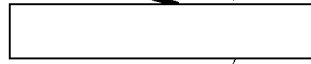


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Iraq's Ground Forces: An Assessment



Memorandum

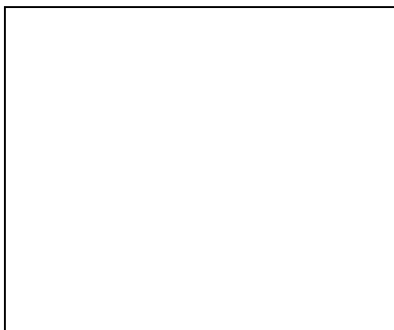
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Iraq's Ground Forces: An Assessment

Information available as of 29 April 1991 was used in the preparation of this Memorandum, which was drafted by [redacted] of CIA. This Memorandum was coordinated throughout the Intelligence Community by the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces.

Iraq's Ground Forces: An Assessment

- **Iraq's ground forces currently do not constitute a regional threat and are capable only of small-scale offensive operations beyond Iraq's borders. Baghdad's military could pose a threat to Kuwait if all coalition forces and United Nations units were withdrawn.**
- **Iraq's ground forces could successfully defend Iraqi territorial integrity against a single regional opponent but would be severely strained by an attack involving more than one state. The Iraqi military remains capable of suppressing internal opposition, even simultaneous rebellions by the Kurds and the Shia following Desert Storm.**
- **Operation Desert Storm significantly reduced the combat power of the Republican Guard, but the Guard tipped the scales in favor of Saddam Husayn's regime against the insurrections in both northern and southern Iraq. The Guard remains the regime's principal guarantor of internal security, and Baghdad will make its reconstitution a priority.**
- **Iraq's Regular Army suffered most from Desert Storm; many divisions were virtually obliterated. Army units have fought with some success against the ill-equipped and poorly organized insurgents, mostly when stiffened by the presence of Guard units.**
- **Iraqi ground forces already have begun to regain some of their lost capabilities and will recover more through reorganization and repair activities. Even after the UN embargoes are lifted, however, the devastation inflicted on the Iraqi economy and the drain of reparations make it unlikely that Baghdad would be able to rebuild its ground forces' combat power to prewar levels until the latter half of the decade at the earliest.**

Discussion

Desert Storm decimated Iraqi ground forces and destroyed much of their equipment. Because of degraded logistic capabilities and command and control networks, Iraq's military is at present incapable of significant offensive operations beyond its borders. If all coalition and United Nations forces were withdrawn from Kuwait, the Iraqi military could conduct offensive operations against Kuwait such as seizing the Ar Rumaylah oilfield or Bubiyan and Warbah islands. Nevertheless, the Iraqi military retains sufficient combat effectiveness to quell insurrections and to defend Iraq's territorial integrity against a single local opponent.

Reduced Capabilities

Although Iraq's ground forces could not stop a determined advance by coalition forces, favorable geography, the sheer size of Iraqi forces, and the limited offensive capabilities of its neighbors suggest that Iraq still could thwart a major incursion by a single regional adversary. The ground forces' reduced mobility and combat strength would make defending against an attack by some combination of neighboring states a much more difficult proposition for Iraq. So long as they remain focused on internal security and military reconstitution, Baghdad's ground forces also would have difficulty in preventing temporary incursions or clandestine infiltration of Iraqi territory from neighboring states.

A Smaller, Weaker Army

Iraq's combined ground forces currently consist of no more than 300,000 to 500,000 men, with 2,000 to 2,200 tanks, 900 to 1,200 artillery pieces, and 3,600 personnel carriers. Iraq lost most of its best equipment in the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO).

Operation Desert Storm:

- Destroyed 70 percent of Iraq's combat power.
- Significantly reduced the combat power of the Republican Guard.

- Severely disrupted the Iraqi military command and control network.
- Severely damaged the Iraqi distribution system. As a consequence, Iraqi units fighting the insurrections initially suffered from acute shortages of ammunition and other supplies.

At its height in January 1991, the Iraqi Army had approximately 230 combat brigades, most of which were subordinate to 55 to 58 divisions. In addition, the Republican Guard comprised 43 brigades, most of which were under the command of 12 divisions. All of these formations apparently still exist, at least on paper, but some probably have been combined and others probably will be disbanded. Since the informal cease-fire on 28 February, surviving units have either been fighting the insurgencies or attempting to regroup. No more than a handful of units, however, have even half their authorized strength in men and equipment, and some possess less than 5 percent of their full strength.

Republican Guard Weakened But Still

Key to Regime Security

Operation Desert Storm significantly reduced the combat power of the Republican Guard. Nevertheless, the Guard has tipped the scales in favor of the regime against the poorly organized insurrections in both northern and southern Iraq. Elements of all eight of Iraq's original Guard divisions—although badly under strength—have been involved in combating the insurgents. Overall, they have continued to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime, performing very effectively against the lightly armed insurgents and frequently succeeding where Regular Army units had failed.

