IMAGINING ARMIES: SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF MILITARY POWER AND
CONTESTED STATE LEGITIMACY IN IRAQ, 2003-2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Imagining Armies: Symbolic Dimensions Of Military Power And Contested State Legitimacy In Iraq, 2003-2014

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This dissertation presents a study of the reconstruction (and subsequent partial disintegration) of the armed forces of Iraq after 2003 as it relates to the larger problematic of state formation and legitimation in contested spaces. The national army, as opposed to paramilitary and police forces, emerged over time as an institution of singular importance in the struggle for Iraq after 2003. Iraq’s new rulers, who otherwise lacked prestige and deeply rooted political support within their own country, sought to appropriate the memory of the old Iraqi Army in order to claim their place as the rightful inheritors of state power. With this inheritance, they claimed, came the legitimate authority to use military force in defense of the new Iraqi state.

I traced the development of Iraq’s new armed forces using interviews, archival sources, mass media reports, and photographs, to show how the symbols of Iraq’s militarist past were used by a new regime to bestow a reimagined Iraqi national identity upon military forces raised under foreign occupation and tutelage. My findings challenge the conventional wisdom that state formation in conflict zones of the developing world proceeds directly from a massive military buildup of government forces. Rather, it is the capacity of rulers to credibly sustain claims that their forces represent the nation and the state, which is most important to establishing a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.
Acknowledgement

This dissertation is the product of nearly eight years of training, research, and reflection. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue a topic of abiding intellectual interest over many years, and to bring an initial report on my findings to a conclusion. This would not have been possible without the support of many others, who provided the mentorship, camaraderie, insight, and financial support necessary for such an extended and ambitious undertaking.

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There is not enough room to thank all of those who offered their time and insights to me over the course of many interviews in Washington D.C., and Amman, Jordan. The Americans I interviewed had been given a difficult and dangerous mission, which they did to the best of their ability without regard to their own personal safety over the course of multiple combat deployments. They were often deeply aware of the limitations of military power as a policy instrument and also, by necessity, astute observers of Iraqi society. I am grateful for their dedicated service and the many insights they provided.

Most of the Iraqi officers I interviewed in Amman served in the former Army before 2003. They felt deeply wronged both by the American invasion of Iraq and the cavalier way in which an institution to which they had devoted their lives was disbanded under foreign military occupation. Nonetheless, without exception, they showed a sincere interest in my work and generously offered me many hours of their time necessary to explain the nuances of Iraqi military history and culture. I am not able to thank them by name here, but I hope they will accept my thanks anonymously. I also hope that they will understand that I have done my utmost to provide a fair appraisal of the history of the Iraqi Army in my dissertation.

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Dedication

Virginia Ricks Humphreys, 1915 - 2015
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theory

1.1 Introduction

My dissertation presents a study of the reconstruction (and subsequent partial disintegration) of the armed forces of Iraq after 2003 as it relates to the larger problematic of state formation and legitimation in contested spaces. I argue that the national army, as opposed to paramilitary and police forces, emerged over time as an institution of singular importance in the struggle for Iraq after 2003, because it was the only Iraqi security force — indeed the only Iraqi state institution — that might credibly claim a usable past, even if this past required significant revision. Thus, appropriation of the memory of the old Iraqi Army became a central part of an effort by Iraq’s new rulers, who otherwise lacked prestige and deeply rooted political support within Iraq, to claim a place as the rightful inheritors of the Iraqi state. With this inheritance, it was claimed, came the right to use military force in the defense of this state.

We see this symbolic dimension of military power in the reconstruction and partial disintegration of the Iraqi military over the course of the previous decade. Ever since official Iraqi governing institutions were first reconstituted in the aftermath of the destruction of the Ba’thist regime in 2003, Iraq’s would-be rulers have struggled to establish the “fact” that the Iraqi Army is indeed Iraqi, and is the rightful heir to the military lineage of the national army founded under British tutelage in 1921. As will be elaborated below, I view this struggle as an ongoing attempt to legitimate the successor state the new army putatively defends, intended to give additional force to official claims that all Iraqis have a mutually reinforcing, morally binding obligation to support and defend the new constitutional order as interpreted by the new cadre of ruling elites. Establishing the authority of this claim, however, has proved difficult
within a profoundly nationalistic but divided society reeling from the aftereffects of dictatorship, sanctions, and the destruction of the state apparatus by force of arms in 2003.¹

Nonetheless, Iraq’s current rulers have made their claims of authority with increasing intensity in recent years, using commemoration, rhetoric, and other forms of cultural production to affix the military lineage of the old army to the new forces, which — in actuality — were founded by the United States as an entirely new institution not intended to have any direct organizational or ideological connection to its predecessor. Over the past decade, the memory of the old army has come to be construed as a legitimating resource both by Iraq’s official rulers and their competitors for the mantle of the Iraqi state, and thus has been the object of jealous controversies and recriminations.

As will be seen in later chapters, this aspect of post-Ba’thist Iraqi politics perplexed many Americans who went to Iraq to remake the Iraqi state. Why should the memory of an army founded under British tutelage as a small colonial police force in 1921 and later implicated in a string of illegal coups, ill-fated military adventures, and war crimes, have been of any value at all? And who exactly, besides Ba’thist revanchists, whom the current regime has assiduously sought to marginalize, would have any use for the state represented by this remembered army? Moreover, why did the victims of the old Iraqi state that formed the core of the new cadre of

¹ Many informed observers of Iraq have noted strong currents of nationalism that have proven to be a persistent feature of political culture even in the absence of national unity. For their part, U.S. policy elites persistently underestimated the effect of nationalism on Iraqi political development after 2003 to the detriment of their political project in Iraq. See, for example, Cordesman, Anthony H. Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006, 4. He writes: “No one provided precise warnings as to the kind of insurgency that would develop in the country before, during, or immediately after the fall of Baghdad and Saddam’s regime. Many inside and outside of government did warn, however, that the United States and Coalition would at best be greeted as liberators for a matter of months and that the United States would immediately begin to face hostility from an extremely nationalistic country while having to deal with deep religious and ethnic divisions.”
ruling elites seek the mantle of this state with the full-throated support of their key social constituencies?

Thus, I pose a question meant to provoke thought and guide inquiry, as much as to be answered definitively: Was the 1921-2003 Iraqi state legitimate? The answer might seem so obvious as so not to merit consideration, but for the fact that Iraqis have fought with each other in parliament and in running street battles over the inheritance of this state. Often, these battles have specifically applied to the state’s symbolic remnants rather than its material remains, which were mostly looted in the aftermath of the previous regime’s collapse. These contests have been for control over the memory and narrative of the Iraqi state, which justifies material aims and provides the moral basis of binding authority claimed by Iraq’s new rulers. The Iraqi Army was that institution, more than any other, which was taken to represent both claims to ownership of the state and the legitimate means of enforcing such claims.

The Iraqi state I refer to is not a generalizable abstraction free of substantive cultural or historical content. The Iraqi state, as the term is used here, specifically refers to the quasi-sovereign political and territorial entity founded in 1921 under a British sponsored monarchy composed of Hejazi nobles, supported by former Ottoman officers from Baghdad and Mosul, and remembered by Iraqis as the cultural, political, and territorial embodiment of the political community they belong to in the present. This entity was recognized by the British and the League of Nations as a formally independent state in 1932, and was later declared a republic in 1958 after the monarchy was deposed in a military coup. After several turbulent years of direct military rule, the state was seized by Ba’th Party activists and ruled under an iron fist until the fall of Baghdad in 2003. By April of 2003, much of the state apparatus and official ideology had
been highly personalized by Saddam Husayn and his inner cohort of family members and Party co-conspirators.

Nonetheless, an image of the Iraqi state persisted in the Iraqi political imagination after 2003. This image was primarily represented in the memory of its army, and made visible by its symbols and commemorative practices. Far from being simply a matter of aesthetics and tokenism, the symbolism of the armed forces became the central tool in an attempt to legitimize the exercise of raw power and coercion in Iraq after 2003, as a new cadre of ruling elites emerged and sought to consolidate its political authority, while redefining the narrative of Iraqi statehood. By seeking to appropriate the memory of the army, it sought to appropriate the narrative of the state, and with this, the moral right to exercise legitimate authority on its behalf. This claimed authority was extended on many occasions to legitimize force when it was used in defense of the state.

In his recent study of post-2003 Iraq, Joel Rayburn writes, “The United States generally built state institutions as though they were not subject to politics, only to find later that such institutions had become tools for warring parties to use against each other.” This is certainly true of the new Iraqi Army, which was thoroughly politicized by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki

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2 See, p.205 Al-Marashi, Ibrahim, and Sammy Salama. *Iraq's armed forces: an analytical history*. Routledge, 2008. The authors write, "The CPA and political circles in Washington failed to appreciate that even if the facilities of the Army were looted or the soldiers merely went home, it still existed as a symbolic institution in the historical imaginary of the Iraqis."

after he took power in the middle of 2006. However, even in cases in which there was observable distinction between private political interest and the physical and institutional infrastructure of rule, the imagination of the Iraqi state was never culturally neutral, and always presupposed morally justified relationships of domination embedded in narratives of historical self-description. It is this aspect of statehood that has been the object of Iraq’s most intractable conflicts, and has driven much of the zero-sum politics that undermined the theoretical neutrality of post-2003 institutions of governance and coercion in Iraq.

A new cadre of would-be rulers has encouraged Iraqis to view the often disjointed and unresponsive armed organizations they encountered in everyday life as state institutions in more than a strictly nominal or juridical sense, and thus as legitimate bearers of binding authority. This particularly includes the new army, which is a ubiquitous part of daily life in its checkpoints and combat operations, as well as its ceremonial and rhetoric. As it emerged after 2006, the new regime made two mutually supporting claims regarding the state and legitimate force. First, that the indigenous forces it inherited from foreign military occupation were an authentic part of Iraqi history and bore the nation’s military lineage extending back to the founding of the modern state.

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Secondly, that the new army represented the state and the authority of its current rulers to demarcate the line between legitimate force and illegal violence.⁶

Therefore, I ask: How did Iraqis encounter these claims in everyday life as the new military forces expanded in numbers and geographical reach? In what ways did these increasingly ubiquitous encounters serve to produce or undermine an imaginary of the state that justified arrangements of power favored by the emergent regime? How did those in control of the state’s symbolic complex of monuments, media outlets, and uniformed soldiers, attempt to use symbolism to manipulate these encounters in order to elicit certain interpretations of their meaning and significance? And how, in turn, were these favored interpretations reinforced or subverted by other centers of initiative and resistance in Iraqi political society? Finally, to what extent was the emergent regime able to effectively use symbolic dimensions of military power to produce and institutionalize a distinction between legitimate force and illegal and immoral violence in ways that favored its vision of Iraqi statehood and its justifications for power?

These questions, which are specific to the Iraqi case, apply to a set of related questions that apply more broadly to state formation and legitimation in contested spaces. First, by what means are armed organizations specializing in violence established as recognized national institutions bearing the special authority of the state? Second, how does this process of symbolization and institutionalization, insofar as it occurs, produce the boundary between legitimate force and illegal violence? How is this boundary enforced through formal and

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⁶ I adapt this construction from Mayer, Arno J. Plowshares into swords: from Zionism to Israel. Verso, 2008. See, p. 8. "Each founding myth celebrates, romanticizes, and sanitizes the primal violence used in forging a new political-legal order and fixing interstate boundaries, in the process transforming illegal violence into what comes to be accepted as legitimate force."
informal practices? How does production of this boundary through mindful manipulation of symbols and everyday cultural practices both shape and reflect the worldview and capacities of the executive, the routine interactions of authorities with subjects, and broader expectations of the citizenry regarding the exercise of authority and legitimate uses of violence?

These questions presuppose an alternative framework for analysis of state formation and legitimation in contested spaces. Namely, that the central problem of statebuilding in such spaces is the lack of a distinguishable boundary separating legitimate force from illegal violence. Therefore, the central problematic of state formation and legitimation is the production and maintenance of this boundary. From this perspective, the formation of a national army is as much an act of symbolism and social imagination as it is of material organization, because it is a means of symbolically producing and institutionalizing a distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence through “the interactive process of conveying ideas.”

I argue that this is a discursive social and political process, which is only partially centralized in the official organs of state administration and its military organizations. Therefore, it is not only the transmission of claims and counterclaims of state legitimacy which matters, but also their substantive cultural content, and how they are encountered in a specific context that serves to produce or elide distinctions between legitimate force and illegal violence.

The reconstruction of the Iraqi state presented Iraqi elites and counter-elites with the opportunity to reinterpret its national narrative, and thus justify revision of patterns of

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domination, and political practices of inclusion and exclusion. This fundamental altering of political order sought by Iraq’s new rulers was implicitly premised on supposition that Iraqis should view the new Army as being Iraqi, and thus as possessing authority to enforce the morally binding obligations of political unity it was said to represent. The frequent official claim that “the Army represents the sons of all the Iraqi people” — which echoed the past — was at its base, a claim that a specific normative basis of political solidarity was intrinsically superior to other alternatives, and that Iraqis should accept the use of military power used to institute and preserve it as a legitimate exercise of public authority.

1.2 Literature

The emerging cadre of new Iraqi ruling elites possessed advantages in material power that grew more significant over time, but faced a problem Hobbes identified in his seminal treatise on the state. As Shapiro has it in his commentary on *Leviathan*:

> The main question of legal philosophy [according to Hobbes]… is what makes the exercise of effective political power legitimate, so that one can conceive of one’s political rulers as authorities, as sovereigns who one has a prior obligation to obey…In order to enjoy the political authority that is required to govern, power must be legitimate, and legitimacy emanates from acting in accordance with law.

Natural law, as Hobbes understood it, generally has had little purchase in Iraqi politics of the state. Nonetheless, the basic Hobbesian logic applies with one significant revision. Instead of

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8 See, Brent Sasley pp. 138-152, “Remembering and forgetting in Turkish identity and policymaking,” in Resende et al., ibid. for an analysis of how similar processes unfolded in Turkey during periods of upheaval.


emanating from “natural law” of Western political philosophy, legitimacy in Iraq emanated from rightful possession of the state narrative, or imaginary, which was symbolically represented by the Iraqi Army as the tangible embodiment of the state.

This understanding of the state and legitimate authority runs contrary to many of the conventions adopted in studies of post-conflict states. State formation is usually associated with production of bureaucratic organizations, elections, security forces, and the like, while legitimation is often conceived in terms of the progressive bureaucratic rationalization of these organizations as functional entities.\(^\text{11}\) Andersen summarizes the main features of this approach as follows:

\[\ldots\text{what one might call a “normative” view, sees the main sources of legitimacy as being the presence of functionally specific actors, institutions and political orders, such as liberal democracy and consent, universal human rights, the rule of law, and so on. Within this approach, there is a tendency to put sources of legitimacy into hierarchies, with the normative and supposedly global concepts usually on top. If not seen as completely a priori to specific cases of statebuilding, at least the lowest common denominator for legitimacy is more external than internal to the context. This logically leads to state legitimacy being characterized by specific political processes, or given a functionalist definition as, for example, the capacity to provide goods or services. Traditionally this}\]

view also builds, explicitly or implicitly, on the assumption that the only legitimate state form is a democratic one.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite claims of universal applicability, the normative view – whatever its intrinsic merits – represents a culturally specific set of ideas about legitimate statehood. It is by no means clear that these ideas can be un-problematically applied to construction of state institutions across the full range of social and cultural contexts we see in the world.\textsuperscript{13} Analysts favoring sociological approaches to understanding legitimacy often make such a critique. For example, a report from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), titled *The Legitimacy of the State in Fragile Situations*, states:

What people come to see as ‘natural’ and ‘desirable’ is shaped by their beliefs and their accustomed practices. Thus, while state legitimacy is often seen through the prism of certain normative standards derived from Western states, it may take on various forms depending on the social and political setting. An empirical analysis of legitimacy means that, however logically and normatively persuasive a claim to legitimacy may be, it does not result in de facto legitimacy without active support – or legitimization – by those on the ‘receiving end’ of such legitimacy claims. This means, in turn, that any discussion of the sources of legitimacy that are central to state legitimacy must be considered with some caution: they are effective only to the extent that the relevant constituency considers them to be so.\textsuperscript{14}

However, sociological approaches have weaknesses of their own, when taken to the logical extreme as exemplified in the NORAD report quoted above, which exhibits a tendency to


idealize local beliefs and practices in contested states as a-historical, essential attributes of specific communities and somehow above politics. In such states, there are diverse and often antagonistic ideas about what is “natural” and “desirable” as these concepts relate to binding authority and enforceable obligations of political unity. Given that the entire premise of the modern state as a normative construct of the modern age is that legitimate authority extends uniformly throughout a geographically demarcated and juridically sovereign space, we need a theory that can account for the emergence of such “uniform” legitimacy across the whole territory controlled by a given state. In other words, we need to understand the mechanism through which such binding authority is constituted and used to address inevitable disputes between diverse legitimacies.

The outline I have given necessarily paints a picture of the statebuilding literature in broad strokes intended to highlight problematic areas rather than the numerous useful insights produced by the best examples of this literature. Nonetheless, I will attempt one more generalization. The distinctions between normative and sociological approaches can be boiled down to the question of where a given analyst locates the ultimate referent of sovereignty in each case. Normative theories of statebuilding locate the ultimate referent of sovereignty in “international” norms favored by powerful liberal democracies, while sociological theories

\[15\] For more nuanced sociologically-oriented treatments, see, Call, Charles T. "Beyond the 'failed state': Toward conceptual alternatives." European Journal of International Relations 17, no. 2 (2011): 303-326. Also, Eriksen, Stein Sundstøl. "'State failure' in theory and practice: the idea of the state and the contradictions of state formation." Review of International Studies 37, no. 01 (2011): 229-247. The former is one of the co-authors of the NORAD report. In his article, "Towards a historical sociology of constitutional legitimacy", (Theor Soc (2008) 37:161–197) Chris Thornhill advances a thesis that normative and sociological theories are not necessarily incompatible with each other. See, p. 168, "Underlying this argument is the assertion that states, as they occur and are historically observed, operate in two distinct dimensions: that is, they operate in a functional dimension and a normative dimension. At one level, states legitimize themselves through the consolidation and factual adaptation of their functions in unique historical and evolutionary settings. At a different level, however, states also produce and contest theoretical self-examinations to explain, describe, and generate legitimacy for themselves and their functions."
stipulate that this referent should be found in local contexts and thus do not specify how to deal normatively with “plurality of legitimacies,” each having an equal normative status.

My argument is that force is not necessarily illegitimate by definition if it is exercised under proper authority. What any person or group considers proper authority is of course always theoretically subject to contestation. Nonetheless, I do not view the use of force as necessarily being indicative of the absence of legitimacy. As I will show in this dissertation, the efficacy of force as an instrument of state power was closely intertwined with the capacity to make authoritative claims of its legitimacy. In other words, it was incumbent upon power to demonstrate that force was being used on behalf of the state, and thus was “legitimate,” rather than being simply a means of pursuing nefarious parochial politics. Likewise, power had to justify itself in order to demonstrate that it had the right to command the use of force as a duly constituted political authority. Among Iraq’s broad array of political factions and communal groups, there was surprisingly commitment to the idea that the Iraqi state should serve as the penultimate referent of sovereignty. The question, time and again during episodes of armed confrontation, was not whether legitimate force existed as a category of “rightful state action,” but whether Iraq’s new rulers should be recognized as sovereigns, and whether their armed forces were actually “legitimate” representatives of the Iraqi state.

In the framework I propose, sovereignty and legitimation are regarded as sites of contestation, where universal-normative, symbolic, and physical dimensions clash. Indeed, why

16 See, Andersen, ibid., 206.

else would control of the armed forces be considered important? I argue that construction or reconstruction of the armed forces is not simply a technocratic process, but is often a highly meaningful one, which is embedded in the politics of memory in contested spaces. In such spaces, the armed forces are not only organized as an instrument of military force, but are discursively produced as the dominant symbolic referent of sovereignty that “makes sense” only in the local context. This symbolic production is constitutive of “the [claimed] parameters of rightful state action”\textsuperscript{18}, which guide the use of the armed forces against threats to the state, however defined.\textsuperscript{19}

In her study of postcolonial India, Srirupa Roy writes, “I argue that the reproduction of the nation-state rests not on the existence of individuals who identify with the nation but rather on their ability to identify the state as the nation’s authoritative representative.”\textsuperscript{20} Despite deep, often seemingly intractable divisions of ethnicity and sect, Iraqis have identified the state as the nation’s authoritative representative, even after the material structures that originally produced the Iraqi state were destroyed in 2003. However, the substantive cultural content of statehood, and the relationships of domination it presupposed and justified, have been the central site of contestation ever since. The formation of the new armed forces as symbolic heir to a mythical

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} This framing is partially adapted from arguments made by Cynthia Weber on symbolism and statebuilding. See, \textit{Simulating sovereignty: Intervention, the state and symbolic exchange}. Vol. 37. (Cambridge University Press, 1995). Barnett Rubin, adopts elements of this approach as well. See, Rubin, Barnett R. "Peace Building and State-Building in Afghanistan: constructing sovereignty for whose security?." Third World Quarterly 27, no. 1 (2006): 175-185. He writes, "Symbolic and cultural resources consecrate the use of force and public revenues as legitimate and link them into a meaningful whole to induce people to comply voluntarily as citizens."

national army of old is not only about brute force, but also, and more crucially, it is about symbolism. It is also about formulating and enforcing the claims of Iraq’s ruling elite in terms of a national military narrative, which justifies power and legitimates the claimed authority to distinguish legitimate force from illegal violence.

1.3 Theory

As of mid-2014, the integrity and survival of the Iraqi armed forces as a national military institution, which was created through immense investment of American blood and treasure, was in doubt. The collapse of at least two divisions near Mosul on June 10, 2014 under insurgent attack, was followed days later by a fatwa issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the revered Shiite religious leader residing in Najaf, which called upon Iraqis to take up arms to save the state. This act, forced by existential desperation, served to compromise — perhaps fatally — the credibility of the Iraqi state as a construct of national unity and source of sovereign authority.

Although the fatwa was made on behalf of the state, in can be seen as undermining the fundamental conceit of Iraq as a modern state — namely, that the state exists in the social world as the authoritative symbolic, ideological, and institutional representative of the mythical Iraqi people as a whole, and is thus is both separate from and above the Iraqi population’s constituent social identities and parochial antagonisms. As this conceit was progressively eroded by events, it became increasingly difficult to produce a recognizable distinction between a national army
and sectarian militia. Indeed, it became difficult to produce a recognizable image of the Iraqi state itself in Iraqi society and politics.  

Recent history indicates that perhaps the current crisis of the Iraqi Army is not so much rooted in military organizational failure as it is reflective of a crisis of imagination within the greater Iraqi polity. While researching this dissertation, I frequently encountered expressions of disbelief, skepticism, or indifference from Iraqis when it came to the question of whether the juridically sovereign entity named “The Republic of Iraq”, formally established in June 2004 after the dissolution of the U.S. led occupation authority, was indeed the legitimate political and institutional representative of the Iraqi people, and whether the new Iraqi Army was indeed the national military force. Former Iraqi generals exiled in Jordan more often than not dismissed the new state as an Iranian stalking horse, its leaders as impostors, and the army as an Iranian-sponsored militia. Even those with more reason to recognize the new state and its army, such as the Shiite Iraqi translator interviewed by a Marine Corps historian outside Ramadi in late 2006, were little in awe of it.

“The current government from my perspective is not official,” he said. “They do not deserve the [government] positions. We [who stayed in Iraq] deserve the positions.” He then proceeded to give an extended explanation about how the “real” Iraqi Army that was disbanded in 2003 was not “The Saddam Army”. Furthermore, he asserted that the current armed forces were being subjected to insurgent attack because they were not regarded as a national force.

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“The people in Ramadi, they do not like the Iraqi Army that is there now. Why? Thank you. Because it is Shia. They don’t care if they are Iraqis of some sort. They are Shia, so that’s why they are attacked by insurgents.” The insurgent propagandists who continue to dismiss the new army as the “Maliki Forces” or the “Safavid Militia” could have hardly said it better.

In the Iraqi case, whether the new armed forces were, or were not, officially Iraqi in some juridical sense, was less important than whether they were legitimate. Legitimacy in this context pertained most closely to fundamental questions of authenticity and moral entitlement: First, which, among the competing Iraqi narratives of the state and national belonging, should these forces represent, and second, should the authority of a state created in this image be regarded as binding, even as it extended to the use of force to preserve it? Everything else was shaped by this underlying contest at the heart of the formation and legitimation of the new state.

National armies in the modern world are more than aggregations of men and materiel. They are above all, organizational embodiments of national imagination, which presuppose that a particular group of men gathered for the purposes of organized violence, whose individual members are often indifferent to pseudo-sacred tenets of official patriotism, nevertheless embody the nation in the aggregate, and serve as the penultimate symbol of the state. This imagined aspect of armies and statehood is obscured as we look inward to the core of the international system by its very ubiquity. In European history, this change in military institutions was part of a

22 Marine Corps Historical Division, Quantico, Virginia, recorded interview by Captain Steven Winslow on September 11, 2006 in vicinity of Ramadi, Iraq. Name of interviewee withheld by author.

23 These terms were in common use on radical opposition satellite television channels in spring of 2013 after clashes between the Iraqi Army and militant protestors in Sunni areas. The use of the term “Safavid” is a common Sunni epithet directed at Iraqi Shiites, which refers to the medieval Iranian dynasty of the same name.
centuries-long process of political development that presupposed, as Ruggie has it, “…a transformation in social epistemology.” 24

Put simply, the mental equipment that people drew upon in imagining and symbolizing forms of political community itself underwent fundamental change…Finally, when the concept of state sovereignty expanded to become the concept of national sovereignty, the use of mercenaries in warfare declined and ultimately was eliminated altogether. Armed forces subsequently became an expression of the nation…private wars ceased to be tolerated, and war making came to be universally recognized as an attribute of sovereignty. 25

Corrigan and Sayer, in their study of early state formation in England, make a similar observation, describing the processes that produced the modern state as a cultural revolution. They write, “Out of the vast range of human social capacities — possible ways in which social life could be lived — state activities more or less forcibly ‘encourage’ some whilst suppressing, marginalizing, eroding, undermining others. Schooling for instance comes to stand for education, policing for order, voting for political participation.” 26 We might add that officially sanctioned military action carried out by troop formations wearing national uniforms comes to stand for collective defense.

In the West, we – as citizens – are products of this transformed social epistemology. Thus, it requires a leap of analytical imagination to understand why cultural forms of national statehood forged in Europe and transferred, often forcibly, to the periphery of international society are assimilated into local power structures in unanticipated ways. An emblematic


25 Ibid., 162-163.

26 See, Corrigan, Philip, and Derek Sayer. The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution. (Blackwell, 1985), 4.
example is the use of uniforms in Western armies, which spread around the globe in the 19th and 20th centuries. As the nation-state became the basis for supreme political authority and military organization in Europe, the state military uniform, or “national military costume principally fashioned from cloth and codified according to regulations,” became ubiquitous. The use of personalized liveries and coats of arms, which had been commonplace in the Western world, became unthinkable. Superficial changes in dress presupposed a much more significant transformation. The wear of uniforms and ceremonial enactments of codified national tradition signified that these formations were something more than armed bands organized in the service of private gain. The use of national uniforms was only comprehensible in the context of a transformed social epistemology in which the idea of the nation and national service were established.

As noted above, nationalism was a firmly established feature of Iraqi political culture. However, after the fall of Baghdad to invading forces, it was unclear what the institutional referent of this nationalism should be absent a state. One former U.S. Marine intelligence officer recalled to me the early days of the new Iraqi forces in Iraq’s Sunni-majority Anbar province, commenting, “They created these units out of thin air and assigned a number to them, and then expected that a soldier would just put on a uniform and take pride because they are defending 'Iraq'. There was nothing behind it driving these guys.” Likewise, eliciting recognition of these forces’ claimed legitimacy from tribal sheikhs and ordinary citizens in Anbar province where


28 Interview with the author, May 3, 2012. Name withheld by author at respondent’s request.
these units operated proved extraordinarily difficult. In other words, the mere issuance of uniforms did not produce transformative acts of state imagination necessary to create a national army.

The modern state’s distinctiveness lies in the peculiar way in which authority is invested in impersonal centralized organizations that penetrate society. These impersonal organizations of rule and armed coercion are embedded in a state imaginary that makes it possible for them to be presented as symbols of the national state, and thus to legitimate, on a routine basis, their organizational power as institutionalized authority.29 In a sea of violence, Iraq’s would-be rulers were faced with the task of making and sustaining credible claims that certain forms of violence were legitimate, and could be differentiated on normative grounds from violence that lacked the official imprimatur of the state. This process of separation was never entirely complete or immune from challenge, and was only partially related to the aggregation of men and armaments in the armed forces of the Iraqi state. The new Army’s importance was also symbolic, in that it represented the claim that force used in defense of the official state was legitimate.

For reasons specific to Iraq and common to many postcolonial states, which I will discuss further on in the next chapter, the Iraqi Army emerged as a symbol of national independence, unity, and sovereignty from the 1930’s onward. One is struck by the general consistency that characterizes the official presentation of the Army as a national symbol across decades of Iraqi history, including the present one. Although it was sometimes the victim of exploitation by politicians seeking to realize devious designs, the Army itself represented the whole of the Iraqi

29 This conceptualization draws heavily upon Weberian analysis. See, “Politics as Vocation”, in Weber, Max. From Max Weber: essays in sociology. (Routledge, 2009), 75-128.
people and their national strivings for unity, dignity, and sovereign status within the international system — or so the thinking went. The actual as opposed to mythical army of course did not fully embody this ideal, and was often involved in squalid political adventures, repression, and wasteful wars. The mythical Army, however, survived in the Iraqi political imagination as a potent symbol of the state despite its physical disbandment in 2003.

