The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service

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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

at BROOKINGS

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

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The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service

The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) is an independent, quasi-ministerial level organization separate from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of the Interior (MoI). Originally created by the U.S., it has a three-tiered organizational structure which includes the CTS headquarters, the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC), and three Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) Brigades. Organizations such as CTS are at the heart of U.S. strategies in the Middle East that aim to develop indigenous capacity to combat insurgents and terrorists. This strategy was most recently exemplified by both President Obama's decision in June 2014 to send U.S. Army Special Forces personnel to Iraq to assess and advise Iraqi Security Forces and his decision to create a coalition to fight the Islamic State without U.S. boots on the ground.

There are many lessons to learn from CTS, both in terms of what worked well and what did not. Today, CTS is deeply involved in the fight against the Islamic State and has retained its cohesion and effectiveness while other Iraqi Security Forces have collapsed. Concurrently, many of the problems present in CTS before the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq have become worse and new problems have emerged. Based on the successes and failures of CTS in Iraq, some conclusions for U.S. military officials can be drawn. To minimize problems and maximize the positive aspects of an organization such as CTS, in the future the U.S. should: 1) anticipate the ramifications of placing a force outside of a nation's traditional security structure; 2) fully consider the roles U.S. advisors and assistance play with an indigenous security force and what happens when they are no longer available; and 3) understand the effects of applying U.S.-based organizational designs that are alien to a nation's traditional military culture. In some cases, an organization such as CTS may be a model for the development of effective forces for nations with military cultures similar to Iraq's.

Section one of this paper will describe the creation of CTS. Section two will discuss the maturation of CTS with full U.S. assistance and the challenges it faced, while section three will examine CTS in the post-U.S. withdrawal environment. Section four will discuss CTS today in the fight against the Islamic State. The final section will focus on the lessons of CTS and conclude with recommendations.

The Creation of CTS

The Iraqi Special Operations Forces

Few countries were as susceptible to terrorism as Iraq in the aftermath of the U.S. led Coalition's invasion to overthrow Saddam Hussein in 2003. Iraq was suspended on a fault line of sectarian and ethnic tensions, but Saddam had largely kept these in check through brutal means that no western nation could endorse. U.S. actions in the immediate aftermath of the invasion — de-Ba'athifcation, the abolishment of the Iraqi Army, and the very presence of western forces — made the situation much worse. Initially, the training of Iraqi forces to assist in stabilizing Iraq was a low priority since Coalition leaders deemed the development of insurgency and terrorism as improbable,[1] but by the fall of 2003, the Coalition recognized the need to develop Iraqi forces to assist in security operations. A special priority was placed on the development of an Iraqi counterterrorism capability that could locate and eliminate terrorist threats.[2]

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are ideally suited to conduct counterterrorism because of their intense training, organization, and specialized equipment, and many nations have SOF units that conduct counterterrorism. Proponents of SOF as a counterterrorism force argue that conventional army units are not capable of conducting counterterrorism due to their organizational structure and broad set of missions. For these reasons, U.S. Army Special Forces (USSF) in Iraq were given the responsibility of creating an Iraqi counterterrorism force modeled after the United States' own Special Operations Forces.[3] USSF, also known as Green Berets, possessed foreign language and cultural abilities, and their primary mission was training indigenous forces. It was only natural that when creating an Iraqi counterterrorism force the USSF would pattern the force on itself and train it using U.S. military doctrine to prevent possible misuse of the force or allegiance to political agendas.

The first branch of the counterterrorism force was created as part of the Coalition Provisional Authority's initiative to create the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) to convince Iraqi leaders to disband their militias. In November 2003, the USSF created and began to train the 36th ICDC Battalion. The unit was formed from the various ethnic and major political parties in Iraq to ensure it would be capable of conducting operations on a non-sectarian and non-political basis, and each of the various Iraqi militia leaders provided candidates. The battalion was operational and able to conduct missions led and directed by USSF by December 2003.[4]

Shortly thereafter in December 2003, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and U.S. Central Command directed the development of a specific Iraqi counterterrorism unit. Again, USSF led this effort and selected volunteers from across Iraq representing Shi'as, Sunnis, and Kurds to form what would become the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force (ICTF). After an assessment and vetting of candidates, those selected were sent to Jordan for training by USSF and Jordanian Special Forces since the facilities required to train the unit in precision counterterrorism were unavailable in Iraq. The training course, later named the Operator's Training Course

1. Kevin Wells, "A Retrospective on SF in Iraq," *Special Warfare*, January–March 2012, 15.
2. Michael O'Brien, "Foreign Internal Defense in Iraq: ARSOF Core Tasks Enable Iraqi Combating-Terrorism Capability," *Special Warfare*, January–March 2012, 21.
3. O'Brien, 21.
4. Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command-Iraq (JFSOCC-I), *Iraqi Special Operations Forces: An Overview*, April 2010, 2; Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (OSIGIR), *Iraqi Security Forces: Special Operations Force Program is Achieving Goals, but Iraqi Support Remains Critical to Success*, SIGIR 11-004, October 25, 2010, 4; and O'Brien, 24.

(OTC), lasted 98 days, consisted of around 100 Iraqi students and was conducted in accordance with USSF doctrine and standards. The first OTC class graduated in April 2004 and produced Iraqi soldiers with advanced marksmanship skills similar to those of USSF, a requirement for the ICTF mission. The graduates returned to Iraq to conduct operations with USSF. Additional OTC classes continued in Jordan until 2006.[5]

Trained, advised, and led in combat by USSF, the ICTF and the 36th ICDC Battalion operated independently until May 2004 when U.S. Central Command directed the two forces merge to form the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) Brigade, with the mission to conduct precision counterterrorism. The ISOF Brigade was established with the assistance of USSF at the Radwaniyah Palace Complex, one of Saddam's many palaces, near the Baghdad International Airport in August 2004.[6] The 36th ICDC Battalion was renamed as the 1st Battalion (Commando) and ICTF as the 2nd Battalion (ICTF).[7] The 2nd Battalion focused on high level counterterrorism such as hostage rescue, while the 1st Battalion conducted raids, ambushes, and cordoning of targets in support of the 2nd Battalion.[8] Another force created by USSF, the Mobile Legion Security Company, also known as the Recce Company, was established as a reconnaissance unit for the ISOF Brigade. It conducted intelligence collection to develop targets

for ISOF using civilian vehicles to avoid detection.[9] The Recce Company was subsequently increased to battalion strength.[10] A support battalion was added to the ISOF Brigade, along with an organization responsible for ISOF training, later designated as the Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School (ISWCS), modeled on an U.S. Army institution at Fort Bragg, NC that trained USSF.[11]

Under the formal command of the U.S. led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP)[12] and trained, equipped, advised, and led by USSF, ISOF had the most continuous U.S. attention of any unit in Iraq. Modelled on USSF doctrine, it became a professional force. USSF advisors and teams lived at ISOF bases and were collocated with ISOF down to the company level and at ISOF's training facilities.[13] Many USSF personnel had multiple tours in Iraq and developed close relationships with their ISOF counterparts, and USSF's oversight and continuity with ISOF was critical to its later success.[14] USSF selected the leaders of ISOF and later presented their advice on who should lead.[15] In a February 2006 Department of Defense report, the senior leadership of ISOF was assessed as "generally strong" but still in need of USSF mentoring. The junior leadership was assessed as strong and able to lead small unit actions. The morale of ISOF was extremely high and desertion rates were insignificant.[16]

5.   OSIGIR, 1, 4; O'Brien, 24–25; Wells, 16; and JFSOCC-I, 2, 3.
6.   JFSOCC-I, 3, 12; and OSIGIR, 12.
7.   JFSOCC-I, 3.
8.   DJ Elliot, "Iraq strengthens the Counter Terrorism Bureau," *The Long War Journal*, September 10, 2008, http://www. longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/the_iraqi_counter_te.php (accessed May 28, 2014); and GlobalSecurity.org, "Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Force (INCTF) Counter-Terrorism Service [CTS]," *GlobalSecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/counter-terrorism.htm (accessed May 30, 2014).
9.   JFSOCC-I, 3, 14; GlobalSecurity.org; and OSIGIR, 13.
10. U.S. Department of Defense (U.S. DOD), *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2009*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 54, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf (accessed June 25 2014).
11. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, October 2005*, Report to Congress in accordance with Conference Report 109-72 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2005, 34, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/20051013_publication_OSSRF.pdf (accessed June 7, 2014); O'Brien, 26; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 70, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/March%209204%20SecDef%20signed%2029%20Apr%202010_1D80.pdf (accessed May 30, 2014).
12. O'Brien, 26.
13. Wells, 16–17; and O'Brien, 21, 24, 26.
14. OSIGIR, 18.
15. Wells, 16; and O'Brien 26.
16. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, February 2006*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2006 (Section 9010), 43, http://www.defense.gov/home/features/Iraq_Reports/docs/2006-02-Report.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014).

USSF supplied ISOF with U.S. equipment to enhance interoperability between the two forces, to ease maintenance, and to form the basis for a long term relationship.[17] The ISOF Brigade used equipment and organizational design based on U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) units.[18] ISOF operated with U.S. supplied rifles, machineguns, and High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV), the primary combat vehicle of ISOF, as well as uniforms, body armor, and even furniture and ink cartridges.[19] Through 2004, funding for ISOF was provided by U.S. Central Command, however in 2005, U.S. Congress appropriated over $19 billion in a special funding program for Iraq, the Iraq Security Forces Fund (ISSF), and at least $237 million was used to train and equip ISOF, although the exact amount was not recorded. For ISOF, ISFF was mainly used to repair and renovate facilities and procure equipment, including HMMWVs. [20] In the fall of 2005, the ISOF Brigade moved from the Radwaniyah Palace Complex to Area IV, a former military compound also near the Baghdad International Airport. [21]

From its inception until June 2006, the U.S. conducted the training of ISOF, which was followed by a phase of training Iraqi trainers.[22] ISOF was trained to standards similar to U.S. Army Rangers and USSF, and its personnel continued to be selected from the various religious and ethnic groups in Iraq.[23] Selected ISOF candidates went through a thorough pre-training screening and vetting process to minimize absenteeism and the risk of insurgent infiltration.[24] Only about half of the recruits had prior military service, with the remainder being recruited off the street.[25]

After screening, candidates went through a three-week Assessment and Selection Course similar to the USSF assessment process, which also provided recruits with basic military training.[26] Attrition rates in the course were estimated to be higher than 40 percent or 50 percent.[27] Following completion of the Assessment and Selection Course, those to be assigned to the 1st Battalion (Commando) attended the 47 day Commando Course which taught advanced skills such as vehicle operations, cordon and blocking, use of helicopters in movement, and raids and ambushes.[28] Those to be assigned to the 2nd Battalion (ICTF) attended the 12 week Operator's Training Course (OTC) which contained the curriculum of the Commando Course as well as advanced marksmanship training. The OTC was conducted in Jordan until approximately February 2006 when proper training facilities were established in Iraq.[29]

ISOF was involved in every major combat operation in Iraq and conducted missions, including precision raids, in the most hostile areas, and was one of the most successful units of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[30] In 2008, many ISOF units participated

17. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, October 2005*, 34; and JFSOCC-I, iii.
18. OSIGIR, i.
19. OSIGIR, 15–16; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, February 2006*, 43; and JFSOCC-I, 14.
20. JFSOCC-I, 12; and OSIGIR, 7, 12. An unknown amount of another special funding source, the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund, was also used to procure equipment for ISOF.
21. JFSOCC-I, 12. Area IV required extensive construction and repair, to include the construction or renovation of training and maintenance facilities, barracks, planning areas, and base infrastructure, at a cost of approximately $32 million in U.S. funding.
22. OSIGIR, 4.
23. William Selby, "Iraqi Counterterrorism Capabilities Expanding," *U.S. Department of Defense*, July 25, 2008, http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=50603 (accessed June 14, 2014); and O'Brien, 25.
24. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, October 2005*, 34; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, July 2005*, Report to Congress, 13, http://www.defense.gov/news/Jul2005/d20050721secstab.pdf (accessed July 7, 2014).
25. O'Brien, 25.
26. Selby; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, July 2005*, 13; and OSIGIR, 5.
27. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2009*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008, 67, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Master_9204_29Jan10_FINAL_SIGNED.pdf (accessed May 31, 2104); and OSIGIR, 5.
28. OSIGIR, 5.
29. JFSOCC-I, 3. Later the length of the OTC was reduced to 52 days with the requirement that before attending the OTC, the candidate must first be a graduate of the Commando Course. Elliot; and OSIGIR, 5. ISOF courses also included some cursory training on logistics and supply and some support personnel and specialists received training at MoD schools. OSIGIR, 5; and JFSOCC-I, 11.
30. JFSOCC-I, iii; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, October 2005*, 34.

in *Charge of the Knights* in Basra, an ISF major operation lasting several months to combat Jaysh al-Mahdi, a Shi'a militia. In Basra, ISOF fought fundamentally better than other ISF units and gained the reputation as the best Iraqi force.[31]

However, most ISOF missions were of short duration, usually lasting less than 24 hours, and were conducted at the company level and below. Generally, several missions were conducted each night. USSF accompanied and initially directed all missions, which enabled ISOF personnel to observe the actions of USSF, gain confidence, and develop trust in U.S. doctrine. Following each mission, U.S. advisors conducted an assessment to identify weaknesses and determine the need for additional training. As ISOF's tactical and technical proficiency improved, it began to take the lead in planning and coordinating missions, and eventually USSF took a supporting role while continuing to evaluate ISOF.[32] Over time, ISOF personnel developed the military professionalism and personnel attributes of their USSF advisers both on and off the battlefield: appearing to look like USSF soldiers due to the equipment they used, the way they moved during operations, and their overall demeanor, and ISOF gained a reputation as the best Arab Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the region.[33]

Due to its success, U.S. planners expanded ISOF, which was challenging due to the demanding training. Nevertheless, by October 2005, ISOF contained approximately 1,300 personnel.[34] By mid-2006, it was 1,600 strong.[35] In 2006, CJSOTF-AP decided to further expand ISOF by

creating a new commando battalion with companies in four of Iraq's provinces to extend ISOF's reach and reduce reliance on Coalition aircraft, which frequently transported ISOF on missions outside of the Baghdad area. ISOF expansion into these provinces would also allow immediate response to time-sensitive targets. Planning continued and facilities were constructed in selected provinces to base ISOF.[36]

ISOF remained under the complete control of CJSOTF-AP until September 2006 when the U.S. led Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) and the Government of Iraq (GoI) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which placed ISF under the control of GoI, to include ISOF.[37] For ISOF, this was largely a formality and in reality, CJSOTF-AP continued to control ISOF operations until January 2008, when control was combined between the U.S. and Iraq.[38] However, with the formal passage of ISF to GoI, a Joint Headquarters (JHQ) in the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD) was created. U.S. advisors ensured that ISOF planners and liaisons were assigned to JHQ to assist with the largely symbolic control of ISOF, although ISOF missions were now coordinated with JHQ and MoD.[39] CJSOTF-AP planners believed that ISOF staff elements at JHQ could form the basis of an Iraqi Special Operations Command, similar to the U.S. Special Operations Command. An annex of the MoA assigning ISF to GoI entitled "Coordination of Special Operations Forces" which would have established the command and control relationship of ISOF with JHQ and MoD was never finalized,[40] although MoD did begin to provide limited logistics support to ISOF.[41]

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31. JFSOCC-I, 21.
32. OSIGIR, 5–6; and O'Brien, 22, 26.
33. Wells; and Shane Bauer, "Iraq's New Death Squad: America has built an elite and lethal counterterrorism force. But who's calling the shots?" *The Nation*, June 3, 2009, http://www.thenation.com/article/iraqs-new-death-squad# (accessed May 27, 2014).
34. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, October 2005*, 34.
35. JFSOCC-I, 4.
36. JFSOCC-I, 6–7, 12.
37. O'Brien, 26.
38. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2008*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289), 55, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Master%20%20Mar08%20-%20final%20signed.pdf (accessed June 25, 2014).
39. O'Brien, 26; and JFSOCC-I, 4.
40. JFSOCC-I, 4.
41. OSIGIR, 15.