After the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq created as many as 15 new Guard brigades, most of them subordinate to four new Guard divisions. The fact that these new

Comparative Iraqi Equipment and Formations

	1 August 1990	1 January 1991	1 March 1991
Manpower	800,000 to 900,000	1,200,000	300,000 to 500,000
Tanks	5,700	5,700	2,000 to 2,240 ^a
Armored vehicles ^b	5,100	5,100	3,600 ^a
Artillery	3,800	3,800	900-1,200
Formations			
Total divisions	45 to 48 ^c (15) ^d	67 to 70 ^c	66 to 69 ^c
Army	37 to 40 ^c (15) ^d	55 to 58 ^c	54 to 57 ^d
Guard	8	12	12
Total brigades	Approximately 180	Approximately 273	Fewer than 273
Army	Approximately 150	Approximately 230	Fewer than 230
Guard	28	43	43

Note: Manpower and equipment numbers are preliminary estimates and are subject to revision; they are current as of 29 April 1991. As of that date, most Iraqi divisions and brigades were badly under strength.

^a Significant numbers are nonoperational due to poor maintenance, age, and cannibalization.

^b Includes troop carriers and other armored fighting vehicles. Does not include armored vehicles used as ambulances, recovery vehicles, ammunition carriers, etc.

^c Three infantry divisions—1st, 2nd, and 3rd Special Infantry Divisions—may have been disbanded before 1 August 1990.

^d Iraq demobilized and “skeletonized” approximately 15 divisions in early 1990. All of these divisions remained in a reserve status and were available for rapid remobilization. Iraq remobilized these units on 5 August 1990.

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Guard formations did not fight in the KTO allowed the regime to deploy them against the insurrections while the original Guard divisions regrouped. These new Guard divisions have played a major role in the regime's success against the insurrection in the south. The Al Nida and Al Quds Infantry Divisions, for example, were the major forces responsible for defeating the Shia insurgents in Karbala' and An Najaf. These new Guard units apparently were formed around a cadre of veterans drawn from the original eight divisions; however, the bulk of their personnel probably are Guard reservists and new conscripts singled out as being Guard caliber.

Regular Army Badly Weakened

Iraq's Regular Army forces in the KTO suffered most from Operation Desert Storm. Many divisions were virtually obliterated by desertions and coalition military action. Almost all of the divisional headquarters

previously in the KTO have resurfaced since the cease-fire, and many are operating against the insurgents. Nevertheless, these units almost uniformly are severely under strength, and many probably consist only of a headquarters and a battalion's worth of troops and equipment. A handful of divisions—such as the 51st Mechanized and the 37th Infantry Division—deployed in the northern KTO were able to escape relatively intact. These were the first Regular Army units Baghdad committed against the insurgents in the Al Basrah area.

The Army units have had a mixed record fighting against the insurgents and primarily have enjoyed success when stiffened by the presence of Guard units. For example, the 4th Infantry Division, one of the best remaining Regular Army divisions, attacked the

rebel-held city of Karbala' and was defeated. This forced the regime to send in the Guard's Al Nida and Al Quds Infantry Divisions and elements of the Guard Special Forces Division, which regained control of the city after a bloody battle. []

After the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq probably formed as many as 10 infantry divisions and one armored division from reservists and conscripts. These divisions were created in several cases by combining existing independent brigades into divisional formations. Most of these new divisions were committed to the defense of the Kuwait Theater. The remnants of these units are generally even more under strength, under trained, and under equipped than older Army units. []

Border Guards Shouldering More of the Load

The broad scale of the insurrection and the heavy losses sustained by the Regular Army and Republican Guard caused Baghdad to press its border guards into service as combat forces as they did in the war with Iran. Iraq currently has at least 16 brigades of border guards equipped initially with little more than small arms. Baghdad apparently has organized these brigades into five division-level Border Forces Commands. The regime committed the border guards against the insurgents in many areas under the Border Forces Commands or existing Army commands, deploying them where combat troops were unavailable or too few to handle the insurgents unassisted. Many border guard units now also are badly under strength as a result of combat losses against the insurgents and desertions. []

Prospects

Despite the devastation inflicted by coalition forces during Operation Desert Storm and rebellions across Iraq, Baghdad's Army has shown considerable resilience and ingenuity in organizing its combat forces

and logistic elements to fight the insurgents. The Iraqi ground forces will turn increasingly toward reconstitution as the counterinsurgency campaign winds down in coming months. The large number of surviving unit formations almost certainly will be pruned considerably to consolidate troops and equipment into full-strength units. By pooling its remaining equipment, Baghdad could reconstitute 16 to 21 full-strength divisions. If Baghdad reduced the amount of equipment assigned per unit, or created infantry formations with little or no armor and artillery support, it could create several dozen more, but these units would be useful mainly for internal security operations. The future organization of the Iraqi ground forces, however, will depend to a large degree on the lessons drawn from their Desert Storm experience and the regime's goals. []

Even after the lifting of the UN embargoes, the devastation inflicted on the Iraqi economy and the drain of reparations make it unlikely that Baghdad would be able to rebuild its ground forces' combat power to prewar capabilities before the latter half of the decade at the earliest. Iraq's ground forces will be able to recover more of their lost capabilities quickly by reorganization and repair, but Baghdad still would need extensive foreign maintenance aid because many of the major repair and replacement requirements of its ground forces are beyond domestic competence. Iraq would have to import large amounts of equipment to supply new heavy divisions. Because of their critical role in maintaining the regime's security, the Republican Guard almost certainly will receive precedence for military reconstitution. []

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