As the Iraqi state teeters on the edge of oblivion, its government has gone to extensive lengths to produce a imaginative transformation of the armed forces organized under its official purview, which might bring these forces into being as a national army with a lineage extending back in time to the creation of the modern Iraqi state after World War I. Without this transformation, the army would be powerless as an instrument of symbolic power and legitimation, instead simply reverting to an aggregation of armed men organized by foreigners or a sectarian militia. As such, a corpus of military customs, history, and tradition belonging to a defunct and discredited state was both a site of contestation and a power resource to imagine and legitimate a new state and its armed forces.

My study uses contextual analysis and ethnographic methods to examine how an alien cultural and institutional form — the European-style national army — was assimilated into Iraqi society, culture, and politics over a period of eight decades following the end of World War I. I show how this process of assimilation served to institutionalize durable forms of symbolism and meaning, which survived the organizational destruction of the Iraqi Army and served to partially structure the politics of memory and symbolism in the post-Ba’thist period. The new regime

\[30\] Here, contextual analysis denotes the study of “how and why a variety of contexts matter to systematic description and explanation of political processes.” See., Robert E Goodin., and Charles Tilly, eds. The Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis. (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2008), 7.
sought to appropriate the corpus of military customs, history, and tradition, while revising its substantive content to reflect a specific narrative of Iraqi statehood that might serve to empower them as its agents. Thus, even seemingly trivial uses of badges, emblems, insignia and other symbols were often used to communicate substantive claims of the authenticity and authority of the state.

How and why did the indigenous military forces organized and trained by the United States to form the core of a “new Iraq” instead become embedded in the historical lineage and cultural identity of the old Iraqi Army? Why did Iraq’s new rulers, who came primarily from militarized Shiite religious parties that had once fought against the Iraqi Army, claim the identity of that same army for the armed forces bequeathed to them by a foreign occupying power? The new forces were organized and trained along American lines by the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT), which had grown into a large military bureaucracy after modest beginnings in 2003. Why did an organization that might properly be called “The Iraqi CMATT Forces” instead assimilate the institutional identity of the same Iraqi Army that had once served a discredited state and was unceremoniously disbanded after an inglorious defeat?

These are puzzling outcomes if one views the state in ahistorical functionalist terms, as presupposed by the U.S. statebuilding project (and much of the statebuilding literature), which assumed the state was synonymous with the material structures of its administration and often conflated legitimacy with bureaucratic rationalization and elections. The outcome of this massive social and political intervention suggests, among other things, that we would do well to

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reexamine current theories of state formation and legitimation that dominate much of the
discursive field of scholarship and practice of statebuilding. Correspondingly, it should direct us
towards more imaginative and imagination-centric conceptualizations of the state and the origins
of the authority claimed in its name.

The act of building a large military force in and of itself did not produce state sovereignty
in Iraq, and in some ways undermined it by empowering destructive sectarian impulses and
authoritarian understandings of political power that were not a primordial given in Iraqi society.
This outcome would indicate that rigidly materialist understandings of the state as an
organization with comparative advantage in coercion\footnote{This view is most commonly associated with the bellicist literature on state formation. For emblematic examples, see, Charles Tilly. See, \textit{Coercion, capital, and European states}, AD 990-1992. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Also, North, Douglass C., John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast. \textit{A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history}. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 2009)} must also be reexamined as well. It is not
the organization, but the specific nature of institutions and the mode of their legitimation that
defines the modern state. Indeed, how else can we explain why a force of 20,000 nominally Iraqi
soldiers armed with artillery, tanks, and attack helicopters surrendered Mosul without a fight to a
much smaller and lightly armed insurgent force? Where, exactly, was the Iraqi state in 2014?

1.4 The new ethnography of the state and theorizing legitimation of the state.

In Weber’s famously oft-quoted dictum, the state is a “human community that
(successfully) claims the \textit{monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force} \cite{Weber, ibid., 78} [original emphasis]
within a given territory.”\footnote{Weber, \textit{ibid.}, 78.} Weber himself was careful to point out that the modern state
represented a particular construct and administrative arrangement of authority, and was not a reified actor, or a feudal warlord writ large. He emphasized that the distinctive characteristic of the modern state was not in the concentration of the means of state administration and violence itself — after all, feudal warlords had accomplished these tasks successfully in ages past. Rather the distinctiveness of the modern state was found in the fact that the means of state administration and violence were no longer owned by those who commanded them. This created a separation between the state and those who sought to exercise sovereign authority on its behalf.

The authority of the modern state, in Weber’s view, was articulated in the social world through functionaries acting as claimants to state sovereignty, who sought to act and command the obedience of others. This posed the question: if ties of putative kinship, patronage, or other personalized ties of loyalty had bound people to feudal lords, what should bind citizens of the modern state to the impersonal administrative apparatus of authority? The now-familiar tripartite typology of ultimate sources of legitimation he provides, examines the problematic of whether state functionaries’ claims of binding authority should or should not be recognized by those confronted with them in the social world. The interaction with the state takes place as an encounter between the “inner justifications” of the individual with the external means of state administration.

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 83.
37 Ibid., 78.
Of the three types of legitimation; traditional, charismatic, or bureaucratized legality, the latter was posited by Weber as the one most closely associated with the ultimate authority of the modern state.\textsuperscript{38} Whether or not this is actually “true”, it will be more useful to focus on the underlying premise of the typology and consider its implications for our understanding of the state. Weber continued to regard the state more as empirical object existing in the social world in the form of an aggregation of state functionaries interacting with individuals than as an abstract object and product of social imagination. In his words, “the modern state is a compulsory association which organizes domination.”\textsuperscript{39} He does not fully consider what makes this association compulsory or the origin of the substantive principles, normative commitments, remembered history, and cultural content, which served to guide its administration of state domination in concrete cases.

Likewise, his focus on state administration precluded a fuller consideration of those aspects of state formation and legitimation not directly under the purview or control of state administration. However, more recent contributions from political ethnography have drawn attention to the diffuse social and political processes by which the modern state idea was imagined and provisionally constituted as the fundamental basis of political authority in a given

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 78-79.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 82.
territorially-bounded polity. As many contributors to this literature argue, these processes of state formation and legitimation occur at least partially through the decentralized and often unintentional manipulation of the symbolic world of the state through everyday interactions with power and claims of authority in a “field of political discourse and practice”.41

The state administration can mandate certain practices, initiate official and informal encounters with both the citizenry and itself, display symbols and preferred meanings through rhetoric, but it cannot fully control how these encounters are interpreted, subverted, or appropriated in practice to “reproduce the imagination of the state as the great enframer of our lives.”42 Furthermore, the state administration is not the only, or necessarily most-dominant, entity capable of initiating encounters with the state, as such encounters occur in multiple locations, and multiple registers from the vernacular to high ceremonial, and include diverse phenomena. Because of the diffuse nature of encounters with the state, the state imaginary can never be fully constituted in subjects’ minds as a unitary and coherent entity that un-

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41 See, Roy, ibid., 15-16.

42 Roy, ibid., 18, quoting Hansen et al., ibid.
problematically confers ultimate authority on the state administration.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, a study of state formation and legitimation conducted along these lines carries with it a top down and bottom up logic of inquiry simultaneously.

An example from the early phases of U.S. led occupation of Iraq illustrates this point: The Iraqi Governing Council appointed and convened under the occupation authorities commissioned a new flag to represent a new Iraq in April of 2004.\textsuperscript{44} The flag design, which was produced by a noted Iraqi artist forced into exile by the Ba’thist regime, bore no resemblance to any previous Iraqi flag. Set against a white backdrop, it depicted a pale blue crescent moon in the center with two blue stripes, representing the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and one yellow stripe, representing Kurdish identity, across the bottom. However, if it “really” represented anything, it represented occupation and Iraqi impotence. It never achieved wide use and was quietly discarded.

Instead, as new Iraqi forces came on line, they typically flew a version of the Ba’thist era flag, with its Pan-Arabist colors of red, white, and black inspired by the 1952 Nasserist coup in Egypt.\textsuperscript{45} Until the permanent government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki took office in 2006, the flag retained the three stars that in the previous era had first represented a hoped for union between Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, and was later reinterpreted as representing Ba’thist tenets of Unity, Freedom, and Socialism after the Pan-Arabist project collapsed in acrimony and mutual

\textsuperscript{43} See, Hansen et al., ibid., 4-5.


\textsuperscript{45} For a discussion of the symbolism of flags of Arab states including Iraq, see, Elie Podeh, “The symbolism of the Arab flag in modern Arab states: between commonality and uniqueness,” \textit{Nations and Nationalism} 17 (2), 2011, 419–442.
recrimination. The appellation, *Allahu Akbar*, or “God is Greatest” — added by Saddam Husayn before the disastrous 1991 Gulf War — was retained, but the script style was changed from Saddam’s personal handwriting to a more neutral “Kufic” style.⁴⁶

Although it is hardly surprising that few Iraqis were enthusiastic about adopting an occupier-approved white flag as an emblem of the Iraqi state, the rapid reappearance of a modified version of the old flag suggests a durability of a state imaginary that continued to affect discourses of Iraqi statehood even in the absence of a duly constituted state administration. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the Iraqi flag that emerged from the transition period would be based on the Ba’thist flag, rather than any of its antecedents dating to the monarchy era. The specific outcome can only be explained in contextual terms. However, in more general terms it points us towards an exploration of the discursive field of the state, and how it is structured and restructured over time, even as different centers of power compete for dominance with it.

This suggests that in our analyses of national armies in the modern world, particularly those created in postcolonial spaces, we must consider not only how they are organized, armed, equipped, and trained, but also how they are imagined into existence as national institutions within the discursive field of the state, and what conceptualizations of national statehood this enables or forecloses. The state, as both general form of political sovereignty and institutional embodiment of a specific political community, becomes part of everyday practices of authority, deference, or resistance, through this discursive process.

1.5 Defining methods

This approach to analyzing state formation and legitimation is not without its critics. In her critique of the rash of anthropological studies of the state inspired by Foucault, Gavin Smith writes:

…recently anthropologists have been tempted to actually try to fill the state with so much theory and magical power that it threatens to break its moorings and float off in the prevailing winds. Heads raised skywards, their fascination with this hot air contraption means they see, hear or think about very little else. It is the state, it turns out, or its effects that constitute everything from everyday life, to intimate forms of subjectivity, to ‘identity,’ to bare life itself — in the words of Sharma and Gupta (2006:9) it is ‘the supreme authority that manages all other institutional forms that social relations take.’

The problem this all-encompassing approach to the state, in Smith’s view, is that it creates as many analytical problems as it solves. She writes, “…[H]ow would one distinguish between what was a state effect and an effect of something else or, put another way, is it not possible, even tempting, to find that everything is ultimately a state effect?” The same critique might be applied to our concept of the discursive field of the state, which I outlined above. Is our conceptualization of it so expansive and all pervasive that nearly all human activity, down to our most trivial interactions with authority, can be seen as occurring within it?

While I agree that the state idea manifests itself in all sorts of small ways, I narrow my inquiry by examining the discourses of state formation and legitimation as they relate to a specific aspect of state-derived authority: the generation of nationalized military power, and the


48 See, p. 166, ibid.
symbolic demarcation of the boundary between legitimate force and those forms of violence deemed to be illegitimate, illegal or immoral.

Although the state idea as such is an abstraction, the organizations based on this idea are tangible entities, which represent specific configurations of collective identity and power that the abstraction presupposes. Therefore, by locating specific sites where members of these organizations, or those who command them, speak in the language of the state and claim its authority, we can begin to discern the structure of the discursive field of the state.49 We may then evaluate the substantive content of claims of state authority, the means of expression and transmission used, the various responses it evinces, and the ways in which this serves to construct or deconstruct state legitimacy through discourse and imaginative acts of transformation.

I identify three “ethnographic sites” within which “the state can be studied and comprehended in terms of its effects, as well as in terms of the processes that shape bureaucratic routines and the designs of policies”50 In each of these sites, the activity of legitimation has a distinct orientation and purpose. Within the inner circles of political leadership, rulers engage in self-identification of themselves as rulers, and seek to establish the relationships of authority that command obedience from immediate subordinates. Within the command structures of the armed forces themselves, it was necessary to establish and legitimate relationships of authority between commanders and soldiers. Finally, claims of state authority were either reinforced or undermined

49 See, Hansen et al., ibid., 8.

50 See, ibid., 14.
through discourses of assent or dissent in the nexus between state military organizations and society at large.51

Importantly for my analysis, the formal constitution of political authority by referendum and the organization and deployment of the armed forces brought state power and claims of authority into the everyday life of millions of Iraqis, who were living under de facto foreign occupation. This process served to produce (sometimes contradictory) images of the new Iraqi state, which confronted both Iraqi elites and masses with multiple and overlapping tasks of interpretation. Broadly speaking, these tasks of interpretation related to the discerning the identity of the new forces, the standing of the official government as a sovereign actor to use these forces, and the legitimacy of the Iraqi state itself. These interpretive tasks were embedded, in both formal and informal ways, in cultural practices of commemoration. These practices were both expressive of interpretations that some sought to perpetuate and disseminate, and manipulative, in the sense that they were mindfully designed to affect how others viewed the armed forces, their actions, and those in position of command or political authority.

As I will show in later chapters, commemorative practices occurred in both formal and informal registers, and in diverse physical and symbolic sites, which often produced unintended or even contradictory images of the Iraqi state. While the emergent regime certainly used the material and ideational resources at its disposal to deploy, manipulate, and regulate these practices, the decentralized and individual nature of commemoration and historical memory meant that it was inherently difficult to produce intended results. The growth of the armed forces and their more ubiquitous presence in Iraqi life as its units were deployed, produced numerous

51 See, Roy, ibid., 14.
and diverse encounters with power and claims of state authority. These encounters between power and objects of its claimed authority produced varied images of Iraqi statehood as the credibility and legitimacy of the state was assessed.

The past decade has witnessed numerous battles for physical control of Iraqi territory and resources. The political origins, meaning, and significance of these battles — the seemingly nonsensical politics of war — becomes more intelligible when we analyze Iraq as a contested discursive field in which competing state imaginaries were formulated, advanced, contested, unconsciously appropriated, fought for, resisted, misunderstood, or ignored. As this contest for the Iraqi state unfolded, shifting centers of initiative and resistance sought to establish or prevent others from establishing certain preferred images of the state within its discursive field. The official cadre of ruling elites was one such center of initiative, which sought to create or recreate commemorative practices to symbolically frame the identity of the new forces and the meaning of their actions in ways favorable to itself. However, it was unable to predictably produce desired effects.

A formation of officers sent to Jordan for purposes of training and professionalization as impartial servants of the new state, chanted Saddam-era nationalist slogans at its graduation in front of shocked onlookers.52 Prior service officers offered positions in the new army insisted on being awarded their old ranks.53 Nominally Iraqi soldiers mutinied when ordered to attack Sunni co-religionists in Fallujah.54 Groups of officers in informal settings found common ground over

52 Interview with former CMATT Commander, Major General Paul Eaton (ret.), on July 25, 2012.

53 Ibid.

54 Author’s interview with former U.S. Marine CMATT adviser to Iraqi Army, August 21, 2012, Washington, D.C.
their shared experiences in the Iran-Iraq war. A checkpoint manned by members of a national army supposedly representing an ethnically and religiously diverse polity, displayed images of the Imam Husayn, the revered Shi’te martyr. A newly formed T-72 tank brigade was welcomed by residents of a majority Sunni district because they recognized its members as former Republican Guard soldiers, who were known to be the only available source of trained manpower capable of operating the tanks. A planned parade to commemorate the founding of the Iraqi Army in 1921 and demonstrate the power of the new state is cancelled, because the troops slated to march in the parade were urgently needed elsewhere to suppress insurgent attacks.

While studying these Iraqi encounters with military power, and particularly official claims of state authority often expressed in such encounters, we observe how they served to either reinforce a preferred imaginary of the state or undermine it. Each of these and other innumerable similar encounters with the state carried the potential to endow the exercise of power with the authority of the state. Simultaneously, they carried the potential to expose the exercise of power as raw coercion in the service of partisan political goals. This aspect of state politics is particularly salient in countries where the fundamental cultural and historical identity of the state is being openly contested. Every state’s discursive field has its revisionist voices and

55 Author’s interview with Lieutenant General Jim Dubik (ret.), former commander of Multinational Training and Assistance Command - Iraq (MNSTC-I) 2006-2007, conducted on February 16, 2012.

56 Various news reports.

57 Laurence Lessard, “Interview with Major David Longbine”, U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Interview conducted by on November 1, 2006.

58 Various media reports, January 7, 2013. The parade had been extensively advertised in Iraqi Ministry of Defense publications and scheduled to air on national television.
shifting centers of initiative and resistance. In established state orders, these elements are generally relegated to the fringes of the discursive field by formal and informal institutions, which preclude any fundamental revision of the state idea for a constitution of alternative state imaginaries. In weakly institutionalized, but juridically sovereign entities like Iraq, the basic productive processes of political order within the geographic expanse of the state are generally more vulnerable to such open contestation.

In the Iraqi case, we can evaluate how the material advantages of military power and organization enjoyed by the ruling cadre of political elites were, or were not, converted into authority in different contexts over time. Specifically, this is seen in whether an imaginative transformation of army as national institution was produced and sustained over time, and the degree to which a given set of ideas pertaining to legitimate statehood and political authority favored by putative ruling elites came to dominate the discursive and symbolic field of the state.

Iraqis of all stripes and stations experienced the discursive production of the new state through a process of institutional development of the new Iraqi Army. A new cadre of ruling elites continually sought to present these forces as a national symbol and meaningful referent of sovereignty. In the aggregate, encounters with these presentations produced a composite image of the state that demarcated the highly contested line between legitimate force and illegal violence, and placed the new army and its enemies on one side of this line or the other. The clarity of this distinction has varied over time — indeed, in the body of this dissertation I seek to describe and explain this variation.

At present, the state image presented in fragments is one of weakness, not strength. The immediate survival of Iraq as a political entity has been shown to be dependent on fatwas of a clerical elite, overtly sectarian images and rhetoric are increasingly deployed alongside claims of state authority, and the Iraqi Army is on the verge of becoming a national force in name only. As the country entered a full-blown succession crisis complete with tanks on the streets of the capital in August of 2014, a Twitter posting by the Army on its official account presented a state-centric image of itself. “We are the army of Iraq, not of Maliki. We will continue to fulfill our promises, and for our nation we shall be defenders.” 60 An exiled Iraqi academic and former police general presented an opposite image in a Facebook posting the same day, which showed a photo of a Shiite mullah affixing rank insignia to an Iraqi soldier. 61

1.6 Political Culture, Symbolic Structures, and the Discursive Field of the State

In the previous section, I outlined the ways in which the discursive field of state can be structured but not completely controlled by state organizations. Thus far, I have focused my discussion of the discursive field of the state as it is constructed through the expansion of its official military organizations. This influenced how and where subjects encounter the state. However, it is not directly related to the cultural content of what is communicated and received through discursive interactions with state organizations. In this section, I consider how this discursive space is permeated by political culture and symbolic structures, and how this affects the content of discourse between different centers of power, influence, and resistance. This

60 Washington Post, August 11 2014.

61 Facebook post, August 11, 2014. Name withheld.
content is often understood in narrative terms, which can be extraordinarily durable, despite their inherently dynamic and fluid nature. Despite the destruction of the Iraqi state apparatus by force of arms in 2003, distinct — and mutually antagonistic — master narratives of Iraqi statehood survived, and have served since to structure political discourse of the state.⁶²

As Edward Said pointed out in a cultural critique of imperialism, issues of narrative are often closely tied to the justificatory basis of political and social order, with resultant implications for the possession of the state’s material resources of land and organization. His commentary was in reference to European imperialism, and indeed it can be applied to Iraq in this framework as the modern Iraqi state was constructed in self-interested ways by alien powers.

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future -- these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.⁶³

This framing can also be applied to Iraq’s internal politics, inasmuch as these can be separated from their trans-national dimensions. In his political history of Iraq, Tripp comments on the significance of narrative in Iraqi political culture:

‘Narratives’ here mean the accounts people give of themselves and others in relation to the state, as well as to their efforts to make the history of that state conform to their self-image. It is both an imaginative construct and an organizing principle, embodied in the way power is handled by those in a position of command. For [Iraqi political elites] the

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⁶² For a full discussion of the historical origins of these narratives, see, Haddad, Fanar. Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic visions of unity. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)

goal has been to ensure that their account — and their account alone — of Iraq should triumph and become both the prism through which all Iraqis must see their country and the measure used to judge its rulers.64

This tendency of Iraqi politics has been a durable motif throughout Iraq’s modern history. Narratives are building blocks of any political culture. Nonetheless, one can speak of an Iraqi political culture in which competing and highly antagonistic narratives of the state were constructed through an exclusionary zero-sum politics. This was frequently exemplified by intolerance of dissent and a general reliance on the coercive apparatus of the state to enforce given terms of national unity. The Maliki regime jealously sought to aggrandize and monopolize its material and organizational advantages as these concern military power. But these were material means to an end. The fundamental force driving Iraqi politics after 2003 was the struggle over ownership of the state narrative and with it, ability to define the moral and ideological basis for rule after the collapse of the old regime.65 Because the apparatus of the state was smashed and remained in pieces for years after the fall of Baghdad, the political struggle was not over existing institutions but rather over ownership and discursive legitimation of political and military organizations that were created in situ under conditions of Hobbesian anarchy in which different visions of political order competed for primacy.

At the time of its final destruction, the identity of the previous Iraqi state had been represented symbolically by the root metaphor of a wall, representing protection of Iraqi cultural authenticity and political autonomy. “The Eastern Wall”, guarded by the ever vigilant and patriotic Iraqi soldier, shielded the Iraqi nation and the broader Arab world to the west from the


65 Haddad refers to this as a contest for the cultural ownership of the state. Haddad, ibid.
insidious cultural, political, and military influence of Iran and an allegedly corrupted “Persian Islam”\textsuperscript{66}. The symbolic representation of the new Iraqi state centered on another metaphor for social and political justice: the intifada. Although it had prior historical referents, this referred to the “People’s Intifada” of 1991, which witnessed widespread unrest and insurrection in Shiite and Kurdish areas of Iraq, and was brutally suppressed though multi-division assaults against populated areas by units of the Republican Guard and regular army.\textsuperscript{67}

The former imaginary was a defining feature of qawmi nationalism, which favored Pan-Arabist discourses presenting Iraq as the eastern flank of the predominantly Sunni Arab world to the west. The latter was more closely associated with watani nationalism, which favored Iraqist discourses presenting Iraq in terms of local patriotisms. Although it is important to note that the boundaries, salience, and meaning of sectarian identities in Iraq have always been highly contextual, a rough generalization is that Sunnis who formed the core of the old state’s security apparatus have often favored qawmi nationalism, while Kurds and Shi’ites have often favored watani nationalism.

Of course, this presents a schematic view of Iraqi communal identities as they existed within the discursive field of the Iraqi state over the span of several decades. Here, it is meant simply to highlight fissures that have become meaningful in the post 2003 context of state formation and legitimation. \textit{Any} attempt to appropriate the memory of the army by \textit{any} successor regime would inevitably have to confront the conflicting narratives and nationalisms

\textsuperscript{66} This motif was ubiquitous in regime propaganda of the 1980’s. See, for example, p. 12, \textit{Thawra}, January 7, 1987. A full-page sketch depicts an Iraqi soldier standing astride the Persian Gulf, facing Iran. For a discussion of the use of the “Persian” moniker to describe the supposedly deviant Islam practiced in Iran, see Dina Rizk Khoury. \textit{Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance}. (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

\textsuperscript{67} For a discussion of the impact of the uprising and its aftermath on current Iraqi politics, see, Haddad, ibid.
described above, given the highly militarized nature of Iraqi politics throughout the history of the modern state. Exactly which coup leaders of the past were national heroes or villains, or whether a given military campaign was a glorious crusade or a war crime, had meaningful implications for formation of political identities and determinations of which Iraqis were qualified to lead Iraq in the present.68

Somewhat paradoxically, the memory of the Iraqi Army as a symbol of unity and independence made ownership of this memory an issue of bitter political contestation as Iraq’s fractious polity struggled to define the cultural identity of the new forces, and more broadly, the national military narrative they represented. The identity and legitimacy of the armed forces under these circumstances was not free of cultural content, but reflected a view of the Iraqi national narrative that favored the claims articulated by Iraq’s new rulers in terms of a Shiite-Islamist tinged watani nationalism. Military symbolism was a powerful means of manipulating and editing this narrative, while stigmatizing qawmi narratives of legitimation that presupposed a different ordering of society and politics, and a different basis for the use of legitimate force. As I will show in later chapters, even something as ubiquitous as the military uniform, presented as a national military costume, carried with it specific narratives of the past and claims of authority in the present. Implicitly, the discourses articulated through the reconstructed armed forces and its symbols seemed to say, “We deserve the positions”.

1.7 Methods and Sources

As I have outlined above, material organizations are part of the state institutional apparatus, but minus the productive processes of state imagination, they are just organizations and nothing more. The state crisis facing Iraq in the middle of 2014 illustrates this point. The army is barely recognizable as such, bearing more resemblance to a sectarian militia than a national force organized under state auspices. Governing institutions do not fare any better. Parliament and the office of the Prime Minister have devolved into mere organizational spoils of the state, fought over in highly personalized battles. Credible authority, to the extent it exists at all in Iraq, appears to reside outside the state as a function of the personal prestige of senior Shiite clerics, tribal sheikhs, and foreign powers that find it expedient to maintain Iraq as a juridically sovereign entity.

I have intentionally avoided discussing my study in variable-centric terms, because the probabilistic ontology of multivariate research works against its “thematic, theoretical, and methodological” logic of the case study research. Nonetheless, I do focus on a central problematic of state formation and legitimation in judicially sovereign but contested spaces: the generation of nationalized military power, and the right to authorize its use in defense of the state, while proscribing other forms of violence as illegal or immoral. This phenomenon emerges as a product of executive power at the apex of the official state hierarchy, the production

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of claims of authority through material organizations and state functionaries, and encounters with these claims within the discursive field of the state at all levels of society.

My cases are the encounters with the state idea as it occurs through contact with its organizations, particularly those military organizations claiming authority to enforce binding terms of political unity, which (theoretically) extend throughout the geographic expanse of the state. Mundane organizational and administrative acts produced everyday encounters with the state idea, which generated various responses of assent, dissent, and indifference, expressed in formal or informal ways. These were publicly observable, and in any one case, worked to produce or undermine imaginative transformation of organizations themselves as institutions bearing the identity and authority of the state.70

Domination of the discursive field of the state in this context possesses a comparative advantage in the capacity to credibly present mundane acts of administration and organization in transcendent terms of belonging and obligation, such that organizations specializing in organized violence can be imagined as national military institutions. The new military forces generated first under American tutelage and later under direct Iraqi administration were hardly ideal instruments for this purpose. Nonetheless, the fact of U.S. material support and diplomatic recognition within the international system conferred juridical sovereignty upon Iraq, and this sovereignty formed the initial material capability and ideological basis for its claims. In the remainder of this dissertation, I trace how an emerging cadre of ruling elites in Iraq attempted to

use both material organization and symbolic discourse in order to affect an imaginative transformation of the army and the state.

I will provide more detail in the body of this dissertation of specific sources used in specific chapters, but I can broadly outline my approach to sources here. My argument has a broadly ethnographic bent, and thus presupposes the particular “problematization and framing”\(^{71}\) of participant observation. My direct observation of Iraq took place between February and September of 2004 and was focused on a relatively small segment of the Euphrates river west of Fallujah. Furthermore, it was not an ethnographic field trip but a military mission that took place years before I began formal training in my current academic discipline. Nonetheless, it has provided context for observations from other sources and indeed helped frame the overall direction of this study.

“What makes ethnographic work special is that its authors are able to generate new theoretical concepts, identify the steps in a particular social process, reveal the organizational principles of social groupings, identify explanatory mechanisms in social dynamics, and link these issues to broader theoretical frames of understanding,” writes Antony Puddephatt et al.\(^{72}\) The methodological emphasis is not on “rigid execution” of prescribed procedures, but on “the unrelenting cultivation of theoretical ideas”\(^{73}\) in reference to a specific empirical context. As I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this dissertation, this approach is at once rigorous,

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\(^{72}\) See, Puddephatt et al., ibid., 1-2.

\(^{73}\) See, Puddephatt et al., back cover, ibid.
empirical, and relevant to the theoretical concerns of political science — specifically, building better understandings of the formation and legitimation of the state in contested spaces.

My formal research is drawn from field research in Washington D.C. and in Amman, Jordan. It includes many interviews with serving and former officers from the United States and Iraq, as well as archival work in both locations. Archival and historical research draws from British diplomatic records of the Mandate era, captured records of the Ba’ath regime, military records, official histories, and Iraqi newspapers of the Ba’ath period. I also make use of post-2003 Iraqi Ministry of Defense publications, reports generated by U.S. military and diplomatic sources, video clips of military parades and other ceremonies, enthusiast web-sites devoted to Iraqi military regalia, public statements of Iraqi officials and intellectuals, mainstream broadcast and print media, and social media sites of Iraqi activist organizations, tribes, and political parties. In the aggregate, this research has allowed me to use an ethnographic problematization and framing for my study to see how visual and rhetorical motifs of statehood and legitimate force are formed, manipulated, remembered, or forgotten over time, always in reference to the political exigencies of the present.