The establishment of CTS and CTC

U.S. leaders wanted ISOF to be self-sustaining with a command structure that connected it to the GoI ministries that made polices and provided resources so Iraq could maintain ISOF after the U.S. departed. U.S. planners developed a concept for this goal which included the development of a Counter Terrorism Bureau (CTB), later renamed as the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS).[42] The CTS would be separate from other Iraqi ministries such as the MoD and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and serve as the advisor to the prime minister on counterterrorism and related policies. CTS would also ensure that ISOF was properly resourced and provide civilian oversight from outside the ISOF chain of command. The concept also included the development of another separate organization, the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC), which would have operational control of ISOF, be equivalent to and on the same organization level as the Iraqi ground, air, and naval forces commands, and be under the control of JHQ/MoD. Finally, a non-sectarian national counterterrorism strategy would be developed. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki approved this concept in October 2006.[43] The CTC was initially a two star general level military command, but it eventually became a three star level organization. The CTS was theoretically envisioned as a civilian ministry, but it was commanded by an Iraqi three star general and later became a four star level organization. The CTC and CTS became operational in March and April of 2007, respectively, and were located in two separate compounds in Baghdad's International Zone.[44] CTS would eventually have an authorized strength of 649 personnel and CTC would have 1,824 personnel, although they were frequently understaffed.[45]

However, in late 2006 and through the spring of 2007, Maliki issued a series of executive orders that changed the original U.S. concept. An executive order in December 2006 placed ISOF under the prime minister. An executive order in January 2007 placed CTC under the prime minister. An executive order in April 2007 placed CTS under the prime minister and in the chain of command of CTC, making it a quasi-ministerial level organization, equivalent in theory to MoD and MoI, and in control of ISOF.[46] The basis of Maliki's decision to remove ISOF and CTC from MoD control and make CTS their operational headquarters remains unclear. Some believe it was strictly an Iraqi action done by Maliki[47] so that the force could serve his interests. Others believe that the U.S. pressured GoI to make the counterterrorism organization separate from MoD.[48] There was speculation that U.S. planners were motivated to remove ISOF from MoD because ISOF operations, which were coordinated with MoD, were being compromised, allowing terrorists to escape before ISOF could apprehend them. Some even suspected that MoD officers were tipping off personnel targeted by ISOF due to sectarian and political inclinations.[49]

42. O'Brien, 22; and JFSOCC-I, 4, 5. In Arabic, CTS is the "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab." "Jihaz" can be translated in English as either "bureau" or "service." The Iraqi CTS Director later determined that the English word "service" more closely defined the role of CTS. U.S. advisors frequently referred to the entire CTS structure as the Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Force (INCTF), although this was seldom translated into Arabic.

43. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, November 2006*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289), 44, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010Quarterly-Report-20061216.pdf (accessed June 6, 2104); and JFSOCC-I, 5.

44. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2007*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289), 41, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010-Final-20070608.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014); and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72. Approximately $3.9 million in ISFF were used to renovate, modify, and construct the CTS headquarters and CTC, which were established at existing Iraqi facilities. JFSOCC-I, 13.

45. JFSOCC-I, 10; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72.

46. OSIGIR, 15. Executive Order 38, December 6, 2006, placed ISOF under the prime minister. Executive Order 14, January 24, 2007, placed CTC under the prime minister. Executive Order 61, April 5, 2007, placed CTS under the prime minister and in the chain of command of CTC.

47. OSIGIR, 15; and JFSOCC-I, 5.

48. Bauer.

49. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014.

With the CTS headquarters now geared towards operational command rather than strictly policy and resourcing, its role expanded.[50] The CTS headquarters' functions were to: 1) coordinate and synchronize all elements of Iraqi power to defeat terrorism; 2) develop the Iraqi National Counter Terrorism Strategy; 3) conduct operations and strategic planning through Iraqi interagency coordination; 4) develop criteria for the identification and classification of counterterrorism targets; 5) coordinate with intelligence agencies for the implementation of counterterrorism plans; 6) collect and analyze terrorism information; and 7) coordinate with the Foreign Ministry to use diplomacy for counterterrorism cooperation with neighboring countries.[51]

USSF advisers and specialists in logistics, administration, intelligence, operations, strategy, communications, and legal affairs were assigned to advise and train the CTS headquarters and CTC staff, who generally did not attend the ISOF training courses. USSF operational units and advisors continued to be embedded in the ISOF Brigade.[52]

There was opposition from the Iraqi Parliament and MoD in granting quasi-ministerial status to CTS. Parliament believed the creation of CTS gave too much power to the prime minister and that he was building a force to attack his political and sectarian rivals.[53] MoD opposed the manner in which CTS was created since it lost its best unit, ISOF,[54] and saw CTS as a competitor in a struggle for influence and resources. In response to criticism and to give legitimacy to CTS, the prime minister's office drafted a law in September 2007 that would codify CTS as a ministerial level organization with appropriate powers and authorities for the counterterrorism portfolio. The draft law was first submitted to the Iraqi Parliament in September 2008 but was never passed.[55]

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50. For the purpose of this paper, the term "CTS" will apply to the entire CTS organizational structure, which includes the CTS headquarters, the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC), and the ISOF Brigades. When discussing the highest headquarters of the CTS structure only, this paper will use the term "CTS headquarter."

51. Republic of Iraq, Council of Ministers, Counter Terrorism Service, *Iraqi Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012, Summary*, 5.

52. Dave Butler, "Out: On 8 Years in Iraq," *Special Warfare*, January–March 2012, 31; O'Brien, 24–26; and OSIGIR, 4–5. A small number of CTS personnel attended training courses in the U.S., but the numbers were limited due to English language requirements, which few of the Iraqi personnel could meet.

53. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 63 http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_CongressJul09.pdf (accessed June 1, 2014); Anthony H. Cordesman and Adam Mausner, *Withdrawal from Iraq: Assessing the Readiness of Iraqi Security Forces*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 2009, 178, http://csis.org/files/publication/090812_Cordesman_WithdrawalIraq_Web.pdf (accessed June 24, 2014); and International Crisis Group, *Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces Between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal*, Middle East Report N99 – 26 October 2010, International Crisis Group, 13 http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/99%20Loose%20Ends%20-%20Iraqs%20Security%20Forces%20between%20US%20Drawdown%20and%20Withdrawal.ashx (accessed June 9, 2014).

54. JFSOCC-I, 15.

55. JFSOCC-I, 7–8; Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 178; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70; and U.S. Department of State (U.S. DOS), *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013 — Iraq, Refworld*, April 30, 2014, http://www.refworld.org/docid/536229e622.html (accessed June 9, 2014).

The Maturation of CTS with U.S. Assistance

CTS Expansion

Under U.S. tutelage, the CTS organization, specifically ISOF, continued to expand. In late 2007, the four commando companies stationed outside of Baghdad were increased in size to become 440 man regional command battalions and by 2008 had operating capabilities in Basra, Ninawa, Anbar, and Diyala provinces.[56] Also in 2007 and 2008, at the urging of U.S. advisors, CTS developed plans to create regional counterterrorism centers where each of the four regional battalions was stationed. These centers were similar to U.S. Joint Interagency Task Forces and worked under CTC to develop terrorist network mapping and to link intelligence in support of the operations of their regional battalions.[57] A subsequent fifth regional counterterrorism center was established in Baghdad to serve as a focal point for the collection, analysis, and coordination of intelligence.[58] At the same time, CTS developed plans to create an ISOF Brigade garrison support unit to provide logistics and to secure ISOF facilities.[59] In December 2007, the ISOF Brigade had an authorized strength of around 4,100 personnel but was only manned at about 3,500.[60]

In May 2008, CTS decided to more than double its size to 8,500 personnel[61] to support the ongoing growth and to form a new brigade headquarters to control the regional commando battalions. The 2nd ISOF Brigade was created in July 2009. It was also located at Area IV and took control of the four regional commando battalions which were previously under the 1st ISOF Brigade.[62] The 2nd ISOF Brigade focused on areas outside of Baghdad, while the 1st ISOF Brigade, frequently referred to as the Golden Brigade, and later the Golden Division, focused on the Baghdad area,[63] although its high-end unit, the 2nd Battalion (ICTF), continued to conduct missions nationwide.[64] In late 2009, the Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School (ISWCS), which conducted the ISOF training courses and now provided training to both ISOF brigades, was reorganized as the Academia with a two star general in command and under the control of CTC.[65] To accommodate growth, CTS further increased its authorized strength to 9,230 in 2009.[66]

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56. JFSOCC-I, 6–7; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2009*, 54. There was also a platoon sized reconnaissance unit assigned to support each regional commando battalion, as well as a 60 man logistical support unit. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70.

57. JFSOCC-I, 7; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2008*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289; Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 57, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_Congress_Sep_08.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014).

58. JFSOCC-I, 7. The Baghdad regional counterterrorism center also provided training for personnel assigned to the other regional counterterrorism centers.

59. JFSOCC-I, 7. The garrison support unit was 766 strong and co-located with the ISOF Brigade. It would also provide regional logistical support units for each of the four regional commando battalions.

60. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2007*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2007 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289), 50, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/FINAL-SecDef%20Signed-20071214.pdf (accessed July 29, 2014)

61. OSIGIR, 16.

62. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70; and JFSOCC-I, 10. The 2nd Brigade had an authorized strength of 2,429. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72.

63. ShadowSpear, "Iraqi Special Operations Forces Launch 2nd Brigade," *ShadowSpear: Special Operations*, August 19, 2009, http://www.shadowspear.com/2009/08/iraq-special-operations-forces-2nd-brigade/ (accessed May 28, 2014).

64. The 1st Brigade, with an authorized strength of 4,328, now consisted of the 1st Battalion (Commando), 2nd Battalion (ICTF), 3rd Battalion (Support), 5th Battalion (Recce) and the 4th Battalion, which operated the ISWCS and conducted ISOF training courses. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70, 72; and O'Brien, 26.

65. JFSOCC-I, 10; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2010*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 79, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/June_9204_Sec_Def_signed_20_Aug_2010.pdf (accessed May 31, 2014). In addition, the garrison support unit began to support both the 1st and 2nd Brigades. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70.

66. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2009*, 68.

Challenges in manning the CTS structure

Assignment to CTS was attractive due to an $800 per month specialty pay not available to most ISF units, and altogether, CTS personnel received about twice as much pay as their MoD counterparts.[67] However, in June 2010, CTS was manned with 5,725 personnel, only 62 percent of its authorized strength.[68] Despite its offer of lucrative pay, CTS faced two challenges in achieving its authorized numbers; the first was the source of recruits, and the second was the rigorous training standards. CTS had two sources for recruits. The first was personnel with no prior military training other than some who had served in the former regime army.[69] These recruits were generally nominated by Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish leaders.[70] Although most of these candidates had no prior military service, they still had to be inducted into the Iraqi Army as a formality, since CTS, although separate from MoD, relied on MoD to pay its personnel's salaries.[71] On several occasions, MoD hiring freezes prevented CTS from adding new soldiers to its ranks, making the recruitment process even more difficult.[72]

The other source of CTS recruits was MoD itself, and although CTS conducted visits to Iraqi Army units and courses[73] to identity candidates to attend the Assessment and Selection Course,[74]

recruiting from MoD was problematic. At times, due to budget cuts, the Iraqi Army stopped recruiting, limiting CTS options.[75] At other times, the prime minister ordered MoD to provide recruits for CTS,[76] but without results. For example, in June 2009, the prime minister directed MoD to provide 1,400 soldiers as candidates to attend the Assessment and Selection Course. MoD in turn ordered the 14 Iraqi Army divisions to provide 100 soldiers each, but later reduced the number to 50, and soon revoked the order altogether,[77] likely due to poor relations between CTS and MoD. Due to MoD's unwillingness to support it, CTS growth remained unpredictable.[78]

The second factor restricting CTS growth was the time-intensive vetting, assessment, and selection process for ISOF personnel,[79] and at times, ISOF growth exceeded the ability of the training base to produce personnel.[80] USSF advisors continued to apply training standards similar to what they themselves had passed to become Green Berets, and advisors were embedded in the Academia to ensure that standards were maintained.[81] In May 2008, only 855 candidates graduated out of the 2,000 who started the Assessment and Selection Course.[82] As mentioned, initially USSF trained ISOF directly, then from June 2006 through June 2008, USSF focused on training Iraqi instructors, which was followed by USSF monitoring of all Iraqi instructed training.[83]

67. OSIGIR, 17; and interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
68. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2010*, 81.
69. U.S. DOD, U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2008*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9010, Public Law 109–289), 58, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Master_16_June_08_%20FINAL_SIGNED%20.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014).
70. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 65.
71. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 63.
72. OSIGIR, 17; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 71.
73. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2008*, 58.
74. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 65, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_Congress_Nov_09.pdf (accessed May 31, 21014).
75. OSIGIR, 16.
76. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2010*, 81.
77. OSIGIR, 17.
78. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72.
79. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2008*, 59.
80. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2008*, 58–59.
81. O'Brien, 25.
82. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2008*, 57–58. The top 70 graduates attended the OTC in order to be assigned to 2nd Battalion (ICTF), the next 200 went to the Commando Course, and the rest were assigned to the growing number of ISOF support units.
83. OSIGIR, 4–5. As of OCT 2010, all training was done by the Iraqis except for Instructor Refresher Courses.

Due to these structural and personnel issues, ISOF often faced a shortage of junior officers and seasoned Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO).[84] USSF culture was NCO-centric, and advisors worked hard to develop a professional ISOF NCO corps, which became a long term CTS goal.[85] ISOF NCO training primarily consisted of on-the-job training at the unit level,[86] and ISOF leaders sometimes placed Iraqi NCOs in charge of planning and leading combat missions for their development.[87] However, traditional Iraqi military culture had marginalized these officers,[88] and generally in Arab armies, NCOs were viewed no differently than the lower enlisted ranks.[89] This ultimately led to more tension within CTS and ISOF and between USSF advisors and their trainees.

Communications and Intelligence

In order for the CTS headquarters to control its units, U.S. advisors provided communications networks throughout the organization.[90] Initially, advisors installed a non-secure, U.S.-funded computer network; however, advisors later developed a secure network exclusively for use by CTS, which was operational by October 2007. CTS used this network to transmit targeting data and orders, but other GoI agencies could not access it, which impeded intelligence sharing. [91] Fortunately in July 2009, CTS and the Iraqi National Intelligence Service connected the CTS network to the intelligence network used by other GoI ministries to enable intelligence sharing.[92]

Generally, CTS used its own intelligence sources to develop information and operated independently from other Iraqi intelligence agencies.[93] Almost all intelligence came from human sources, and CTS maintained a robust network of these contacts throughout Iraq. Communication with sources was maintained by cell phone, and U.S. funds were used to purchase cell phone cards.[94] When the U.S. purchased a computer intelligence and information management system widely used throughout the world for CTS to store and analyze intelligence, advisors' initial expectations for its use and for the other networks were not met due to the Iraqis' lack of computer skills.[95]

Formal Transfer of Control, Success, and Continued Reliance on the Coalition

In January 2008, CJSOTF-AP and CTS began combined control of ISOF, meaning in practicality that some missions for ISOF came from the U.S. and others from GoI, although on the ground, almost every operation continued to be a partnership between USSF and ISOF.[96] In summer 2008, the next phase of transition began with Iraqi control of ISOF with U.S. oversight.[97] In 2009, ISOF was formally transferred to CTS with USSF and ISOF continuing to conduct side-by-side operations on the ground.[98] U.S. advisors and trainers remained embedded in all levels of the organization and retained considerable influence over operations.[99] Advisors always found that the CTS staff were transparent and readily accepted advice. ISOF continued to conduct nightly missions and support all

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84. JFSOCC-I, 8; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2008*, 58.
85. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 179.
86. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 66.
87. OSIGIR, 6.
88. Anthony H. Cordesman, Sam Khazai, and Daniel Dewit, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces, US-Iranian Competition Series*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, December 16, 2013, 10–11.
89. Norvell B. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," *The Middle East Quarterly*, December, 1999, 6, http://www.meforum.org/441/why-arabs-lose-wars (accessed August 5, 2014).
90. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 64.
91. JFSOCC-I, 16–17.
92. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 71.
93. Bauer.
94. JFSOCC-I, 13–14; Butler, 32; and International Crisis Group, 13.
95. JFSOCC-I, 17.
96. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, June 2008, 58.
97. JFSOCC-I, 8; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2008*, 57.
98. JFSOCC-I, 8.
99. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2009*, 54.

