas held by the Islamic State in eastern Syria. **Credit:** (Ivor Prickett/The New York Times).

What Does the Resurgence of ISIS Look Like?

ISIS militants are setting a new trend as they engage in terrorist activities, posing a new set of challenges for the Coalition Forces. The group's new tactics differ from its previous methods: instead of large groups of militants charging villages with tanks and machine guns (as happened during the first stages of their onslaught on Iraq and Syria), the group has shifted to guerrilla-style tactics involving small cells with rifles and booby traps. This is all happening in the middle of discussions of a US and Coalition Forces withdrawal, especially in Iraq. Currently, the US alone maintains 2,500 personnel in Iraq and 900 in Syria.⁴⁴ Instead of averting an ISIS resurgence through developing critical military capabilities, policymakers from Baghdad are busy with formulating exit plans for the US and Coalition Forces.⁴⁵ With the surge of ISIS attacks, immediate activation of the sleeper cells in Iraq is an expected next step for ISIS.

Iraqi Army: Strengths and Challenges in the Post-ISIS Period

Iraq is ranked 45 out of 145 of the countries taken into consideration in the Annual Global Firepower review, as explained in the informational box below. Iraq holds a power index score of 0.7441 with a score of 0.0000 being considered exceptional in the GFP assessment. At a glance, Iraq's general capabilities is indicated in *Figure 8* below

Military Ranking 2024⁴⁶ – Explainer

From GFP: Since 2006 Global Firepower (GFP) has provided a unique analytical display of data concerning 145 modern military powers. The GFP ranking is based on each nation's potential war-making capability across land, sea, and air fought by conventional means. The results incorporate values related to manpower, equipment, natural resources, finances, and geography represented by 60+ individual factors used in formulating the finalized GFP ranks, providing an interesting glimpse into an increasingly volatile global landscape where war seems all but an inevitability. Military power is measured through the Power Index Score (PwrInd) where a score of 0.0000 is considered perfect.

Top 10 Powers in 2024

1. United States
2. Russia
3. China
4. India
5. South Korea
6. United Kingdom
7. Japan
8. Türkiye
9. Pakistan
10. Italy

Gulf Powers 2024

1. Iran
2. Saudi Arabia
3. Iraq
4. UAE
5. Kuwait
6. Oman
7. Bahrain

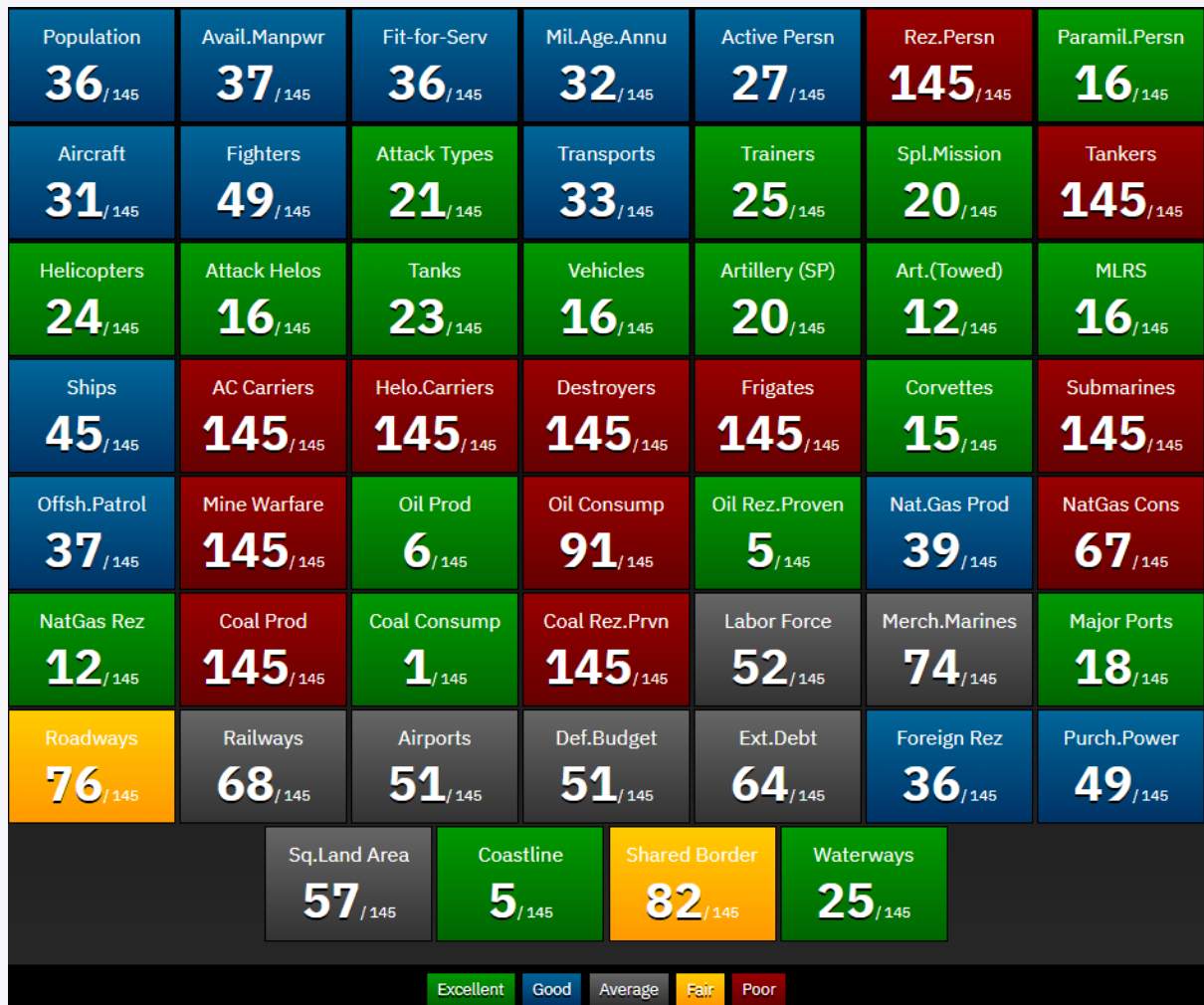


Figure 8 :Iraq’s general capabilities. Credit:GFP

According to Global Firepower, measuring capabilities takes into account various crucial factors, such as financials, geography, and manpower. The figures for Iraqi military’s financials and manpower are as follows for the year 2024.⁴⁷