In the Iraqi case, I am specifically concerned with the organizational construction of the new military forces, the connection with claims of state authority, and their emergence as the official national military force of Iraq. The problems of the identity and legitimacy of the new forces were not worked out in value-neutral spaces free of culture and memory, otherwise there would be no politics of the state and any violence with official imprimatur would be legitimate by definition. As outlined above, these forces’ nominal status as the Iraqi Army did not necessarily make them “official”, in the sense that they were taken as representing a legitimate
Iraqi state. This distinction is important in a number of ways, which I will elaborate on more fully in the next chapters of this dissertation.

Generally speaking, a government of quislings and its hireling army were considered legitimate targets for attack in Iraq. Conversely, they lacked authority to make just war on enemies of Iraq. However, except for jihadi groups that explicitly rejected the post-World War I states system of which modern Iraq is a creation, most other factions, including nationalist insurgent groups, were bound by a strongly held norm that the Iraqi Army, as a mythical construct, represented the Iraqi people and should not be the target of attacks. Thus, we return to the question of whether the Iraqi Army was actually Iraqi. Depending on the answer, one was either bound to, or unbound from, certain norms of assent, cooperation, and compliance with the armed forces and government that commanded them. The power of this idea was seen in, among other things, the frequency with which insurgent groups composed of former officers claimed that their organization was the real Iraqi Army, while the members of the official Iraqi uniformed force were merely costumed impostors.

Therefore, producing an imaginative transformation of “The Iraqi CMATT Forces” to evince the authority of the state and the authentic military lineage of the Iraqi Army has been a matter of consequence; both for Iraq’s would be rulers and those who have sought to thwart their designs. As Maliki’s tenure in office apparently comes to an end, and the very territorial integrity of Iraq remains deeply compromised by radical Islamist forces, it is tempting to look at state legitimation in Iraq as an abject failure. However, it is important to note that although the current situation is dire, there has been variation in this dimension of stateness over time, both over the previous decade and over the previous century. Thus we can ask where and when this
transformation was affected, even if only partially, and under what circumstances. Why was it
durable or not? Where was resistance to accepting the new forces as Iraq particularly salient and
stubborn, and how was it (partially) overcome in some cases?

1.8 Organization of the dissertation

I develop and substantiate the arguments made above in the next six chapters. Chapter
two provides historical context, which is necessary to understanding contemporary Iraq. It deals
primarily with the origins of the Iraqi state under British suzerainty after World War I and its
later development under a series of military rulers until 1968, when the Ba’th Party seized and
held power. I show how the Iraqi Army first emerged as a British colonial side project in the
1920’s, but over time assumed both military and symbolic significance. It became the central
vehicle for Iraqi domestic politics, as well as a symbol of Iraqi aspirations for independence and
recognition of the state as a sovereign actor in international society. In a way, the story of the old
army parallels that of the new army that seeks its lineage. Both were forces founded under
foreign occupation to serve agendas of the great powers. Indigenous leaders sought to legitimate
these forces as national armies and appropriate them in order to form and legitimate an Iraqi state
according to their purposes.

Chapter three focuses on the Ba’thist period, devoting particular attention to the
unprecedented efforts to structure and dominate the discursive field of the Iraqi state in the late
20th century. I consider how Saddam Husayn sought to fashion an image of himself as a military
leader on par with the great commanders in history, and how his command of the army became a
metaphor for his command of the nation. He sought to refashion an existing narrative of Iraq
that he inherited from his predecessors, placing himself and the Ba’th Party at its apex. The appropriation and invention of military customs, history, and tradition played a major part in this effort, and became entwined with his own pursuit of grandeur and military triumph at the expense of his subjects. His military build up and adventures were cast as the fulfillment of Iraq’s destiny as a great power in the Arab world, with its national army at the vanguard.

In chapter four, I examine the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Ba’thist state and the dissolution of the Iraqi Army. As U.S. policymakers faced the reality — just as their British forebears had — that it would be necessary to reconstruct some type of indigenous force in order to unburden themselves of the costs of occupation and direct rule, a new (nominally national) military was formed. I describe how Americans encountered memories of the Iraqi state they thought they had destroyed with the regime of Saddam Husayn, and how this forced a reevaluation of assumptions that institutions could be constructed independently of history, politics, and culture. Events from the middle of 2003 to the end of 2004 demonstrated that supposedly universal institutions quickly became entangled in Iraqi narratives and local contests to control symbols of the new state. The effects of this entanglement were seen in near absence of effective authority within the newly created forces, which suffered from high rates of desertion, lack of discipline, and endemic insubordination.

Chapter five focuses on the period of provisional sovereignty between the dissolution of the occupation authority led by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer in mid-2004 and the election of a permanent Iraqi government under Nuri al-Maliki in mid-2006. During this period, the new army expanded rapidly from a few ill-disciplined battalions to a much larger and incrementally more effective force of more than ten divisions. The new forces were raised, organized, trained,
and deployed absent a permanent government. Most units were not capable of operating without significant tactical and logistical assistance from U.S. forces, and were only nominally under the command of provisional Iraqi authorities in Baghdad. This ambiguity created a situation in which varied Iraqi imaginings of the state took hold at the local level in individual units, and legitimation of newly created units’ status as legitimate forces was negotiated with local power brokers. This period of localized power and claims of authority presents a unique context in which to analyze legitimation of force in the absence of the state.

In chapters six and seven, I document how the newly empowered elites — specifically Maliki and his inner circle of Dawa Party allies — sought to create a broader narrative of legitimate monopoly of violence by framing the actions of its forces in terms of heroism and sacrifice, and thus to institute the identity of these forces as the national army of Iraq possessing a long and glorious military lineage. Within this narrative of meaningful violence, there is a progressively intensified and varied effort to concentrate political power as part of a “memory project”\(^\text{74}\) presenting a distinct view of Iraqi history and the basis for legitimation of the state and the force necessary to institute and preserve it. This occurred in reference to the political and military demands of the present.

Symbolism was used in attempts to justify both the empowerment of a new cadre of ruling elites under disputed constitutional arrangements, and the large military operations necessary to maintain this arrangement in power. Chapter six looks at the new government’s

initial efforts to claim sole authority to legitimize force, as it conducted its first large scale military operations against Sadrist militias in Baghdad and Basra. Chapter seven looks at the period immediately after the U.S. withdrawal, and how legitimation of the state and efforts to centralize power under conditions of anarchy (as the term is commonly understood in international relations) proceeded. It was not only an effort to monopolize violence but to monopolize the symbolism of the state that legitimated that violence as something more than a sectarian power grab. This was not necessarily persuasive to disenfranchised groups, but it was critical to facilitating the attempted seizure of the state.

A brief concluding chapter follows.

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Illustration 1.1. January 2014 issue of Bilady (My Country), commemorating the 93rd anniversary of the Iraqi Army. The soldiers are members of the “Imam Musa Kadhim” battalion, the first Iraqi unit formed under British tutelage in 1921.
Chapter 2: The Emergence of the Iraqi Army and its Symbols: 1920-1968

2.1 Overview

In this chapter, I trace the emergence of the Iraqi Army and its symbols, and the ways in which Iraqis encountered its power and claims of authority over time. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate how the armed forces were discursively institutionalized\(^1\) as a national symbol during the first five decades of modern Iraqi history that predated Ba’thist rule. Over time, the Army as a symbol became interwoven with the creation of the military customs, history, and tradition that represented the Iraqi state, and claims made by a variety of actors to the moral right to use violence on its behalf. In subsequent chapters we can then look at how Iraq’s new rulers sought to dismantle, forget, redefine or otherwise manipulate this corpus of tradition and historical memory for their own purposes after 2003, and how these structures enabled and constrained institutional formation of the armed forces and the exercise of state sovereignty in the post Ba’thist period.

This process occurred over time as successive regimes sought to legitimate the state as the authoritative representative of the Iraqi people, with its authority extending to the moral right to use violence — or legitimate force — against those violating the norms of loyalty to the Iraqi state as these regimes imagined it. I use process tracing and within case analysis to trace the emergence of the history, customs, and traditions of the old Iraqi army. In this way, I seek to map the creation and expansion of the symbolic universe of the Iraqi

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\(^1\) For an overview of discursive institutionalism, see Schmidt, ibid.
state and the military, which served to construct a visible and enforceable distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence.

The central questions I address in this chapter are the following: What prompted the creative and expansionary processes of military symbolism? What are the physical objects, cultural relics, and symbolic structures produced by this historical process that represented a particular imagining of Iraqi statehood? To what degree did they become ubiquitous and recognizable\textsuperscript{2} to Iraqis across Iraq’s ethnonational, sectarian, and political divides? And finally, were they meaningful to Iraqis in substantive terms — i.e. in what ways were they endowed with national significance and did they produce a recognizable and enforceable distinction between legitimate violence in defense of the state and illegal violence?

The Iraqi state was, above all, a vehicle for self-determination in the early 20th century world of emerging national states. The monarchial system represented by flag of the Hashemite Kingdom was imposed by a foreign power, but nonetheless it represented the only pathway for the creation of an Iraqi political community and national politics, if for no other reason that it was the only flag the great powers of the day would recognize as being legitimate.\textsuperscript{3} The “Sharifian solution” the British arrived at to rule Iraq relied heavily on the presumed stature of the Hashemite clan in Mecca.\textsuperscript{4} The Iraqi flag was based on the flag of

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\textsuperscript{2} This draws upon Roy’s discussion of ubiquity and recognizability of state authority. See, Roy, ibid., 14-19.

\textsuperscript{3} For an account of the internal politics of international policy of World War I victors, see, Ernst B. Haas, "The reconciliation of conflicting colonial policy aims: acceptance of the League of Nations mandate system." \textit{International Organization} 6, no. 04 (1952): 521-536.

the Arab Revolt, which had been designed by British intelligence officers in Cairo under the supervision of Sir Mark Sykes of Sykes-Picot fame during World War I. The designers of the flag were evidently aware of Arab nationalist trends being propagated in nationalist clubs in the region, and chose the colors in reference to perceived popular sentiment. Sykes then submitted several flag designs to the Sharif of Mecca for his approval.5

In his analysis of Arab flags, Podeh writes, “The black, according to the official note, represented the flag of the prophet (called al-Uqab, literally ‘the Eagle’), his companions (al-Sahaba) and the Abbasid empire; the green represented the Prophet’s family (ahl al-bait); white represented various Arab rulers; and the triangle red, which encompasses the three historical colors, represents the Hashemite dynasty in the Hijaz.”6 The somewhat garbled history of Arab glory represented in the flag was evidently no obstacle for the British or their Hashemite allies. After some debate concerning the possibility that a new flag might inflame local ethnic nationalisms, the Arab Revolt flag was slightly modified and adapted as the Iraqi national flag under the monarchy, combining elements of religious and nationalistic legitimacy claims.7

Leaving aside the issue of whether any of the Iraqi groups should have recognized state authority claimed by the monarchy, we can ask how Iraq’s rulers sought to legitimate

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6 Ibid.

7 As late as 1919, British officials debated whether Iraq should have its own flag or be governed as a British possession. A cable from the British political office on August 6, 1919 from Baghdad warned, “…if we permitted the Hejaz flag to appear, it would be followed by Kurdish and Armenian flags, and the Chaldeans would in self-defense hoist the French flag, and the next development would probably be racial riots, to which Mosul has always been prone… So long as we are in military occupation of the country, the only flag we can advisedly permit is our own.” See, p. 193, Alan de L. Rush and Jane Priestland (eds.) Records of Iraq 1914-1966, Vol 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press Archive Editions 2001.
the military power necessary to draw competing political factions and social groups into the
“orbit” of the Iraqi state. To do this, rulers had to not only create the apparatus of a new state, but a corpus of legitimating ideas as well that justified their position at the apex of hierarchical organizations of command and administration within Iraq. As will be in evidence below, the capacity to concentrate and command a modern military organization based on principles of centralized hierarchy was dependent upon rulers’ ability to sustain claims of legitimate state authority based on these moralistic imperatives.

Yet, Iraq’s rulers found it easier to seize power by military coups than successfully claim legitimate authority, both during the monarchy and republican eras. (The external military coup of 2003 was little different in this regard.) With few exceptions, Iraqi rulers have all died violently, often at the hands of their successors, or in exile. It is perhaps not coincidental that the ruler who held unchallenged power for the longest period of time, Saddam Husayn, also pursued the most sustained and elaborate effort to create and control a symbolic universe of Iraqi statehood suffused with a messianic ideology. Symbolic dimensions of power were not separate from the physical means of state coercion, but were part and parcel of them.

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8 See, Tripp, ibid., 1.

9 Faisal I died of natural causes, his son Ghazi died in a car wreck, the Regent Abdullah I and Faysal II were both killed in the 1958 anti-monarchy coup. Other senior officials and military officers of that era also met violent ends, including Jafar al-Askari during the 1936 Bakr Sidqi coup, with Sidqi himself being assassinated in 1937 by Arab nationalist officers, and Nuri al-Said being murdered in 1958 while fleeing Baghdad. Colonel Rashid Ali, who led a pro-Axis coup in 1941 was driven into exile in Iran by British forces. Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, the leader of the 1958 coup, was killed in the 1963 Ramadan coup. General ‘Abd al-Salam Arif died in a helicopter crash under murky circumstances, his brother ‘Abd al-Rahman held power briefly before being forced into exile in Jordan in 1968. Iraq’s first Ba’thist president, the “Father Leader” General Hasan al-Bakr was forced to resign by Saddam Husayn in 1979. Husayn was executed in December of 2006.

However, Saddam did not draw upon a clean slate in pursuit of his own visions of Iraqi statehood and grandeur. Rather, he drew heavily upon pre-existing national narratives and symbolic structures that others before him constructed under entirely different conditions. I will now turn my attention to explaining how symbolic structures were constructed — often under conditions of crisis — and how these shaped subsequent iterations of state formation in Iraq. I organize the chapter according to four distinct periods of state development predating the Ba’thist era.

These are:

- The post-WWI Mandate of 1920 until formal independence in 1932
- From independence until the 1958 Free Officers’ coup that deposed the monarchy.
- The brief (1958-1963) rule of Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim
- The first (1963) and second (1968) Ba’thist seizures of power, interspersed with competing coups.

In each period, the demands of mobilization of the Iraqi state’s coercive power and a crisis of legitimation confronted the cadre of political and military elites most directly involved in shaping events. Meeting these demands of mobilization and legitimation produced development of the national military’s organizational structure and the symbolic complex. As Iraqis encountered these demands over time, a “language of stateness”\(^\text{11}\) emerged whose forms and meanings were forged in repeated practice and discursive interactions, which served to give coherence and meaning to violence carried out on behalf of the imagined state.

2.2 From Mandate to Independence

The creation of the Iraqi Army was closely linked to the first crisis of legitimation to confront Iraq’s rulers following the expulsion of the Ottomans and the assumption of British mandatory rule. Proponents of direct British rule in Iraq after World War I faced several obstacles, the most significant being legitimation and control of their political project in context of changing international norms and severe financial constraints. As concerned the latter, the historical record shows that the British government and colonial administration was acutely aware of the costs of imperial expansion, and sought a means to expand influence and access without taking on costs of direct rule. In the early 1920’s, the British public debt had ballooned to 181 percent of GDP and service on the interest reached nearly 10 percent of GDP as a result of the war and its economic aftereffects.

It is also evident from the diplomatic correspondence and personal letters of British officials of the early twentieth century is that changing views of empire began to impose normative constraints on British policy. This followed principally from American intervention in the First World War as a belligerent and financier. President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, particularly as they concerned national self-determination, imposed normative constraints on the blatant exercise of raw imperial power in international society.

Writing in the present era, Mark Beissinger notes the normative distance between contemporary notions of empire and those held by members of the imperial classes at the

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12 British diplomatic correspondence of this era frankly discussed the costs of occupation in Iraq and the feasibility of constructing an “Arab Facade” that might provide local pro-British administration at an affordable rate. See, Rush and Priestland, ibid., Vol. 2.

turn of the century. “Empire has been a rapidly moving target over the twentieth century, altering in meaning as a result of the resistances it encountered and the rise of anti-imperial norms of sovereignty and self-determination,” he writes. “…[T]he practices of power that people ascribe to empire today and the politics surrounding empire are no longer the same as those associated with empire a century ago. Rather, empire has been transformed into a form of illegitimate power and a form of bad reputation.”\textsuperscript{14}

The Iraq project turned on this hinge of history. British policymakers came to view direct rule of this sort as excessively expensive, and also awkward for its obvious conflict with emerging international norms of national self-determination. This did not preclude imperialism \textit{per se}, but it did affect the forms used in its practice. In a cable to London from Baghdad during the war, Sir Percy Cox wrote, “Of these [Wilsonian] principles the one which particularly concerns us at the moment requires that the peoples of the countries interested or affected should be allowed to determine their own form of Government.”\textsuperscript{15}

As head of the civil administration in Baghdad imposed by a combined British-Indian expeditionary force of 170 thousand troops, Cox understood that the future of Iraq would be determined in large part by the ability to raise, maintain, and deploy highly-centralized and hierarchical military forces characteristic of modern European states against the more numerous but decentralized tribal forces in Iraq.\textsuperscript{16} With the defeat of the Ottomans in


\textsuperscript{15} See, Rush and Priestland, ibid., 452.

\textsuperscript{16} For a discussion on the comparative advantage of centralized military organizations over organizations based on negotiated patronage relationships and kinship loyalty in the developing world, see, Abdulkader H. Sinno, \textit{Organizations at war in Afghanistan and beyond}. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008)
Mesopotamia, no other plausible alternatives to British military power existed. In the same communiqué he wrote, “The question of the ‘Arab Facade’ [in Iraq] offers no insurmountable difficulties to my mind… It is agreed that the administration should be under British guidance, and the more complete the British control can be, the better for the country.”

However, British ambitions in this direction were only partly realized as its colonial administrators encountered bouts of resistance within the territories awarded them by the League of Nations after World War I. Revolts occurred in Egypt, Transjordan, and Iraq, forcing a modification of the Mandate system that conferred more authority on local actors. Iraqis did not universally accept the British state-building project as an unalloyed good. The nature of this relationship between would-be nation and nation-builder was made apparent by the July 1920 insurrection against British rule, which lasted several months and at one point threatened the British garrison in Baghdad. The insurrection drew support from Sunni tribes and a large swath of the Shia population of southern Iraq, and was only suppressed by 130,000 Imperial troops with heavy air support from the RAF. The cost of suppressing the uprising was 36 million pounds, which was a sum greater than that expended by the British government to foment and support the Arab Revolt during WWI.

The insurrection has survived in Iraqi national mythology to the present as The Great 1920 Revolution, and has been used by state officials and insurgents alike in various eras to justify their rule and use of force on behalf of the state. The letters of Gertrude Bell, who held several influential official and unofficial diplomatic postings in Baghdad in the 1920’s,

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17 Rush and Priestland, ibid.

offer a window into the essentially schizophrenic nature of British policy, which required simultaneous expression of Iraqi nationalism and acquiescence to overall foreign control of the nascent national state.

Bell’s report on the uprising in a personal letter illustrates the inherent contradictions of simultaneously attempting to create a sovereign state and a puppet regime within the same polity, and the violence necessary to impose such a political construct on Iraq. “We are greatly hampered by the tribal rising which has delayed the work of handing over to the Arab Govt,” Bell wrote in late 1920.19

Sir Percy [Cox], I think rightly, decided that the tribes must be made to submit to force. In no other way was it possible to make them surrender their arms or teach them that you mustn’t lightly engage in revolution, even when your holy men tell you to do so… Without the lesson and without drawing their teeth by fines of arms (impossible to obtain except by force) we should have left an impossible task to the Arab Govt. Nevertheless, it’s difficult to be burning villages at one end of the country by means of a British Army, and assuring people at the other end that we have really handed over responsibility to native Ministers.20

In a personal letter of November 20th, 1921, she wrote of a dinner with British officers and Jafar al-Askari, a sharifian officer who later served as Iraq’s first Minister of Defense and subsequently in several senior government postings. He came to be seen by later generations as the father of the Iraqi Army. “It was an amazing evening… I said complete independence is what we ultimately wished to give,” Bell wrote, “‘My lady,’ [al-Askari] answered… ‘complete independence is never given; it is always taken’ – a profound


20 Bell, ibid.
saying… The man is an idealist with a high purpose, animated by fervor for his race and country.”

However, she took it for granted that the basic parameters of the Iraqi political system would be defined by an unequal relationship with Britain, which held the keys to statehood in the form of its superior capacity to organize and deploy modern military forces in Mesopotamia. That Britain preferred that indigenous peoples man some of these forces or carry out routine tasks of administration and governance did not change the basic calculus of power.

The Arab government, as Bell and many of her compatriots conceived of it, would institutionalize the privileged position of its sharifian clients by force. Any imposed government would privilege some and marginalize others, and therefore this policy had the effect of subverting other possible alternative mechanisms for aggregating preferences and institutionalizing an open political process. Given the demographic realities of Iraq, such alternative processes would have likely privileged Shia communities in the south of the country that shared close cultural ties with Iran and had resisted the British seizure of Iraq from the Ottomans during World War I.

This left the British and the sharifian government with the problem of marshaling the necessary military manpower to affect the consolidation of the client regime around a predominantly Sunni elite of former sharifian and Ottoman officers. “No Govt. in this

country, whether ours or an Arab administration, can carry on without force behind it,” Bell wrote.22

The Arab Government has no force till its army is organized, therefore it can’t exist unless we lend it troops… The bedrock on which this argument rests is that no administration can exist without force behind it. I think you have seen enough of the country to know that it’s correct. Mesopotamia is not a civilized state, it is largely composed of wild tribes who do not wish to shoulder the expense of citizenship.23

The central problem, however, was not cooperation among cooler heads as much as it was finding a way to a formula that would assuage Iraqi demands while guaranteeing Britain a leading role in Iraqi affairs amid the strategic rivalries of the region. The emergence of a Turkish national state under another former Ottoman officer, Kemal Ataturk, and the threat this might present to British control of an Iraqi state staffed by former Ottoman elites, was not lost on Bell or others. Likewise, the influence of “Shiah Divines” in the south of Iraq, many of whom had Persian roots, was considered problematic, and thus the British sought to minimize Shi’ite influence in the new government.24

“One of the main difficulties is that all or nearly all of the leading men of the Shia towns are Persian subjects, and must be made to adopt Mesopotamian nationality before they can take official positions in the Mesopotamian state,” Bell wrote.25 Of course, Mesopotamian nationality was still in the process of being invented. Bell correctly realized that the concentration of an Iraqi military force under an Iraqi flag backed by the British was

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 571-575.
25 Ibid., 571.
central to determining what “Mesopotamian nationality” actually meant in terms of control of the Iraqi vassal state, and whose strategic ends would be served by this rule. “The Council is aware and Sir Percy has constantly impressed upon them, the vital need of getting down to the formation of a native army to relieve ours,” she wrote. Less prescient was her implicit assumption that the interests of an Arab government would naturally identify itself and its interests with those of Great Britain, even if its existence in the final analysis was guaranteed by British arms.

2.3 The “Sharifian Solution”

The British policy establishment of the day openly discussed the viability of the Iraqi political project amongst themselves as they searched for a workable formula that squared the circle between promises of Arab national sovereignty made during the Arab Revolt, Iraqi nationalism in its various stripes, and their own policy goals in Iraq. In the aftermath of the 1920 insurrection, the British convened a conference in Cairo attended by key figures in its colonial administration and several sharifian officers of Iraqi origin recruited to the cause of Arab independence during the war.

Opinion converged on a “Sharifian Solution” outlined above, that would rely upon Hashemite emirs – sons of the Sharif of Mecca who led the Arab Revolt on Britain’s behalf -- to rule territories gained by Britain. Through this mechanism, the British hoped to create quasi-constitutional monarchies that were strong enough to maintain order and secure British interests, but too weak and reliant on British support to pursue independent national policies.

26 Ibid.
This splitting of the difference was reflected in British plans for the Iraqi Army drafted by the Finance Committee of the British Government and cabled to Baghdad at the height of the 1920 revolt in August of that year.

As regards the Ministry of War, it must be clearly laid down in our agreement with Faysal that his Minister of War has no connection with or control over the British garrison in Mesopotamia, which must remain, for the period of the Mandate, under the direct authority of the British representative. The Arab Minister of War will simply be concerned for the present with the organization and distribution of indigenous formations of a military or semi-military character, calculated, with the assistance of such British instructors as may be necessary, ultimately and gradually to replace the present Army of Occupation.27

The emirs selected for this role, Abdullah and Faysal, were well aware of the conditions of British support, but lacking other visible means to pursue their own political ambitions, accepted the thrones offered them in Amman and Baghdad respectively. However, getting indigenous populations of Iraq and Transjordan (as Jordan was then known), particularly the political classes, to accept Hashemite monarchies would not be a simple matter. Outside the relatively small coteries of former Ottoman officers that joined the emirs’ Arab armies during the war, there was little awareness of the emirs in Iraqi society or acceptance of their claims to rule. In Hobbesian terms, neither Abdullah nor Faysal evinced much awe among those target populations that were required to accept the divine right of kings as a basis for legitimate political authority.

The report of the Cairo Conference, held in April of 1921 in the wake of the rebellion, was matter-of-fact about the difficulties inherent in the British enterprise, which sought to build a truncated national state that administer its own internal affairs but had no agency in

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27 See, Rush and Priestland, ibid., 405.
international relations. No less a political mind than Winston Churchill, then serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies, understood this. “We are quite as fully conscious as you are of the desire for securing a spontaneous movement for Faysal in Mesopotamia as a prelude for his being countenanced by us,” he wrote from Cairo in a communiqué with the Prime Minister. “Unless we have a mind of our own on the subject it is by no means certain that this will occur. Situation is complicated by a variety of claimants to the Throne, several of whom are quite impossible, and none of whom affords a prospect of suitable effective Arab government capable of relieving our military commitments.”

To make up the awe deficit, the British stationed Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons in Habbaniya and Basra, Iraq. The practice of “air policing”, as it came to be known, spread throughout the colonial spaces under British control in the 1920’s, extending all the way into Waziristan in Central Asia. The importance of British air power in maintaining overall political control of colonized areas at acceptable expense quickly became axiomatic. “I need not recall at length the obligations of Iraq to the Royal Air Force,” wrote one official in Baghdad in 1920. “The power and efficiency of that force overshadows the whole country and must be realized as backing up all other instruments of security.”

The truth of this statement was reflected in the fact that overall command of both British and indigenous forces in Iraq during the 1920’s resided with the RAF Air Officer, Commanding, in Baghdad.

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28 See “March 14, 1921 communiqué”, Rush and Priestland, ibid., 505-506.

29 See, Dean, ibid.; Also, David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1990); Graham Chandler, “The Bombing of Waziristan”, *Smithsonian Air and Space Magazine*, July, 2011. Omissi argues that the key role of the RAF in suppressing colonial uprisings was a key to its emergence as an independent service, 34.

However, the RAF was a mid-term expedient at best in the minds of British officials, who sought a longer term military solution to Iraq that could be maintained on the backs of the Iraqis themselves. “It was recognized that the existing force of Arab levies under British officers must for the present remain in existence, though political considerations demanded that measures should at the same time be adopted for the raising of a purely Arab army,” wrote one official in his report of the 1921 Cairo Conference.31

Political correctness was not the only consideration. As a later generation of Western policymakers learned in the early 21st century, expeditionary warfare in Mesopotamia is expensive. “The cost of the levy organization would be borne on the Colonial Office vote, subject to a possible contribution by the Mesopotamian Government. The cost of the Arab army, on the other hand, would be borne entirely on Mesopotamian revenues, and would constitute for the year 1921-1922 the contribution of that Government towards the cost of Mesopotamian defense.”32

King Faysal became the nominal commander of Iraqi forces following his installation in 1921 after a stage-managed Iraqi national referendum in which he won 96 percent of the vote.33 From the beginning, the architects of the army confronted issues of legitimation that have echoes in the contemporary era. Specifically, these concerned the questions of where the locus of political authority should be placed, what its ultimate referent of sovereignty should be, and the credibility of its claims to wage just war on behalf of the political


32 Ibid.

33 For a historical summary of the creation of the Hashemite throne in Iraq, see, Tripp, ibid., 47.
community it sought to rule. For the British, these questions had been a rather simple ones when it came to Empire: ultimate political authority should be located in London, and the referent of sovereignty was the power symbolized in the British throne. Some authority necessary for public order and administration might be delegated to indigenous populations, but only to certain designated classes — usually based on racist criteria\(^34\) — and only under British supervision.

The first Iraqi Army battalion was officially formed on January 6, 1921. Faysal, who was deeply impressed with Gertrude Bell, wanted to name the battalion in her honor, but was dissuaded by his advisers.\(^35\) However, given the real relationship of power between their two countries, such a name would have been entirely appropriate. Instead, the battalion was named after the Imam Musa Kadhim, recognized by Shia as the seventh of twelve infallible imams and respected by Sunnis as a religious scholar. Although not a single Iraqi officer of the battalion was a Shiite Muslim, the symbolism was important as it suggested inclusion of the Shiite population into the new political community represented by mandatory Iraq — whether they wanted such inclusion or not. “As became a pattern within the new Iraqi state, the Sunnis got the substance and the Shia got the symbolism,” writes Abbas Kadhim in a contemporary study of the 1920 revolution.\(^36\)

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\(^35\) Conversation with Dr. Abbas Kadhim.