major ISF operations.[100] However, ISOF remained completely dependent on Coalition intelligence, aerial reconnaissance, close air support, logistics, and helicopters for movement, a shortcoming the U.S. acknowledged.[101]

Even with the critical reliance on Coalition enablers, CTS, and ISOF in particular, continued to have the reputation as the best Arab SOF in the Middle East.[102] U.S. advisors believed it had become a professional force with respect for rule of law and concern for subordinates.[103] Most remarkably, ISOF did not have the ethnic and sectarian leanings that plagued most ISF units.[104]

The Targeting Process and Warrants

Together, U.S. advisors and CTS developed a refined target-vetting process to ensure that operations were based on the national interests of Iraq and free of sectarian, political, and ethnic influences.[105] In theory, proposed CTS targets could come from a number of organizations since many agencies such as MoI, MoD, the Ministry of National Security Affairs, and the Iraqi National Intelligence Service also developed terrorism intelligence. Each of these agencies compiled target lists and high level targets were passed to CTS.[106] At CTS, targets went through three separate levels of review: a target working group, a target review group, and a target validation council. Iraqi officers and U.S. advisors were represented at each level in a checks and balances system to ensure that the targets were appropriate and free of sectarian and political underpinnings.[107] Inappropriate targets such as scouts, simple criminals, or low level assistants were passed to other agencies.[108] Once accepted by CTS, targets were placed in one of four tiers, from high level leaders and groups to low level operators and support elements. Targets were next classified according to risk. High risk targets would have religious or political ramifications based on their detention or deaths, medium risk targets would have limited ramifications, and low risk targets would have little to no ramifications.[109] Targets that were deemed as high or medium risk were passed to the Ministerial Council for National Security for approval, a group which included the prime minister, the ministers of Justice, Interior, and Defense, and the chief of staff of the Iraqi JHQ.[110] If the target was time-sensitive and required immediate action, it could be approved by the prime minister alone.[111] Low risk targets could be approved by the CTS Director.[112] In 2008, the GoI added a requirement that all targets have legal warrants issued by a judge from the Central Criminal Court of Iraq who was independent from CTS.[113]

Because of the internal checks and balances, advisors believed that the targeting process was free of sectarianism and political agendas.[114] For example, of the 195 suspected terrorists apprehended by CTS in conjunction with U.S. advisors between

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100. JFSOCC-I, iii.
101. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 180–181; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 39; and U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2010*, 50.
102. Steven Lee Myers, "Special Ops and the 'End of Combat' in Iraq," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2010, http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/17/special-ops/ (accessed May 28, 2014); Robert Tollast, "Maliki's Private Army," *The National Interest*, December 31, 2013, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/malikis-private-army-7915 (accessed June 9, 2014); and Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 180.
103. O'Brien, 26.
104. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 180.
105. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 179.
106. Republic of Iraq, Council of Ministers, Counterterrorism Bureau, *The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012*, June 16, 2008, 25.
107. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 179.
108. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 65.
109. Republic of Iraq, *Iraqi Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012, Summary*, 28–29.
110. Republic of Iraq, *Iraqi Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012, Summary*, 29; and Marisa Sullivan, *Maliki's Authoritarian Regime, Middle East Security Report 10* (Washington, DC: The Institute for the Study of War, April 2013), 12, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Malikis-Authoritarian-Regime-Web.pdf (accessed June 12, 2014).
111. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2009*, 66.
112. Republic of Iraq, *Iraqi Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012, Summary*, 29.
113. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2009*, 66; International Crisis Group, 15; and Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 179.
114. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70.

February and October 2008, 52 percent were Shi'a and 48 percent were Sunni.[115] Although this is a high percentage of Sunnis since 70 percent of Iraq's overall population was Shi'a, Sunni extremist groups did pose a significant terrorist threat. However, even before the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, there were accusations that the prime minister used CTS to target his political opponents.[116] Some U.S. advisors reported sectarianism, the withholding of information, and corruption in the targeting process. Some CTS units were reluctant to act against targets with religious or sectarian connections to high level GoI officials, and unless a target was a low level Shi'a, it would not be actioned.[117] Likewise, the required legal warrants were often delayed or disapproved without reason. The information about the target was sometimes leaked, allowing suspects to escape before they could be apprehended.[118] So while CTS made concerted efforts to remain non-sectarian and transparent about its targeting process, there still remained drawbacks to the approach and many accusations were leveled against the organization.

The composition of CTS

The central identity of CTS was that of a non-sectarian organization and its composition proportionally reflected the sectarian breakdowns of Iraqi society.[119] In September 2008, of the 4,160 members of the 1st ISOF Brigade, 61 percent were Shi'a, 24 percent were Sunni, and 12 percent were Kurdish, with the remaining three percent reflecting other minorities.[120] The CTS headquarters and CTC had a higher percentage of Shi'a than the ISOF Brigade,[121] but had internal vetting procedures for key personnel and were ahead of other ISF units in numbers of personnel who voluntarily submitted to screening by U.S. counterintelligence agents. These screenings consisted of interviews and polygraphs which proved, for example, that members were not associated with militias.[122] During a February 2010 visit to the CTS headquarters, Prime Minister Maliki warned CTS personnel against belonging to any political group or receiving orders from outside parties — those who did would be considered traitors.[123]

Former advisors and others indicate that at times there was punitive reassignment of officers that were ethnically oriented,[124] that effective leaders were often replaced without reason,[125] and that many commanders were assigned based on loyalty to the prime minister or nepotism.[126] For example, in August 2011, advisors reported that one of the ISOF brigades had a new brigade commander and all new battalion commanders. The reasons for the changes were never specified.[127] In addition, the prime minister appointed high level CTS officials without the approval of Parliament as required by Iraqi law, and the appointments were accused of being based on party affiliation. However, it was pointed out that Parliament's inability to approve nominees for senior positions left the country in a dangerous security position and the prime minister could not afford to leave key positions vacant.[128] Therefore, CTS tried to mirror sectarian breakdowns at all levels, but the culture of nepotism remained strong and undermined these efforts.

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115. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2008*, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110–252), 54, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_Congress_Dec_08.pdf (accessed June 3, 2014).

116. International Crisis Group, 14–15.

117. Butler, 32; Tollast; and Sullivan, 12.

118. Butler, 32.

119. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72.

120. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2008*, 54.

121. JFSOCC-I, 9.

122. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 72.

123. Al-Sumaria, "Al-Maliki yakshif 'an wujud jihat siyasiyah tu'arid istikmal bina' Jihaz Mukafahaf al-Irhab," (Maliki reveals the presence of political entities opposed to the completion of CTS) *Al-Sumaria*, February 1, 2010, http://www.alsumaria.tv/mobile/news/22039/iraq-news (accessed June 13, 2014).

124. Tollast.

125. Butler, 32.

126. Sullivan, 12.

127. Butler, 32.

128. International Crisis Group, 14–15, 20.

The controversies surrounding CTS

From its very inception, CTS made many Iraqis and outsiders nervous. Because of its elite status, operational and intelligence capabilities, secrecy, and mission of quickly neutralizing specified individuals, CTS had a tremendous potential for misuse. Its quasi-ministerial status, its control by the prime minister rather than the MoD, its lack of a clear legal status without an approved law, its establishment and command of ISOF by prime ministerial directives, and its nearness to U.S. advisors made CTS controversial. Accusations of abuses were leveled against the organization, making it the very opposite of how U.S. planners envisioned it would be perceived. In light of Iraq's history, there was considerable concern that a powerful prime minister might employ it against his political rivals. U.S officials recognized the potential for misuse but hoped that the vetting process and close partnership with U.S. personnel would curb, if not eliminate, any extracurricular use of the force. U.S. advisors at CTS believed that the submission of the draft CTS law to Parliament, the subsequent debate, and its passage would codify the CTS structure and end controversy with its formal establishment under law.[129]

But opponents of the CTS law and CTS in general described CTS as illegal since it was formed without Parliament's approval and its members were selected based on inappropriate criteria. Members of Parliament even called for CTS to be disbanded and said there was no basis for it to operate outside MoD or MoI control.[130] In turn, those who opposed the CTS law were described as supporting terrorism. CTS insisted that it was established legally according to powers given to the prime minister as the commander of the armed forces and that it was desperately needed.[131] Although the draft law had been submitted to parliament on numerous occasions since 2008, it languished and was never passed due to parliamentary opposition to Maliki.[132] Maliki, on a visit to the CTS headquarters, acknowledged political opposition to CTS but believed that these opponents had ties to terrorism and were afraid of being arrested if CTS fully developed.[133]

Regardless of the true legal status of CTS, it was unregulated and free of the controls that govern most military forces. Parliament had no influence over CTS and knew little of it; it was accountable only to the prime minister.[134] Many Iraqis believed that CTS was the prime minister's force[135] and critics called it Maliki's "private army" or "Praetorian guard" that he used to attack opponents and intimidate senior Sunni critics and Sunnis in general.[136] Others believed CTS was Maliki's anti-coup force to counter moves against him by MoD or MoI.[137] The prime minster controlled CTS through his Office of Commander in Chief (OCINC). The OCINC worked for Maliki, was staffed by officers loyal to him, and had considerable power and resources. It had no oversight or accountability except to the prime minister and could countermand MoD and MoI orders. The OCINC followed a sectarian agenda that targeted Sunnis in high numbers and removed officers who had acted against Shi'a militias. It was Maliki's means of controlling all ISF, but unlike other ISF units of equivalent size, CTS reported directly to the OCINC. The OCINC was accused of being used to circumvent the checks and balances of the CTS targeting process.[138]

129. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 178.
130. Bauer; and Elliot.
131. Naji Sitar, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yuntazir iqrar qanunah" (CTS awaits the establishment of its law) *Idha'ah al-'iraq al-Hurr*, October 19, 2013, http://www.iraqhurr.org/content/article/25141659.html (accessed June 7, 2014).
132. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70; JFSOCC-I, 7–8; Naji Sitar; and Michael Knights, "Rebuilding Iraq's Counterterrorism Capabilities," *The Washington Institute: Improving the Quality of U.S. Middle East Policy*, July 31, 2013. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rebuilding-iraqs-counterterrorism-capabilities (accessed April 14, 2014).
133. Al-Sumaria, "Maliki reveals."
134. Bauer, 1–2; and International Crisis Group, 13.
135. International Crisis Group, 17.
136. Tollast; International Crisis Group, 14; Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, Congressional Research Service, May 20, 2014, RS 21968, 17, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21968. (accessed June 8, 2014); and Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism* (New York: Routledge, 2012) Kindle Edition, loc. 2194–2203, and loc. 2300–2310.
137. Ryan Crocker, "Crocker: Send More U.S. Counterterrorism Troops to Iraq." Interview with James Kitfield. *Defense One*, October 31, 2013, http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2013/10/crocker-send-more-counterterrorism-troops-to-iraq/73049/ (accessed May 29, 2014); Elliot; and Tollast.
138. Sullivan, 11–12; and Katzman, 17.

CTS itself was implicated in cases of political and sectarian targeting. In December 2008, ISOF apprehended members of a competing Shi'a political party before an upcoming election.[139] In May 2009, ISOF arrested newly elected provincial council members in Diyala following an election in which the prime minister's political coalition did poorly.[140] In 2010, ISOF arrested a politician who had been critical of ISF in Diyala. The most controversial case, however, was in August 2008, when ISOF raided the governor's office in Diyala province, arrested two Sunni politicians and killed one person.[141] After the Diyala incident of August 2008, CTS officers and U.S. advisors reviewed the CTS targeting process to verify that sensitive targets had been properly approved, but challenges remained to ensure that the CTS staff fully understood the political and military implications of targets.[142] The U.S. leadership in Iraq also considered stopping all support to ISOF as a result of the incident, and Maliki said he did not authorize the raid, although the orders came from CTS.[143] In June 2009, the prime minister issued a 12 day pause of CTS operations for a review of the targeting process, and another pause occurred in July 2009.[144] It seems that at times, CTS was used to pursue the prime minister's political agenda.

CTS sometimes conducted mass and arbitrary arrests, and was accused of using collective punishment to intimidate neighborhoods to apprehend a single suspect,[145] as well as stealing private property, abusing women[146] and conducting operators into the sectors of other ISF units without prior coordination, creating confusion and resentment.[147] Some Iraqis referred to ISOF as the "Dirty Brigades," or the "Fedayeen al-Maliki," a reference to the paramilitary force Saddam Hussein created before the 2003 U.S. invasion.[148] CTS was also accused of operating a secret prison[149] and torturing and abusing detainees.[150] CTS acknowledged that it operated a detention facility, but claimed it operated in accordance with Iraqi law. CTS detained no suspects without warrants, an Iraqi judge saw detainees shortly after their detention, and they could not be held longer than 48 hours before they were either released or transferred to the Ministry of Justice.[151] Sometimes CTS units were blamed for operations conducted by other ISF units; it was often impossible to determine which ISF unit had conducted a specific operation, since most operations occurred at night when it was often difficult for bystanders and outsiders to distinguish specific units.[152]

The closeness of CTS to U.S. advisors and their ubiquitous presence at all levels make these particular accusations likely untrue, and U.S. advisors dismissed most allegations of CTS irregularities as false charges from hostile politicians.[153] U.S. advisors always maintained that the CTS organization as a whole, and ISOF in particular, was professional and operated in a non-sectarian manner.[154] GoI control measures and oversight prevented sectarian or political agendas even without the passage of the CTS law.[155] The

139. Sullivan, 12.
140. International Crisis Group, 15.
141. Sullivan, 12.
142. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, December 2008*, 53.
143. Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The End Game: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012) Kindle Edition, loc. 10729–20158.
144. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 64.
145. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Secret Jail Uncovered in Baghdad," *Human Rights Watch*, February 1, 2011, http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/01/iraq-secret-jail-uncovered-baghdad (accessed May 29, 2014); Bauer; and International Crisis Group, 16.
146. International Crisis Group, 13.
147. International Crisis Group, 13; Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Secret Jail."
148. Sullivan, 12; Fadhel Barwari, "Al-Liwa' Fadhel Jamil Barwari qa'id al-'amaliyat al-khassah fi Jihaz Mukafahah Al-Irhab yu'akkid fi hiwar khass li al-Bayyinah al-Jadiidah" (Major General Fadhel Jamil Barwari, Commander of Special Operations in CTS, confirms in a special conversation with al-Bayyinay al-Jadiidah) *Al-Bayyinah Al-Jadiidah*, December 3, 2013, http://www.albayyna-new.com/news.php?action=view&id=26976 (accessed June 13, 2014); Bauer; and Dodge, loc. 2310.
149. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Secret Jail."
150. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq 10 Years Later, Creeping Authoritarianism," *Human Rights Watch*, March 19, 2013, http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/19/iraq-10-years-later-creeping-authoritarianism (accessed July 21, 2014).
151. International Crisis Group, 15.
152. International Crisis Group, 13.
153. Bauer.
154. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 94.
155. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70.

closeness of CTS with U.S. advisors prevented wide-spread misuse of the force,[156] and the result of not placing ISOF under MoD or MoI allowed the rapid increase in professionalism of the force.[157] However, this also led to what one critic described as an USSF dream come true, "a deadly, elite, covert unit, fully fitted with American equipment, that would operate for years under U.S. command and be unaccountable to Iraqi ministries and the normal political process."[158] Proponents thought that ISOF's independence from MoD and MoI might be the perfect model for counterterrorism worldwide.[159] The closeness of CTS to the U.S. did, however, render it suspect in the eyes of many Iraqis[160] and the perception that ISOF was a covert Iraqi force controlled by the U.S. military persisted throughout the years and across the country.[161]

At the heart of the matter, some U.S. officials mistrusted CTS because of its relationship with Maliki. Even though the U.S. initially sanctioned CTS operating separately from MoI and MoD, or as we have seen, perhaps even directed it, later U.S. leaders would recommend to the GoI that CTS fall under MoD supervision.[162] Although U.S. senior leaders did push GoI for the passage of the CTS law to end the controversies, they did not use as much influence as they perhaps could have.