Category	Metric	Details
Financials	Purchasing Power Parity	\$390,265,000,000
	Foreign exchange/gold	\$64,231,000,000
	Defense budget	\$5,252,000,000
	Foreign debt	\$75,000,000,000
Manpower	Total population	41,266,109
	Available manpower	17,331,766
	Fit-for-service	14,030,477
	Total military personnel	293,000
	Reaching military age annually	701,524
	Active personnel	193,000
	Reserve personnel	0
	Paramilitary (figures are higher than GFP reports)	100,000
	Airforce personnel	5000
	Army personnel	175,000
	Navy personnel	12,500

Table 1: Data assumptions for Iraq’s general capabilities in 2024. **Credit:** GFP.

Airpower: Given Iraq’s decreased defense industrial production, the active inventories and strength of the Iraqi Air Force includes 371 aircrafts, 26 fighters, 197 helicopters and 40 attack helicopters.

Land Forces: The land warfare capabilities of Iraqi forces consist of 39,872 vehicles, 848 tanks, 281 Self-Propelled Artillery, 1, 446 Towed Artillery, AND 425 MLSR (Rocket Artillery).

Naval Forces : Iraq's naval forces' total assets are 2 corvette vessels and 26 offshore patrol vessels. Iraq lacks several critical naval warfare assets, such as Aircraft and Helicopter Carriers, Destroyers, Frigates, Submarines, and Mine Warfare.

Policy Recommendations

As indicated in the abovementioned data, Iraq lacks the technological edge across all domains, especially in the air (including cyber and space). As a developing country, Iraq's force posture is facing critical challenges in meeting the technological demands of modern warfare. When dealing with adversaries such as ISIS, modern weaponry becomes a necessity. Evidently, the air capabilities of US and Coalition Forces paved the way for the Iraqi Army and Kurdish Peshmerga Forces to advance forward and defeat ISIS in their strongholds. Without it, Iraq, and the Kurdistan Region's limited defense capabilities,⁴⁸ could not have possibly defeated ISIS alone. To this day, one of the key warfighting capabilities that Iraq needs to develop is in the airspace. In a volatile and high-threat security environment like Iraq, it is crucial for the Iraqi forces to have a stronger force posture.

Despite Iraq's decreased defense industrial base as a result of sanctions and limited economic capabilities, Iraq requires a strong force posture by sustaining a large military investment- even at the cost of its national prosperity. Considering the volatile security environment of the Middle East, the optimal course of action for Iraq is to implement a grand military strategy that includes the acquisition of a technological advantage in all domains of warfare as part of its long-term military objectives. The most viable way to add a technological edge to the Iraqi Army's capabilities would be through developing the economic capacity to produce, maintain, and coordinate complex military systems.

However, taking into consideration the on-ground security realities in Iraq and the wider region, especially the threat of ISIS's resurgence, Iraq needs to increase its access to advanced technologies from abroad, such as drones, to compensate for its weaknesses in the force posture. This is important to address because ISIS has used drones on the battlefield previously,⁴⁹ and with the recent wave of attacks in Iraq and Syria, the group may be able to obtain drones and other cutting-edge military technology. The frequent missile attacks by Iran in its conflict with the United States in Iraq, and the breaches of airspace brought about by Turkish drone warfare against the PKK, necessitate such advancements even further. The evolving character of warfare, that is technology intensive,⁵⁰ pushes developing countries, in this case Iraq, to invest in capability enhancement besides the acquisition of new technological platforms as part of a long-term strategy.

ENDNOTES:

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11. AL-MARASHI, IBRAHIM. "IRAQ'S ARMED FORCES : AN ANALYTICAL HISTORY." LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2008, [READ MORE ↵](#)
12. SIPRI ARMS TRANSFERS DATABASE, IRAQ 1973-1990. SIRPI, [READ MORE ↵](#)
13. HEAVY WEAPONS ARE WEAPONS FIRING AMMUNITION LARGER THAN 7.62MM, MACHINE GUNS, CREW-SERVED WEAPON, ANTI-TANK WEAPONS SUCH AS ROCKET PROPELLANT GRENADES (RPGS), ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS (TO INCLUDE SHOULDER FIRED MISSILES AND AA GUNS), INDIRECT FIRE WEAPONS (MORTARS AND ARTILLERY PIECES), ARMORED VEHICLES OR SELF-PROPELLED WEAPONS, HIGH EXPLOSIVES AND EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (INCLUDING MINES AND HAND GRENADES). [↵](#)
14. SMALL ARMS INCLUDES SHOTGUNS, PISTOLS, AND RIFLES THAT FIRE AMMUNITION UP TO AND INCLUDING 7.62MM. [↵](#)
15. FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE [READ MORE](#) [READ MORE](#) [READ MORE](#) [READ MORE](#) [READ MORE](#) [AND READ MORE ↵](#)
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A REVIEW OF THE IRAQI MILITARY'S READINESS AND CAPABILITIES IN LIGHT OF THE GROWING THREAT POSED BY ISIS



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