Although the founding of the battalion came to be marked as a secular holy day in the annals of Iraqi statehood in later decades, it was little noted at first, and some — including Kadhim — have cast doubt on its significance in the military (versus symbolic) history of the Iraqi Army. The way in which this date assumed significance in Iraq as an invented tradition, which served the purposes of successive regimes seeking to legitimate the state they commanded, is a central part of explaining how the nexus between symbols and military power formed in the Iraqi state. For the time being, it is sufficient to note that the date was not officially commemorated until 25 years after the event as a one-off silver anniversary celebration by a monarchy that had survived the Second World War by the barest of margins thanks to foreign intervention. It was only after the monarchy was deposed in 1958 that the Army anniversary became a central part of the state ceremonial.

The relationship of power between Britain and Iraq implicit in the formation of the army was codified by a treaty proposed in 1922 after maintaining direct mandatory rule became politically and militarily unfeasible in the wake of the 1920 revolt. Although the treaty was formally between sovereign states, it carried a strong whiff of imperialism and was not easily ratified, achieving this milestone only in 1924 after the period of the treaty was reduced to 4 years from 25. The treaty obligated Iraq to accept British advisers in key ministries, including Defense, Interior, and Justice, while stipulating that “His Majesty the King of Irak [sic] agrees to be guided by the advice of His Britannic Majesty tendered

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38 See, Khaymat al-Iraq, ibid.

through the High commissioner on all important matters affecting the international and financial obligations and interests of His Britannic Majesty for the whole period of this treaty.\textsuperscript{40}

The treaty also required the Iraqi government to accept responsibility for paying British advisers as it would pay its own officials, the justification being that British advisers were in theory answerable to Faisal’s government, not the British High Commissioner in Iraq. This arrangement was entirely keeping with the political logic of the mandate era. In neighboring Transjordan, British general John Glubb served as commander of the Arab Legion, wearing its uniform and pledging allegiance to the Hashemite monarchy in Amman for more than two decades.\textsuperscript{41}

Furthermore, Iraq would be compelled to accept British financial oversight as long as it carried a balance of payments with Britain — a situation that might extend to perpetuity given the burden of financial obligations foisted upon it. These conditions compounded the task of the Iraqi monarchy’s legitimation, which faced numerous crises as a result. The 1922 Treaty and subsequent treaties in 1930 and 1948 became integral to a nationalist narrative that came to see treaties as symbols of colonial domination. As a signatory to these treaties, the Iraqi monarchy itself came to symbolize foreign domination. One of the first acts of crowds that came out on the streets of Baghdad to support the 1958 coup was to cast the only


\textsuperscript{41} See for example, John Bagot Glubb, \textit{The story of the Arab Legion}. Hodder & Stoughton, 1948. Glubb served as the commander of the Jordanian national army, owing allegiance to the Hashemite throne, until his dismissal by King Hussein in 1956.
two equestrian statues of Baghdad into the Tigris. The likenesses of Faysal I and General Maude, the WWI British conqueror of the city, both represented Imperial authority.

2.4 The Emergence of the Iraqi Army as a National Institution

This reliance on British military and diplomatic power existed in tension with the build up of the Iraqi armed forces and the necessity of suppressing periodic tribal uprisings endemic to Iraq under the monarchy. The size and mission of the Iraqi Army became a central concern and point of dispute between Iraq’s nominal rulers and their British patrons. Former sharifian officers, including Faysal, favored a large conscript army as a tool to foster nationalism, dominate the market for military labor in Iraq, and assert Iraqi claims as a sovereign actor in international society. Such an army, however, was inimical to British interests.

The British explicitly forbade conscription during the short-lived Mandate, and maintained the policy on a de-facto basis until Iraq was granted independence in 1932. This was especially interesting in light of the cross-border Ikhwan raids from Arabia in the 1920’s targeting majority Shi’ite areas of southern Iraq. The Ikhwan (brothers) represented a radical movement inspired by wahhabi Islam that was implacably hostile to the Western influence represented by the new Hashemite rulers in Baghdad and Amman, with whom they had longstanding conflicts over territory, resources, and ideology. The British kept to their policy of a small gendarmerie Army, despite the potential to unify a recalcitrant Shi’ite

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population behind an Iraqi national army against an external threat. According to Batatu, Faysal himself told a Shi’ite Iraqi petitioner from an influential family that the British must be secretly supporting the Ikhwan — otherwise there was no rational explanation why they would not allow Iraq to recruit a larger army under national command to deal with the threat.\footnote{44 See, Hanna Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Bathists and Free Officers}. Saqi, 2012. (Kindle edition), location 7600.}

As it was, a separate indigenous force known as the Iraqi Desert Police was raised under Glubb’s command.\footnote{45 For a full account, see, Sir John Bagot Glubb. \textit{A Soldier with the Arabs.} (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957)} The nominal national force remained small and focused on suppressing local insurrections. The capabilities of the army, as Faysal himself formulated them, were focused on the mission of simultaneously suppressing two uprisings distant from one another — presumably in northern Kurdish and southern Shia areas.\footnote{46 See, Kadhim, ibid., 152.} Bell, who fancied herself a partisan of the Iraqi national cause, nonetheless was clear when pressed by al-Askari that a large conscript army was not in the offing as long as the British dominated the Iraqi state.

In the evening we talked of the Arab Army. Under the terms of the Mandate conscription may not be applied, and Jafar [al-Askari] is beginning to wonder how he will get recruits – a difficult problem. He had been to the great people and tried to prove to them that the sole object of the Provisional Council summoned by the Naqib was to lay the foundations of National Institutions. But they would reply only that they wanted a govt. elected by the people and that nothing else was of any use.\footnote{47 See, Bell, ibid., 572.}
The Iraqi Army remained small during the Mandate era, never numbering much more than 5,600 soldiers, and heavily dependent on British armaments, training, and white officers. As is evident from the British diplomatic correspondence of the era, members of Persian-influenced Shia tribes were considered by the British to be little more than dregs of Iraqi society and certainly not members of one of Iraq’s “martial races”. In any case, it was not clear that those segments of Iraqi society possessing the largest potential reserves of military labor would willingly supply it to the Sharifian state, regardless of British feelings on the subject.

Conscription itself later assumed symbolic importance as a mark of Iraqi state sovereignty over Iraq’s various communities, and the right of rulers to invoke the authority of the state when impressing military labor. Likewise, it came to symbolize freedom from foreign domination and Iraqi state’s right to mobilize its human resources for war making as a full member of the international states system, and was one of the first policies adopted by the Iraqi government after 1932.

“Conscription was an article of faith for the sharifian officers and for those who believed that the strength of the Iraqi state lay in its armed forces,” writes Tripp in his history of Iraq.

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48 See, H. Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff, “Future of Military Forces in Iraq”, Rush and Priestland, ibid., Vol. 4, 403. Trenchard discusses the “leavening” of Iraqi forces with British officers as a means of lessening Imperial expenditure on supporting regular British units. “In no case are British Officers to be subordinate to Iraqi Officers in matters of command and discipline,” he wrote, thus illustrating the imbalance of power between the nominally sovereign Iraqi state and its Imperial sponsor.

49 See, “Composition of the Iraqi Army”, dispatch from The High Commissioner for Iraq, in Rush and Priestland., ibid, Vol. 4, 138-139. Kurds and Shia Arabs were singled out as not meeting British racial and class criteria. “It is unwise to recruit Persians for the ‘Iraq Army’. They cannot be expected to have a spark of loyalty to the Iraq government and the beggar type recruited is most undesirable.”
Continuing the late Ottoman ideal of military education as the token and engine of modernity, Iraqi officers — products of just such an education — saw conscription as the key to the disciplined creation of a new social order to meet the needs of the state, as they themselves defined those needs. These modernizing and nation-building rationales were to become increasingly current among the officials of the Iraqi state and would eventually provide the background and justification for the militarism that became so much a part of Iraqi public life in the 1930’s. 

Whatever effect the small army might have had on Faysal’s standing as an Iraqi sovereign during the Mandate era, it was diluted by the direct recruitment of Iraqi Levies by the British High Commissioner. Levies were predominantly recruited from Iraq’s Christian Assyrian community, wore distinctive uniforms, and were under the direct command of the British. Among other duties, they were tasked with suppressing uprisings and defending the RAF bases used to deploy air power against restive Iraqi communities. Both the bases and the Levies used to guard them thus also assumed a place in the Iraqi political imagination as symbols of British overlordship, something that would lead to conflict and bloodshed after independence.

Furthermore, the suppression of uprisings of one or another of Iraq’s restive communities remained as the primary mission of the Army throughout the Mandate period. Whether suppression of these uprisings was being conducted on behalf of Iraqi state rather than British colonial interests was ambiguous in many cases. In some these cases, Faysal had to place himself in the awkward position of requesting air support from the RAF —

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50 See, Tripp, ibid., 59-60.

something that gave impetus to the creation of the Royal Iraqi Air Force in 1931, a year before formal independence. As Sluglett has it in his history of the Mandate era,

Political power had to lie in the hands of those who, however grudgingly or resentfully, realized their own deep dependence on the British connection. Hence in its task of preserving internal order the RAF was in reality merely propping one or other of the political groups who had combined to form the Iraqi government of the day.52

By the early 1930’s the question of independence had become pressing not only in Iraq, but throughout much of the world subject to European domination in one form or another. In what has become a famous Pan-Arab nationalist tract in Iraqi political history, Sami Shawkat, the Minister of Defense gave an address to the Central Secondary School in Baghdad in autumn of 1933 to explain and advocate for the introduction of compulsory military education into Iraqi schools. Evincing the achievements of Egyptian and Indian civilizations, which remained under British control, he remarked:

Money and learning, therefore, are not all that is needed for the independence of nations, nor are they the only axe with which to strike down the walls of imperialism and sever the chains of humiliation. But… There is something else more important than money and learning for preserving the honor of a nation and for keeping humiliation and enslavement at bay. That is strength…. On the banks of this great river which we see morning and evening Harun al-Rashid established his throne, and from this sandy shore he ruled more than 200 million souls. We will not deserve to take pride in him and to claim that we are his descendants if we do not restore what he built and what the enemies of the Arabs destroyed. The spirit of Harun al-Rashid and the spirit of al-Ma’mun want Iraq to have in a short while half a million soldiers and hundreds of airplanes… If we do not want death under the hooves of the horses and boots of the foreign armies, it is our duty to perfect the Profession of Death, the profession of the army, the sacred military profession.53

52 See, Sluglett, ibid., 192.

Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma’mun ruled the Abassid Caliphate in Baghdad in the late 8th and early 9th centuries respectively. Thus, the message of Iraqi independence and national grandeur was cast in terms likely to resonate with Sunni Pan-Arabists, but alienate Kurds on national grounds, and Shiites on sectarian grounds, due to their historical antipathy to the Abbasids. From the early stages of Iraqi statehood, the acts of imagining the state had the potential to produce “antagonistic visions of unity”.\textsuperscript{54} Ironically, it was a military assault against a putatively Iraqi community that same autumn that generated wide public support and cast the Iraqi Army as a symbol of unity and independence.

2.5 Independence and militarism

The status of the Iraqi Levies following the League of Nations recognition of Iraqi independence on October 3, 1932, was controversial. The terms of the British withdrawal allowed for Assyrians who formed the bulk of the Levies to retain their weapons and receive pension payments, which aroused resentment among many other Iraqis who viewed them as an alien element in Iraqi society that served as colonial enforcers.\textsuperscript{55} The underlying issue from the standpoint of Iraqi sovereignty, however, was the right of Iraq’s rulers to claim the exclusive authority to distinguish legitimate force from illegal violence by virtue of their position as commanders of the state.

The Army’s massacre of Iraq’s Assyrian community in August 1933 following a botched effort to disarm a contingent of armed Assyrians, a year after the end of the mandate and assumption of formal independence, gave the Iraqi Army credibility in the eyes of the

\textsuperscript{54} See, Haddad, title page, ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Marashi and Omissi, ibid.
national community it claimed to represent. The massacre directed against the predominantly Christian Assyrian minority that settled in northern Iraq in the wake of dislocations of World War I was viewed as a blow against a symbol of British domination. Photographs of the era show large crowds in the street celebrating the Iraqi Army’s defeat of the remnants of the Iraqi Levies and the ethno-political community they belonged to. According to contemporary accounts, Colonel Bakr Sidqi, the Iraqi Kurdish commander of the operation, became a national hero.

The prestige conferred upon Sidqi within Iraqi nationalist circles by the Assyrian massacre strengthened his position within the nascent military and the Iraqi state as a whole. Despite his Kurdish ethnicity, his prominence and political support was based on his position as Iraqi nationalist, with the underlying assumption that authentic Iraqi nationalism was culturally Arab and Sunni. The Iraqi state’s troubled relations with its Kurdish ethnic minority has its roots in this era. Although Sidqi’s actions indicated that there were alternative framings of Iraqi nationalism that cut across ethnonational and sectarian divides, his Kurdish identity proved to be a persistent problem and ultimately contributed to his demise in 1937.

Darwisha, writing of the five major Kurdish uprisings that took place between 1921 and 1936, remarked, ”The natural tension that would be expected to exist between two ethnically separated groups, and that could have been lessened by adopting conciliatory political and cultural policies, was in fact exacerbated into an ever deepening fissure by the

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56 See, Tripp, ibid., 78

57 See, Davis, ibid., 60-62
The relentless pursuit of exclusionary Arab nationalist symbols and values by the political and cultural elite in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{58}

The death of King Faysal in September 1933 after years of declining health coincided almost exactly with the rise of Sidqi as an Iraqi political-military leader in the wake of the Assyrian massacre. Faisal’s son Ghazi assumed the throne as King Ghazi I at the age of 21, and assumed all the senior military ranks of Iraq. He is described by Tripp as a man “who had little interest in the political world,” and “showed neither his father’s sensitivity to the forces at work in Iraqi society nor his acumen in drawing them into the circles of royal patronage.”\textsuperscript{59}

Between 1933 and 1936 a number of uprisings took place in the Iraqi south that Sidqi — who had been promoted to General after the Assyrian massacre — was called upon to suppress by the Prime Minister, Yasin al-Hashemi.\textsuperscript{60} Ironically, the revolts could be traced in many cases to resistance to conscription. The army’s role in suppressing the revolts also highlighted its growing power in Iraqi politics. The two short-lived governments before al-Hashemi had been forced to resign when his two close allies in the army, his own brother Taha al-Hashemi and Sidqi, refused to put down uprisings in Shiite areas.\textsuperscript{61}

Further machinations produced an alliance between Sidqi and Hikmat Suleiman, who conspired to launch a military coup to depose the Hashemi government and replace it with one led by Suleiman in 1936. The coup was the first military coup in the Arab world, and

\textsuperscript{58} See, Darwisha, ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{59} See, Tripp, ibid., 78.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 80-81.
marked the ascendancy of the Iraqi Army as an autonomous actor in Iraqi politics. In the course of the coup Jafar al-Askari, the father of the army, was murdered by troops loyal to Sidqi when he attempted to intervene on behalf of the King and broker a settlement. This created a deep rift with a faction of officers whose careers had taken root under the patronage of al-Askari.62

The coup took place as a major expansion in the size of the national army as conscription was being implemented. Between 1932 and 1941, the Iraqi Army grew from 12,000 to 40,000 troops. The demands conscription placed upon Iraqi society, together with the growing size and open intervention of the military in politics, created a need to legitimate an increasingly powerful and intrusive state. “Suleiman, Sidqi, and the Ahali Group needed to justify their use of the military to overthrow the Yasin Al-Hashimi government,” write Marashi and Salama.

Their need for legitimacy [emphasis added] was highlighted by the fact that their action was the first military coup in Iraq, never mind the Arab world, and thus unprecedented in the politics of the region. In a November radio broadcast, in an almost apologetic tone, the Suleiman government justified its cooperation with the ‘gallant army officers’ promising that they would strengthen the pride of the nation, the Army, in addition to delivering reforms of education, unemployment and land distribution.63

Iraqi politics as it emerged in the mid twentieth century was highly personalized. The narrowing group of military officers at the apex of state authority often claimed to act as disinterested servants of the state, but in reality used their growing power to control state

62 See, Tripp, ibid., 86.

63 See, Marashi and Salama, ibid., 49.
institutions and networks of patronage. “Key state institutions became instruments in the hands of powerful individuals and their followings, encouraging factionalism among officials and throwing into question the nature of their loyalties. Nowhere was this phenomenon more apparent than in the officer corps of the Iraqi army,” writes Tripp.

Sidqi himself was assassinated in 1937 at the behest of pan-Arabist officers who doubted the Iraqi Kurdish general’s Arab nationalist bona fides. In the Darwinian world of Iraq’s militarized politics, four colonels emerged as arbiters of military and political power in Iraq as the world edged towards general war in the late 1930’s. Colonel Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, Colonel Kamal Shabib, Colonel Fahmi Said, and Colonel Mahmud Salman were both pan-Arabist and anti-British, which largely reflected the views of Iraq’s ruling minority that viewed Iraq as part of a larger Sunni Muslim civilization in the Arab world.

Iraqi militarism emerged in tandem with educational initiatives and reforms that sought to create a disciplined and monocultural society according to the Prussian model. This model had first been introduced into Iraqi political thought at the Ottoman military academies under German tutelage in the late 19th and early 20th century, and was encouraged further in the late 1930’s by the German ambassador, who had the ear of the four colonels, or ‘Golden Square’ as they came to be known. The Iraqi state became a producer of official state nationalism that was overseen, curated, and protected by those who commanded the army.

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64 See, Dawisha, ibid., 96.
65 See, Tripp, ibid., 75.
66 See, Simon, ibid.
The death of King Ghazi while at the wheel of a sports car in 1939 weakened the monarchy still further, as his son, Faisal II was still in infancy and not able to assume the throne. His cousin, Prince Abdullah assumed the regency at a time when the monarchy was already in crisis, and had little opportunity to develop his own networks of patronage and influence within the army, which was central to command of the state itself. Furthermore, the commanders of the Golden Square had remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire during the Arab Revolt in their formative years, and thus had little personal connection or stake in the British backed monarchy.67

In 1941, with Britain seemingly on the ropes in its struggle against Nazi Germany, the colonels of the Golden Square decided to dispense with the monarchy entirely rather than content themselves with dictating its policies and personnel decision. Colonel Sabbagh, commander of the Army’s 3rd infantry division, surrounded the British air base at Habbaniya and ordered the garrison there to surrender. Prince Abdullah, for his part, was chased into exile and the new regime declared that Iraq was abrogating the strategic cooperation treaty it had with Britain in favor of alignment with Nazi Germany.68

Perhaps Britain would have been able to countenance an Iraqi republic in 1941 had it been commanded by men generally sympathetic or at least acquiescent to core British strategic priorities in the Middle East. The potential of losing a source of oil to the Germans and one of its primary access routes to India was too much for the British. An expeditionary force was dispatched from Jordan to relieve the garrison at Habbaniya. In something of an

67 See, Marashi and Salama, ibid., 52.
68 See, ibid., 62-63.
historical irony, the Jordanian Arab Legion, which shared sharifian roots with the Iraqi Army, participated in the operation. Within weeks, the Iraqi Army had been scattered along with the Golden Square plotters, who were all forced into exile. Prince Abdullah was promptly reinstated as the Iraqi regent.

Although the monarchy survived for the time being, the episode illustrated its underlying weakness and lack of deep roots in an Iraqi political society dominated by military men. For the remainder of the war, the Iraqi Army fought on behalf of the Allies, although the scale of its participation was comparatively minor. When the influence of Nasser’s Arab nationalism began to be felt in the postwar period, secret societies of “Free Officers” formed in Iraq. Nasser, who seized power from a British backed monarch in Egypt in 1952, made a habit of using his radio program “Voice of the Arabs” to taunt Arabs in the surviving Hashemite monarchies in Iraq and Jordan by accusing them of subservience to imperialist masters.69

Faysal II, who reached his majority in 1953, was enthroned in Iraq as the anti-monarchical spirit of the times gripped the region. Palace intrigues led by the former regent Prince Abdullah further weakened his position.70 Finally, on July 14th 1958, coup plotters led by Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy and murdered the king and his family outside the royal palace. Nuri al-Said, one of the last surviving figures of the Arab Revolt and Mandate era who had served in many senior ministerial posts under the


monarchy, was tracked down and murdered as he tried to flee Baghdad. His body was then disinterred and dragged through the streets of the city after having been briefly buried after the murder.

2.6 1958: From Coup to Revolution

The monarchy had existed for years on something like political life support in Iraq before finally being swept away by a comparatively minor Iraqi military officer acting with a few co-conspirators. The coup itself was proof that the monarchy lacked a deep reservoir of substantive commitment from key sectors of an Iraqi political society, which by 1958 centered on the military. Nonetheless, for as long as it survived, the monarchy served as the organizational and symbolic entity that legitimated the use of Iraqi military force. Even if in practical terms the balance of power had rested with the generals rather than Iraqi royalty for a long time, the generals had to invest the monarchy with some actual authority in order for it to serve at least formally as a referent of sovereignty. Now, with the monarchy gone and the military at the apex of state politics, the military was confronted with the task of legitimating its power without the benefit of a visible referent of sovereignty external to itself.

Two new realities of Iraqi political life were established as a consequence of the [1958] coup. First, from being one of several competing political forces, the military emerged as the ultimate source of power in Iraq. A relatively small group of disgruntled army officers had succeeded in erasing an entire political system. Second, the aftermath of the coup illustrated the vital role of mass mobilization as an instrument of political control. The Free Officers encouraged the Iraqi people to take to the streets in order to present the appearance that the coup was a popular and thus legitimate [emphasis added] revolution -- the better thereby to preclude outside intervention or a possible counter-coup by loyalist army officers. Henceforth, the relative power of political
parties was determined not by size of party membership or by coherence of ideological message, but by capacity for mass mobilization.71

Despite the clear Nasserist influence on the coup plotters, Qasim’s own ancestry was Shia Arab on his mother’s side and Kurdish on his father’s, and therefore he did not share the affinity of some of his military rivals and co-conspirators for Sunni pan-Arabism or political union with Egypt. However, as indicated above, he did adapt the Nasserist style of mass politics that drew on socialist and anti-imperialist motifs while seeking to direct its ideological focus inwards.

Qasim actively promoted a cult of personality of himself as the “Sole Leader” of Iraq, which implicitly highlighted the precarious position self-legitimation placed him in: theoretically, any army officer and a few trusted friends could seize control of the Iraqi state and declare a revolution. For coups to succeed, they need to make a successful claim of political legitimacy, first and foremost among the conspirators, but also among a wider circle of power brokers, civil servants, and their key social constituencies — hence Qasim’s prodigious efforts to generate the appearance of mass support for his revolution.72 In effect, it this presented an image of illiberal popular sovereignty, with the referent of ultimate authority located in a mythologized people constituted in the regime’s own imagination rather than through a contractual process of constitution.

71 See, Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, eds., The future of Iraq: dictatorship, democracy, or division? (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 33.

72 For analysis of this dynamic in comparative context, see Koonings, Kees, and Dirk Kruijt, eds. Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the age of democracy. (Zed Books, 2002), 25. Koonings writes, “Since political armies are so concerned with the protection of the state as the core national institution -- and while this is in itself is seen as lending automatic legitimacy to the political activism displayed by the military -- the act of taking over the state by force and of the subsequent closure of politics requires specific forms of legitimization.”
Although he lived modestly, Qasim required personal acclaim not only for his own satisfaction but for his survival for this very reason. Minus a visible bond between leader and people, it would not be difficult for future plotters to claim that they should be Iraq’s Sole Leader. Beyond his own cult of personality, he took an activist role in propagating a new national culture and narrative that served the purpose of buttressing the historical legitimacy of a regime that came to power on the heels of a coup conspiracy, whatever ideological commitments he might have otherwise had.

“It was not long before the spectacle of July 1958 was incorporated into the myth of the Iraqi revolution,” writes Tripp, “Some used it to reinforce the claim that a profound social movement, rather than a coup d’état, had occurred. Others tried to suggest that by participating they had helped to determine the outcome, thereby justifying their claims to share, or indeed to monopolize, the revolutionary inheritance.”73 In any case, revolutionary legacy of popular legitimation rather than (supposedly) traditional authority of kings and prophets became the primary referent of sovereignty — a characteristic of Iraqi statehood that survived until the fall of Baghdad in 2003.

Iraqis assess the various coups, revolutions, and even the 2003 invasion itself, in this light. Thus, successive generations of Iraqis, including the current one, have debated whether regime changes were illegal coups or glorious revolutions, and whether these represented corrupt and particularistic interests or principles of social progress and inclusion. Qasim himself was deposed and murdered in 1963 in a coup led by his former co-conspirator ‘Abd al-Salam Arif. The Ba’th Party briefly came to power in the wake of the coup before being

73 See, Tripp, ibid., 145.
deposed in a counter-coup. Finally, in 1968, the Ba’th Party seized power again and successfully held it until 2003.

2.7 Assessing the Symbolic Legacy of Iraqi Statehood and Militarism: 1920 - 1968

In this final section of the chapter I build upon the historical summary given above in order to show that no matter how artificial or reliant on outside support their state was during the mandate and early independence eras, Iraqis produced symbols of statehood that served to demarcate the purposes and bounds of state action in Iraq, including the use of military force. Given the demographic and cultural realities of Iraq, it is perhaps not surprising that the flag and the state it came to represent in Iraq never answered the question for many Iraqis as to why a Hijazi clan from the Arabian peninsula should rule over them, especially when it was clear that its survival in power relied heavily upon British military assistance. One retired Iraqi general who entered the Baghdad Military College as a cadet in 1958 related to me how both the symbols of the monarchy and any residual support for it among military officers quickly evaporated.

The changes were rather simple. The stars [on flags and emblems] changed from seven points [representing the first seven verses of the Koran roughly equivalent to the Nicene Creed] to eight points. The emblem of the Army also changed after the end of the monarchy and beginning of the republican era. Those who had won Iraqi military medals such as the Order of Two Rivers (Rafidain) continued to wear them, but officers who had been awarded specifically British medals quietly disposed of them. The Army took on some superficial aspects of Nasserist republicanism. Officers’ rank titles were changed to reflect republican ideas, and the symbols of the Iraqi crown disappeared from uniforms and insignia.74

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74 Interview in Amman, Jordan, April 4, 2013.
The flag of the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq was replaced with a republican banner designed by Qasim to evoke Iraq’s pre-Arab and pre-Islamic past, and a new state ceremonial to replace the one performed by the monarchy was gradually enshrined. Nonetheless, there was not a concerted effort to dispense with the state or its symbols as there was after 2003. The Rafidain medal was first awarded by Faisal I in 1927 as an order of merit in both civil and military spheres, was actually briefly discontinued after 1958 but was revived by subsequent republican regimes of the 1960’s and then the Ba’thist regime minus the image of the royal crown in its center. A new medal commemorating participation in the anti-British 1941 “Golden Square” coup against the Iraqi monarchy was also introduced in 1959. In this way, Iraqi national narrative as symbolically represented on its national military costume was gradually reshaped in the post-monarchy civil-military sphere to reflect anti-imperialist sentiment of the day.

The same process of revision extended to other areas of the symbolic world of the state, as symbols closely associated with the monarchy and British domination, such as an equestrian statue of King Faysal I in downtown Baghdad, disappeared from public view while those perceived to represent the Iraqi state were retained and repurposed with slight modification. Although efforts to rewrite history did not assume the proportions they later did under the Ba’thist regime of Saddam Husayn, Iraqi elites sought to adapt old symbols and create new ones to represent a new national narrative that could legitimate a new political order. The transition was not as harsh or extreme as subsequent transitions would be.

75 See, Davis, ibid., 111.

During the first anniversary military parade of the 1958 coup, held on July 14th, 1959, iconic imagery of Qasim could still be juxtaposed against the flag of the monarchy era. Likewise, Qasim himself continued to wear decorations from the previous era on his uniform.

Nonetheless, in substantive ideological terms, the ultimate referent of the state authority, and by extension its claim to monopolize the production of legitimate violence, underwent a radical shift. No longer would ties to the Hashemite clan and its claimed ancestry and military lineage traceable to the Arab Revolt be the primary determinants of power and privilege in Iraq. The direction this shift should take, whether towards the broader Arab world to the west or towards a more uniquely Iraqi national community, became a much greater source of political contention than the disposal of the symbolic remains of the monarchy was. Efforts to appropriate the revolutionary legacy of 1958 consumed the next three decades of Iraqi politics, as different factions vied for control of this scarce legitimating resource.

The same retired general, speaking of the political atmosphere within the Baghdad Military Academy in the late 1950’s, noted that political turmoil was unleashed within the ranks by the possibility of defining a new political order free of overt foreign domination.

There was strife between the communists, the qawmi nationalists, and the independents within our ranks. Even the leaders of the revolution were separated in two main divisions between communists and qawmi nationalists. Qasim was on the side of the communists even though he was not one himself. And there were a lot of problems from without, particularly with ‘Abd al-Nasir, who had a bad influence with his Pan-Arabist ideology. So the communists were with Qasim against Nasir, with his slogan of

Arab unity. All of this had an effect on us cadets at the military college... It did not erupt into open violence, but there was strife and unrest between us during my first year there.\textsuperscript{78}

These political issues were not simply a matter of philosophical preference, but had a direct effect on Iraqi military alliances, doctrine, and intrigues. Iraq withdrew from the U.S. and British sponsored CENTO military pact modeled after NATO and began accepting military advisers and equipment from the Soviet Union. Rejection of Western alliances had broad support on both sides of the \textit{qawmi} and \textit{watani} divide in Iraq, given the country’s history of British domination and humiliating alliances. Arab unity in the form of political alliance or union with Nasirist Egypt was much more contentious, with the Ba’thists and their sympathizers firmly on the Arabist side.\textsuperscript{79}

In 1963 Qasim’s erstwhile co-conspirator ‘Abd al-Salim Arif led a Ba’thist inspired coup in which Qasim and his inner circle were killed. Once again, an Iraqi coup leader faced a legitimation crisis and sought public demonstrations of support from supporters among the general populace representing “the people”. “The Iraqis immediately proclaimed their desire to form a political union with Nasser.”\textsuperscript{80} Barnett writes, “Such proclamations stemmed not only from ideology but also from a desire to generate political support from the demonstrators in the streets of Baghdad who were shouting the name of Nasser.” In one sign of this shift, the short-lived flag of the Qasim era was replaced with a tricolor flag that, save

\textsuperscript{78} April 4, 2013 interview, ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

for a brief period after the 2003 U.S.-British invasion of Iraq, has served as the basic template for the Iraqi national flag ever since.