CTS sustainment, budget, and support from MoD

U.S. advisors always assumed that Parliament would approve the CTS law, but CTS continued to experience resistance from both Parliament and MoD. Its extra-ministerial status and its lack of true ministerial representation[163] limited the prime minister's ability to provide support.[164] Besides U.S. support, CTS relied on a hodgepodge of funding and support mechanisms, none of which appeared to work very well, and CTS provided advisors only limited information on how it was supported by GoI.[165] A basic problem with GoI supporting any ISF unit was that Iraq's national budget was based on its oil revenues; drops in oil prices would limit budgets and create deficits. Spending any portion of the budget in Iraq was difficult because of the bureaucratic obstacles and poorly defined rules and regulations.[166] Corruption in procurement costs also significantly impacted budgets.[167]

Before the establishment of CTS, ISOF initially relied on U.S. equipment and funding and received limited support from MoD.[168] After CTS was created, it initially operated using prime ministerial discretionary funds for some of its operations in 2008–2009, which was problematic due to Parliament's opposition to the organization.[169] In 2008, CTS was granted semi-autonomous budget authority[170] and was able to request a portion of its budgetary needs directly from the Ministry of Finance (MoF), but MoF never met its full needs. For the calendar year of 2008, CTS requested $358 million from MoF but received only $167 million in direct funding, and MoD was directed to pay $157 million to cover the base salaries of personnel assigned to CTS.[171] In 2009, CTS requested $580 million in funding, but

156. International Crisis Group, 15.
157. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 178–179.
158. Bauer.
159. Bauer.
160. International Crisis Group, 13.
161. Bauer.
162. Richard R. Brennan, Jr., Charles P. Ries, Larry Hanauer, Ben Connable, Terrence K. Kelly, Michael J. McNerney, Stephanie Young, Jason H. Campbell, and K. Scott McMahon, *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of the United States Forces Iraq*, Rand National Defense Institute, 2013, 145, 188–189, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR232.html#relatedProducts (accessed July 6, 2014).
163. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 63.
164. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 70.
165. JFSOCC-I, 18.
166. DoD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 11; and Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 97–98.
167. International Crisis Group, 33.
168. OSIGIR, 15–16,
169. OSIGIR, 16; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 63; and Cordesman, Withdrawal from Iraq, 94.
170. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 63.
171. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2008*, 57.

due to falling oil prices, MoF later informed CTS that its budget for 2009 would likely remain at the 2008 level of $167 million.[172]

After ISOF was removed from MoD in late 2006, MoD continued to provide limited support which was formalized in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed in spring 2008 by CTS, MoD, and the prime minister.[173] The MOA was designed to serve as a support mechanism until CTS obtained its own budget. It was in effect for only one year and was to be re-signed annually.[174] In the MOA, MoD agreed to provide CTS with base salaries of personnel, emerging expenses for operations, compensation payments to the families of CTS personnel killed in action, personnel to fill shortages, coordination of promotions and other personnel actions, ammunition, weapons, permissions for CTS members to attend training courses at MoD schools, transportation assistance, aircraft support, medical support, and maintaining CTS detainees at a MoD detention facility.[175] CTS was responsible for funding its infrastructure, general expenses, vehicle maintenance, and spare parts.[176]

The MOA was not re-signed the following year although MoD and CTS continued to honor it to some extent. MoD paid salaries, but inconsistently, and other items were not provided. In 2008–2009, CTS had difficulty obtaining fuel, ammunition and logistical support.[177] ISOF training courses were delayed or cancelled due to a lack of ammunition, equipment, and pay for trainees.[178] Part of the problem was the poor quality of MoD's logistics structure and part was the poor relations between CTS and MoD.[179] Furthermore, there were no mechanisms to provide funding for special counterterrorism equipment, to pay for intelligence sources, or to give special incentive pay for ISOF soldiers.[180] The effects of not having a dedicated budget and other resources became apparent at the ISOF base at Area IV as infrastructure began to crumble in 2009.[181] In early 2010, MoD support to CTS improved slightly and it began to provide predictable salary payments, repair parts, and an increase in monthly fuel. The 2010 GoI budget passed by Parliament in January 2010 included $170 million for CTS as part of the overall MoD budget. CTS had requested $350 million, so there were still shortages of fuel, ammunition, and other logistical support.[182]

In December 2007, CTS and MoD signed a MOA for air support to CTS. The MoD provided armed Mi-17s helicopters configured to support counterterrorism to transport ISOF, as well as aircraft for reconnaissance and surveillance. The 15th Special Operations Squadron of MoD, composed of Mi-17s, was specifically tasked to support counterterrorism missions. Iraqi aircraft were first incorporated into ISOF training in October 2008,[183] although coordination for training remained difficult,[184] and CTS continued to depend on Coalition aircraft.

Iraq's counterterrorism dysfunction

While Iraq suffered from terrorism, this was only one part of its larger societal problems. The U.S. surge in 2007 and 2008 with its population-centric counterinsurgency focus and the Awakening movements did much to address the symptoms of Iraq's problems, but a much larger approach was required.

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172. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 178; and JFSOCC-I, 19.
173. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 63–64; and JFSOCC-I, 15.
174. OSIGIR, 16.
175. MoD also agreed to provide CTS with life support, water purification, special vehicles, and use of MoD maintenance facilities on a reimbursable basis. OSIGIR, 16; and JFSOCC-I, 15.
176. JFSOCC-I, 15.
177. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 63–64; and JFSOCC-I, 15.
178. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 65.
179. JFSOCC-I, 15.
180. JFSOCC-I, 18.
181. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2009*, 65.
182. OSIGIR, 16.
183. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 63–64; Elliot; U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, September 2008*, 58; and Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 178.
184. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, March 2010*, 71.

To this end, with the assistance of U.S. advisors, CTS developed the Iraqi National Counter Terrorism Strategy, which the prime minister approved in June 2008.[185] The strategy was not focused on military force but emphasized the prevention of terrorism and elimination of its causes such as unemployment, poor education, political disaffection, poverty, corruption, and radical interpretations of Islam. It promoted political participation, government reform, national consensus, and the involvement of civil society in political and social discourse.[186] The strategy required that GoI employ all elements of national power in counterterrorism, and of these, military force was the least important.[187] While all agencies had to be involved in counterterrorism, CTS was to oversee all efforts and develop counterterrorism policies in collaboration with all applicable entities.[188] The prime minister directed all ministries, agencies, and institutions to coordinate with and assist CTS.[189]

The strategy was worthless, but not because of its contents. GoI took no actions to address the root causes of terrorism because of competing interests and internal power struggles. GoI used force to address terrorism, but even in using force it was deficient. There was no synchronization, de-confliction, or intelligence sharing between MoD, MoI, and CTS. Resources were limited and competed for.[190] Another prominent counterterrorism force was MoI's Emergency Response Brigade (ERB), which was also established with the assistance of USSF. By late 2011, USSF no longer worked with ERB and advisors believed that ultimately the ERB would be placed under CTS,[191] but this never occurred. There were also several other MoI and MoD units involved in counterterrorism.[192] The fundamental issue was that no single entity had true responsibility for counterterrorism, and many agencies had overlapping authority.[193]

However, the military instrument was the least important of all the counterterrorism tools because it could not address the broader societal issues causing terrorism. Iraq required national reconciliation, the end of Sunni disenfranchisement, and the mitigation of Shi'a fears that they might once again be persecuted by the Sunnis as occurred under Saddam. The U.S. could have served as a mediator in this process, but without true Iraqi political and societal commitment, no amount of U.S. involvement could end Iraq's terrorism problem.

185. Republic of Iraq, *The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012*, 3.
186. Republic of Iraq, *Iraqi Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012, Summary*, 13–14, 17.
187. Republic of Iraq, *The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012*, 3.
188. Republic of Iraq, *The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012*, 25.
189. Republic of Iraq, *The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2008–2012*, 1.
190. U.S. DOD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, June 2009*, 64.
191. Butler, 31–32. The ERB consisted of six Special Weapons and Tactics battalions and a support battalion.
192. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2012, 84, http://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001094456/http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/July2012/Report_-_July_2012.pdf (accessed June 16, 2014).
193. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report*, July 30, 2012, 85.

CTS after the U.S. Withdrawal

The Status of Forces Agreement

The full withdrawal of U.S. forces, advisors, and enablers such as intelligence and aircraft support to ISF in December 2011 was never what the senior U.S. and Iraqi leadership had envisioned; it was always assumed that the Iraqi Parliament would approve a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to provide legal immunity for the continued presence of up to 10,000 U.S. military personnel who would continue to train and advise ISF, but negotiations for a SOFA failed.[194] If a residual force had been approved under the SOFA, one of its principle missions would have been to train and advise CTS so it could continue effective counterterrorism operations; no other ISF unit had the intense training requirements and could conduct high end operations.[195]

CTS leaders had concerns about the withdrawal of U.S. advisors and enablers at several levels. At levels below the ISOF brigades, there was concern that without a high advisor presence ISOF would revert to the culture of the former regime army that placed loyalty and political reliability above competence and experience.[196] At the brigade level, there was concern over ISOF's dependence on U.S. enablers. At the highest levels of CTS, there was a fear that it would not be able to maintain its independence and would be absorbed by MoD

or MoI.[197] Perhaps the most public figure of CTS, Major General Fadhel Barwari, commander of the 1st ISOF Brigade, pleaded in an interview with *The New York Times* in July 2011 for USSF to remain since Iraq did not control its borders.[198] In another interview in December 2011, Barwari said that the withdrawal would affect CTS due to the lack of U.S. air and intelligence support, and that U.S. trainers were needed since CTS equipment was of U.S. origin. However, other than these critical enablers, according to Barwari, CTS forces had been ready since 2008 and had sufficient equipment and weapons to operate through 2013.[199]

U.S. assessments of CTS prior to withdrawal

Through December 2011, U.S. advisors remained embedded at all levels of CTS and USSF units continued to conduct partner operations with the ISOF brigades. For ISOF in particular, the role of the advisors had evolved from directing missions to mentoring and advising while continuing to accompany ISOF on missions. However, the Iraqis were in the lead and the Americans merely assisted with planning, intelligence, and critiques.[200] It was believed that the U.S. doctrine and organizational structure had been instrumental in the successful development of ISOF, along with the continuity of advisors and their constant assessments.[201]

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194. Jim White, "Iraq Counterterrorism Service: No SOFA? Then Transition Death Squad Control from Special Operations to CIA," *emptywheel*, March 12, 2013, http://www.emptywheel.net/tag/iraq-counterterrorism-service/ (accessed June 14, 2014); Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 5; Robert L. Caslen, Dean Raab, and Geoffrey Adams, "Security Cooperation Doctrine and Authorities: Closing the Gaps," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 71, 4th Quarter 2013, 77; and Butler, 32.
195. Brennan, 12, 142, 188.
196. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014; and Kevin M. Woods, Thomas Holaday, Mounir Elkhamri, Williamson Murray, and the National Defense University, *Saddam's War: An Iraqi Military Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War* (Progressive Management, 2013) Kindle Edition, loc. 177, 470.
197. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014.
198. Butler, 30.
199. ALMADA Newspaper, "Quwwat Mukafahah Al-Irhab jahizah bi-raghma ta'aththur 'amalha bi-al-insihab" (Counterterrorism Forces are ready despite the effects of the withdrawal on its work) *ALMADA Newspaper*, December 14, 2011, http://almadapaper.net/ar/printnews.aspx?NewsID=236043 (accessed June 15, 2014).
200. Brennan, 187; and Darsie Rogers, "Q&A: Brigadier General Darsie Rogers, Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command-Iraq." Interview with Special Warfare. *Special Warfare*, January–March 2012, 9, 11.
201. OSIGIR, 18.

At the time of withdrawal, some U.S. assessments were that Iraq and the U.S. had built a counterterrorism capability in CTS that could develop intelligence, conduct independent operations, and exploit intelligence obtained for follow on missions. CTS could be sustained within the existing Iraqi structure after the U.S. withdrawal, and it would continue to apply pressure on terrorist networks. CTS forces had received intensive training followed by combat; few forces were as experienced.[202] Its ability to conduct helicopter operations and its lack of reliance on sophisticated technical intelligence was seen as a benefit of allowing it to operate without U.S. advisors and enablers.[203] ISOF was the best ISF unit[204] and after eight years, the U.S. had created a professional military unit that operated as a legitimate force.[205]

There were negative assessments of CTS that contradicted the above, and there was always an underlying belief that CTS was dependent on U.S. support.[206] The first concerns were that CTS was dependent on U.S. intelligence and Coalition aircraft for fire support and transportation; there were few Iraqi helicopter pilots, particularly those qualified to fly at night.[207] But it was important not to judge CTS by U.S. standards — it would not have intelligence capabilities or aviation support similar to U.S. Special Operations Forces, and CTS probably had what it needed for the time being.[208]

Next were concerns regarding the long term sustainment of CTS and its need for assistance and training to maintain equipment and combat skills.[209] Advisors believed that GoI's commitment to CTS

was questionable given the past trends of an unpredictable budget, poor logistics, manning shortfalls, and a lack of consistent salary payments.[210] CTS needed to address its support from GoI, along with its structure and training. One way to mitigate some shortcomings was to integrate with MoD or MoI, or if it remained separate, it could contract for services from private defense contractors for logistics and maintenance,[211] but this would still require sufficient funding. The future clearly depended on how GoI would support CTS,[212] but given CTS's uncertain legal status and opposition from MoD and politicians, that future would prove problematic at best.[213]

Another concern was the tendency within CTS to equate size with success, even though advisors had stressed that precision capability was more important than numbers. In summer 2011, CTS already had plans to expand with four new battalions, which advisors viewed as feasible,[214] but ill-advised, and as early as 2009, there were also plans to create a third brigade, and perhaps even more.[215]

As previously mentioned, there were always concerns that CTS could become a secret police force[216] given its positon outside of MoD and MoI[217] and that it could be used to pursue the prime minister's political interests. Again, mitigation lay with placing CTS under MoD since integration with the military chain of command was believed to be the only way to develop a truly non-political counterterrorism force. Therefore, prior to withdrawal, U.S. leaders recommended this course of action to GoI.[218]

202. OSIGIR; 18; and Rogers, 9.
203. Tollast.
204. Brennan, 187.
205. Rogers, 9; and Wells, 16.
206. Tollast.
207. Brennan, 187; and Gordon and Trainor, *End Game*, loc. 12934–20158.
208. Rogers, 9.
209. Wells, 16; and Butler, 31.
210. OSIGIR, 5, 18.
211. Rogers, 10.
212. OSIGIR, 18.
213. International Crisis Group, 13.
214. Rogers, 10.
215. Cordesman, *Withdrawal from Iraq*, 144.
216. Wells, 16.
217. Wells, 16; and OSIGIR, 15.
218. Brennan, 145, 188–189.

The Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq and CTS

With the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the responsibility of advising, training, and equipping CTS fell upon the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I), which was part of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.[219] OSC-I was intended to operate like any of the other U.S. security cooperation offices around the world. Its authority to support and equip ISF was derived from the U.S. Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, which provided the legal parameters for activities to support military forces in a partner country's MoD and not for an organization such as CTS outside of MoD.[220] When OSC-I was formed in October 2011, it was assumed that a U.S. residual military force operating under different authorities would be present to train and advise CTS.[221] In 2006, U.S. Congress approved the Iraq Security Forces Fund (ISFF) which authorized U.S. forces to train and assist ISF, which included CTS. ISFF expired in 2012, and without it, the only way OSC-I could assist CTS was to seek special authorities in the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act, which was granted for 2013,[222] but it only allowed OSC-I advisors to provide non-operational training and assistance to CTS. In other words, advisors could not assist CTS in ongoing combat missions or even make recommendations.[223] It was not possible to bring in other military forces to assist and train CTS under different legal authorities because of the lack of a SOFA.

