



# Iraqi Army Will to Fight

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

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[www.rand.org/t/RRA238-1](http://www.rand.org/t/RRA238-1)

The Iraqi Army's collapse in summer 2014 has been widely attributed to a lack of will to fight. In this report, Ben Connable applies RAND's analytic model of will to fight to the regular Iraqi Army, identifying factors that contribute to or undermine Iraqi Army will to fight and providing recommendations for the U.S. security force assistance mission in Iraq.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What factors contribute to or undermine Iraqi Army will to fight?
- How can U.S. advisors help strengthen Iraqi Army will to fight and overall combat effectiveness?



### KEY FINDINGS

The Iraqi Army is brittle

- When circumstances are in their favor, Iraqi Army units can and do fight effectively, but they are brittle: They are inflexible and, in adverse or unexpected circumstances, they break too easily.
- There is no single-factor explanation for this brittleness—it is the result of a holistic accumulation many cultural factors.

Long-term support is probably necessary

- Advisors and Iraqi leaders have repeatedly proven that Iraqis can be trained to fight as a basically competent modern combat force.
- However, the Iraqi Army has always relied on external financial, training, leadership, and materiel support to some degree, and it will probably remain dependent on external support for many years.

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Multiple factors contribute to or undermine Iraqi Army will to fight

- The Iraqi Army's emphasis on special units undercuts the will to fight of all nonspecial units and reduces the overall combat effectiveness of the Iraqi Army.
- Cohesion can undermine Iraqi will to fight: When the chips are down, horizontal social and task cohesion are as likely to generate group collapse as they are to generate will to fight.
- Iraqi culture places great value on individual courage. Individual will to fight is there, and it can be harnessed.
- The Iraqi Army's emphasis on top-down control has resulted in a dearth of junior leadership, contributing to brittleness. Many younger officers are hungry for opportunities to lead, but developing junior leadership will be a long-term effort.
- Neither sectarianism nor ethnicity are primary drivers of Iraqi will to fight, or lack thereof.
- Iraqi nationalism is real, and it is a useful motivator for Iraqi Army recruiting and will to fight.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Reduce the imbalance in manpower quality, resources, and training between Iraqi Army special and regular units.
- Train junior leaders to assume increasing levels of authority and responsibility.
- Identify ways to help support civil and military education in Iraqi national identity, and explicitly reinforce national identity in military training, ceremonies, and cultural activities.
- Incorporate situational awareness into training and operations.
- Training programs should routinely incorporate reactions to unexpected situations, and advisors should mentor for adaptability.
- Avoid placing regular Iraqi Army units in isolated defensive positions.
- Expect long-term dependency and use it to advantage. The Iraqi Army is probably the best lever the United States has to influence events on the ground in Iraq.
- Rebuild esprit de corps and emphasize individual courage.
- Continually reassess Iraqi Army will to fight.