The fortunes of the Ba‘th party fluctuated within the new government until 1968, when a coup led by Hassan al-Bakr deposed Arif’s brother ‘Abd al-Rahman who had taken over the presidency after the elder Arif was killed in a helicopter crash believed by many to be an act of sabotage.\(^\text{81}\) An ailing and increasingly irrelevant Bakr was succeeded by Saddam Husayn, who forced his resignation in 1979, but in reality had been the de facto commander of the Iraqi state throughout the 1970’s.

Perhaps the primary summarizing symbol of the early revolutionary era became the \textit{nusba al-hurriya} or Liberation Monument, constructed during Qasim’s tenure in 1961 by noted Iraqi architect Jawad Salim. Until that time there had only been three public sculptures in Baghdad, all constructed by the British. These were General Maude, the WWI-era conqueror of Baghdad, King Faysal, whose depiction on horseback was placed outside the state radio and television broadcasting station, and Mushin Sadun, a former prime minister.\(^\text{82}\) Both Faysal and Maude’s statues were pulled down, broken in pieces, and cast into the Tigris during the tumult of the 1958 coup. Interestingly, a replica of the Faysal statue was later commissioned by Saddam Husayn and placed in central Baghdad on the 31st anniversary of the July 14 Revolution in 1989.\(^\text{83}\)

\(^{81}\) This view was often related to me by retired Iraqi officers exiled in Amman.

\(^{82}\) See, Makiya, ibid., 81.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 57.
The monument was constructed as bronze wall-relief of figures placed against an elevated wall of white stone in downtown Baghdad on Liberation Square, evoking ancient Assyrian and Babylonian artistic forms. The central figure in the mural is an Iraqi soldier using his arms to break prison bars, which are typically interpreted as a symbol of the physical and cultural domination of imperialism. The placement of other figures in the monument representing different classes of Iraqis from the ancient past to the present has been read in various ways, but most emphasize the central place of the national army in the creation of Iraqi identity through the act of liberation.

Although we might regard it as a summarizing symbol of Iraqi national identity and narrative, the monument also illustrates root metaphors and key scenarios that constitute the primary elaborating symbols of Iraqi state politics as they were constituted in the middle of the 20th century. In Iraq during the 1960’s, features of a national discourse emerged, even if they existed more as sites of symbolic contestation rather than as part of a national consensus on the origins, purpose, and essential cultural identity of the political community. The Army assumed a central place in Iraqi political life both as the primary site of (violent) state politics, a summarizing symbol of state-centric Iraqi identity, and an instrument of symbolic elaboration as indicated by the nusba al-hurriya.

Until 1958, Iraqi foreign policy and thus its identity as an actor in the international arena was constrained in often humiliating ways by Iraq’s relationship with Western powers,

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84 Ibid., 83.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
particularly Great Britain. The nusba al-hurriya’s image of the soldier breaking prison bars indicated a break with these constraints and the emergence of a large national army as an instrument of an independent foreign policy based on militant nationalism. The issue of conscription and the freedom to build such an army, which had been a contentious issue since the mandate era, was subsumed in this narrative. The roots of this idea could be seen in Shawkat’s ‘Arts of Death’ speech in the 1930’s minus his exhortations to link the institution of the monarchy with national independence.

The other major monument of this period commissioned by Qasim was the Monument to the Unknown Soldier constructed on Firdous square in Baghdad. Built by Iraqi architect Rifat Chadirji using the Ctesiphon arch, constructed in 400 A.D. by the Parthian Persians as an inspiration, it was inaugurated on the first anniversary of the July 14 coup in 1959. The choice of inspiration reflected the regime’s watani sensibilities and preference for cultural forms that drew upon pre-Islamic and pre-Arab themes. It also marked, together with the nusba al-hurriya, a new phase in Iraqi public life.

“Qasim’s injection of the state into the realm of reassessing culture and the past represented the first systematic effort in modern Iraq to officially restructure historical memory,” writes Davis. “The state’s extensive involvement in cultural production not only represented a new role for the state, but also established a model for Saddam Husayn and the Ba’th Party to follow after the 1968 putsch that brought them to power.”

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88 See, Davis, ibid., 110.
The military became the primary instrument for achieving these goals in both the symbolic and physical worlds. The anniversary of the founding of the Imam Musa Kadhim battalion in 1921 under the mandate became an important national holiday that was commemorated in as Iraqi Army Day — an invented tradition that assumed grandiose proportions under Saddam and was revived under the current regime of Nuri al-Maliki. Awards and decorations also began to proliferate after 1958, particularly those designed to place a patina of legitimacy on the string of coups and countercoups that characterized the era. This also assumed greater scale during the Ba’thist period and was a major component of the regime’s strategy of social and political control.89

2.8 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I posed the following questions: What prompted the creative and expansionary processes of military symbolism? What are the physical objects, cultural relics, and symbolic structures produced by this historical process that represented a particular imagining of Iraqi statehood? To what degree did they become ubiquitous and recognizable to Iraqis across Iraq’s ethnonational, sectarian, and political divides? And finally, were they meaningful to Iraqis in substantive terms?

Symbolism was a part of the Iraqi military from the very beginning as evidenced by the attention given to the naming of the first army battalion, but the army itself did not emerge as a national symbol until much later. Early military decorations were introduced by Faysal’s brothers who held the thrones of Transjordan and (briefly) the Hejaz, but these

commemorated WWI service during the Arab Revolt and indicated the blurred boundaries of nationality in the 1920’s that emphasized the identity of the monarchy over that of the nascent state. The 1920 revolt became a part of the Iraqi state imaginary, but was not initially built into its official ceremonial or symbols given that its target was the British power that guaranteed the survival of the Hashemite monarchy.

The first major Iraqi decorations for valor and service to the state were not created until 1926-1927, the period following the collapse of the Hashemite monarchy in the Hejaz and the signing of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1926 that established Iraq’s modern boundaries, leaving Faysal with the problem of expanding his authority within them. Overall, the place of the Army in public life was not particularly prominent. This reflected the status of the army, which remained a small force numbering just over 5,000 men until shortly before formal independence in 1932 when its ranks began to expand. It was thus regarded, more-or-less correctly, as an adjunct to British interests with only nominal Iraqi control.90

The achievement of formal independence in 1932 followed quickly by the Assyrian massacre of 1933 led by Colonel Bakr Sidqi established the Iraqi Army as a national force and the dominant player in Iraqi politics. By leading the massacre, Sidqi established a link between militant nationalism and the national military that became a defining feature of Iraqi politics. Military education was introduced into the schools and Faysal’s successor Ghazi introduced or modified a number of military decorations and generally was drawn into its orbit as more capable and aggressive military men began to dominate the state.

The physical destruction of the monarchy in 1958, however, was the watershed moment in Iraqi history and marked a major expansion of the military’s role in determining the identity of the state and realizing its aspirations with an international system of states. The construction of a new republican identity of the state in symbols and narratives was a key to this process. Relatively junior military men seized the reins of power and also set about the task of creating new cultural forms of legitimation, which were reflected in the construction of major public monuments, the proliferation of new awards and decorations, and the incorporation of the Army into major public holidays.

The military became a summarizing symbol of the Iraqi state, which represented a coherent historical narrative of compulsory unity and independence from foreign domination. The *nusba al-hurriya* monument, with an Iraqi soldier as the central protagonist in the national narrative, was a tangible representation of emerging ideas of Iraqi statehood. This served as a resource used by succeeding Iraqi regimes to frame their own actions and the possible ways the Iraqi state could be imagined. Likewise, the popularization of politics, even if the bounds of participation were tightly controlled, became more pronounced as various coup leaders sought popular mandates to seize the revolutionary mantle for themselves.

The regimes of the decade that followed 1958 were short lived, but the symbolic structures of state militarism that guided the Ba’athist regime for nearly four decades took shape during this period. These were constitutive of the armed forces as a national symbol and instrument of sovereignty, while also being constitutive of the identity of Iraq’s rulers and the favored segments of the political-military class they drew upon for support. The
generals who sought to rule Iraq continually sought to evince an imaginary of the Iraqi state through articulation of symbolic discourses, which justified their place at the apex of organizations and status hierarchies used to rule state and society.
Illustration 2.1. Above: A photograph of the detail of the *nusb al-hurriya* monument in Baghdad, c. 1983, depicting an Iraqi soldier symbolically breaking the prison bars of monarchy and colonial domination.
Chapter 3: The Ba’thist Era and the Expansion of the State

3.1 Historical Background

The 1958 coup that deposed the monarchy came to be broadly construed as a revolution that at once purged Iraq of an illegitimate political system and paved the way for political and social progress. The struggle for access to the revolutionary legacy became acute in Iraq during the 1960’s as successive groups of military conspirators competed with one another for control of the Iraqi state, and with it the Iraqi national narrative. This narrative was edited, rewritten, and expanded by successive rulers to legitimize institutional arrangements under which they claimed sovereignty.

This narrative had several consistent themes that could be reinterpreted according to political context and exigency: the legitimate meaning of revolution; the role of the army in Iraqi history; the nature of appropriate demands that rulers make on the people; the legitimate use of force against other Iraqi citizens; and the meaning of sacrifice, suffering, and death in war. The Ba’thist regime took this struggle to new extremes as it built a large coercive apparatus of interlocking and competing security agencies that extensively penetrated Iraqi society, while embarking on a program of military expansion and aggrandizement. This process included both the enlargement of the military structure and an extensive investment in symbolism, especially after the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980.¹

¹ See, Baram, ibid., and Davis, ibid.
The size of the army nearly doubled between 1975, when Saddam signed the Algiers accord with the Shah of Iran, and 1980, when he ordered the invasion of Iran. In the Algiers accord, the Ba’thist regime granted concessions to its secular counterpart in Teheran in exchange for withdrawal of Iranian support for Iraqi Kurdish insurgents. The perceived humiliation of the accords combined with Saddam’s own ambitions for grandeur as leader of the Arab world and of its preeminent military power drove this expansion. After the Shah was deposed in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the new regime actively targeted Iraq’s Shi’a majority with its revolutionary agitation, and thus was viewed by Saddam as a threat. It was also an opportunity to use his army to defend the (Sunni) Arab world and realize his historical destiny as its leader.

This 1975-1980 military growth paled in comparison with the mobilization that took place after the initiation of war with Iran. The invasion was hastily planned and few outside a narrow circle of Iraqi generals close to Saddam knew of the plans for war more than several days in advance. The predictable result was a series of minor initial successes followed by failure to seize tactical initiative and a grinding stalemate that lasted 8 years. The Iraqi army ultimately reached 56 divisions at the height of the war, becoming the fourth largest army in the world after

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2 Marashi, ibid., 123. Marashi writes, “Between 1973 and 1980 the Iraqi military expanded on a level unlike that of any other Arab military during those years. The size of the Iraqi military doubled to 210,000 men, with the addition of nine divisions.”


4 See, ibid., 10. The authors’ write: “There was an underlying assumption that the Iraqis, like the Israelis in 1967, would win a Blitzkrieg victory. But how military force was going to accomplish such a victory without clear operational or tactical goals was a mystery that Saddam and those surrounding him were incapable of examining. Instead, the Iraqi Army trundled into Iran with the hope that something might turn up. What turned up was completely unexpected: an extended war of attrition in which the existence of the Ba’thist regime was at stake.” Estimates of the size of the Iraqi Army during the war vary due to the effects of war on new unit formation, desertion, and losses. Senior retired officers most often quoted a size of 56 divisions. Isam Khafaji states that under Ba’thist rule the size of Iraq army doubled from six division in mid 1960’s to twelve in 1980 and 44 divisions during Iran Iraq war. Furthermore, in the first year of war military expenditure reached 70 percent of Iraqi GDP. See, Isam al-Khafaji. “War as a vehicle for the rise and demise of a state-controlled society: The case of Ba’thist Iraq,” in War, institutions, and social change in the Middle East (California: 2000), 267.
the Soviet Union, China, and the United States. Casualty figures for the Iran-Iraq war are notoriously imprecise, but it is clear that they reached into the hundreds of thousands on both sides.

Even in a highly authoritarian state, this placed a significant burden of legitimation upon the Ba’thist regime to demonstrate that it had the right above others to lead the country into war as an act of sovereign statehood. “There were reports emerging of sedition within the military concerning the legitimacy of war against Iran,” Marashi writes. “Even the leadership realized that the conflict not only had to be won on the battlefield but through an ideological campaign that could spark enthusiasm in Iraqi society and the military tasked with combatting Iran.”

Militaristic values were penetrated into Iraqi society on a par with the era of Husri’s and Shawkat’s glorification of Iraq’s pan-Arab army [in the 1930’s]. Part of the war populism directed towards Iraq’s fighting ranks included the label for the Iran-Iraq War and the symbols surrounding it. The official Iraqi term for the Iran-Iraq War became Qadisiyyat Saddam, a reference to the first battle between the Persians and Arabs in which the Arab Muslims emerged victorious. The battle, which took place in AD 657, led by the Arab General Sa’ad ibn Wawwas [sic] lasted for three days, resulting in the end of Persian Sassanian rule in Iraq. The collapse of Zoroastrian Iranian forces at Qadisiyya allowed the Arabs to spread Islam eastward, thus giving this battle a religious significance, an analogy that Hussein hoped the Iraqis would make.

This era witnessed the proliferation of military awards and decorations, introduction of elaborate naming conventions of military units and weapons designed to emphasize preferred

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5 See, “Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War”, FMFRP 3-203. (Quantico, Virginia: U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 1990.) The publication was released by the Marine Corps in advance of the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq as a means of educating military leaders about the likely response of the Iraqi military to a decisive engagement with U.S. forces. In retrospect, it is clear that it overstated the capabilities of the Iraqi forces. However, it shows that the Iraqi armed forces had demonstrated a baseline level of effectiveness that was taken seriously within the U.S. military establishment.


7 See, Marashi et al., ibid., 135.

8 Ibid., 136-137.
parts of the Iraqi national narrative, the construction of major monuments valorizing the military and commemoration of battles, heroes, and martyrs, and modification of the national holiday calendar to introduce or expand several major ceremonial occasions. I will elaborate on this phenomenon below in order to show how the Ba‘thist regime used the military to appropriate, modify, or dispense with existing elements of national narrative and symbolism, while creating new ones to suit its needs of mobilization and pursuit of ideological goals.

3.2 Chapter organization, sources and methods

This outline of symbolic manipulations of the Ba‘thist period outlined above will be expanded upon in two sections below that deal with the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War respectively. In each section, I will show how events, their interpretation, and mindful efforts at manipulation reshaped the narrative of the state. The purpose is to illustrate and analyze processes of cultural construction during the Ba‘thist period, which were specifically directed towards the legitimation or stigmatization of regime efforts to mobilize legitimate violence on behalf of the Iraqi state. We can then see how symbolically significant objects or events may be “endowed with specific national and revolutionary meanings” or stripped of them, metaphors may change, or certain key scenarios may become salient or lose their relevance.

I draw upon several diverse sources to conduct this analysis. These include the secondary literature on Iraqi political culture of the Ba‘thist period, interviews with retired Iraqi officers, pictures and descriptions of cultural relics of militarism, such as medals, monuments, uniforms, official histories of the Iraqi military produced by the Ba‘thist regime, naming conventions of

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military units and weapons, national military cemeteries, and official press accounts of the Iran-Iraq war and state ceremonial surrounding it. The regime produced cultural relics and practices to frame its vision of the Iraqi state. This was seen in the medals, monuments and ceremonies mentioned above, which can be analyzed as representations of symbolic structures that were constructed, modified, or destroyed over time. In the final section of this chapter, I separately analyze the Army Day holiday, the emergence of official military historiography, naming conventions, and the proliferation of awards and medals.

3.3 The Army as instrument of revolutionary rhetoric.

The Ba’thist state, with Saddam at its helm, was built in reference to — if not necessarily in sympathy with — the symbolic structures which emerged during the previous decades of Iraq’s emergence as a postcolonial state. First among these was the root metaphor of liberation represented by the key scenario of revolution and summarized in the *nusb al-hurriyya* monument, which depicted an Iraqi soldier symbolically liberating the nation. The Ba’thist political sensibilities were in diametric opposition to Qasim’s in many ways, particularly as concerned the appropriate orientation of Iraqi nationalism, whether towards the Sunni Arab world or towards a more uniquely Iraqi multiethnic state. Indeed, Saddam himself was involved in an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Qasim in 1959 that later was consecrated as a public holiday during the Ba’thist period.¹⁰

¹¹ See, “Today is the Anniversary of the Rising of the Ba’th Against the Tyranny of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim.” *al-Jumhuriya* (The Republic), October 7th, 1997. The article’s critique of Qasim is not concerned with the lack of democratic procedures in his government as much as it is with his supposed ideological deviation from principles of the Revolution.
Successive coups of the 1960’s were presented as “corrective” revolutions that were necessary to purge Iraq of leaders that deviated from the true spirit of 1958. The 1968 coup led by Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr shared these revolutionary pretensions of the earlier coups, and established the Ba’th party as the penultimate political force in Iraq, in no small part due the exertions of his deputy Saddam Husayn who first took over the security apparatus of the Ba’th party and then over a period of several years, the Iraqi state itself. Husayn had applied to and been rejected by the Baghdad Military College, but nonetheless fancied himself a brilliant military commander and frequently posed in the uniform of a highly decorated officer that had graduated from the Army’s prestigious staff academy, ultimately assuming the rank of Field Marshal. This compulsion to present himself has something more than a village thug that had murdered his way to the top of Iraqi politics was characteristic of Husayn.

Nonetheless, broadly held ideas regarding the parameters and purposes of legitimate Iraqi statehood gave the symbolic structures inherited by the Ba’athist regime a coherence that guided its own revolutionary activism. As will be detailed below, an anti-imperialist and socialist tinged revolutionary ideology that had broad currency in Iraq in the 1960’s was constitutive of the regime’s identity and also served a significant justificatory role in legitimating its use of violence in war and internal repression.

The regime of Saddam Husayn made extensive attempts to put forward the July 17-20, 1968 Ba’thist coup as the ultimate expression of Revolutionary ideals in modern Iraqi history.


This occurred simultaneously and in conjunction with efforts to appropriate the history of the Iraqi Army into the Ba’athist narrative and present the Army as an agent of history guided by the Ba’th Party on behalf of the Iraqi people. An historical essay published in the Party newspaper *Thawra* (revolution) on January 5th, 1981, the eve of the official 60-year anniversary of the Army’s founding, illustrates this point.\(^{13}\) Titled, “January of Commemoration, January of Victory”, the article presented little new content but was rather a continuation of the ubiquitous encounters with the state, which rigidly structured discursive interactions within the public sphere.

The author evaluated the broad sweep of the history of the modern Iraqi state, affixing value judgements and meanings to each of the multiplicity of intrigues, coups, and interventions, beginning with the British incitement and support of the Arab Revolt in 1916. In neighboring Jordan, where the Hashemite monarchy established by the British had survived, it was (and continues to be) referred to as The Great Arab Revolt. The role of the Sharif of Mecca, his sons, and their successors, in establishing and maintaining Arab governments in its wake was the lynchpin of the monarchy’s legitimation claims.\(^{14}\) One could find this terminology in Iraqi regime scripts of the 1980’s as well. However, the Arab role in the Revolt and founding of the Iraqi officer corps was emphasized, while the Hashemite monarchy that followed was officially

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\(^{13}\) See, *Thawra*, No. 3875, 5.

\(^{14}\) The Jordanian royal family maintains an official web site in memory of King Hussein (1935-1999), the grandson of Jordan’s first king Abdullah ([http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_arabrevolt.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/his_arabrevolt.html)) that presents the official view of Jordanian national history.
regarded as a colonial imposition and the role of the Sharif’s sons in founding the Iraqi and Jordanian states was downplayed.\textsuperscript{15}

Official attitudes of the Iraqi regime towards the monarchy would soften somewhat at the end of the decade, as evidenced by the installation of a replica of the equestrian statue of Faysal I in 1989 three decades after the original was pulled from its pedestal and cast into the Tigris in pieces, but the monarchy was regarded in official discourse of the early 1980’s as a collaborator-agent regime.\textsuperscript{16} The formation of the Imam Musa Kadhim battalion in 1921, considered in official historiography to be the first unit of the Iraqi Army, required the writer to thread an ideological needle by noting that many of the officers came from the Turkish Army to the Arab Army during the revolt, carrying with them \textit{qawmi} thought and the concept of the Iraqi army as the vehicle of Arab unity, which they taught to new officers and soldiers. This, as the article claimed, made the army the cradle of \textit{qawmi} thought, which obtained full bloom in Iraq after the founding of the Ba’th Party in 1947.

The pre-1947 Iraqi Army occupied a place in this historiography somewhat akin to that occupied by ancient Greek philosophers, whose work predated the birth of Christ, did in medieval Christian theology. They were spared eternal damnation even though they had not accepted the true faith. Despite being deprived of the guidance of the Ba’th Party, the Army’s inherent goodness drawn from the masses kept it from the nefarious designs of pre-Ba’thist

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\item See, Makiya, ibid., 180. According to Makiya, “The point the regime wanted to make was that Ba’thism had nothing to fear from Iraqi history. The Ba’th today exude an air of timeless inevitability, a sense of connectedness with the was so profound that its terminus in their rule seems almost logical.” Also, in the 1997 issue of the official state newspaper \textit{al-Jumhuriya} (The Republic) commemorating Victory Day over Iran, the Poet of the Armed Forces Dr. ‘Abd al-wahd Zeki al-Quasi linked Saddam to the Hashemites in verse. “Saddam, you are Son of Husayn, member of the Hashemy clan, the family of the Prophet, your forefathers…” See, No. 9578, August 16th, 1997: 18.
\end{thebibliography}
regimes. These regimes “dreamed of using the army to repress the people’s intifadas”, but “the army that was cut from the broad cloth of the people was always on the side of the masses” the writer intoned, conveniently forgetting the many tribal insurrections suppressed by the Army — often in cooperation with the RAF. “The Army has always fought on the side of the people in all their qawmi and watani battles against agent-collaborator and reactionary governments that sought to rule the country.”

The Army’s involvement in politics since the Bakr Sidqi coup in 1936 is noted as a badge of honor, citing the report of the 8th Ba’th Party Regional Conference (Iraq) in 1974. The Army had the honor of “igniting” the 1941 watani revolution that briefly overthrew the monarchy before the British reinstated Prince ‘Abd al-illah by force of arms. The Ba’th Party is then credited with leading the 1958 watani revolution, which ignores the leading role played by Brigadier Qasim. The Party then led the 14 February [Ramadan] Revolution of 1963, where it toppled the “dictatorial power” [of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim]. This era of coups and political intrigues was finally “crowned with the glorious light of the 17-20 July Revolution of 1968, which was led by the Ba’th Arab Socialist Party that is considered the one true [revolution] of the glorious watani national epic.”

The essay also goes to pains to detail the Army’s participation in the larger qawmi struggle of securing Arab unity and dignity. The Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 are all listed as glorious episodes in which the Iraqi Army defended Arab land and honor against Zionist aggression. However, the Army’s contribution to the 1973 war (conveniently taking place after the 1968 Ba’thist coup) was especially illustrious. Speaking in sacral tones, the writer notes the Army’s deployment across hundreds of miles to save Damascus from conquest at the
hands of the Zionist enemy. The essay accords greater historical significance, however, to the Qadisiyat Saddam. The Arab-Israeli wars were defensive wars fought by Arab armies on Arab land, whereas the Iran-Iraq war is the first time in history that an Arab army has fought on the land of the enemy — the logic being that the Persian clerical regime and Zionist forces were conspiratorial allies.

The essay was hardly an isolated or obscure piece of regime propaganda. The three main regime papers of the era, Thawra (revolution), al-Jumhuriya (The Republic), and Qadisiyya, which was a rough Iraqi equivalent of “Stars and Stripes” that began publication during the Iran-Iraq war, carried reams of such writing, especially in the days before and after proliferating national holidays commemorating the military achievements and sacrifices of Iraq.

The typical format was a front page story with banner headlines announcing the latest victories of the “soldiers of Saddam Husayn” and highlighting the key role played by the “President-Leader” (or some other honorific title) in securing the victory. Stories below the fold might cover top regime officials’ participation in ceremonial events at monuments to martyrs and heroes, which also proliferated during this era. Several subsequent pages might be devoted to coverage of soldiers’ exploits, which also followed a ritual format. Soldiers with names that clearly identified them as belonging to each of Iraq’s main ethnosectarian groups humbly described their camaraderie with each other, love of the army, and hero-worship of their Leader.

In the same issue as the essay described above, a headline read “We Carry Their Greetings [from the front] to the Great National (qawmi) Liberator, Saddam Husayn”. Elsewhere

17 For a more scholarly first-hand historical account of this episode, see Gen. Ra’ad Hamdani, Qabl an al-Tarikh Yeghaidrna (Before History Leaves Us). Several of my interview subjects among retired officers in Amman also mentioned this episode as a key event in Iraqi military history.
in the paper, the fighter (muqat) Sabiyh ‘Abd-allah lauded the “leader of our victorious (qawmi)
national march — the heroic Saddam Husayn,” while the fighter Qasim 'Abd al-Amir praised
“the liberator of our beloved [qawmi] nation, the great general Saddam Husayn and leader of all
our victories over the Persian enemy.”

Such accounts were typically followed with ideological historical essays or news analysis
that emphasized the regime’s preferred themes and narratives, such as the essay described in
detail above. Headlines for features published in the next issue of Thawra published on the 60th
anniversary of the Iraqi Army in January 1981, read “The Celebration of the 60th Year of the
Birth of the Army of Revolution, The Army of Liberation, The Army of Peace,” and “The Iraqi
Army: The Expression of the Soul of the People”.

3.4 Purpose and effects of symbolism

The regime of the 1980’s continually sought to define the aspects legitimate meaning of
revolution; the role of the army in Iraqi history; the nature of appropriate demands that rulers
make on the people; the legitimate use of force against other Iraqi citizens; and the meaning of
sacrifice, suffering, and death in war. The state-sanctioned Project for the Rewriting of History
set as its explicit goal “to construct a new public sphere, including the reconstitution of political
identity, the relationship of the citizen to the state, and public understandings of national

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18 See, Thawra, ibid, 5.
19 Thawra, No. 3876, 5.
20 Thawra, No. 3876, 3.
heritage”. Although such efforts had been informally underway during the previous decade, the revolutionary threat of Iran and military expansion of Iraq gave new impetus to it.

Whatever the intrinsic plausibility of its claims, the 1981 Army Day historical essay and its like published in *Thawra* succeeded on its own terms as a demonstration of power and domination. The army was at once the “soul of the people” guided by the Arab Ba’th Socialist Party, the cradle of [Ba’hist] *qawmi* thought, and the primary agent of an Iraqi historical narrative, which found its penultimate expression in the endless victories of *Qadisiyyat Saddam* won by the historical president-leader Saddam Husayn. No other interpretation of Iraqi history, identity, or interests was permitted.

Written texts, such as the *Thawra* essay, fit into a broader symbolic discourse with interlocking and mutually supporting elements. As Davis points out, the discourse of the regime needed to have at least some alignment with structural realities of society in order to maintain credibility. The predominant structural reality of Iraq in the 1980’s and 1990’s was war. The grandiosity of most regime discourse made little sense when juxtaposed against a small army of five divisions, such as the one Iraq possessed at the beginning of the Ba’th era. Likewise, a giant army of 56 divisions only made sense if a military conflict of appropriate size and historical significance was available to justify it. "The expansion of the military served as a means to buttress Saddam Husayn’s leadership, projecting the image of an Arab regional leader and demonstrating the development and technological strength of the armed forces to the Iraqi

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21 Davis, ibid., 148.
22 Davis, ibid., 10.
public,” writes Marashi. “The threat to Iraq emanating from Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution ultimately provided Husayn with the opportunity to use this expanded military in such a demonstration of power.”

Besides the practicalities of fighting a major war with Iran, which had three times the population of Iraq, the expansion of the army and its use in war had symbolic significance. It marked a definitive break with the era of mandates and humiliating treaties that limited the size and mission of the Iraqi armed forces. The abrogation of the 1975 Algiers accord with Iran can be seen in the light of Qasim’s abrogation of the CENTO treaty in 1959 as a key scenario repeated within the republican political culture of Iraq. The Army’s use in war, particularly against the purported source of the Zionist-Persian cultural threat against the Arab world, also had symbolic meaning. While the monarchy had been forced to sign over external defense to Great Britain, Saddam was reclaiming the right of sovereign states to make just war.

### 3.5 Expansion of the ceremonial complex and ritual performance

A “tree of commemorative symbolism” watered by blood and Saddam’s thirst for grandeur grew during the war. Such commemorative trees include seven cultural objects, according to Schwartz.²⁴

- scripture (biographies, eulogies, poems, plays and commentaries)
- music (anthems, hymns and inspirational songs)
- icons (paintings, statues, prints, photographs, films and videotape)
- monuments (obelisks, temples and war memorials)
- shrines (sacred sites such as birthplaces, residences, and cemeteries)
- naming practices (streets, cities, towns, countries and states)
- commemorative observances (holiday rites).