In addition to advising and training CTS, another problem was how to equip it. As long as ISFF could be used, equipping had been possible, but after it expired, CTS had to use the standard Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system, which was how the U.S. equipped the majority of its partner nations. But again, as a non-MoD force, CTS could only use the FMS system to obtain equipment and other services on a case-by-case basis and after an intensive legal analysis by the U.S. Department of State to ensure the items supplied were consistent with the Arms Export Control Act.[224]

Another limiting factor in assisting CTS was the number of U.S. CTS advisors assigned to OSC-I. Before the withdrawal, there were over 100 advisors working at the CTS headquarters, CTC, and Academia, the CTS training institution. In addition, USSF operational units were paired with the ISOF brigades. Following the withdrawal between January and June 2012, there was only one U.S. advisor assigned to the entire CTS organization.[225] Planning began to bring in additional advisors to work under OSC-I to provide non-operational assistance to the CTS, and by July 2012, there were over thirty advisors working at all levels of CTS.[226] Later, a USSF team of twelve personnel deployed to Iraq and was assigned to OSC-I to work with the 1st ISOF Brigade and the Academia but again was restricted to non-operational training and advice and there were no advisors for the 2nd ISOF Brigade, or the later created 3rd ISOF Brigade.[227] By

219. Butler, 30.
220. Caslen, "Security Cooperation Doctrine and Authorities," 76.
221. Caslen, "Security Cooperation Doctrine and Authorities," 74–75, 77.
222. Caslen, "Security Cooperation Doctrine and Authorities," 76; and Robert Caslen, "Q&A With the OSC-I Chief." Interview with Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, April 13, 2013, in *Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, April 30, 2013, 10, http://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001091934/ http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/April2013/Report_-_April_2013.pdf (accessed June 16, 2014).
223. Rowan Scarborough, "U.S. troops prevented from helping even as al Qaeda overruns Iraqi cities," *The Washington Times*, January 5, 2014, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jan/5/us-troops-prevented-from-helping-even-as-al-qaeda- /?page=all (accessed May 28, 2014).
224. Department of Defense, *Security Assistance Management Manual (DSCA Manual 5105.38-M)*, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, April 30, 2012, C5.1.5.3, http://www.samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-5#C5.1. (accessed July 10, 2014).
225. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014.
226. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2012, 54; and interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014.
227. Katzman, 37; Tim Arango, "Syrian War's Spillover Threatens a Fragile Iraq," *The New York Times*, September 24, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/25/world/middleeast/iraq-faces-new-perils-from-syrias-civil-war.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed June 8, 2014); and interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.

the summer of 2013, in an attempt to resize the OSC-I to a more traditional security cooperation office, the number of advisors assigned to CTS headquarters and CTC was reduced from thirty to two, with a USSF team continuing to work with the 1st ISOF Brigade and Academia.[228]

In March 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had increased its support to the CTS at a time when Iraq's ability to utilize intelligence to target terrorists had declined.[229] CIA support to CTS allowed the U.S. to avoid the lack of a SOFA since it operated under covert authorities.[230] OSC-I also continued to partner with CTS.[231]

During Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Washington, D.C. in November 2013 to discuss U.S.-Iraqi relations, he requested additional U.S. military advisors to train and assist with counterterrorism.[232] By early 2014, a second USSF team was added, with the first team now working with the 1st ISOF Brigade and the second with Academia. U.S. personnel assigned to work with CTS had almost unlimited access to the organization and participated in its meetings and briefings. As one former advisor said, CTS was probably the most transparent organization in Iraq.[233]

Also in 2014, USSF and Jordanian Special Forces began training small numbers of CTS forces in Jordan. The training was modest but allowed the U.S. to again avoid the SOFA issue at a time when CTS was beginning to suffer significant combat losses.[234]

Continued growth comes with challenges for CTS

CTS continued to grow during and after the U.S. withdrawal, and by December 2011, consisted of 15 battalions.[235] In January 2012, the prime minister directed that CTS expand by another brigade.[236] By the spring of 2013, the 3rd Brigade had been established in Basra, with the 2nd Brigade now in Mosul, and the 1st Brigade remaining in Baghdad. Between the three brigades, there were now regional commando battalions assigned and located in most of Iraq's provinces which were intended to compensate for the lack of Coalition aircraft support.[237] To-

228. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014; and Department of Defense, *Assessment of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq Mission Capabilities Report No. DODIG-2013-136*, Inspector General, United States Department of Defense, September 18, 2013, 24, http://www.dodig.mil/pubs/documents/DODIG-2013-136.pdf (accessed July 22, 2014).

229. Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes, and Siobhan Gorman, "CIA Rumps Up Role in Iraq," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324735304578354561954501502 (accessed May 28, 2014).

230. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 35.

231. Michael Bednarek, "US, Iraq continue counterterrorism cooperation." Interview with Azzam. *Almonitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, May 6, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/05/us-iraq-support-weapons-terrorism.html# (accessed June 8, 2014).

232. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 43.

233. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.

234. Lolita C. Balder and Bradley Klapper, "US Developing Plans to Train Iraqis in Jordan," *AP*, January 23, 2014, http://big-story.ap.org/article/us-developing-plans-train-iraqis-jordan (accessed May 29, 2014); Missy Ryan, "U.S. renews training of elite Iraqi forces in Jordan," *Reuters*, May 7, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/08/us-usa-iraq-jordan-idUS-BREA4701Z20140508 (accessed June 8, 2014); Katzman, 22; and Al-Madar, "Ba'da khasa'ir fi al-Anbar Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab fi al-Urdunn lil-tadriib" (After losses in Anbar, CTS is in Jordan for training) *Al-Madar Al-Akhbari*, May 25, 2014, http://www.faceiraq.com/inews.php?id=2742565 (accessed June 8, 2014).

235. ALMADA Newspaper, "Counterterrorism Forces are ready."

236. Interview with former CST advisor, April 29, 2014.

237. Fadhel Barwari; U.S. Department of State, *Iraq 2013 Human Rights Report*, 14, http://photos.state.gov/libraries/iraq/231771/PDFs/2013-human-rights-report.pdf (accessed June 7, 2014); interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014; and Ba'ada Al-Tasi'ah, "Al-juz' al-thani min barnamaj Ba'da al-Tasi'ah wa liqa' ma'a qa'id al-'amaliyah al-khassah al-liwa' Fadhel Barwari (Part two from the Program After Nine and a meeting with the commander of Special Operations, Major General Fadhel Barwari) *YouTube*, 18:26, August 23, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OUCK6AP53Q (accessed August 2, 2014). The 1st ISOF Brigade in Baghdad now consisted of the original Commando Battalion, the ICTF Battalion, the Special Tactics Unit Battalion, the Recce Battalion, the Support Battalion, and regional commando battalions in Babil, Anbar, and Karbala provinces. The 2nd ISOF Brigade in Mosul consisted of regional commando battalions in Ninawa, Salah Ad-Din, Diyala, and Wasit provinces, a recce battalion, a support battalion, and the Kirkuk regional commando battalion, which remained at Area IV in Baghdad due to tensions with the Kurdish Regional Government. The 3rd Brigade in Basra consisted of regional commando battalions in Basra, Diwaniya, Najaf, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Muthana provinces, a recce battalion, and a support battalion.

tal CTS strength in the fall of 2013 was around 13,000 personnel.[238]

The need to fill the expanding ranks of CTS led to a reduction of training standards, and attrition rates in courses were decreased as Iraqi instructors pushed to increase the numbers graduated.[239] There were few U.S. advisors to recommend enforcement of standards, and some courses had a 100 percent graduation rate.[240] CTS continued to recruit personnel without prior military service, or from MoD, but MoD recruits were generally of a low quality.[241] There was also a decrease in the amount of ammunition used for training, which was horded for future operations.[242] The poor quality training led to a degradation of skills[243] and mistakes in operations.[244]

The rapid growth led to an acute equipment shortage and CTS continued to receive poor support from MoD.[245] CTS requests to MoD for weapons, ammunition, and vehicles in 2013 went unfilled,[246] and it continued to be challenged by the lack of an official budget.[247] CTS leaders believed that since the U.S. had created CTS, it had the continued responsibility to equip, support, and provide CTS with enablers such as aircraft, close air support, and intelligence.[248] Given the post-withdrawal environment and opposition within Iraq to CTS, this was not possible except in some limited requests for equipment.

As mentioned earlier, the CTS headquarters and CTC always contained high percentages of Shi'as, but ISOF had generally reflected the demographics of Iraq in terms of percentages of Shi'as, Sunnis, and Kurds. In 2011 there was an increase in the percentages of Shi'as in ISOF courses despite the recommendations of U.S. advisors.[249] In a rebuttal to these allegations, Major General Fadhel Barwari, the 1st ISOF Brigade commander, stressed that CTS remained true to its original vision as a non-sectarian force; it was composed of Sunnis, Shi'as, and Kurds, and anyone demonstrating sectarian tendencies was quickly expelled.[250]

By the end of 2011, CTS saw a severe increase in politicization. Many experienced officers had been replaced by personnel with connections and loyalties to the prime minister,[251] and were accused of being selected based on criteria inappropriate for a military organization.[252] By the end of 2013,

238. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014. The Iraqi press reported CTS strength as between 10,000 and 13,500. ALMADA Newspaper, "Counterterrorism Forces are ready;" Iynas Tarik, "Naksah Ramadan al-amniyah taqta' shawari' Baghdad bi-tawabir min al-zahmat," (The Security Debacle of Ramadan cuts the streets of Baghdad with lines of jams) *ALMADA Newspaper*, August 1, 2013, http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/448827/%D9%86%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B9-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A7 (accessed June 15, 2014); and Al-Sumariah Nayoz, "Ihalah qa'id Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab al-firqah al-dhahabiyah wa al-qa'id al-sabiq fi al-bishmirgah Fadhel Barwari ila wazifah mustashar" (The Transfer of the Commander of CTS 'the Golden Division' and the former commander in the Peshmerga , Fadhel Barwari, to an advisory position) *Iraq5050*, April 7, 2012, http://www.iraq5050.com/?art=6863&m=5 (accessed June 13, 2014).
239. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014; and interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
240. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014. The Operators Training Course (OTC), which produced soldiers for the ICTF Battalion, had not been conducted in over a year when U.S. advisors ran the course for the Iraqis in fall 2013.
241. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
242. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2014; and interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
243. Katzman, 22.
244. Ned Parker, Ahmed Rasheed; and Suadad Al-Salby, "Special Report: Iraqi forces, images testify to atrocities in new fighting," *Reuters*, March 20, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/20/us-iraq-anbar-specialreport-idUSBREA2J11720140320 (accessed June 8, 2014).
245. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014; and Knights.
246. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
247. Fadhel Barwari.
248. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
249. Brennan, 188. The graduates of the eight assessment and selection courses before November 1, 2013, were 85 percent Shi'a, 13 percent Sunni, and 2 percent Kurds, while the demographics of Iraq as a whole were 70 percent Shi'a, 15–20 percent Sunni, and 10–15 percent Kurds.
250. Fadhel Barwari. Barwari himself was a Kurd and a former member of the Peshmerga. The reporter conducting the interview with Barwari noted that the 1st ISOF Brigade was composed of Sunnis, Shi'as, Kurds, Christians, and Turkmen.
251. Brennan, 188; and Sullivan.
252. Naji Sitar.

many of the ISOF battalion commanders had no prior ISOF training or experience and were new to CTS.[253] Again, Major General Fadhel Barwari rejected claims that CTS was politicized and invited whoever suspected this to visit the CTS headquarters to see its non-sectarian and non-political methodologies. Anyone who followed political agendas was not allowed to remain.[254]

Before the withdrawal, U.S. advisors and trainers had worked to lay a foundation for strong junior officers and NCOs within ISF,[255] and this was especially true for CTS. After the withdrawal, CTS junior officers and NCOs were marginalized, given little authority, and their promotions stagnated as the organization began to return to Iraq's traditional military culture which valued loyalty above competence and military professionalism.[256]

Without the CTS law, which members of Parliament refused to pass, CTS continued to be seen as the prime minister's political tool, unconstitutional, and accused of imitating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.[257] There were charges of financial corruption from Parliament regarding how CTS procured its arms and equipment.[258] Some members of Parliament alleged that the Obama administration asked Prime Minister Maliki to abolish CTS during his trip to Washington, D.C. in November 2013.[259] There were continued accusations that CTS operated secret prisons.[260] To no avail, CTS leaders pleaded for the passage of the CTS law so that the organization could properly develop, have a formal budget, operate as an official service, and be tied to Iraq rather than the office of the prime minister.[261]

CTS operations without the U.S.

Despite the challenges facing CTS after the U.S. withdrawal, it remained a highly effective organization. From the inception of ISOF in 2004 through December 2011, CTS detained over 9,000 terrorism suspects while conducting operations with U.S. advisors.[262] From January to September 2013, CTS reported that it had made 700 terrorist arrests,[263] comparable rates for a similar length of time when it operated with USSF.

In the later years, most arrests of suspected terrorists were made while CTS acted in a law-enforcement-like role. The original purpose of CTS was to conduct precision counter-terrorism operations, usually at the company level and below, against valid targets approved through the targeting process. With the development of the warrant requirement, CTS began to strictly adhere to Iraqi law in the face of the constant criticism of its politicization. The result was, at times, that CTS operations were conservative in their targeting in order to avoid providing fodder to political opponents. Because of their tenuous political position, CTS leaders understood that they were held to a higher standard than their MoD and MoI counterparts and ignoring legal due process was not

253. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
254. Fadhel Barwari.
255. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 10–11.
256. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
257. Sahat Al-Tahrir, "Jihaz Mukfahah al-Irhab al-tabi' li-maktab al-Maliki 'ala minwal al-haras al-thuri al-Iran: akbar min failaq wa balagha qawamah 'asharah afwaj bi-tajhiiz 'alin" (CTS subordinate to the office of Maliki is modeled on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard: bigger than a corps and has ten battalions with advanced equipment) *AltahreerNews.com*, September 11, 2012. http://www.altahreernews.com/inp/view.asp?ID=11108 (accessed 7 June, 2014).
258. 'ala Musa, "Ba'da thubut tawarrutah fi fasad safqah al-aslihah al-Rusiyah, hurub qa'id Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab ila jihah majhulah" (After certainty of his involvement in a corrupt Russian arms deal, the commander of CTS flees to parts unknown) *Chakooch*, http://www.chakooch.com/news.php?action=view&id=1304 (accessed June 12, 2014).
259. Al-Mawsil, "Washinton tansah al-Maliki bi-ilgha' Sawat wa Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab (Washington advises Maliki to abolish SWAT and CTS) *Al-Mawsil*, November 8, 2013, http://www.almawsil.com/vb/showthread.php/124214-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A1-%C2%AB%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%C2%BB-%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8 (accessed June 13, 2014).
260. Sullivan, 12.
261. Fadhel Barwari.
262. ALMADA Newspaper, "Counterterrorism Forces are ready."
263. U.S. DOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013-Iraq*.

tolerated. There were no special permissions permitting CTS to work outside of Iraqi law. Only suspects with warrants and sufficient evidence against them to stand up in an Iraqi court were targeted.[264] In most of its law-enforcement operations, ISOF simply drove up to the target and arrested suspects who seldom offered resistance since most believed they would be detained only for a short time,[265] and the chances of being convicted of terrorism in Iraqi courts were becoming increasingly small.[266]

After the U.S. withdrawal, CTS generally targeted Sunnis and anti-government forces, including al-Qaida in Iraq and Ba'athists versus Shi'as,[267] although in its defense, Sunni extremists were the greatest terrorist threat at the time, and CTS continued to follow its targeting and warranting methodologies. However, during times of national crisis when the terrorist threat was greatly elevated, such as during Shi'a holidays, CTS would temporary suspend its warrant and targeting processes and conduct mass arrests and sweeps. Prior to the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in November 2013, CTS, along with other ISF, conducted mass roundups of thousands of Sunni males, raiding homes and making arbitrary arrests in Baghdad.[268] At these times, CTS was employed to conduct operations that it was not designed to carry out.[269]

CTS, the most effective organization, became a victim of its own success, and what a former advisor described as the "answer to all problems." CTS was tasked by the prime minister's office to guard conveys, man checkpoints, run special training courses for other ISF units, participate in sweeps with MoD and MoI,[270] and secure voting centers.[271] Following the mass prison escapes at the Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons in July 2013, CTS was tasked to assist in securing prisons and was used to search prisoners for contraband. CTS leaders acknowledged that this was an improper use of the force, but since the orders came from the prime minister, they had little choice but to obey.[272]

CTS even adopted a public media presence, which included TV interviews, frequent official statements to the press, a Facebook page, and even a music video that appeared on Iraqi TV.[273] It often asked the Iraqi public to provide it with information regarding terrorists, and offered its Facebook page and different phone numbers to call in tips.[274] Although the CTS media presence was never envisioned by U.S. advisors when the organization was first formed, it did bring public awareness and support for the CTS mission.

The Iraqi security environment in 2013 and Iraqi counterinsurgency and counterterrorism

Violence levels in Iraq rose dramatically in 2013, inflamed by sectarian and political differences, the spillover of the civil war in Syria, and the growing influence of Iran.[275] During that year, the terrorist

264. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
265. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
266. In 2013, there were an estimated 2,252 cases of terrorism but only 363 resulted in convictions. U.S. DOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013-Iraq*.
267. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2012, 85; and Brennan, 188.
268. U.S. DOS, *Iraq 2013 Human Rights Report*, 13–14.
269. Interview with former CTS advisor, April 29, 2104.
270. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
271. Al-'iraqiyah Channel, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yusharik fi tamiin al-marakiz al-intikhabiyah" (CTS participates in securing election centers) *YouTube*, 2:18 minutes, April 29, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FdCgniZcpU (accessed August 2, 2104).
272. Fadhel Barwari.
273. Ahmed Ali, "Iraq Update 2014#9: Anbar Standoff Continues With Clashes in Ramadi and Fallujah," *Institute for the Study of War Iraq Updates*, January 18, 2014, http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2014/01/iraq-update-2014-9-clashes-and-standoff.html?q=CTS (accessed June 7, 2014); and see for instance, Muhammad 'abdel Jabbar, (Al-maut al-ahmar lil-firqah al-dhahabiyah (The Red Death from the Golden Division) *YouTube*, 5:03 minutes, May 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqAW1-H3jv8 (accessed August 2, 2014); www.facebook.com/ISOFGold; and http://www.isof-iq.com/.
274. Ba'ada Al-Tasi'ah, "Al-juz' al-awwal min barnamaj Ba'da al-Tasi'ah wa liqa' ma'a qa'id al-'amaliyah al-khassah al-liwa' Fadhel Barwari (Part one from the Program After Nine and a meeting with the commander of Special Operations, Major General Fadhel Barwari) *YouTube*, 15:04 minutes, August 23, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QamzqlcBtz0 (accessed August 2, 2014).
275. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 3.

group known as al-Qaida in Iraq changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and conducted attacks with levels on par with 2007. In 2013, there were estimates of over 7,800 civilian and 1,000 military deaths.[276]

On paper, ISF appeared capable of meeting the ISIS threat. It had been trained and equipped by the U.S. for years and numbered more than 800,000, with about 300,000 in MoD, mainly concentrated in 14 Iraqi Army divisions. MoI had around 500,000 security personnel, some of whom were organized into military-like divisions that included mechanized units. MoI also had the Emergency Response Brigade and other specialized counterterrorism units.[277] In addition, Iraq had CTS. Nevertheless, the Iraqi Army lacked the capabilities of effective support and command structures, and the larger MoD was judged as ineffective; MoI was assessed as even worse.[278] The U.S. continued to equip MoD, but the prime minister was mainly interested in procuring U.S. F-16 fighters, AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, and air defense systems,[279] none of which were particularly suited to counterterrorism or counterinsurgency.

Before and after the U.S. withdrawal, ISF shifted away from U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, which focused on protecting the population, and started conducting large scale clearing operations, which even the prime minister referred to as "sweeping attacks,"[280] setting up security checkpoints[281] and making thousands of unnecessary arrests. Maliki

had politically alienated Iraq's Sunnis and was focused on consolidating Shi'a power in fear that the Shi'as might again be persecuted by the Sunnis.[282]

Counterterrorism is an important aspect of counterinsurgency, but since no single entity was responsible for coordinating it, many units, such as MoI's Emergency Response Brigade and MoD units, conducted counterterrorism in addition to CTS.[283] In military terms, there was no unity of command to direct counterterrorism efforts.[284] CTS was formally charged in the Iraqi National Counter Terrorism Strategy to coordinate and lead all counterterrorism efforts, but competition for resources, consolidation of power, and anti-coup considerations trumped CTS's role. The lack of cooperation and coordination, the failure to exchange information, and the attempted monopolies of one ministry over another would contribute to Iraq's security debacle of 2014.[285]

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276. U.S. DOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013-Iraq*.

277. Inyas Tarik.

278. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 3.

279. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 36.

280. Knights; and Sa'd Hashim, "Qarrarna al-tawajjuh nahwa al-hujum al-kasih fi kull makan fih irhab wa irhabiyan" (We have decided to conduct sweeping attacks in every place that there are terrorism and terrorists) *Khaimah Al-'iraq (Newspaper)*, August 14, 2013, http://www.mod.mil.iq/khaima/pdf/284.pdf (accessed June 14, 2014).

281. Scarborough.

282. Scarborough; and Crocker.

283. U.S. DOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013-Iraq*; and Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress, July 30, 2012*, 84–85.

284. MoD announced in August 2013 that it was forming two Special Forces divisions which would have likely further overlapped into the counterterrorism realm, creating additional confusion. Sabah al-Khaz'ali, "Aaliyah at-tatawwu' li-sufuf al-jaish al-'iraqi shaffafah jiddan wa 'an tariq mauqi' wizarah al-difa' al-iliktroni hasran" (The mechanism of volunteering for the ranks of the Iraqi Army are very transparent and by means of the MoD's website exclusively) *Khaimah Al'iraq Newspaper*, August 14, 2013, http://www.mod.mil.iq/khaima/pdf/284.pdf (accessed June 14, 2014).

285. Buratha News Agency, "Na'ibah: da'f al-tansiq baina al-ajhizah al-amniyah wa 'ajz al-qiyadat al-'ammah lil-quwwat al-musallahah wara'a ahdath Samarra" (The weakness of coordination between security agencies and the failure of the General Command of the Armed Forces are behind the events of Samarra) *Buratha News Agency*, June 6, 2014, http://burathanews.com/news/238472.html (accessed June 15, 2014).

Original US Proposal for CTS Structure

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                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │  Government of Iraq   │
                    └──────────────────────┘
                               │
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │   Prime Minister      │
                    │ (Commander in Chief)  │
                    └──────────────────────┘
          ┌────────────────────┼────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────┐
│ Counter Terrorism│ │Ministry of Defense│ │Ministry of Interior│
│ Service (CTS) Advi-│ │                  │ │                  │
│ sory Function only│ │                  │ │                  │
└──────────────────┘ └──────────────────┘ └──────────────────┘
                               │
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │  Joint Headquarters   │
                    └──────────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────┬───────┼───────────┬──────────────┐
┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│Counter Terror-│ │Ground Forces │ │  Air Force   │ │    Navy      │
│ism Command    │ │              │ │              │ │              │
│(CTC)          │ │              │ │              │ │              │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
        │
┌──────────────┐
│Iraqi Special │
│Operations     │
│Forces (ISOF)  │
└──────────────┘
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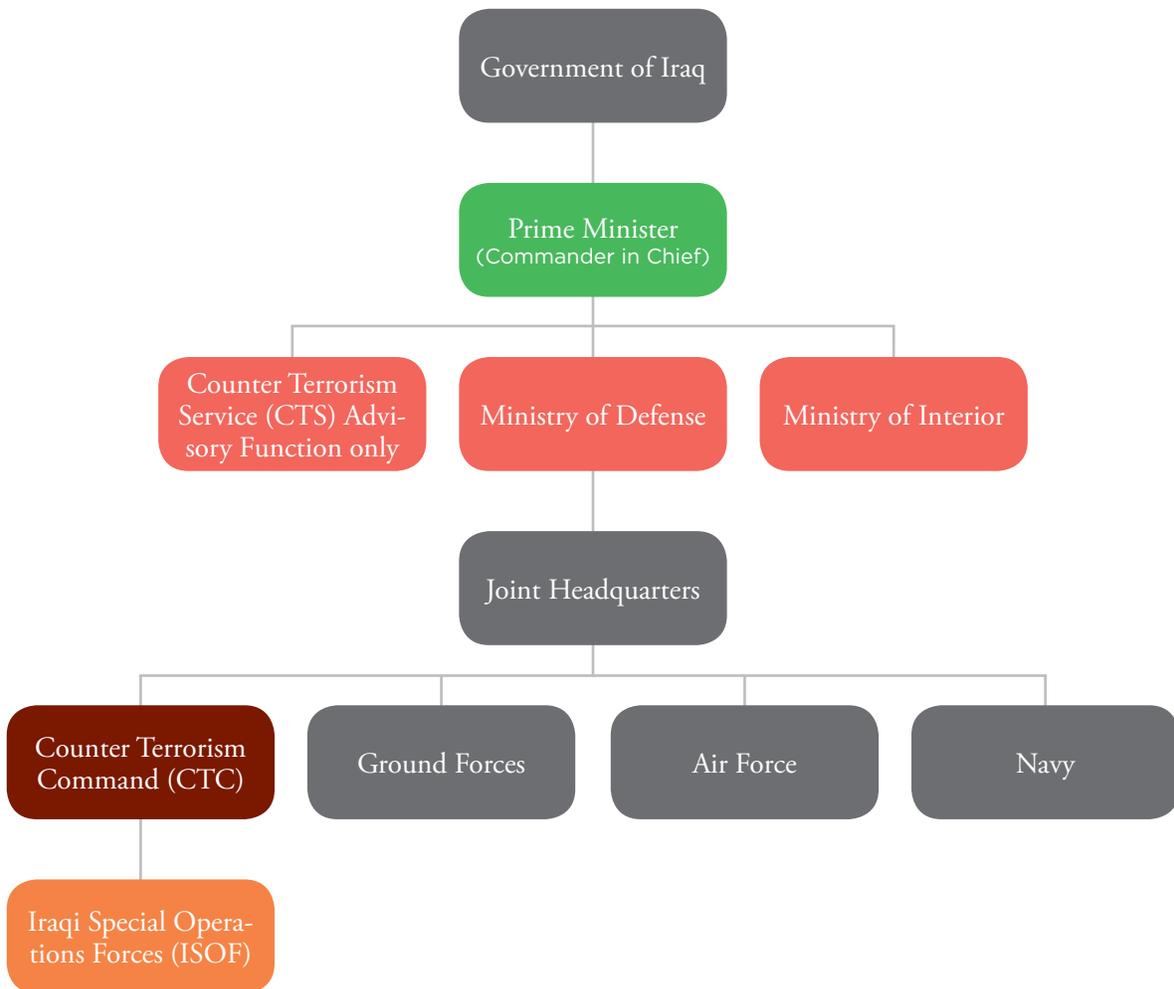
CTS Structure as Implemented

Internal CTS Structure

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Counter Terrorism     │
                    │     Service (CTS)        │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                                │
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Counter Terrorism     │
                    │   Command (CTC)         │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
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Academia (Training Institution)	1st ISOF Brigade	2nd ISOF Brigade	3rd ISOF Brigade
	ISOF Battalions	ISOF Battalions	ISOF Battalions
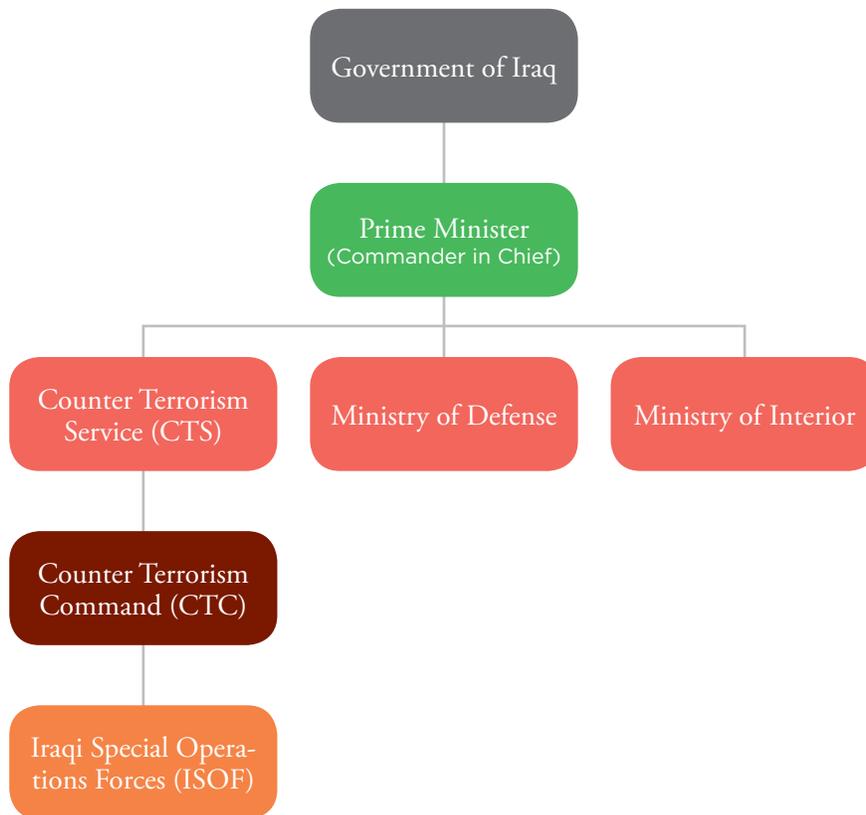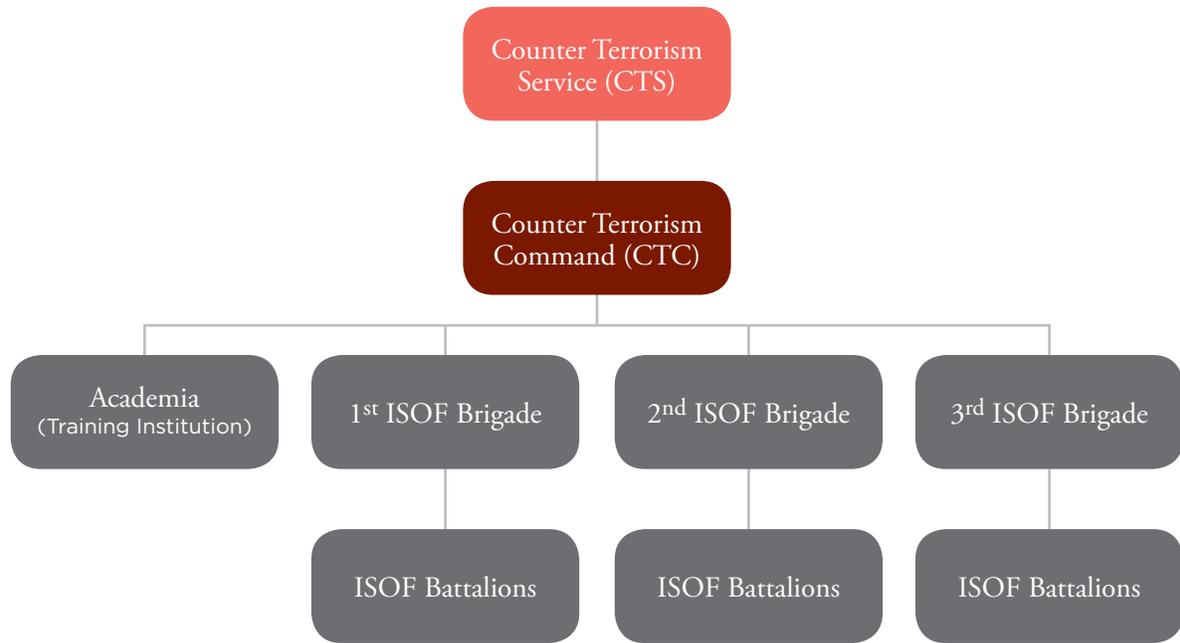
NOTE:

ISOF Brigades are headquarters which control the ISOF Battalions

ISOF Battalions consist of between 440 and 600 personnel each

CTS Today

CTS and ISIS in 2014

Before the U.S. withdrew, CTS suffered from problems such as perceived illegitimacy, partial politicization and never receiving the level of support it believed it required from GoI. After the U.S. withdrawal, these legitimacy problems persisted and politicization became worse, and CTS continued to face a shortage of resources. It also lacked the enablers it previously had access to, such as U.S. intelligence and aircraft support. Several new problems had arisen without U.S. advisors present in large numbers — the deterioration of training standards and a proliferation of new missions which diverted it from its true purpose. However, at the beginning of 2014, CTS was still considered the most effective security force in Iraq.