The human sacrifices of war also prompted modification of existing symbolic structures and construction of new ones, both material and abstract. Scripture has already been discussed above, written as regime propaganda and often adopting sacral tones of reverence and veneration. It was often accompanied by pictures (icons) depicting Saddam in heroic poses, while presenting his soldiers according to articles of faith regarding the simple and good-hearted Iraqi fighter who bonded with his brethren across ethnosectarian divides while bravely confronting the Persian enemy. Other aspects of commemoration I will discuss in this section are monuments, shrines — particularly cemeteries, naming practices as applied to weapons, military units, and operations, and commemorative observances.

As concerns the former, the regime built several major monuments during this period and numerous lesser installations. Among the major monuments are included the Unknown Soldier Monument, which was constructed in 1982, replacing the smaller monument built during the Qasim era that stood in Baghdad’s Firdus square. (The monument was replaced with a statue of Saddam Husayn, which was famously pulled down by U.S. Marines in 2003.) The Nusb Shuhada’ Qadisiyat Saddam (The Monument to the Martyrs of Saddam’s Qadisiya) was constructed in 1983. The process reached its apex with the construction of the Victory Arches, or Swords of Qadisiya, which began construction in 1986 at the height of the Iran-Iraq War, and became the site of massive military parades after Saddam accepted the final U.N. ceasefire in August, 1988.

25 See, Davis, ibid., 279. Davis writes, “A proliferation of propaganda images during the war showed Saddam in poses demonstrating his humble background, and his dual role as leader and expression of the common people.”
The regime’s interest in promoting a qawmi tinged narrative of martyrdom through construction of a physical ceremonial complex did not stop at Iraq’s borders. Cemeteries in Jenin, Palestine and Mafraq, Jordan that contained Iraqi graves from the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars were refurbished in the 1980’s. The central monument at the Mafraq cemetery has the Quranic fatiha inscribed on it and a miniature model of the Martyrs’ Monument in Baghdad atop its obelisk. What had been a small, privately held plot, was turned into a well-kept and tasteful national cemetery that articulated Iraq’s Arabist claims during its war with Iran. In the case of Jenin, Saddam elicited recognition as a champion of the Palestinian cause through commemorations held at the cemetery and generous donations made to villagers in Jenin for decades afterwards.26

These and lesser installations formed the basis of a new military ceremonial complex that was of impressive scale when compared with comparatively modest facilities that had existed before the war. As such, they formed a stage upon which the military could perform the official state military ceremonial. A new state calendar took shape over the course of the war that gave occasion for ceremonial events to be performed. Martyrs’ Day was the first of these holidays, instituted to commemorate the war dead, with the date of December 1st marking the day that a number of Iraqi prisoners of war were executed by their Iranian captors in grisly fashion.

As Podeh has it in his article on Iraqi national celebrations:

Saddam was engaged in cultural production on a scale never seen before in Iraq (or elsewhere in the Arab world), resulting in the existence of a ‘thick’ calendar. Like the burst in architectural activity in the 1980s, the number of state holidays reached the astounding number of 15—not including religious holidays (see Appendix), over and beyond any other

Arab state. Saddam’s ingenuity resulted in a large repertoire of holidays, manipulated according to his interests and the prevailing circumstances. The ‘thickness’ of the calendar and its obsessive use were meant to bolster the regime’s legitimacy and raise people’s morale. In reality, however, it was rather an indication of the insecurity and illegitimacy of Saddam’s regime.27

The two other major military holidays to emerge from the war commemorated the liberation of the Faw Peninsula on April 17, 1988 and Victory Day, instituted on August 8, 1988, the day Iraq and Iran accepted the U.N. brokered ceasefire. This in addition to Army Day, which assumed a grand scale during this period. All of these holidays were observed with extensive ceremonies and rituals, and were accorded extensive press coverage. On its first anniversary, Victory Day was observed for three days.28 Martyrs Day was observed with wreath laying ceremonies at the major monuments in Baghdad and smaller ceremonies in outlying cities, as well as visits by Saddam and other officials to martyrs’ families to bestow awards and gifts.29 As will be seen in chapter five, the state commemorative practices associated with military martyrdom have resurfaced in modified form in the current era as the new regime has sought to claim the mantle of the Iraqi state.

The linking of Both the Martyrs’ Monument and Unknown Soldier Monument were featured prominently on Iraqi currency of the era alongside portraits of Saddam. In the latter case, Saddam was portrayed on the 25 Dinar bill in full dress uniform juxtaposed against a scene of medieval Arab Muslims leading a calvary charge during the first Qadisiya battle. This was

27 See, Podeh, ibid., 203.
28 See, Podeh, ibid., 195.
29 Such observances even produced their own kitsch, which is now sold on eBay — presumably to collectors and enthusiasts of the old regime. One such item is a clear glass ball manufactured during the Ba’thist era, and said to contain sand from the Faw peninsula “mixed with blood of Iraqi martyrs.” See, The Iraq Military History Forum, Facebook, “Martyr Ball”, available online at https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.302364436555511.1073741873.127413387383951&type=3, last accessed March 6, 2015.
only the most obvious way of incorporating the iconography of the state and its military monuments into everyday practices of daily life and pursuit of material rewards.

The regime instituted a multitude of laws regarding state service, particularly military service and death in its wars, which were designed to co-opt ordinary Iraqis into support or acquiescence to Saddam’s militarism. “Tens of thousands of Iraqis were the recipients of different medals, badges, certificates, and insignias during the Ba’th rule,” writes Sassoon in his study of state co-optation during the Ba’thist era. “All signified status and privileges, which in turn corresponded to whatever medals or badges the recipient already had, and the more medals a citizen or a member of the party accumulated, the higher the rewards.”

Numerous badges were distributed, among them the nawt al-shaja’a (Badge of Bravery) and nawt al-istihqaq al-‘ali (Badge of High Esteem). The former was given especially to military officers, prisoners of war, and the families of martyrs, and recipients received one, two, or three stripes. In granting this badge to an officer, a presidential decree declared that he had shown outstanding bravery in ‘liberating al-Faw region from the claws of racist magi Persians.’ …On receiving three stripes, the individual was eligible for the highest privilege — possessing the card of ‘Friends of the President’. An equally prestigious badge was wisam al-rafidain (Medal of the Land of the Two Rivers), which was first awarded under the monarchy, predating the Ba’th regime.

With the collapse of the Ba’thist regime, these trinkets lost their value and many are available for purchase on eBay for a few dollars apiece. Others, like the wisam al-rafidain, were manufactured at considerable expense by European firms and in some cases are still considered collectors items. Whatever their intrinsic or economic value, they are significant to this analysis for what they tell us about Saddam’s efforts to dictate a historical narrative and shape the

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31 ibid., 207-208.
parameters of Iraqi militarism. They are also cultural tokens that are still recognized by many Iraqis both positively and negatively as representative of the old state’s authority.

3.6 The national military costume

As was elaborated in the introductory chapter, the national military uniform imported to the developing world from Europe is a costume, above all. It has no utility in modern combat. Its only purpose is symbolic: to represent the wearer as a servant of the state and an agent of its claims to legitimate force. It is typically not worn on an everyday basis, even in garrison.

Rather it is worn on ceremonial occasions and in stage settings that communicate certain ideas about the boundaries of the political community, its essential cultural identity, and notions about moral duties and honor associated with their defense through state service. Paying attention to the details of how this costume is decorated with medals, insignia, and other devices, tells us something about what is being said about the legitimizing moral basis of military violence by those who command the armed forces, and how they are attempting to draw those who wear the uniform into a particular narrative of statehood with its accompanying “institutional rites, schemes of classifications, hierarchies of competence, achievement and honor”.

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The shift between the monarchy era and the early republican era was a relatively subtle one in terms of uniform changes. Qasim continued wearing the same uniform he had previously worn, only changing insignia to remove the crown of the monarchy and removing decorations associated with British hegemony and royal, rather than national service. Two new medals were introduced: one for the 1948 Palestine War and one for the 1941 Revolt led by the “Golden Square” conspiracy that temporarily toppled the monarchy. The *wisam al-rafidain* was subtly redesigned with royal iconography removed and replaced with republican, but not pan-Arabist, symbols. Lesser medals, such as the General Service and Bravery medals instituted by Faysal I, received the same treatment. Finally, Qasim introduced two orders, one commemorating the Revolution and another or exceptional state service was introduced and immodestly named “The Order of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim.”

An ordinary commemorative medal for the 1958 coup was only introduced in 1964 by Qasim’s former co-conspirators who deposed him and seized his revolutionary legacy. Needless to say, the two orders introduced by Qasim were promptly discontinued. Perhaps seeing the need to act quickly to commemorate their own coup, they introduced the 14 Ramadan (February) 1963 medal in 1964. A medal commemorating the end of a three year campaign to suppress a Kurdish pursing in northern Iraq that ended in 1964 was issued that year. The Ba’thist dominated government under General ‘Abd al-Salam Arif was deposed in November of 1963 by the revolution’s anti-Ba’thist faction while Arif himself remained president. This internal coup within a coup was also commemorated with a medal in 1964.

The November 1963 medal fell out of favor after July 20th, 1968, when a resurgent Ba’th Party led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Husayn overthrew the Arif government and
declared that their revolution was the crowning achievement of a process of political emancipation begun in 1958. A medal commemorating this revolution was introduced the following year in 1969. Each successive revolution brought with it military purges, as each new ruler attempted to avoid sharing the fate he had imposed on his predecessor. During the early Ba’th era slight modifications were made to the bravery and Rafidain medals. The 1967 war with Israel was never commemorated with a campaign medal, but the 1973 medal war in which Iraq played a larger and more successful role was commemorated in this fashion. During a period of relatively good relations with the neighboring Ba’thist regime in Syria a military cooperation medal was also issued to those that had conducted joint operations with the Syrian military. A second peace medal was issued in 1971 to commemorate the Army’s latest suppression of a Kurdish uprising. Another order for high state service, the wisam al-jadara, was also introduced during this time and awarded to Saddam Husayn and a few other top officials. That year also marked the 50 year anniversary of the Iraqi Army, which was commemorated with a jubilee medal.

For several years, the basic configuration of military awards changed little until the onset of the Iran-Iraq war. A medal for combat wounds was introduced in 1982 and awarded alongside the bravery medal inherited in modified form from the monarchy. Both came to be associated closely with the war with Iran, and as such these became the only two medals explicitly banned by the new Iraqi regime in 2007, although in practice all pre-2003 medals are now associated with the Ba’thist era. Specific campaigns, such as the liberation of the Faw peninsula, for which the regime instituted a national holiday, were not assigned specific medals, although a general medal for service in the war was introduced.
What medals one wore on their uniform said something about the particular narrative of Iraqi politics one subscribed to with their attendant personal loyalties. Controlling the process of composition and editing of decorations placed on the uniform thus became a means of dictating the story of Iraq itself and compelling others to publicly accept it. Squalid Third World military conspiracies were given the status of revolutions that promised justice and social progress, or else dismissed as inexcusable deviations from the correct path towards these goals. As politics became ever more militarized in the 1960’s — to the point where there were coups-within-coups — it came to resemble a live-action costume drama in which performance of one’s assigned role was compulsory.

Saddam ultimately assumed the role of director and lead actor in this drama, often presenting himself as an Iraqi military genius of historical significance, and demanding that his coterie of respected military professionals publicly praise his supposed military qualities. The analogy of Saddam as director is not far fetched. During the Iran-Iraq war he produced two major motion pictures. Saddam sponsored a multimillion dollar film titled *Qadisiyat Saddam* which was ostensibly about the 7th century battle, but we can surmise from the title that the true purpose was glorification of Saddam as the inheritor of General Waqqas’ military genius. Despite being the most lavishly funded Arab film to that date, the film flopped at the box office. A second movie titled “Clash of Loyalties” was produced in Arabic and English versions in 1983 and presented the regime’s tendentious version of the 1920 Revolution with the parts of Gertrude Bell and Sir Percy Cox played by major British actors.

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There was a strong element of theatricality to the presentation of the war, of which the uniforms were simply one element of the live-action drama. Saddam often wore the costume of an Iraqi field marshal despite not having served in the military. The costume included the coveted red shoulder tabs awarded to graduates of the military staff academy, which Saddam had, of course, never attended let alone graduated from. Baram comments on the prevalence of this tendency throughout the upper reaches of Iraqi political society, noting that for the duration of the Iran-Iraq war, top Ba’thist officials only appeared in public when wearing military uniforms, even though many had not served in the Army. The national military narrative symbolized by these medals was not always easy to interpret. Interestingly, pictures of Saddam in dress uniform show him wearing the two medals the monarchy had introduced to commemorate participation in World War II on the side of the Allies, alongside the medal of the 1941 “Golden Square” coup by officers with anti-monarchy and Fascist sympathies.

Beyond its own presentation of self, the regime sought to elicit performances from its subjects that depicted their appropriate roles in the war drama. The vast network of party activists and informants was used extensively by the regime to create and stage manage public performances of the war narrative, with the military often in the role of costumed extras against the backdrop of the state monumental complex.

“The shaping and control of the official version of the war was one of the most important functions of the local branches of the Ba’th Party,” writes Dina Khoury in her anthropological

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study of memories of the Iran-Iraq war. “Not only did they ensure the propagation of the regime’s message, they also became the main organizers of the numerous public ceremonies related to the war. Whether celebrating soldiers on Army Day or commemorating the fallen in the war on Martyr’s Day, the Ba’th Party cadres played a central role in shaping the public perception of the war.”

The culmination of the war pageant and high-water mark of the regime’s credibility as an agent of state nationalism was the day the U.N. ceasefire agreement with Iran entered force on August 8th, 1988. The day was declared a national holiday as Victory Day, and for years afterwards was celebrated as the high holy day of the Iraqi national calendar until the collapse of the Ba’thist regime. Each year, the Army would ritually reenact the victory in lavish displays of military symbolism and tradition, while the state’s full complement of propaganda outlets produced appropriate scriptural commemoration highlighting the role of Saddam Husayn in the victory.

3.7 The decline of the state and its monopoly of legitimate force

As preposterous as many of the claims of military genius made on behalf of Saddam were, there is general consensus among both senior Iraqi military leaders who participated in the war and foreign military analysts that Iraq won the war in a strictly tactical sense, even if few of


37 This began immediately with the cease-fire announcement in 1988 published in *Thawra*, which depicted Saddam in the garb of an Arab tribal sheikh. See, “Qa’id Saddam Husayn: Sana’ al-nusr wa al-salaam [Leader Saddam Husayn: Maker of Victory and Peace],” p. 1, No. 6649, August 10, 1988. The victory remained on the front pages for days afterwards, despite the lack of any additional substantive news. For example, the headline for the August 14th issue read, “Saddam Husayn: Hero of Victory and of Peace”, which was only a slight re-wording of the original announcement. In subsequent years newspapers carried blanket coverage several days before and after the cease-fire date, with news of VIP visits to various major war memorials, as well as parades, and pronouncements.
its original strategic goals were attained.\textsuperscript{38} A plausible, if strained, claim of military victory might have guaranteed the Ba’thist regime relative stability for an extended period if buttressed with economic progress and limited political liberalization.

However, postwar indebtedness to Kuwait and other Gulf monarchies, perceived political threats of demobilization, and low oil prices combined with Saddam’s resentments and regional ambitions drove Iraq towards war again in 1990.\textsuperscript{39} A full scale invasion of Kuwait was not inevitable. The Iraqi regime had other choices. However, it made sense within the symbolic universe that the regime had created for itself. Significant parts of this universe were inherited from its predecessors, even though their form and scale assumed new dimensions under Ba’thist rule.

The Kuwait crisis had strong elements of a broader postcolonial narrative in it that were shared across the Arab world and across the Iraqi political spectrum. Under the Ottomans, Kuwait had been part of Basra province. Like Lebanon, it was a territorial carve out made to suit the political interests of imperial powers. Even Qasim, who came to symbolize inclusive \textit{watani} nationalism, had demanded the annexation of Kuwait during his tenure in office. On top of this layer of postcolonial nationalism were the symbolic structures of \textit{qawmi} thought.

The root metaphor in \textit{qawmi} ideology as it came to be articulated by the Ba’thist regime was Iraq as the Eastern Wall of the Arab World. The renovation of the Mafraq cemetery in Jordan, the production of expensive feature films, and myriad other texts and visual


\textsuperscript{39} See, Davis, ibid., 197, and Jerry M. Long, \textit{Saddam’s War of Words: Politics, religion, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait}. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2004), and also Marashi et al.,ibid., 175-176, who emphasize stresses of demobilization from the Iran-Iraq war as a factor, and Tripp, ibid., 239-244.
representations used this metaphor to legitimize Iraqi militarism and suppress alternative discourses within the Iraqi political community. One such representation, a full-page line drawing printed in *Thawra* on Army Day in 1987, depicted an Iraqi soldier standing astride the Arabian peninsula with his rifle leveled at a shadowy, unseen threat to the east. His shadow is cast on the Arab world behind him, which is bathed in light and has no political boundaries drawn on it. To the east, Iran is depicted in dark shadows with multiple fracture lines across it as if it were a plate dropped on the floor.\(^{40}\)

Kuwait’s refusal to forgive Iraqi war debts was seen as an arrogant dismissal of Iraq’s role as the guardian of the Arab world’s eastern flank and cultural integrity — a role which it had carried out at great cost to itself. These resentments, financial stress, diversionary motives, and the material blandishments offered by Kuwaiti oilfields were all factors that played into the decision to go to war. As was the case with the Iran-Iraq war, the decision was made on the personal whim of Saddam with only the barest notice to senior military commanders responsible for the campaign.\(^{41}\) The Iraqi Army invaded and overran Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

The anti-imperialist frame Saddam attempted to use resonated with Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Jordan, but attracted little support elsewhere among regimes that actually commanded states. As is well known from the historical record, a coalition of Western powers, Gulf monarchies, and both Syria and Egypt — Iraq’s main regional rivals for recognition as leaders of the Arab world — carried out a major air campaign followed by a brief ground invasion to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait. After the Iraqi surrender to Coalition forces,


\(^{41}\) Interview with former senior Iraqi military planner in Amman, Jordan, November 6th, 2012.
remnants of Iraq’s Army and Republican guard violently suppressed major uprisings in Shia and Kurdish areas in the south and north of Iraq respectively.

An era of truncated sovereignty and economic decline followed in Iraq under a punishing U.N. sanctions regime perpetuated in part by Saddam’s continued defiance the 1991 ceasefire agreement. This historical outline of the Kuwait war and its aftermath is familiar to most analysts, of course. What is important about this historical period for the present analysis is the ways in which the symbolic structures of Iraqi statehood were changed both by the war itself and the way in which Iraqis remembered it in later years. This would set the stage for the struggle over control of the Iraqi successor state that began after the fall of the Ba’thist regime in 2003.

For all of the pan-Arabist pretenses of the regime during the Iran-Iraq war, it was repeatedly compelled to cast the war in *watani* terms. Indeed, many former Iraqi officers refer to it as a *watani* war in contrast with the Kuwaiti war. The tree of state commemoration that grew during the war, as well as the material and social status incentives that accompanied it, bequeathed a powerful symbolic apparatus to the Iraqi state. However, it was warped and weakened by the ill-conceived and ill-fated Kuwaiti adventure in ways that undermined Ba’thist ideological ambitions.

These depredations, combined with the economic costs of the Iran-Iraq war and the effects of U.N. sanctions, pushed the Ba’thist regime to seek political survival based on a narrow circle of loyalties centered around Saddam Husayn’s family and related Sunni tribes from the Takrit area, rather than a broader co-optation strategy that had characterized the Iran-Iraq war period. As Davis has it, “The reintroduction of tribalism paralleled the transformation of the Ba’th Party in the 1970’s and 1980’s from an organization dominated by army officers, veteran
party members, and intellectuals into one dominated, at the top, by Saddam’s family and, in the ranks, but the rural and tribally based lower middle class.”  

This corresponded with a broader ideological push, in which Umm al-Ma’arik, or The Mother of Battles, was accorded mythic status as not only an event, but an entire ideology that represented the culmination of anti-imperialist qawmi thought that rivaled the teachings of Gandhi in their worldwide significance.

This was mirrored by extreme brutality and coercion controlled by a narrow kinship network centered around Saddam himself. Umm al-Ma’arik, as an ersatz ideology, was developed to justify the intensification of coercion in Arab areas of Iraq beginning with suppression of the post-Kuwait uprisings. Haddad argues that these campaigns were qualitatively different than the equally brutal suppression of Kurdish insurrection during the Anfal campaign of the late 1980’s that culminated in the nerve-gas attacks on Kurdish villages, because they directly threatened the regime’s national narrative of Arab unity.

“The uprisings in southern Iraq were by far the most serious internal threat faced by the Ba’th. Unlike the uprisings in the north, and Kurdish rebellions generally throughout the twentieth century, the events in the south were an existential threat to the regime,” he writes.

Whilst Kurdish rebellions revolved around regional goals and ethnic politics, the southern governorates had no such ambitions. In short: for the southern rebellions to succeed, significant political change would have to be visited upon Baghdad… The unprecedented rebellions in the south were geographically closer to the central state (some villages and towns as close as 60 km south of Baghdad were enveloped by the uprisings) and were

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42 See Davis, ibid., 239.

43 Such pronouncements were ubiquitous in regime propaganda after 1991. Several poets of Umm al-Ma’arik were minted by the regime during this period to propagate its “sacred” principles on the pages of official publications, and were frequently aided by a host of academic ideologues. In an article titled, “Saddamism is the Soul of Umm al Ma’arik,” one such academic wrote that as Gandhi is the Soul of India, Saddam is the Soul of Iraq, and that both shared the cause of fighting British imperialism, adopting austerity as a means of doing so. However, Gandhi only faced one country, whereas Saddam faced 30 countries. See, al-Jumhuriya, June 29, 1997, No. 9544, 6.
symbolically and emotively more pertinent to the average Baghdadi particularly those with
kinship ties to the southern governorates... Finally, for the regime’s narrative of state and
its message to the Iraqi people, the southern rebellions presented a greater ontological
challenge to its legitimacy than the northern rebellions due to the former’s demographic
weight and [Arab] ethnicity.  

Indeed it is hard to overstate the brutality with which the uprisings were suppressed by
Iraqi military units deliberately left intact by the Coalition for this express purpose. Among
captured records of the regime archived at the U.S. National Defense University, one finds
numerous communiques detailing the planning and execution of these operations. It quickly
becomes clear from an examination of these records, that the scale of these operations was
massive, involving corps and division sized units.

One such series of communiques written between September 1991 and February 1992
describes operations in the vicinity of the Rumaila oil fields bordering Kuwait. A series of
villages was targeted for clearing operations against “saboteurs”. The Army’s 3rd Corps was
tasked with “cleansing” villages of al-Masdan and Shanshal in al-Ahwaz north of Basra. 4th
Corps was assigned the villages of al-Arida, Huwaysa, and Laqeet. 6th Corps was tasked with
moving from the town of Islam towards al-Rajayna, Upper and Lower Salaf Urn Jarha, Barakat
al Arima.

“My President Leader, May God protect you,” wrote the senior officer overseeing the
plan in a communique to Saddam. “In light of the success of the above operations, and in order
to limit the activities of the saboteurs in al-Ahwaz, prevent them from continued contacts with
the local people, and tighten the rope around their necks, we seek your approval to execute the
above-mentioned limited cleansing operations on the evening of 29-30 of September, 1991.

135-136.
Obeying your orders my President Leader and the Chief commander of the armed forces. May God Protect You.”

A later set of communiques in April of 1992 describe plans to drain marshlands and either co-opt, kill, or evict Marsh Arab communities that had lived there for centuries, and then replace them with more reliable settlers through a resettlement program under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture. Control would be maintained by “[l]easing the Marshes to the prominent clans and clans that support the authorities, and making them responsible for any sabotage action.”

The communiques reveal a great deal about the cultural prism through which senior regime members and military leaders viewed the uprisings.

The author gives a brief history of the marshes, divided into three segments.

- The phase prior to “the glorious Qadisiyat Saddam”, characterized by nuisance outlawry common to inaccessible areas.

- The “sabotage phase” during “the glorious Qadisiyat Saddam”, in which organized crime and illegal armed checkpoints proliferated.

- The phase after the Qadisiyat Saddam and the “Page of Treason and Treachery” [the post-Kuwait uprisings].

“After Umm al-Ma’arik a large number of the saboteurs took refuge in the Marshes in addition to a number of renegades. The Iranian materialistic and moral support for them

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45 “Correspondence between the Ministry of Defense and the Chief of Army Staff regarding military operations against saboteurs, September 1991-February 1992”. SH-IZAR-D-000-943. (Fort McNair, Virginia: Conflict Records Research Center). Note: the Center has been closed as part of federal budget cutbacks.

46 “Document regarding plan set in the Operations Department recommending the drainage of the marshes to limit the sabotage operations, April 17th 1992.” SH-IZAR-D-001-169. (Fort McNair, Virginia: Conflict Records Research Center). See note in above footnote.
increased and their activities started to take an organized political form and their activities
toward the military troops started increasing,” the author wrote.

The identity of the insurgents was clear, he wrote, continuing. “The political
organizations and groups present in the Marshes areas are members of the treacherous Da’wa
Party, members of the treacherous Hizballah, escapees, renegades, criminals, and outlaws”
organized into units of one hundred men or more, and armed with mortars, rocket propelled
grenades (RPGs), heavy machine guns, and small arms.

The threat to the Iraqi regime was both clear and increasing in size, the author wrote,
blaming the increase on insurgents that had been targeted in earlier clearing operations in
villages and cities who had fled to the marshes, with additional reinforcements coming from Iran.

During the last period, and due to the circumstances Iraq went through, the number and size
of the saboteurs started increasing due to the support and help of the residents of the area
who are controlled by their religious beliefs, affiliation, tribal fanaticism, and their
relationships which connect them with one another in addition to the foreign support
represented by Iran and others.

Besides the two aforementioned resistance groups, the author also accused “treacherous
renegades” from the Badr Corps of aiding the insurgents. The Badr Corps was an organization
trained and armed by the Iranian revolutionary regime during the Iran-Iraq war that was
composed largely of religious Iraqi Shi’a who sought the downfall of the secular Ba’thist regime.
Many of its political leaders and military commanders later assumed prominent places in the

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47 The Da’wa Party would come to play a major role in post-2003 Iraqi politics as the party of the Prime Minister,
Nuri al-Maliki.

48 An Iraqi Shiite resistance organization not related to the Lebanese-Iranian group of the same name.
Iraqi government and military after 2003, which has given rise to accusations from some Sunni nationalist quarters that Iraqi Army troops today are merely “Safavid forces” in disguise.

The communique claims that 200 separate military operations were carried out to implement the plan using army brigades to cordon off villages and clear them with the use of artillery, helicopter airstrikes, ambush patrols, and an intensive intelligence gathering effort. The combined casualties of these operations and those in the north against Kurdish populations likely numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In addition to physical violence against Shia population centers extensive cultural violence was also inflicted, most notably against the Imam Ali mosque in the Shi’a shrine city of Najaf, which was sacked by Republican Guard units. Shiite rituals and faith were stigmatized in state media, and the assassination of a leading Najafi cleric, Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr was carried out in 1999 by regime agents.

This narrowing of the basis of state legitimacy was reflected in divergence in how the events of 1991-1992 were remembered and commemorated that split along regional and sectarian lines. The Ba’thist regime’s characterization of the uprisings as “The Page of Treachery and Treason” has survived to the present “and has become a fixture in most negative accounts of the uprisings”. Likewise, in Shia communities, the uprisings came to be referred to as the “People’s Intifada” and have continued to be designated as such in the official discourse of

49 The Safavid dynasty in Iran ruled between 1502 and 1736, and its credited with building the Imam Ali Shiite mosque in Najaf, Iraq.

50 After the 2003 war the U.S. attempted to catalog mass graves. The U.S. Marine officer in charge of the investigation estimated that at least 350,000 Iraqis occupied these graves. Personal conversation, 2005.

51 According to many reports, Republican Guard tanks were painted with sign reading “No Shia After Today”. For a discussion of how physical destruction of communal shrines is often used as a means of erasing the identity of the community itself, see, Robert Bevan. The destruction of memory: architecture at war. (London: Reaktion Books, 2007)

52 Haddad, ibid., 147.
the new regime, which commemorates the uprising each January as part of the broader national celebrations surrounding Army Day on January 6th.

This bifurcation in the Iraqi political community’s relationship to *intifada* contrasts with the image of the Army put forward by the regime at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, when the propagandist writing in *Thawra* sought to tie an idealized people’s army to the people’s intifadas of the Sunni and Shi’a tribes against the monarchy during the mandate era. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the construct of a people’s intifada was transformed in those predominantly Shi’ite and Kurdish communities, which were targeted for repression at the hands of the Army and Republican Guard. The regime’s preferred meaning of “people’s intifada” as national resistance to political usurpation was no longer credible in these communities. Rather, the term came to summarize Shi’a suffering and resistance under the Ba’thist regime. The metaphor had a similar structure in both cases, but the identity of the usurper changed from “agent-collaborator regimes” to the Ba’thist regime itself.