In late 2013, ISIS evolved from conducting terrorist attacks to open warfare as it began to seize and hold terrain, a significant shift as it transformed from an insurgency to a war of movement, starting in the Anbar province. In late December 2013, ISF dismantled a Sunni protest camp outside of Ramadi, and in the wake of violence that followed, Maliki withdrew ISF from Ramadi and Fallujah. When ISIS quickly occupied Fallujah and parts of Ramadi it was the first time anti-government forces had taken open control of major cities in years.[286] In response, CTS was assigned to lead GoI attempts to retake the cities and other parts of Anbar,[287] supported by the Iraqi Army, MoI, and pro-government tribal elements.[288]

For the next several months, CTS conducted clearing operations in Anbar[289] and was used as a strike force in grinding operations to seize and clear terrain in the cities. Once CTS captured terrain, it was turned over to the Army to secure it, but the Army was usually repulsed the next day and the terrain was lost.[290] In intense fighting, CTS units were accused of atrocities such as killing captured and wounded terrorists on the spot, which was attributed to a lack of training. CTS denied these allegations and insisted it held its soldiers accountable for inappropriate actions.[291]

Although CTS was the most effective force, it was now conducting more missions for which it was not trained or equipped. These operations required heavy weapons such as mortars, artillery support, and armored vehicles that CTS neither possessed nor was trained to use. Previously, most CTS operations had been conducted at the company level and below; now it was operating at the battalion level and above, requiring the integration of artillery, mass close air support, and close coordination with other ISF units, none of which had been covered in U.S. or Iraqi training.[292] The Iraqi press described CTS as suffering high losses in Anbar, particularly to the 1st ISOF Brigade, known as the Golden Division. Some of the best and most experienced officers and soldiers

286. Middle East Online, "Iraqi counter-terrorism forces battle jihadists in Ramadi," *middle east online*, March 3, 2014, http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?=64598 (accessed June 11, 2014).

287. World Tribune, "U.S. advisors train Iraqi special forces to counter spreading Sunni offensive," *World Tribune.com*, April 14, 2014, http://www.worldtribune.com/2014/04/14/u-s-advisers-training-iraqi-forces-bomb-detection-helicopter-assaults/ (accessed June 14, 2014); and Ahmed Ali, "Iraq Update 2014#9."

288. Ahmed Ali and Iraq Team, "Iraqi Army Launches Fallujah Offensive," *Institute for the Study of War Iraq Updates*, May 9, 2014, http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2014/05/iraqi-army-launches-fallujah-offensive.html (accessed June 7, 2014).

289. See for instance, Al-Sumariah Nayoz, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yutahhar hayyai al-Dubbat wa al-Bikr fi al-Anbar min al-musallahin (CTS clears the districts of al-Dubbat and al-Bikr from armed fighters) *Al-Sumariah*, April 20, 2014, http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/98419/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8/ar (accessed June 11, 2104).

290. Parker.

291. Parker.

292. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.

who had been trained by the U.S. over the years were among the casualties.[293]

At first, U.S. advisors assigned to OSC-I were unable to assist CTS in the Anbar operation even with advice since their role was restricted to non-operational matters,[294] although CTS asked for this type of advice, along with requesting that the U.S. provide it with heavy vehicles such as armored personnel carriers and tanks.[295] By April 2014, restrictions on the type of advice advisors could provide appeared to have loosened, and it was reported that U.S. advisors were training and mentoring CTS on specifics of operations in Anbar.[296]

In June 2014, ISIS captured Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, as ISF abandoned their posts and refused to fight.[297] This was followed by the fall of Tikrit and other cities in northern Iraq as ISIS began to consolidate its control of northern and western Iraq. In the process, ISIS, now renamed the Islamic State, captured around 1,500 U.S. supplied HMMWVs, along with other equipment including artillery pieces.[298] The Islamic State, consisting of only about 10,000 fighters, was able to quickly replace its losses by freeing of prisoners from GoI

prisons and recruiting from a stream of reinforcements from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Chechnya, and Europe.[299] Initial GoI counteroffensives to retake lost terrain were unsuccessful.[300] Later in June it was announced that the U.S. was sending 300 USSF personnel to Iraq to assess the status of ISF and to serve as advisors after an agreement was reached between the U.S. and GoI to give the new troops legal protections from Iraqi law.[301] This agreement was not approved by the Iraqi Parliament but by an agreement from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. The agreement is not binding under the Iraqi constitution, which can only be approved by parliament,[302] but the U.S. is now willing to accept greater legal risk in Iraq with the rise of the Islamic State.

Assessments of ISF and CTS after the fall of Mosul

Following the Islamic State's seizure of most of northern Iraq, assessments of ISF were grim. ISF suffered tens of thousands of desertions and was assessed as having a lack of training and equipment, low morale, and on the verge of "psychological collapse."[303] ISF leadership was incompetent, cor-

293. Parker; Aluni, "Ba'da takabbudah khasa'ir fadihah bil-arwah maktab al-qa'id al-'amm lil-quwwat al-musallahah yuqarrar i'adah haikalah Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab wa Barwari fi mahabb al-riih" (After enduring burdensome losses, the Office of the General Commander of the Armed Forces decides to send CTS and Barwari to the winds) *IRAQ4ALLNEWS.DK*, March 15, 2014, http://iraq4allnews.dk/ShowNews.php?id=65609 (accessed June 8, 2014); and Al-Madar. CTS losses required replacements if it was to continue the fight, and the ongoing U.S. training of CTS forces in Jordan was seen as a partial solution.
294. Scarborough.
295. Interview with former CTS advisor, June 28, 2014.
296. World Tribune.
297. Matthew Bell, "Islamic militants have taken over Iraq's second-largest city," *PRI*, June 10, 2014, http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-06-10/islamic-militants-have-taken-over-iraqs-second-largest-city (accessed June 11, 2014). After the fall of Mosul to ISIS, Major General Fadhel Barwari, the 1st ISOF Brigade commander, announced that he had not participated in the battle of Mosul. Wikalah Al-Istiglal lilAkhbar, "Qa'id Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yu'tarif bi'adam musharikatuh bima'arik al-Mawsil wa yaqul al-ta'irah alliti tasallamnaha bada'at taqsuf" (The Commander of CTS admits the lack of his participation in the battles of Mosul and says the aircraft we received began bombing) *Wikalah Al-Istiqlal lil-Akhbar*, June 11, 2014, http://independencenews.net/news.php?action=view&id=26106 (accessed July 22, 2014).
298. Mitchell Prothero, "Iraqi army remains on defensive as extent of June debacle becomes clearer," *Stars and Stripes*, July 14, 2014, http://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/iraqi-army-remains-on-defensive-as-extent-of-june-debacle-becomes-clearer-1.293417 (accessed July 22, 2014).
299. Alissa J. Rubin and Michael R. Gordon, "Iraq's Military Seen as Unlikely to Turn the Tide," *New York Times*, June 22, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/23/world/middleeast/iraq's-military-seen-as-unlikely-to-turn-the-tide.html?_r=Q (accessed July 21, 2014).
300. Prothero.
301. Associated Press, "US, Iraq agree to legal protections for special forces teams deploying to the country," *Fox News*, June 23, 2014, http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/06/23/us-iraq-agree-to-legal-protections-for-special-forces-teams-deploying-to/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+foxnews%2Fnational+%28Internal+-US+Latest++-+Text%29 (accessed July 22, 2014).
302. Eli Lake and Josh Rogin, "Obama Flips on Immunity for U.S. Troops in Iraq," *The Daily Beast*, June 23, 2014, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/23/obama-does-a-u-turn-on-immunity-for-u-s-troops-in-iraq.html (accessed September 8, 2014).
303. Loveday Morris and Karen DeYoung, "Iraqi military facing 'psychological collapse' after losses, desertions," *The Washington Post*, June 22, 2014, http://m.washingtonpost.com/world/iraqi-military-facing-psychological-collapse-after-losses-desertions/2014/06/22/88ed659a-fa4a-11e3-8176-f2c941cf35f1_story.html (accessed July 21, 2014); and Prothero.

rupt, and cowardly. In the years following the US withdrawal, senior leaders had been selected due to their political reliability rather than their competence or military skills, and good officers were seen as a threat due to their popularity and initiative and were removed.[304] Their replacements saw their assignments as opportunities to make money through the embezzlement of unit funds and the extortion of subordinates. Money for the purchase of food for soldiers was pocketed, fuel sold on the black market, and absent soldiers allowed to stay on the rolls in exchange for a portion of their salaries.[305] During the battle of Mosul, these officers fled their units, which left their men little incentive to fight.

With the combat losses and desertions, 60 of the Iraqi Army's 243 combat battalions were gone, along with their equipment, which likely ended up in the hands of the Islamic State. Five of Iraq's 14 Army divisions were rated as ineffective, [306] or had disappeared completely. U.S. advisors rated remaining units as infiltrated with Shi'a militias and Sunni extremists.[307]

At the other extreme, CTS was assessed as the one bright spot of ISF. It was the best military organization, and was able to maintain its cohesion and effectiveness,[308] despite experiencing some of the most intensive combat, suffering heavy losses, and continuing to be used as a regular, although elite, ISF unit, rather than in a dedicated counterterrorism role. When it initially appeared that Baghdad was threatened after the fall of Mosul in June 2014, CTS announced plans to deploy its forces throughout the city to calm the population and end the of spread armed groups in the streets after religious authorities called upon militias to fight the Islamic State.[309] CTS was involved in initial operations in June to retake Tikrit, Samarra, and Baiji.[310] CTS, reinforced with armored vehicles and air support, made some headway in retaking Tikrit, again appearing to be used as the main striking force,[311] although the larger ISF operation was ultimately a failure. A CTS force remained the sole ISF unit defending the critical Baiji oil refinery after other ISF units fled, despite being outnumber five to one.[312] In August, CTS and Peshmerga forces supported by U.S. airstrikes were able to clear Iraq's largest dam, the Mosul Dam, of Islamic State fighters in what was called a "model military operation."[313] CTS and the Peshmerga, again supported by U.S. air, also retook several towns north

304. Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, "Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division," *War on the Rocks*, July 1, 2014, http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside-the-collapse-of-the-iraqi-armys-2nd-division/ (accessed July 17, 2014).

305. Abbas and Trombly.

306. Rubin and Gordon.

307. Prothero. In September 2014, General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, said that almost half of the Iraqi army was not suitable to effectively partner with U.S. forces against the Islamic State. The other half of the Iraqi army required training and equipment. Robert Burns, "Dempsey: Half of the Iraqi army not OK as US partners," *YAHOO News*, September 17, 2014, http://news.yahoo.com/dempsey-half-iraqi-army-not-ok-us-partners-052845869.html (accessed November 4, 2014).

308. Abbas and Trombly; Rubin and Gordon; and John Bednarek, "Mas'ul al-ta'awin al-'askari al-Amriki li (al-Zaman): Kulfah al-Harb 'ala Da'sh 7.5 milyan dolar yaumiyan" (Chief of American Military Cooperation to al-Zaman: The cost of the war on ISIS is $7.5 million daily) Interview with Hussein al-Najm. *Azzaman.com*, September 20, 2014, http://www.azzaman.com/2014/09/20/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2/ (accessed November 4, 2014).

309. Yunus Muhammad, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yanshur 'anasiruh fi manatiq bi-Baghdad" (CTS deploys its forces in the districts of Baghdad) *Idha'ah al-'iraq al-Hurr*, June 24, 2014, http://iraqhurr.mobi/a/25433789.html (accessed July 22, 2014).

310. Ahmed Ali, Heather L. Pickerell, and ISW Iraq Team, "Iraq Situation Report: June 17, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Iraq Updates*, June 17, 2014, http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2014/06/situation-report-june-17-2014.html?m=1 (accessed July 21, 2014); and Al-Hikmah, "Al-Firqah al-Dhahabiyah: Hamlah wasi'ah satabda'a fi thalath manatiq shamaliyah li-tathiirha min Da'sh" (The Golden Division: A wide campaign shall begin in three northern regions to clear them from ISIS) *Al-Hikmah*, June 27, 2014, http://www.alhikmeh.org/news/?tag=%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A (accessed July 22, 2014).

311. Al-Qurtas Nayoz, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yashunnu hamlah wasi'ah wa yutahhar mustashfa Tikrit wa akadimiyah al-shurtah wa al-markiz al-thaqafi" (CTS launches a wide campaign and clears the Tikrit Hospital, the Police Academy, and the Cultural Center) *Al-Qurtas Nayoz*, July 15, 2014, http://www.alqurtasnews.com/mobile/news/36054/iraq-news (accessed July 22, 2014).

312. Ahmed Ali, Heather L. Pickerell, and ISW Iraq Team, "Iraq Situation Report: June 18, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Iraq Updates*, June 18, 2014, http://iswiraq.blogspot.com/2014/06/iraq-situation-report-june-18-2014.html?m=1 (accessed July 21, 2014); and Hannah Allam and Mitchel Prothero, "Islamists have cornered commandos defending Iraq's largest refinery," *Miami Herald*, July 9, 2014, http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/07/09/4227130/islamsits-corner-commando-defending.html (accessed July 21, 2014).

313. Reuter, DPA, "Quwwat al-'iraqiyah mushtarakah tas'a li-isti'adah al-Mausil ba'ada (tathiir al-sadd) min 'anasir (Da'sh) bi-al-kamil" (Combined Iraqi forces strive to retake Mosul after clearing the dam from elements of ISIS completely) *Al-Riyad*, August 19, 2014, http://www.alriyadh.com/962098 (accessed September 8, 2014).

of Mosul.[314] In September, CTS spearheaded an offensive supported by tribes, police, MoD forces, and U.S. air to secure the Haditha Dam in Anbar province, which was threatened by the Islamic State.[315] Again in October, when Islamic State fighters were approaching the outskirts of the capital, CTS deployed units into the streets of Baghdad.[316] A CTS spokesperson announced that Baghdad was secure and urged citizens not to believe rumors about the security situation after alarming reports in the Iraqi media stated that Islamic State forces were approaching the Baghdad International Airport.[317] Also in October, CTS led an ISF operation in another attempt to liberate Tikrit.[318] On October 31, CTS, along with other ISF units, entered the district of Baiji after a battle with the Islamic State fighters.[319] During the advance on Baiji, CTS forces were exposed to improvised explosive devices which the Islamic State had placed in the road every 20 meters.[320] With the exception of the Peshmerga, CTS appears to have spearheaded all major combat operations, and as of this writing, remains the most effective military organization that GoI possesses.

Although mostly employed as a conventional force, CTS still retained the ability to conduct some high profile counterterrorism missions and remained effective. For example, in early June 2014, CTS was able to successfully free close to 1,000 students who were held hostage by ISIS at the University of Al-Anbar in Ramadi.[321] In addition, in early November 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the emir of the Islamic State, said that Iraqi intelligence and CTS agents had successfully infiltrated his organization, resulting in significant Islamic State battlefield losses. In response, al-Baghdadi instructed his followers to no longer accept Iraqi volunteers into the organization as a precaution against future infiltrators.[322]

After the fall of Mosul, there were calls for the passage of the CTS law, and hopes that the formation of the new Iraqi government would facilitate this.[323] Maliki announced on August 14 that he would step aside as prime minister in favor of Haider al-Abadi and would not seek a third term.[324] Contrary to what many had predicted, CTS did not act as a

314. Bill Roggio, "US airpower supports Peshmerga, Iraqi forces to retake Mosul Dam," *The Long War Journal*, August 18, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/08/us_airpower_supports.php (accessed September 8, 2014).

315. Loveday Morris, Craig Whitlock, and Greg Jaffe, "Iraqi forces, aided by U.S. airstrikes, launch ground offensive to secure dam in Anbar," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-launches-new-airstrikes-against-islamic-state-fighters-in-iraq/2014/09/07/a456ba66-3686-11e4-8601-97ba88884ffd_story.html (accessed September 8, 2014).

316. Wajh Al-Haqiiqah, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yanshur qita'at mudarrabah wa mujahhazah tajhiizan 'ali al-mustawa li-tamin shawari' Baghdad" (CTS deploys trained and highly equipped units to secure the streets of Baghdad) *Wajh Al-Haqiiqah*, October 29, 2014, http://www.dijlah.tv/index.php?page=article&id=176830 (accessed November 3, 2014).