Likewise, the construct of martyrdom propagated by the Ba’thist regime was also undermined by the Kuwait war and its aftermath, which stripped it of national meaning. During the Iran-Iraq war, the regime went to extensive lengths to draw Iraqis of all backgrounds into the commemorative rituals and bureaucratic routines of the Ba’thist state. “At the beginning of the war, martyrs within the party were elevated posthumously within the party hierarchy. More significant, those who had died with no party affiliation were inducted into the party after death,” Khoury writes. “By the end of the war, it became incumbent on cadres to visit the families of martyrs a certain number of times each month and submit reports about them to the branch.
Visits, according to one report, ‘should be organized and meaningful so that the sacrifices of the martyrs are acknowledged and remembered.’”53

Official martyrdom in the aftermath of the uprisings, was restricted to members of military units that remained loyal to the regime and died in its service while suppressing the various insurrections of the early 1990’s. Whatever sway official nationalist constructs of martyrdom had among Shiite Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq war — in which the Shi’a rank and file of the army bore the brunt of combat losses — was lost in the aftermath of the Kuwaiti adventure. The successor regime of Nuri al-Maliki, deeply rooted in “the treacherous Da’wa party”, would make extensive efforts to strip the official martyrdom of the late Ba’thist era of its national meaning while endowing Shiite martyrdom of the 1990’s with it.

3.8 Conclusion

The Ba’thist regime that took power in 1968 inherited and expropriated the revolutionary legacy of 1958 bequeathed to Iraq by Qasim. Although it drew on some similar themes of Third World nationalism and socialism, its fundamental ideological orientation was defined by its qawmi pretensions. The ideological distinction between qawmi and watani nationalism was meaningful in that these implied divergent ideas of political community. The qawmi idea of political community was bounded by Sunni Arabism. Certainly Iraqis from other ethnosectarian groups could participate in state politics, sometimes at very senior levels, but only if they accepted the cultural and ideological supremacy of the official Ba’thist qawmi as the

53 Khoury, ibid., 70.
fundamental basis for state power.\textsuperscript{54} Over time, even this definition of political community became more restrictive as Saddam came to rely more heavily on direct kinship ties for political survival, although he always cloaked this tendency in revolutionary rhetoric and ideology.

The period of the Ba’th party’s ascendance corresponded with the oil boom of the 1970’s, which funded a significant military expansion before the Iran-Iraq war and a vast one during it. As explained above, the roots of this expansion extended deep into Iraqi history, reaching the debates over conscription between Gertrude Bell and Jafar al-Askari during the early mandate era. Saddam Husayn claimed, with some justification, that his regime attained a historic milestone by producing a large, well-equipped army able to act beyond Iraq’s own borders. The scope and mission of the Iraqi army would again become a salient issue after 2003 as a fledgling Iraqi government negotiated with its U.S. and British patrons, who favored a small domestic police force just as their predecessors had in the 1920’s. The issue was not only technocratic, but symbolic as well, as a large national defense army would represent certain elements of the Iraqi national narrative with its strong streak of anti-imperialism, and certain ideas about the nature of the Iraqi state.

The successor Iraqi regime introduced by U.S. and British force of arms after 2003 would be confronted with the existence of symbolic structures and cultural relics in the turbulent post-Ba’thist social world, which affected the development of political society and successor state institutions. This regime could attempt to appropriate, destroy, or redefine this legacy, but they

\textsuperscript{54} Davis, ibid., 188. Davis writes, “...Saddam casts a pall of suspicion over Iraq’s entire Shi’i community, secular and religious, throughout all of history because they are alleged to harbor continuous feelings of disloyalty and evil intent toward the Iraqi nation-state. For the Shi’a, the only escape from these allegations is to become more Ba’thist than the Ba’thists to prove their loyalty to Iraq. In light of Saddam’s attack, the defense of Iraq by the Iraqi army, whose infantry is predominantly Shi’i, during the Iran-Iraq War was all the more remarkable, not as an indicator of support for Saddam and the Ba’th, but as an indicator of then Shi’a’s nationalism, with the Ba’th has constantly impugned.”
were ultimately unable to ignore it in its entirety or otherwise act as if it had no independent
structuring affects on the legitimation of the successor state and its armed forces. To be sure,
some cultural elements of Ba’thist statehood quickly lost whatever national meaning they might
have had during Saddam’s rule. Ba’thist regime efforts to present *Umm al-Ma’arik* as a
significant body of political thought worthy of mention alongside the teachings of Gandhi was
largely treated as an absurdity it was by Iraqis across the political spectrum, and dropped from
sight after the collapse of the Ba’thist regime. In my interviews with former senior officers
exiled in Amman, they universally described *Umm al-Ma’arik* as a strategic miscalculation of the
first order, and found it laughable that it might be advanced as a legitimate ideological
expression of Iraqi nationalism.

State-centric martyrdom, *intifada*, and revolution, however, did survive the destruction of
the Ba’thist state and remain significant sites of symbolic contestation. For Sunni nationalists,
the locus of state-centric martyrdom is located within the memory of the Iran-Iraq war and the
specific claims of state legitimacy it gave rise to, although it is rarely referred to as the *Qadisiyat
Saddam* by anybody except the most committed regime loyalists. The bounds of this discourse
are not strictly limited to Sunnis, but extends to former Shi’a officers who came of age during the
1980’s and view the war as a nationalist phenomenon regardless of the Ba’thist efforts to
appropriate it. The cadre of such officers allowed to serve in the new army often claimed
persecution or marginalization under the old regime.

55 Interview with Don Get, Senior Adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, 2010-2011, conducted on August 2,
2012 in Washington, D.C.

56 Ibid.
As has been suggested in this chapter and will be detailed in chapter six, the Maliki regime attempted to institute a new construct of state-centric martyrdom in an effort to crowd out and marginalize the Iran-Iraq war as an object of historical memory and legitimation. Two distinct but related loci of this new discourse of state-centric martyrdom were the “People’s Intifada” of 1991-1992, and the losses suffered as a result against military operations in predominantly Sunni governorates against Al Qaeda affiliates. Participants in this symbolic discourse are predominantly Shiites and (to a lesser extent) Kurds who suffered direct persecution under the old regime or share historical memory of it with members of their respective communal groups.

The new regime has generally not framed its legitimation claims in explicit revolutionary terms, perhaps because of the association of this cultural form with the Ba’thist period. However, much of the official rhetoric of the new regime associated with military symbolism makes claims of revolutionary changes in the basis of state authority, emphasizing human rights, constitutionalism, and pluralism. These claims should not be taken at face value, but they are politically significant in ways that will be elaborated on further in chapter six as well. Meanwhile, the revolutions of the past remain as part of Iraqi political discourse as a sort of shorthand that immediately summarizes what narrative of Iraq the author of a given text supports.

The commemorative tree of memorials, shrines, observances, and the like, constructed by previous Iraqi regimes has survived in recognizable form in the post-2003 period, but has been significantly pruned and reshaped. Some branches have been cut off, others allowed to wither, and still others encouraged to grow in new ways. Commemorative trees provide the cultural
basis for symbolic discourses of statehood, bringing to remembrance its distinctions between legitimate force and illegal violence in the present. It is not only this distinction, but the claim that rulers bear the authority of the state as sovereigns to protect their subjects from illegal violence with legitimate force, which is important. The Maliki regime attempted to use such motifs, just as its Ba’thist predecessor did.

Many of the familiar monuments, such as the Martyrs’ Monument and the Unknown Soldiers Monument, are still used, but the content of the narrative they articulate during ceremonial occasions has been changed to reflect the ideological stance of Iraq’s new rulers. Likewise, the national military uniform has retained many of the key stylings and features of the past, although the symbolic texts it its designed to convey have since been edited in subtle but significant ways by the new regime. This editing of symbolic texts is indicative of the larger issue to which I now turn my full attention: the ways in which the army itself became a site of symbolic contestation after 2003.

The Ba’thist regime’s array of paramilitary forces, such as the Saddam Fidayeen with its Galactic Empire aesthetic\(^5\) under the viciously erratic leadership of Uday Husayn, the Ba’th Party militia, and the Jerusalem army, with its well earned reputation for ineptitude, all dropped quickly from view. However, the Army itself, through war and ubiquity in everyday life over a period of eight decades, attained status as the authoritative (but not necessarily beloved) representative of the Iraqi state. By extension, this carried the implied claim that the state itself was indeed the authoritative representative of the nation. The army founded as a British colonial

\(^5\) It was rumored that Uday Husayn was an avid Star Wars fan, and designed the uniforms of the Saddam Fidayeen to resemble forces of the fictitious Galactic Empire. “Darth Vader” style Kevlar helmets can still be had on eBay for upwards of $600.
side project, came to symbolize an Iraqi national narrative of independence and unity suffused with pervasive militarism.

The problem of concentration and legitimation of force in post-2003 Iraq became acute in part because this symbolic dimension of military power was initially ignored by those who sought to transform the Iraqi state. The hodgepodge of new forces introduced by the U.S. led coalition during the early occupation period in 2003 failed to elicit any recognition of their official status. Iraq’s new rulers faced an acute crisis of legitimation similar to that of their historical predecessors that came to power behind foreign armies. In an existential contest to define the terms of ultimate political authority in Iraq, they sought to appropriate the customs, history, and traditions of the old army for the purpose of eliciting recognition of the new army’s claimed status as the legitimate instrument of state-sponsored military violence in Iraq.
Chapter 4: The tabula rasa army

4.1 Initial Efforts Towards Rebuilding

In May of 2003, Major General Paul Eaton, then-commanding general of the U.S. Army Infantry Center and School in Ft. Benning, Georgia, got a call at home asking whether he would be interested in going to Iraq to supervise the creation of a new army. When he told his wife, a former Army captain, about the call, she asked in disbelief, “Don’t they have somebody there for that already?”

They did not. Eaton arrived in Baghdad on June 13, 2003, two months after the fall of Baghdad. He described the scene to me during an interview in 2012.

I get off the helicopter and am greeted by five men all borrowed from the CENTCOM staff. So, the United States has kicked over the Iraqi government, they are completely unprepared for the Phase IV, they don’t have anybody in place who knows what they are doing or has planned for this. CENTCOM was told not to plan for it. [Gen.] Tommy Franks, the colossal dolt that he is, didn’t do any work on it at all. So we are flat on our collective ass as far as providing anything that looks like governance to a country of 25 million people. And my mission is to generate that component of national power that we refer to as the military.¹

After taking over one of Uday Husayn’s abandoned villas in the Green Zone, getting the electricity working, and filling the pool with water somehow, the small team got to work.

“We sat down, and we designed the Iraqi Army,” he said. “It looks a lot like the American army — it might surprise you.” Eaton was given a budget of $173 million without further explanation.

¹ CENTCOM stands for Central Command, the military command responsible for the Middle East and Central Asian theaters. Phase IV refers to the post-combat phase of a military operation when reconstruction is started. This and other quotations of Eaton from interview with the author in Washington, D.C. on July 25, 2012.
or justification for the funding level, and instructed to generate an Iraqi army of 40,000 men.²

The team then “reverse-engineered” three light infantry divisions with support units, and made
plans to station the new army at several former military bases at remote military bases near Iraq’s
borders. The level of funding and troop levels, and their positioning in remote border areas,
reflected the generally held belief that Iraq would remain relatively peaceful and would have
little need of an army for a prolonged domestic counterinsurgency campaign.³ Such a belief
hardly seemed preposterous in the late spring of 2003, when U.S. soldiers routinely moved about
Baghdad in unarmored vehicles — often without body armor or heavy weapons — and enjoyed
relatively good relations with local residents.⁴

It was also stipulated that the United States would assume responsibility for the external
defense of Iraq for the foreseeable future, and apparently assumed that this would be politically
acceptable to Iraqis.⁵ Plans to station these troops at remote bases near Iraq’s international
borders indicated that they would be used as a tripwire force, while a U.S. strategic umbrella
would protect against larger military threats. This arrangement proved to be problematic. First,
given the transnational dimension of many of the insurgent threats that faced Iraq, there was not
necessarily a clear separation between internal and external defense. Second, it presupposed the

² See, “Official History Spotlights Iraq Rebuilding Blunders”, by T. Christian Miller and James Glanz, in
ProPublica, December 13, 2008. The authors cite a State Department report quoting then-Secretary of State Colin
Powell remarking that estimates of Iraqi troop strength were fictitious during the early days of the occupation, often
growing by 20,000 soldiers per week.

³ Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld reportedly told Jay Garner, the head of the reconstruction effort after
the fall of Baghdad in 2003, that “if you think we're going to spend a billion dollars of our money over there, you are
sadly mistaken.” Ibid.

⁴ The first U.S. soldier to die by enemy action after the initial push to Baghdad in early April 2003 was killed on
June 27th as he browsed through items at a sidewalk stand in the Iraqi capital. See, “U.S. Soldier is Shot in the

⁵ Eaton, ibid.
existence of national consensus on the nature of legitimate political authority, which did not exist at the time and has shown little evidence of emerging since. Finally, it bore remarkable similarity to the conditions imposed by the British during the monarchy era that placed responsibility for Iraqi foreign policy and external defense in London.

In a state with highly developed institutions, a police force capable of defeating identifiable criminal elements might be sufficient. Iraq at the time, however, was an occupied territory with no functioning institutions and lacking even juridical sovereignty. The post-conflict reconstruction plan as it took shape in the summer of 2003 was oblivious to these realities. The first Iraqi troops were explicitly recruited on the basis that they would not be used for internal security missions. Presumably, their only mission would be border defense against minor threats from smuggling and low-level infiltration, and to show the flag — whatever color it turned out to be.

A neutered army of this type was galling to many former members of Iraq’s pre-2003 security establishment, not just hard-core Ba’thists. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the size and mission of the Iraqi Army had long been seen in anti-imperialist terms, stretching back to the Mandate era when the British limited the size of Iraq’s army to 5,000 men, recruited security forces independently of the nominal government, and took over responsibility for Iraq’s foreign

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6 Eaton, ibid.

7 According to Anthony Cordesman senior U.S. officials were more concerned with ensuring civilian control of the military, and were thus wary of building a large force. “The initial goal the CPA set for the Iraqi Army was to create three light motorized divisions (over a period of several years) that were designed for border defense. These were to be built slowly from the ground up and gradually become heavier, mechanized divisions with a vaguely defined longer-term goal of creating six to nine divisions over a period of five years or more.” See, p. 57, Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006). Ironically, the Ba’thist regime, whatever its other failings, had exercised firm civilian control over the military for 35 years.

policy and external defense. This dimension of security policy in post-2003 Iraq was not immediately apparent to Eaton or other Coalition commanders, and provoked only minor resistances at first, given the wide imbalance of power that existed at the time. However, these resistances grew more marked over time and assumed larger dimensions as the political and financial costs of occupation for the U.S.-British coalition increased, and failure to make meaningful progress eroded morale at home. At the most senior levels, an autonomous Iraqi Army came to be seen as necessary for American disengagement from Iraq at an acceptable price.

The resistances encountered by Eaton and other officers at all levels of command when bringing a new army into existence are worthy of analysis because they reveal how both Americans and their putative Iraqi partners diverged in assessing the nature and meaning of their interactions. Often the key issues at stake were not technocratic as much as they were symbolic. They also showed how Iraqi and American commanders viewed their moral obligations to each other and to “Iraq” as both an abstract entity and concrete set of governing personalities and institutions. Assessments of the validity of certain courses of action, such as full-scale military assaults on Iraqi cities, were also made in reference to a politics of the state, or really memory of the state, which was opaque to foreigners. The durability of symbolic structures of statehood can be seen in these interactions, which frame the discussion in chapter six of how the leadership of Iraq’s first permanent government sought to mobilize symbols to seize the cultural ownership of the new Iraqi state.

As Eaton relates it, early efforts to construct an Iraqi identity for the forces being recruited as the new national army floundered as his cohort of staff and officers struggled to
understand the human terrain of Iraq. Efforts to play to Iraqi sensibilities and interests often provoked unintended resistance and resentments. In an attempt to bring institutional memory of the old army into the new, he instructed division commanders in Iraq to send him a handful of former mid ranking officers of Lieutenant Colonel and below. The seemingly arbitrary rank limit was based on Eaton’s reading of a study of German military integration after 1989, which claimed to demonstrate that officers above this rank were too invested in the previous system to serve the cause of reform.

“So I get 40 guys at training base at Kirkush… These guys, I give them the welcome speech — you’re the nucleus of the first battalion of the first Iraqi military force [after the collapse of the Ba’thist regime]. You’re patriots, we’ve selected you based on your potential,” Eaton said, recalling the encounter.

“Two hours later, the contractor in charge of training knocks on my door and says, ‘We have a problem: they have demands. A: They want their old rank back. Now.’ We told them: Some of you are going to be lieutenants, some will be captains, and one of you is going to be a lieutenant colonel. That’s it. Now as the army expands, you will obviously [be promoted quickly]. Now I told them of American Army where we went from 100,000 at the dawn of WWII to 12 million. I explained all that. They weren’t having any of it. We want our old rank back. We want more money. And the third demand was: We ain’t working for no stinking coalition. So I wait till the next morning after I’ve done my morning run, walk in in PT gear still kind of sweaty and say ‘I understand you have demands, we will not meet your demands, we are putting you on a bus and sending you back to Baghdad.’ Which is what we did.”

Evidently, the Iraqi officers had already sorted out among themselves who was senior in the group and would speak for them. The hard line demands carried the day, although some had second thoughts when threatened with the loss of their jobs. Eaton retained several to go through

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9 Eaton, ibid.
the new training course and provide feedback, but this proved similarly unacceptable to their
sensibilities of justice or regard for the legitimacy of U.S. Army orders, and so they were
summarily dismissed. Quite simply, until this point nobody had told them that the Iraqi state and
its institutions no longer existed, and the “languages of stateness”\(^\text{10}\) they had grown accustomed
to speaking were dead. The American refusal to acknowledge their old ranks and the identities
those presupposed was a clear signal that a fundamental reordering of Iraqi society was at hand.\(^\text{11}\)

An intriguing exception to this tendency was described by a senior Marine Corps civil
affairs officer, who faced a major civil disturbance in the city of Diwaniya shortly after the fall of
Baghdad. Between 700-1000 Iraqi soldiers from the old army rioted outside the municipal
building demanding to be paid, threatening to overwhelm the small U.S. force, which effectively
consisted of a handful of Marines standing post. The Marine officer collared an Iraqi general
that had been visiting the civil affairs detachment when the riot erupted, and demanded that he go
outside to quiet the crowd. However, the demand was met with flat refusal.

I finally told him that I appreciated the fact that he had not fought the U.S. Marines and
because of that many of his soldiers are alive today and many of my Marines will get to go
home… If somebody is not out there controlling his forces it is likely that many of his
people will not get to go home tonight to see their family and their children, and that it
would hurt me deeply if that occurred because there is no need for that to take place. And
that if he was a real leader of Marines, or soldiers, he would go out there and get control of
his people. And he said, ‘No, I won’t go out there without you’.

The two went out to address the crowd and got them to sit on their hands, but control started to
slip away as insurgents that had infiltrated the ranks began agitating again. It was here that the
Marine officer used the Iraqis own language of the state and its authority to speak to them. His
comments showed an awareness that, although the regime had been destroyed only a short time
before, the Iraqi state could still be used as a referent of authority.

\(^\text{10}\) See Hansen and Stepputat, ibid, 5.
I told the crowd, ‘I don’t understand your army. In my army when my general speaks everybody listens. And you have young soldiers here who apparently don’t want to show discipline and why is that? With that, the senior individuals in the crowd turned around and looked at these young kinds that were trying to start the problems, and literally picked them up and carried them out like you see at the rock concerts and threw them over the wall, and that was the last I saw of the insurgents.\textsuperscript{12}

Unfortunately, few U.S. officials or officers possessed this social acumen in 2003, and thus did not realize how latent authority of the defunct Iraqi state might be used to maintain order and constitute a successor state. The Iraqi Army was officially disbanded on May 23, 2003, a month after this incident.

By the fall of 2003, Eaton’s team had to deal with the reality of building an army entirely from scratch. It began by setting up three recruiting centers across Iraq designed to build the Iraqi Army at the platoon level — meaning that individual platoons numbering 30-40 men with one junior officer leading them would be formed under the organizational hierarchy of Coalition forces in Iraq. The highest ranking officer in the new Iraqi Army under this plan would be a first lieutenant, although promotions above this level were theoretically possible as the organization matured. One need only look at the rosters of Iraqi units of the Mandate era, with the Anglo names of white officers commanding Arabs to understand how this might further rankle Iraqi sensibilities.

Each platoon was to be “representative of Iraqi culture”\textsuperscript{13}, which in the language of the day meant that a sectarian quota should be used in selecting recruits and officer candidates. The


\textsuperscript{13} Eaton, ibid.
formula used by CMATT stipulated an army that was 60 percent Shia, 20 percent Sunni, and 20 percent Kurd, which roughly corresponded to the presumed demographics of Iraq.\textsuperscript{14} Although this corresponded to U.S. policymakers’ and commanders’ notions of fairness through proportional representation, it empowered sectarian Iraqi elites who sought a Shiite dominated state based on sectarian identity rather than an inclusive national identity. Likewise, the “national percentage” as it came to be known, became a symbol used by former elites and regime opponents to stigmatize the new army as a uniformed sectarian militia.\textsuperscript{15}

\section*{4.2 Attempts to Build a New Military Culture}

Another significant, if short-lived, attempt to engineer the culture of the new Iraqi Army was a CMATT initiative to train Iraqi officers in Jordan. The plan, described to me by General Eaton, called for 1,500 officers and 6,000 non-commissioned officers (sergeants) to be trained by Jordanian Army trainers over a period of two and a half months, which would be sufficient to staff three Iraqi divisions. The plan was part of a $2 billion initiative begun in September 2003 to introduce the “cadre” training principle into the formation of the new army — something that was adopted as American practice during WWII. Under this plan, officers and senior enlisted staff of an entire battalion would train together for a period before being sent 1000 raw recruits, who would then be trained from the ground up as a cohesive unit rather than being parceled out individually after their initial entry training.

\textsuperscript{14} The last official census of Iraq was conducted in 1987. For a discussion of the political sensitivities of census taking in Iraq, see, “Counting Iraqis: why there may never be a census again,” by Mustafa Habib, \textit{Niqash}, June 20, 2013. Available online at, \texttt{http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=3238}. Accessed, February 22, 2015.

\textsuperscript{15} Interviews with retired Iraqi officers in Amman, Jordan, September-October, 2012.
Interestingly, the main rationale for training in Jordan was not shared language or relative security, which was becoming of greater concern in Iraq by the fall of 2003 as indicated by the more than tenfold increase in U.S. funding for the new Iraqi forces from the initial $173 million. Rather, the initiative was an effort to engineer a new corporate culture and ethos within the Iraqi Army. This effort was ongoing, and extended to (somewhat hackneyed) religious-patriotic exhortations on behalf of Allah and Iraq, as well as futile efforts to get Iraqi officers to adopt customs of the servant-leader ethos that had become part of the Western military tradition during the Napoleonic era. This included allowing low ranking soldiers to eat first at meal times and not demanding personal servitude from them, which were apparently alien concepts to many Iraqi officers who had served in the old army. Eaton recalled how he had seen Jordanian officers and senior enlisted staff interacting during a visit to the Hashemite kingdom to buy weapons for the new Iraqi Army. “This was the first time had seen Arab army at close range…”, he said. “It reminded me of the British Army. I saw an NCO argue with lieutenant colonel — professionally — [and] a lieutenant colonel argue with generals. I thought to myself: The Iraqis have got to see this.” When he told a Jordanian general about his idea, the

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16 By the beginning of 2005, $1.7 billion had been spent on Iraqi security forces. The U.S. Congress authorized $5 billion for Iraqi security forces in 2004.

17 Eaton was one of many U.S. commanders or advisers who remarked on this issue.

18 In Iraq during this period it seemed that weapons were ubiquitous in society, yet finding rifles and ammunition for new security forces -- and preventing its waste or theft -- was a constant headache. (Personal observation.)
Jordanian officer’s response was, “You want us to brainwash them.” “Yup,” Eaton replied, “I want Iraqis to act like you.”

The request made its way all the way up to King Abdullah’s office and was approved. Although the plan was successfully executed in the technocratic sense that the required number of Iraqi officers and sergeants received competently presented tactical training in Arabic, it failed in the larger goal to instill British-style military professionalism in the new Iraqi Army. The overarching problem was not the Jordanian training per se, but the perceived legitimacy of Jordanians as trainers of the new Iraqi Army and the perceived legitimacy of the American political project in Iraq itself.

I observed one telling illustration of the former while in Amman, when I discussed the Jordanian experiment with a retired Iraqi general. He had played a leading role in building the military education infrastructure of the Iraqi Army in the 1970’s. He wondered aloud with a colleague why Iraqi officers would train in Jordan. They had an extended conversation detailing the ways in which the Iraqi Army had in fact built up the Jordanian Army during its heyday as the region’s most powerful military. One got the impression that the Iraqis had been told that their kid brother — who had never succeeded in shaking off the embarrassing relic of imperialism that was the Hashemite monarchy — was going to train them in how to be a real Arab army.  

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19 This was one of several institutionalized efforts to remake Iraqi military and political culture. NATO, for example, ran rule-of-law and civil reconstruction exercises for several years. The commander remarked to me that Iraqis from across the sectarian and political spectrum were adept at solving problems in the abstract when real political objectives were not at stake. This suggests that the problem was the political environment in Iraq rather than Iraqi ignorance or lack of imagination.

20 al-Marashi and Salama, ibid., 214, quote an Iraqi officer remarking, “So what has suddenly transpired that requires the officers of the fourth strongest army in the world to be trained by an army that was used only to suppress demonstrations and riots, crush the Palestinians, and protect the border with Israel?”
Likewise, a Jordanian military trainer I spoke to during my research trip to Jordan in 2013, a retired lieutenant colonel, remarked that the Iraqis seemed to be motivated primarily by their salaries and showed no discernible enthusiasm for a “new Iraq” based upon democratic principles.\(^\text{21}\) Taken in its larger context, this does not necessarily reflect Iraqi apathy or antipathy towards the reconstruction of a more inclusive post-Ba’thist political order. However, the Iraqi political project was conducted under the purview of top U.S. policymakers that explicitly sought to retain a controlling interest in their own project — something that could hardly be expected to elicit enthusiasm from Iraqi officers.\(^\text{22}\)

A small but telling symbol of this relationship were the utility uniforms issued to members of the new army. Eaton sought out and found an Iraqi supplier that was capable of filling a uniform supply contract in the post-invasion chaos, thus fulfilling one of the mandates given him to use Iraqi industry to the maximum extent possible. However, CMATT instructed the supplier to use the “chocolate chip” camouflage pattern that U.S. soldiers wore during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Apparently this was done for the practical reason that it was an existing design suitable for Iraqi terrain and it was no longer in use by United States forces. There were complaints about the quality of the uniforms, but as Iraqis related to me, the main problem was that Iraqi officers did not like being dressed to look like the army that dealt them an ignominious defeat in 1991.\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Interview, March 1\(^{st}\), 2013 near Zarqa, Jordan.

\(^{22}\) Ironically, the government of Prime Minister Abadi is reportedly seeking to run a similar training program for Iraqi officers in Jordan in an effort to rebuild the Army after the 2014 military debacle. See, “Jordan About to Begin Re-Training First Group of Iraqi Army Soldiers”, Reuters, via Indian Strategic Studies, December 23, 2014. Available online at: http://strategicstudyindia.blogspot.com/2014/12/jordan-about-to-begin-re-training-first.html.

\(^{23}\) Interview in Amman, April 4, 2013.
Indeed, it was not at all clear in 2004 what an Iraqi soldier should look like, or what national military narrative — if any — he represented. U.S. advisers reported that Iraqi soldiers of that period typically ornamented whatever uniform they were wearing with a hodgepodge of military insignia, award ribbons, berets of various colors, and patches. Some of these adopted American military motifs, which enjoyed a certain prestige at the time, but many other motifs directly appropriated Iraqi styles and symbols of the past. Eaton, who perhaps understandably felt he had more pressing issues to deal with, simply decreed that pre-Saddam medals were authorized for wear and that Iraqi soldiers should not look like “Saddam soldiers”.

“We were not going to give them their old uniforms,” he said, stating his position flatly. He had initially instructed that graduating soldiers wear desert camouflage baseball caps as part of their utility uniform, but a U.S. Army sergeant serving on his staff ordered a shipment of tan military berets from Spain after the baseball cap initiative fell flat with the soldiers. When Eaton demanded an explanation, the sergeant offered that he had been instructed not to make them look like Saddam soldiers. Since black berets were associated with Saddam and his soldiers (who actually most often wore red berets from the 1980’s onward), tan seemed to be a good compromise and worked better in the sun, besides.

“So, the tan beret was an Army staff sergeant decision,” Eaton said.

Eaton himself was aware of the Iraqi officers’ attitudes, but used his authority as the de facto commanding general of the nascent Iraqi Army to override their misgivings on many

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24 Various Iraqi military patches for sale on eBay 2011-2014. My interviews with U.S. advisers suggested that more elite Iraqi units belonging to Rapid Intervention Forces or Iraqi Special Operations Forces with large numbers of prior service personnel used Iraqi special operations insignia and patches from the previous era, while newly formed conventional units favored American motifs. Interviews on August 20, 2012; August 21, 2012; August 27, 2012; August 30, 2012; June 30, 2012.
issues. The most significant was the aforementioned Jordanian training initiative. As he recounted to me: “The Iraqis were very resentful at going to Jordan, to which I said basically, tough s**t.”

Although the writ of senior U.S. commanders carried enough weight in the fall of 2003 to compel obedience from Iraqis participating in the U.S. led state building project, it could not elicit active support outside a relatively exclusive group of favored expatriates that stood to gain control of a new Iraqi state backed by the power of United States and Britain. Eaton was unable to attend the graduation ceremony outside Amman, but his wife observed the proceedings and was shocked when the newly graduated officers began chanting Saddam-era slogans.