317. ALMADA Press, "Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab yad'u al-muwatineen ila "adam tasdiiq al-isha'at" wa yu'akkid: Atraf Baghdad mu'ammanah" (CTS calls citizens to not believe rumors and confirms that the extremities of Baghdad are secure) *ALMADA Press*, October 14, 2014, http://www.almadapress.com/ar/news/38150/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86- (accessed November 3, 2014).

318. ALMADA Press, "Al-Quawwat al-Musallahah bi-qiyadah quwwah min Mukafahah al-Irhab tabda' hajuman 'ala mihwarain li-tahriir Tikriit" (The Armed Forces led by a force from CTS begins an attack on two axes to liberate Tikrit) *Iraqi Women's League-IWL*, October 22, 2014, http://iraqiwomensleague.com/mod.php?mod=news&modfile=item&itemid=28624#.VFvFs-NEcTIW (accessed November 3, 2104).

319. ALMADA Press, Al-Quwwat al-mushtarikah tuharrar Baiji min Da'sh wa taqtul musa'idan barizan lil-Baghdadi" (Combined forces liberate Baiji from ISIS and kill a prominent assistant of al-Baghdadi) *Al-Mada Newspaper*, November 1, 2014, http://www.alm-adapaper.net/ar/news/474108/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84- (accessed November 3, 2014).

320. Nichole Dicharry, "Iraq Situation Report: October 28–29, 2014, *Institute for the Study of War*, October 29, 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-situation-report-october-28-29-2014 (accessed November 3, 2014).

321. Aswat Al-'iraq, "Masdar Amni: Tahriir kull tulab jami'ah al-Anbar badun khasa'ir fi safufhum" (Security Source: Freeing of all the students from the University of Anbar without losses) *Aswat Al-'iraq*, June 7, 2014, http://ar.aswataliraq.info/(S(4x0e4iqlp0aqb2jwgazgedms))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=332285&l=1 (accessed June 11, 2014).

322. PUKMEDIA, "Al-Baghdadi rejects Iraqi Volunteers," *PUKMEDIA*, November 2, 2014, http://pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=22559 (accessed November 3, 2014).

323. Al-Muraqib Al-Iraqi, "Khubara' Amniyan: Khamsah ajhizah istikhbariyah ta'mal bidon qanon wa munashidah li-tashri' qawanin tahmi amn al-bilad" (Security Experts: Five Intelligence agencies work without a law and implore for legislation of laws protecting the security of the country) *Al-Muraqib Al-Iraqi*, July 21, 2014, http://almurakeb-aliraqi.org/index.php/political/22756.html (accessed July 22, 2014).

324. Loveday Morris and Karen DeYoung, "Maliki steps aside, easing Iraq's political crisis," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/maliki-agrees-to-step-aside-easing-iraqs-political-crisis/2014/08/14/4535fd40-23ed-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a_story.html (accessed September 8, 2014).

countercoup force to keep Maliki in power. In late August, al-Abadi praised CTS for its role in liberating land from the Islamic State.[325] In October, al-Abadi attended a graduation at the Iraqi Military College for officers who would be assigned to CTS,[326] an indication that al-Abadi accepts the legitimacy of the CTS organization.

325. Kull Al-Akhbar, "Al-'abadi yakshif 'an khittah jadiidah li-muqatalah Da'sh wa yushiid bi-Jihaz Mukafahah al-Irhab" (Al-Abadi reveals a new plan to combat ISIS and praises CTS) *KUL AL-AKHBAAR*, August 26, 2014, http://www.kulalakhbar-iq.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11866:2014-08-26-06-37-54&catid=23:2012-08-27-19-12-30&Itemid=23 (accessed September 9, 2014).

326. Alghad Press, "Al-'abadi yasil al-Nasiriyah lil-musharikah bi-hafl takharruj dubbat Mukafahah al-Irhab" (Al-Abadi arrives in Nasiriyah to participate in the graduation ceremony of CTS officers) *Alghad Press*, October 15, 2014, http://alghad-press.com/ar/news/21892/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B-4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%81%D9%84- (accessed November 3, 2014).

Implications and Recommendations

Lessons from CTS

The overall disastrous performance of ISF in 2014 has led to criticism of the U.S. -provided training and raises questions about the U.S. approach to building military forces.[327] Iraq had its own unique military culture based upon British doctrine[328] and its later combat experiences from the Iran-Iraq War and its two wars with the United States. Under Saddam, operations were micromanaged, decision making centralized to the highest levels, and the military chain of command bypassed. The military was politicized with leader selection based on loyalty instead of competence. Extreme limits were placed on the initiative of subordinates, and junior officers and NCOs were marginalized.[329]

Rather than trying to improve the existing Iraqi system, the U.S. attempted to impose its own military system upon ISF, and when the U.S. withdrew, Iraq was still transitioning to a U.S. structure that was fundamentally different from the previous Iraqi system. The U.S. did affect change at the lower levels, but found it was harder to make change at the upper echelons of ISF.[330] Once the U.S. departed, the higher levels asserted their traditional military cultural proclivities on their subordinate units. Some now question if rather than trying to create a western military structure in Iraq it would have been better to work with the existing Iraqi system or try a less ambitious approach by mixing western military elements with the existing Iraqi military culture.[331]

Others argue that the U.S. system applied to CTS worked, not perfectly, but well enough to func-

tion in the security environment in 2014. CTS maintained its cohesion and fighting ability and performed better than other ISF units. CTS had more U.S. attention than any other ISF unit, with U.S. advisors deeply embedded in CTS for years advising Iraqi leaders who readily accepted their recommendations. After the U.S. withdrawal, CTS was used in ways for which it was never designed, but it was still successful. The U.S. system, which emphasized individual initiative and low level decision making, enabled it to adapt to its new roles while still maintaining its ability to conduct precision counterterrorism. CTS abilities had degraded after the U.S. withdrawal, but enough of the U.S. military cultural was left to maintain a successful organization.

CTS was cheap; of the more than $19 billion U.S. Congress appropriated in the Iraq Security Forces Fund to support the development of ISF, only about $237 million was spent on CTS.[332] While advisors had discouraged growth and emphasized that precision counterterrorism capability was more important than numbers, this growth was ultimately helpful since it gave Iraq additional capabilities to fight the Islamic State. CTS still functioned after U.S. enablers were withdrawn despite some of the pessimistic U.S. assessments at the time of withdrawal.

The placement of CTS outside the normal security structure freed it from the interference of the larger MoD force structure and its internal machinations. Not being a part of the MoD enabled CTS to rid itself of the corruption, incompetence, and poor leadership that plagued most ISF units. This likely

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327. Bell.
328. Woods, loc. 1998.
329. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 11.
330. Cordesman, *Shaping Iraq's Security Forces*, 3, 11–12.
331. Jonathan Marcus, "Factors behind the precipitate collapse of Iraq's Army," *BBC News Middle East*, June 13, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838435 (accessed July 17, 2014).
332. OSIGIR, 7.

would not have been the case if it had been assigned to MoD and it probably would have suffered the same problems of other ISF units. CTS experienced some of these problems, such as politicization, the replacement of effective leaders, and marginalization of junior officers and NCOs, but to a much lesser extent. Outside of the traditional military structure, it also drew upon more robust support than was available to other ISF units, such as the close attention it received from advisors, the direct funding that ISOF initially received from the U.S., its use of prime ministerial discretionary funds, its semi-autonomous budget authority, and its direct access to the Iraq Security Forces Fund through its constant contact with advisors. Although U.S. assessments were that GoI support to CTS was inadequate, it now appears that CTS developed into a more capable force than other ISF units.[333] Acting outside of MoD also made CTS more apt at maintaining U.S. military culture.

Some of the problems CTS later suffered from could have been avoided if the U.S. and GoI had agreed on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to allow a residual force to remain to train and advise CTS in larger numbers. Advisors could have enforced high training standards, discouraged the use of CTS in inappropriate missions, and helped maintain more of the U.S. military culture. Advisors would have been able to limit some of the later increase in politicization, but of course some politicization was present even before the U.S. withdrawal. Ultimately, CTS in its true envisioned form could not endure without the presence of advisors in large numbers to enforce standards and provide checks and balances, but what was left was sufficient to a certain extent.

An avoidable problem even without a SOFA was the mixed messages the U.S. sent to GoI on whether the U.S. approved of CTS being a separate entity and not part of MoD, which further contributed to its perceived illegitimacy. Regardless of the true basis of CTS or ISOF not being a part of MoD, whether it was an Iraqi or U.S. decision, if the U.S. leadership fundamentally disapproved of its command structure, they could have withheld support, which never happened. As the withdrawal approached, the U.S. began to recommend that CTS be placed under MoD, even though the U.S. had originally sanctioned, or even directed, it to be a separate organization. But as pointed out above, the consequences of it not being part of MoD ultimately enabled it to remain effective.

It was a mistake for the U.S. not to have insisted that CTS be the sole focal point for all counterterrorism before the withdrawal, with all units conducting counterterrorism assigned to it. The U.S. could have also taken a stronger role in urging Iraqi political leaders to pass the CTS law, but as we have seen, there was skepticism on the U.S. part about CTS because of its relationship with Maliki.

Without a SOFA and the lack of U.S. willingness to decisively engage GOI on CTS specific issues, many problems were unavoidable. Due to CTS's quasi-ministerial status without a law, it would always be perceived as an extra-legal organization and the target of criticism. It was inevitable that CTS would become partially politicized given its legal status and its relationship to the prime minister. It was inevitable that it would be misused and given inappropriate missions because it was the only effective force. Likewise, it is not surprising that it started to revert back, if only partially, to Iraq's traditional military cultural which marginalized junior leaders and valued political loyalty above competence.

More importantly, even if there had been a SOFA and CTS specific issues solved, given GoI's unwillingness to address the fundamental factors that enabled the growth of terrorism — Sunni disenfranchisement and Shi'a fears of again being oppressed — the growth of terrorism was inevitable even if a residual U.S. force had remained, although it probably would have been slower and not as dramatic as is occurring today.

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333. Brennan, 187.

Recommendations for the future of CTS and counterterrorism in Iraq

In August 2014, the U.S. began airstrikes against the Islamic State to prevent the fall of Irbil, which have since expanded in Iraq and into Syria, and President Obama formed an international coalition to fight the Islamic State. The U.S. is now taking a larger role in Iraq, and CTS has a major part to play. CTS continues to have a special relationship with the U.S. and USSF in particular. CTS is the entry point for greater U.S.-GoI cooperation in fighting the Islamic State because with it the U.S. has reliable eyes and reliable interlocutors in any operation. CTS has a controversial past, but it is the most competent military partner the U.S. has within GoI.

The most critical challenge facing CTS was what would happen after Maliki was no longer prime minister. Many believed that whoever came after Maliki would dissolve CTS since he created it and tied it directly to his office,[334] or break it up and assign its battalions to Iraqi Army divisions. CTS leaders pleaded for the passage of the CTS law so the organization would stay connected to Iraq and not a particular prime minster to avoid this possibility.[335] With the current effectiveness of CTS, some outsiders are now finally calling for the passage of the CTS law,[336] although as of this writing it has not been passed. CTS might be perceived as too competent and too effective for Iraq to do without, and it appears that Iraq's new prime minister, al-Abadi, will maintain CTS in its present form. Many of the controversies surrounding CTS were related to its relationship with Maliki. Now that he is gone, perhaps CTS can begin a new chapter.

The U.S. should use its influence with GoI to support the passage of the CTS law so CTS can be placed under the oversight of Parliament and removed from the direct control of the prime minister to end questions about its legitimacy.[337] CTS should remain outside the MoD structure so it can maintain what is left of its U.S. design and training, free from most of the problems present in other ISF units. All counterterrorism responsibilities and counterterrorism organizations in Iraq should be placed under the control of CTS so operations can be coordinated and synchronized. The Iraqi National Counter Terrorism Strategy should be fully implemented to begin to address the root causes of terrorism. The GoI might find this unsettling, but given the security situation, its need for U.S. assistance in fighting the Islamic State, and the new government leadership, it can be persuaded.

The U.S. should commit to returning advisors and enablers to CTS at pre-U.S. withdrawal levels, to again serve as checks and balances, limit sectarianism and politicization, enforce training standards, provide operational advice, and improve overall effectiveness. This can occur without U.S. ground forces accompanying CTS on combat missions. The U.S. should fully commit to arming and equipping CTS. Advisors could refocus CTS on its original purpose of precision counterterrorism operations. It is unlikely that ISF will be able to retake all lost territory in northern and western Iraq in the coming months,[338] but as ISF is rebuilt, CTS, with U.S. enablers, such as advisors, intelligence, and aircraft support, can conduct precision raids against the Islamic State to keep it off balance, potentially even into Syria if it is supported with U.S. aircraft.[339] If the GoI continues to use CTS as a spearhead unit to retake lost territory in conventional operations, its effectiveness in counterterrorism will diminish.

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334. International Crisis Group, 14.

335. Fadhel Barwari.

336. Al-Muraqib Al-Iraqi.

337. Knights.

338. Phil Stewart, "Ground offensive against Islamic State months away in Iraq: U.S.," *Reuters*, October 24, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/24/us-mideast-crisis-usa-military-idUSKCN0ID08M20141024 (accessed November 4, 2014).

339. The need for aircraft support for CTS is particularly pressing since the Islamic State has downed at least six Iraqi helicopters and damaged 60 others. Eric Pianin, "ISIS Delivers 'Shock and Awe' with Arms from U.S., China, and Russia," *The Fiscal Times*, October 16, 2014, http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2014/10/16/ISIS-Delivers-Shock-and-Awe-Arms-US-China-and-Russia (accessed October 18, 2014).

However, given the overall sorry state of ISF, GoI might have no choice but to use CTS as the main force strike. In this case, GoI will probably try to expand its missions and size, transforming it into a parallel military. It will become less focused on its primary mission of counterterrorism. For the long term benefit of Iraq, CTS should remain a dedicated counterterrorism force and ISF should be rebuilt. In a future, stable Iraq, CTS could function in its present form separate from MoD and MoI as long as the CTS law is passed and it is not seen as serving the prime minister's interests. Placing CTS within the larger MoD structure will undoubtedly lead to its downfall.

CTS — a model organization for Middle Eastern security forces

CTS has demonstrated that the U.S. approach to building an effective counterterrorism force does work but with limitations. The GoI contained too many fiefdoms and competing interests to implement the Counter Terrorism Strategy, and gradual politicization in CTS sometimes interfered with targeting. When advisors were present in large numbers, their nearness to CTS prevented widespread abuses, but there were still some slips. However, after the departure of the majority of advisors, the targeting process still worked and was only truly deviated from in times of national crisis when the terrorist threat was greatly elevated, resulting in CTS sweeps, mass round ups, and arbitrary arrests. CTS performed missions it was never designed for, being employed as any other ISF unit, except it was effective. Due to the intense U.S. training and emphasis placed on initiative and low level decision making, CTS was able to adapt to being used in a conventional role in taking and holding terrain in prolonged operations, learning how to effectively integrate its operations with other ISF units, supported by tanks and the integrated use of close air support.

In some cases, an organization such as CTS, created from scratch with a U.S. force design, U.S.-inspired military culture, and placed outside the normal military structure, can be a model for the development of security forces for countries with cultures similar to Iraq's. In countries where the MoD is traditionally politicized, sectarianized, and suffers from poor corrupt senior leadership, creating a small organization outside the normal military structure is one method to rapidly build effective capabilities. Creating an independent, small force is a means to bypass the otherwise long and slow process of trying to build a larger, effective military force that will likely take decades, and might degrade rapidly after a U.S. withdrawal. It is critical, however, that the creation of an organization outside of a nation's normal security establishment be a decision approved by the entire government and not merely its executive branch in order to avoid the type of criticism CTS has faced. The organization would need to be open, transparent, and highly regulated by all branches of the government. It would also be necessary that advisors are present in large numbers to enforce standards, provide checks and balances, prevent misuse and abuses, and to serve as role models of military professionalism, while not participating in ground and combat operations.

Even with its flaws, CTS was a good use of U.S. resources and efforts, and it is ultimately a success story despite the past controversies. Effective counterterrorism requires a dedicated force with specialized training and equipment that conventional military forces neither possess nor have the capacity to gain due to their broad mission requirements. However, CTS in its envisioned form, synchronizing all Iraqi counterterrorism efforts instead of operating as an "answer to all problems," would have been much more effective.

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