4.3 Recruiting the New Army

The Iraqi Army was viewed as a minor sideshow during the early phases of force generation, as evidenced by its threadbare budget and the lack of sustained attention from senior levels of policymaking and military command. As Iraq spun into a state of insurgency and insurrection rivaling the tumult of the 1920 revolt, the U.S. administration — just like the British Colonial Office of the 1920’s — urgently sought to generate a viable indigenous military force that would allow disengagement of the costly imperial expeditionary force. As in the early 1920’s, the task was complicated by the paucity of indigenous political interlocutors who might be able to maintain some credibility in Iraq while being supporting the geopolitical priorities of their great power sponsors.

The growing crisis in public order that took root in late 2003 and the continued reluctance of senior U.S. policymakers to cede control of the Iraqi political process to domestic Iraqi
politics,\textsuperscript{25} meant that development of indigenous Iraqi forces outstripped development of indigenous political authority. As new Iraqi army battalions were generated by CMATT they were placed under the organizational hierarchy of U.S. division commanders. At this early stage they did not have their own “battle space”, but operated alongside U.S. troops under U.S. command. Even if Iraqi troops had operated autonomously, there was no clear Iraqi political authority to operate under or Iraqi national political objective to pursue, however defined.

This ambiguity was reflected in recruitment patterns and techniques, which followed a hodgepodge of improvised practices. Furthermore, CMATT did not have a monopoly over legal or quasi-legal recruitment in the Iraqi military labor market. In western Iraq, local commanders struck their own political bargains with local sheikhs and notables to recruit members of local Iraqi National Guard (ING) units, which operated parallel to and then eventually assimilated the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) formed under the aegis of the CPA. Other units were recruited on an ad hoc basis by mid-level U.S. commanders to protect local infrastructure or to address immediate political crises.\textsuperscript{26} Interviews with junior officers who recruited or trained Iraqi forces during this period illuminates the social and political realities of forming a new army absent legitimate political authority.

"We had to give them [CMATT] an assist and say [to locals] that 'yes' this actually exists and the Iraqi Army will be back, but as far as what it would look like, I had no clue,” said a company grade U.S. Army infantry officer that served in Mosul in 2003. “For me as an Army


\textsuperscript{26} Such was the case with my battalion, which was one of the first Marine units to raise indigenous security forces in 2004. See, Philip Skuta. "Partnering with Iraqi Security Forces." \textit{Marine Corps Gazette, Quantico, Virginia} (2005).
officer, I didn't have all that information. I knew to throw that flyer out and make sure guys got on that bus."\textsuperscript{27}

Recruiting standards for soldiers and officers were hardly rigorous.

We would have Iraqi Army guys show up as long as they weren't of any rank, they would show up when they felt comfortable enough to do so — when they needed money,” he said. "The best guys were anybody who could speak English. If they could do that they were automatically good to go. And that was something I always found when advising in Iraq, was that if somebody could speak English they were automatically a good guy."\textsuperscript{28}

Captain Smith, a Marine Corps intelligence officer that worked extensively with Iraqi forces and tribal authorities in western Iraq on deployments in 2004-2005 and 2006, recalled how recruitment into Iraqi forces, particularly the ING which operated separately from the CMATT forces at the time, essentially became a vehicle for socially marginal Iraqis to get guns and U.S. backing, as former Iraqi officers above the rank of captain were typically refused entry.\textsuperscript{29} The cadre of officers typically had no pull in their local area as a counterinsurgent force, especially if they did not come from influential tribes as was the case with most of them. Many would claim former Iraqi Army experience in order to gain field commissions as company grade officers and claim the accompanying privileges that officers had typically been entitled to in Iraq before 2003.\textsuperscript{30}

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\textsuperscript{27} Interview with former U.S. adviser, August, 30, 2012.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} I have changed the name in order not to compromise his identity.
\textsuperscript{30} Interview, May 3, 2012.
\end{flushleft}
Despite a set of rudimentary safeguards implemented by CMATT to vet its own applicants, ethnosectarian tensions from the broader Iraqi society — produced in part by the formation of the very institutions of security and governance meant to quell them — leached into the new army. One former company grade Marine Corps officer who advised Iraqi forces on three separate deployments in 2004, 2006-2007, and 2009, described this general situation of exacerbated ethnic tensions during his first deployment as an adviser to the CMATT forces.

“At this point [in early 2004] the ethnic tension is just boiling over, he said. “You have some good guys that see themselves as Iraqi and want to make this work, but the Army is completely infiltrated by people who are loyal to their tribes or ethnic sects more than Iraq. American advisers see it through our American lenses - they see a guy wearing an Iraqi uniform and think ‘oh this guy must be loyal to Iraq’”.31 One evening he and other members of his advising detachment encountered saw these tensions break out openly.

You had some guys who were officers in the old army saying I just need my old job back and be able to make a living. You had Shi’a and Kurds coming in who wanted influence in government, so at Taji you had this situation where Kurds, Shia, and Sunni were all coming together at the same place… One night coming back from the chow hall in our little Hyundai minivan we see our soldiers throwing rocks at each other with Shia on one side and Sunnis on the other and Kurds standing off to the side. These are softball sized rocks they use to make helicopter landing zones with — they can kill you. We got in the middle and said ‘Hey guys calm down’ and then they started throwing rocks at us. It was insane. I fired three warning shots into the side of a nearby building. Fortunately I had some good guys to back me up [with my unit] because our ROE (rules of engagement) said we were not supposed to fire warning shots, but I didn’t want to shoot my own guys. What was I supposed to do? We were supposed to go on patrol together later. We had stuff like that happen all the time.

31 Interview, August 21, 2012.
At the beginning of 2004 the Iraqi Army had no indigenous senior leadership, although there were nominal division commanders in the Green Zone with no command authority or staff. The units that had been recruited and trained had been formed on the basis of a hated “national percentage” that exacerbated ethnic tensions and the nascent officer corps been filled with socially marginal leaders in many cases. In others, it brought in officers whose enculturation into the Iraqi national narrative of the Ba’thist era through the Army left them resentful and uncommitted to the U.S. state building project. It was against this background that the Fallujah crisis erupted and exacerbated existing fissures.

Fallujah had been a trouble spot for U.S. forces from the beginning of the occupation period. The relationship between U.S. forces and the local population was never good, but degraded precipitously after unit from the 82nd Airborne fired on a mixed mob of protesters and insurgents that cornered it in a local school, an incident that resulted in the deaths of several Iraqis. The shortage of U.S. forces and the difficult local conditions combined to create a situation where the city came under the sway of jihadi insurgent forces. Then-Major General Mattis intended to use an ink-blot strategy as commander of 1st Marine Division to build political support for the nascent U.S. state building project in areas surrounding Fallujah before attempting to pacify the city itself. This strategy was short-circuited by the murders of U.S. contractors outside the city and the hastily considered order from senior policymakers to seize the city immediately.

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33 Statements made to 7th Marine regiment officers during command visit to MCB 29-Palms circa 2006.
The acute crisis emerging from these events forced a fundamental change in the relationship between U.S. forces and the Iraqi military labor market. Namely, recruits for the new Iraqi Army would be trained for and deployed on internal security missions. This added a dimension of contentious politics to the Iraqi Army that had not been present before, which intersected with both troublesome questions of sub-national identities and loyalties, and the cultural identity of the Iraqi Army itself as a national force.

“Remember when we recruited them we told them they would not be used for internal security,” said Eaton. “Fallujah looks a lot like internal security. We told them you’re going to provide outer ring security - prevent anybody from going in and keep anybody from coming out because we had a lot of foreign fighters. They didn’t buy that.”

I am a legitimate actor, on behalf of a legitimately elected government, to perform a legitimate mission: obviously none of that was in that mix. The day after [the contractor murders] in the recruiting process we said ‘you may be used internally for internal security requirements’. So we had all these guys that had volunteered to be Iraqi soldiers, then we went to them and asked for volunteers to be in internal security movements…We told them you have a choice, you can be an Iraqi soldier and defend Iraq from without or you can be an Iraqi soldier and do an internal security mission - period - you don’t get to pick. We had to jump through hoops to make that change. The problem was not new guys but the guys we had recruited at the beginning when we thought that internal security would be a police issue… In April [2004] have this gut wrenching change that we have to go after serving Iraqi units and reconfigure them.

4.4 The 2004 Fallujah Crisis and the Turn to Internal Defense

These issues came to a head as the Fallujah crisis accelerated in April of 2004. The commander of U.S. forces in Iraq at the time, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, was eager to include indigenous Iraqi forces in the assault. Available forces, numbering only two raw battalions that had just emerged from the training pipeline, were hurriedly mobilized for
deployment to Fallujah against the advice of Eaton, who felt that the troops would need at least three years to be fully prepared for an operation of that magnitude. Their subsequent performance in the crisis, which included armed mutiny and mass desertion, was rooted in the more fundamental issues outlined above. When pressed into the Fallujah assault in April of 2004, the results were predictable. The CMATT adviser – the same one who described the ethnic strife among these Iraqi troops -- recalled:

We sent half of 2nd Battalion through Baghdad in trucks - what we think happened is that the Sunni soldiers called their buddies in Fallujah and said, ‘Hey, we’re on our way’ and then ambushed us along the way. The Sunnis in the trucks started shooting Shia. Our advisers didn’t really know who was shooting who so they started shooting everybody. We had one guy, Sgt P_. who literally had one round left and was picking up AK’s off the ground. I mean, he had been killing guys inside the trucks - I mean it was bad.34

The fluid boundaries between Iraqi state nationalism, and sub-national identities and commitments was significant in that it affected the ability of U.S. advisers to secure the loyalty of Iraqi troops, even those directly in their employ. Surviving members of the battalion were arrested en masse by the Marines and then re-vetted and purged.

Militant Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia in fact played a significant role in breaking the Iraqi Army battalions dispatched to Fallujah in the spring of 2004. The convoy passed from Taji through Sadrist neighborhoods in Baghdad on its way to Fallujah and was engaged by Mahdi Army militiamen as a demonstration of solidarity with Sunni jihadists and resistance fighters in the besieged city, which prompted mass desertions. Many re-tellings of the ill-fated expedition focus on this incident, rather than the sectarian ties between Sunni soldiers

34 Interview, August 21, 2012.
and sectarian compatriots in Fallujah and it remains unclear whether the two strands of the narrative are directly connected or not.

A U.S. Army major that led a CMATT advisory detachment in the months before the incident recalled that the leadership of his battalion was well represented by all of Iraq’s major communal groups, but that did not serve the cause of reconciliation or military effectiveness on behalf on an unformed Iraqi state entity.

I have no doubt that a couple of the guys in the battalion were diehard al-Sadr supporters, and they made statements to the Marines about not being able to fight against their brothers...They were all about going to Fallujah and fighting the Sunnis; but when they got ambushed on their way there by the Jaish al-Mahdi, that created some issues which snowballed and caused the Marines to strip them all down to their underwear and wrap them in concertina wire. General Eaton flew in to address the situation and, as the outgoing MiTT, we were still there waiting to leave and I remember just shaking my head thinking, “I bet nobody is going to have the guts to stand up and tell General Eaton that the entire battalion is actually just two buildings over sitting in their underwear surrounded by concertina wire.”

The only other significant indigenous force in Fallujah was the 36th Commando Battalion formed and trained under a U.S. Army Special Forces detachment. Interestingly, as if to emphasize their identity as “Iraqi” commandos, both the U.S. Special Forces soldiers and their Iraqi charges wore the distinct camouflage pattern once worn by Republican Guard commandos.


36 See, Gordon and Trainor, ibid., 61.

The Fallujah assault was called off after several days, during which time the Marines made gains against insurgent forces, but at the cost of press coverage in the Arab world that further stigmatized the American mission in Iraq. As part of the ceasefire agreement, General Mattis negotiated the creation of a “Fallujah Brigade” with former Iraqi officers exiled in Amman. Under the plan, former Iraqi Army officers living in Fallujah would lead a brigade of Iraqi soldiers from the old army that would assume responsibility for security within the city. The Brigade was short-lived, serving mostly as a face-saving means to agree to a cease fire before it succumbed to the jihadi insurgency raging in Anbar province. Nonetheless, it illustrated that the Iraqi Army of the previous era had residual credibility as a frame of legitimate force in the regions of Iraq where it had once been dominant.38

Meanwhile, surviving Iraqis from two battalions were held until an investigation could determine who had mutinied. The purged battalions were then rebuilt (and re-dressed) under new leadership. The disastrous episode need for effective Iraqi units that will fight within Iraq, and also the need to recruit Iraqi military leadership that was both capable and committed to the survival of an Iraqi successor state. The ING, border troops, police, and miscellaneous “rent-a-cops” were all placed under the overall supervision of CMATT for purposes of organization and training. The Ministry of the Interior, which still operated under CPA auspices was also placed under CMATT.39 Tellingly, no ministry of defense existed at the time.

On April 30, 2004, as smoke was still clearing in Fallujah, a simmering scandal relating to treatment of Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison west of Baghdad exploded as

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38 The platoon I commanded was slated to lead an attack on the city before the ceasefire was called. As such, I was a witness and participant in these events.

39 See, Steven E. Clay, Iroquois Warriors in Iraq. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007)
photographs of extreme abuse were published in major U.S. news publications. It became clear to Eaton that it would be impossible to operate an Iraqi Army indefinitely as an adjunct to American policy and military power in Iraq. “I was still making all the decisions for them. I ran promotion boards, we wrote all their regulations,” he said. “It was a white sheet of paper.

Finally, we needed Iraqi generals, but I kept getting pushback [from senior policymakers]. I am becoming increasingly illegitimate in their eyes, especially after Abu Ghraib, and I need an Iraqi general to command this outfit, because I was the de facto commanding general of the Iraqi Army which is a really strange place to be.”

In June of 2004, Iraq was declared sovereign, the CPA was shuttered, and Paul Bremer surreptitiously left the country on a military flight. At the moment of its regained sovereignty, Iraq had 4 trained battalions, and 3 more in various stages of generation, all of which operated under the purview of U.S. division command structures. None of these battalions possessed heavy weapons or could be integrated into autonomous combined-arms operations.

### 4.5 Conclusion

Post-regime memory politics in Iraq were largely opaque to U.S. policymakers and military leaders, particularly during the early phases of the occupation, and particularly among those most ideologically committed to constructing a “New Iraq” atop a tabula rasa. Following their British forbearers, U.S. policymakers and military leaders initially sought to reconstruct the armed forces of Iraq along the lines of a national gendarmerie — a sort of paramilitary police force suitable for conducting internal security operations and relieving the burden of occupation costs from the U.S. treasury. This task was initially left to improvisation, which reflected the
ambivalence of leading U.S. policymakers towards centralized state institutions in general, and centralized Iraqi state institutions in particular.\footnote{A number of journalistic accounts of the war document the attitudes of senior policymakers. See, Gordon et al., and Ricks, ibid.}

The degradation of the security situation exemplified by widespread looting and the bombing of the U.N. Mission in Baghdad forced a reappraisal. Yet, the reconstruction of the Iraqi armed forces in its early phases was largely approached as a technocratic process rather than one that impinged directly upon Iraq’s fraught politics of memory and communal identity. However, the disregard of these elements of statehood did not change the underlying political and social realities of Iraq. American forces were confronted with recruitment problems, endemic desertion, popular resistance and non-cooperation, refusal to engage in combat, and outright mutiny from hastily recruited and trained Iraqi forces.

This mountain of evidence suggested to all but the most obtuse that legitimacy of Iraqi forces was not a given, and could not be attained simply by designating these forces as “legitimate”\footnote{This reflects a fundamental error in the collective thinking of the U.S. military, which views legitimacy as a self-referential category or designation made by U.S. policy makers and military leaders rather than as being a socially and politically contested claim made within a given cultural and historical context. A prominent example of this line of thinking is the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army joint counterinsurgency manual. See, Nagl, John A., James F. Amos, Sarah Sewall, and David H. Petraeus. \textit{The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual}. No. 3-24. University of Chicago Press, 2008.}.

Time and again, U.S. advisers tasked with reconstruction of the Iraqi military were confronted with unanticipated effects of the intersection of politics of memory with military organization and deployment, and were forced to adjust their plans to Iraqi realities, or else face failure. Iraq lacked not only a coherent and credible national military institution, but also a viable state idea that such an institution might be taken to represent. Minus this basic construct of statehood, there was no visible or enforceable boundary between legitimate force and illegal
violence. The derisive epithet directed at the new forces — the *fidayeen Bremer* — indicated they were, for all intents and purposes, just another militia of doubtful legitimacy.⁴²

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⁴² See, Marashi and Salama, ibid., 212, quoting a 2003 International Crisis Group report.

5.1 Overview

The military setback and political defeat represented by the Fallujah stalemate in spring of 2004 prompted U.S. policymakers and military commanders to seek new ways to recruit an Iraqi military force capable of carrying out a sustained counterinsurgency campaign in Anbar and in areas of Baghdad and southern Iraq controlled by Sadrist militias. In effect, the first year of the occupation provided information that leading U.S. policymakers and military commanders had vastly overestimated both their own capacity and that of an inchoate Iraqi political authority to monopolize legitimate force in Iraq simply by exercising American advantages in military armament and organization. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, a monopoly of force requires an institutional and symbolic framework of the state that produces a distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence, without which there is nothing to monopolize.

Substantive engagement with indigenous political processes and negotiation of a new political order that would have been required to construct this framework was largely disconnected from the process of organizing indigenous military forces. Much of the previous regime’s cadre of security sector elites were in fact slated for disenfranchisement under the new order. General Eaton’s curt refusals to allow former Iraqi officers their old ranks and uniforms were emblematic of broader policies to erase Iraq’s national military narrative, its symbols, and the cultural basis for domination of the old political-military class. The un-ceremonial disbandment of the Iraqi Army — whatever its necessity or other merits — signaled this, as did a campaign of aggressive de-Ba’thification that went far beyond the removal of top regime figures and war criminals from public life.
This preceded, and in part provoked, Iraq's descent into Hobbesian chaos. The four year period from 2003 to 2007 marked the disintegration of social order in Iraq, marked by the near complete absence of the state, negotiation of an exclusive elite state bargain through a truncated constitutional drafting process, a civil war, and the formation of a permanent government.\(^1\) To the extent to which this process of state building followed any logic, it reflected the political exigencies of American domestic politics as much as it did Iraqi aspirations or realities.\(^2\) During this period, U.S. military and diplomatic power was focused on meeting benchmarks of elections, referenda, troop strength, and the like, while bringing U.S. firepower to bear on insurgent strongholds.

Formation and legitimation of a recognizable Iraqi state was not problematized at the policy level beyond creation of a formal juridical structure of state institutions, and therefore the reconstruction of Iraqi forces took place in the absence of the state. Lack of routinized authority meant raw power was privileged as an instrument of politics. Although the command hierarchy of the new military and its subordinate units were built relatively quickly between 2005 and 2006, the effectiveness of this force as a symbol and instrument of Iraqi statehood was generally


negligible, as evidenced by the rapid escalation of communal violence in Iraq during the same period and the inability or unwillingness of nominally Iraqi forces to quash it.³

In the initial stages of military organization, power lacked any centralized identity, authority, or purpose outside the immediate tactical needs of the U.S. military command structure, as Iraq lacked a permanent constitution or government.⁴ Therefore, a multiplicity of legitimacies were negotiated at the local level between newly created units and local power brokers who could demonstrate they possessed authority independently of the state. In one notable case, which I examine at the end of the chapter, the creation of quasi-official Sunni tribal militias in Anbar province in 2007 to fight foreign al Qaeda militants, the units themselves were localized. This was a remarkable outcome extending from a functionalist understanding of the state and legitimate force, which produced highly localized legitimation of force lacking meaningful referents of state sovereignty beyond the barest formal acknowledgements of Baghdad’s authority.

5.2 Building Indigenous Leadership

Initially, members of the former political-military class as a group had little incentive to cooperate with the new order or acknowledge the legitimacy of its military organizations as long as de-Ba’thification was a given. This was apparent simply by looking at the massive social infrastructure built around the military, which I did first hand when on a regimental clearing operation south of Fallujah in spring of 2004. One of our regimental objectives was the town of

³ Both Gordon and Trainor, ibid. and Rayburn, ibid., provide extensive documentation of how security forces formed under U.S. oversight often devolved into sectarian death squads.

Ameriya, a settlement built for Republican Guard officers covering just under a square mile in the desert on the approaches to the city. Several bomb-proof bunkers were built into the city plan, hundreds of five story concrete buildings of much better construction than one often saw in Iraq, a large mosque, parks, and a hospital were all part of the military city. Anbar was dotted with many similar settlements.⁵

The previous day my platoon had searched a house suspected as an IED control site. The house was unoccupied, but clearly not abandoned. Several automatic rifles, including a silver plated AK-47 reportedly given to Republican Guard officers as a reward by Saddam Husayn were found, along with various bomb-making materials. The various photo albums we found showed a prosperity and social status of a military man’s family that I was quite certain my platoon was directly involved in undermining. It would be hard to imagine former officers from these places extending recognition to the symbols of the new Iraq, which included tan berets imported from Spain, “chocolate chip” camouflage once worn by Iraq’s conquerors, a government run by people once denounced as traitors, and a proposed national flag that resembled the one of Israel.⁶

Conversely, the national military narrative and symbols of the previous order continued to evince recognition as emblems of state power within these circles. This recognition was not exclusive to hard-core Ba’thists, but extended through much of Iraqi society. The policy of insisting upon a clean-sheet redesign of Iraq’s security architecture reflected an ignorance or disregard for these realities. As Marashi writes, “The CPA and political circles in Washington

⁵ See, Gordon and Trainor, ibid., 56-57.

⁶ See, Marashi and Salama, ibid., 206, for description of flag controversy.
failed to appreciate that even if the facilities of the Army were looted or the soldiers merely went home, it still existed as a symbolic institution in the historical imaginary of the Iraqis. […] They searched for continuity with their past through institutions like the Army at a time when America was trying to rewrite a new future for the nation.”

As I saw in and around Ameriya, this historical imaginary was woven into patterns of settlement and socialization, family histories, and remembered status and prestige in Iraqi society.

Time and again, U.S. commanders and military advisers encountered the memories of the Iraqi state. As their bargaining leverage declined over time, they were compelled to engage in symbolic exchanges in which Iraqi recognition of the new Army’s formations as Iraqi, and thus legitimate armed forces of the Iraqi successor state, was traded for a measure of indigenous control over these forces. This extended not only to operational matters, but to the cultural identity of Iraqi forces themselves and what imaginary of the state they purportedly represented. This dynamic produced encounters with military power in which political elites, power brokers, officers and ordinary soldiers considered the legitimacy of the Army and the moral obligations of cooperation or resistance emanating from it.

5.3 Contested Identity

The issues of recruitment, organization, leadership, weak discipline, desertion, and absence of broad based respect for or cooperation with the new security forces, illustrated the need to reconstitute authority within the new national military organization, and to institutionalize its identity as a national force within the broader Iraqi society. The strategy of

7 Marashi and Salama, ibid., 205-206.
growing a military from the ground up, which had barred former Iraqi officers above the relatively junior rank of captain from joining the new army, was abandoned as the need for Iraqi leadership of the new force became apparent after the failure of Iraqi forces outside Fallujah in spring of 2004. The U.S. occupation authorities were compelled to recruit indigenous leadership whose authority would be recognized by their charges and by society at large. In practice, this meant recruiting more senior officers to the CMATT forces.

Such people could hardly be expected to serve in “The CMATT Forces of Iraq” even if they were personally willing to do so, for that would undermine their authority and defeat the purpose of having an indigenous military force to begin with. Following O’Neill, we can regard legitimacy in this context as being “the moral right of an actor to be obeyed by virtue of his or her position” in a given hierarchy.\textsuperscript{8} Extending this insight, this dissertation shows that the legitimacy of hierarchical organizations themselves is not a given in the context of state formation. For a military organization to survive as a national entity, the hierarchy itself and its overarching institutional identity need to be regarded as the “authoritative representative of the nation”.\textsuperscript{9} Likewise, individuals holding positions in this hierarchy must be seen as having a morally defensible claim to those positions.

Forced to confront this reality, both U.S. advisers and their Iraqi interlocutors increasingly began to speak of a “reborn” Iraqi Army that former officers would “return” to.\textsuperscript{10} Even before formal sovereignty was granted, the Iraqi Governing Council used the modest


\textsuperscript{9} See, Roy, ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{10} Author’s interview with U.S. military intelligence officer, May 3, 2012.
symbolic means at its disposal to claim ownership of Iraqi state nationalism by declaring January 6th, 2004 as Army Day, reversing an earlier decision its members made to void all existing Iraqi national holidays, and declare the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 as a new national holiday. Prominent members made statements in support of the Army. One member, Sunni exile politician Adnan Pachachi, attended the graduation of the new Army’s 2nd Battalion which coincided with the reinstated holiday. (The battalion would go on to earn ignominy for its mutiny on the approaches to Fallujah that spring detailed in the previous chapter.) This seemingly mundane VIP visit represented a significant claim: that no matter how unimpressive the Iraqi Army and government were in their current form, they had together inherited the mantle of statehood represented by the old army and would be the sole legitimate agent of Iraq’s national military narrative in the future.

Not surprisingly, this claim to the lineage of the Iraqi Army was not universally accepted. On the same day the Ba’th Party of Iraq, operating as a conspiratorial group, released the following statement:

The anniversary of the establishment of the Iraqi army, the holder of the immortal record, comes to Iraq and the Arab nation as Iraq is an occupied country where the occupiers, traitors, and agents are causing corruption and destruction, the Arab nation's existence and human dignity are targeted, and the valiant army was "disbanded" on the orders of the "US-Zionist" occupier. A thousand curses on the one who "disbanded" the army.

The Iraqi army is the people in their national and pan-Arab choice, defending Iraq and the nation as it had always done. It is the valiant armed resistance that is striking the occupation and its agents. Let the resistance continue until the occupation is repelled and Iraq is liberated and united from one end to another. The army of Iraq is the army of the people and

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nation and can the people of Iraq and the Arab nation be disbanded by a decision? The valiant Iraqi army was always lying in wait whenever the Iraqi people were targeted and fought whoever the enemy was. And now when the army of Iraq is targeted and the Iraqi people are fighting with their army and the armed resistance has been launched and will escalate, spread, build, and stiffen its mass program in which the army is in it, from it, and for it and the people are with it, in it, and for it. The army becomes legions with the people and the people with the army and the homeland is liberated by the two of them. This is how the Ba'th built the army and why the demand for "disbanding" the Iraqi army and the Ba'th Party came from the enemies of Iraq and the nation and from its traitors. When they "disbanded" the army, they "disbanded" the Ba'th Party and the response came as always.

The army and the party, the party and the army are fighting for the sake of Iraq, the nation, and Palestine and for the sake of the army and the party. Neither the army can be disbanded nor the party and the armed resistance remains and will continue. The one on the other side has to choose. His army that is embroiled, his allies from all over the world, and his agents the traitors of Iraq have to confront the army of Iraq, the Iraqi people, and the Ba'th in an unstopping and fierce war that has its requirements, which no armies other than Iraq's army, people, and the Ba'th have experienced.

Long live Iraq free and long live the proud people of Iraq.
Long live the army of Iraq and long live its supreme commander Staff General the captive Saddam Husayn.
Glory above to the martyrs of the army of Iraq.
Long live the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party and its valiant strugglers.
Long live Palestine free and Arab.
God is Great, God is Great, and may the lowly be accursed.13

The statement, typical for nationalist insurgent groups of the era, illustrates the degree to which the memory of the Army, and ownership of its lineage, had begun to emerge as a scarce and indivisible legitimation resource. Over the next year, the Provisional Government under Iyad Allawi intensified its claims to this resource.

A year later, on January 6, 2005, the first official celebrations of Army Day under a nominally sovereign government were held in Taji, the site of the new forces’ induction and

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training center. Allawi attended and spoke in glowing terms of the Iraqi Army. “Since the day of its establishment and throughout its history, our army has been an army for Iraq and a shield to safeguard its borders, land, waters, and skies… Despite Saddam’s attempts to put out the candle of the army and suppress its spirit, he has failed to destroy and alter the history of the establishment of our army, the army of Iraq.”

The remainder of ING forces recruited under CPA auspices, which had come to be referred to by ordinary Iraqis as the Fidayeen Bremer, were officially folded into the new Iraqi Army’s nascent command structures on that day, indicating its symbolic significance. The implicit message was — again — that the forces raised, trained, and supported by the United States and its allies, now under the nominal command of their hand-picked Iraqi interlocutors, had inherited the mantle of the Iraqi Army as a symbol of Iraqi independence and state sovereignty. However, the precise meaning of this claim, and which among the theoretically possible narratives of Iraq it represented, was not specified beyond the vaguest terms.

5.4 Establishing Iraqi Identity and Command Authority

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine two issues directly tied to problems of state formation and legitimation in Iraq, which threatened to undermine the effort to build a national military force capable of independently engaging in a prolonged counterinsurgency campaign. These issues were:

14 Marashi and Salama, ibid., 207.

15 See, Cordesmann, 122 ISF ibid. The ‘fidayeen’ designation in Iraqi political discourse was originally applied to Palestinian guerrillas and later appropriated by Saddam for his eponymous paramilitary force. Opponents of the current regime and even ordinary Iraqis refer to the U.S. trained, black-uniformed Iraqi Counterterrorism Force, as the “Fidayeen Maliki”, reflecting their perceived role as regime enforcers.
• Recognition of hierarchical authority. As outlined above, this required eliciting recognition of both the individual commander’s moral right to be obeyed and the legitimacy of the hierarchical organization itself.

• Recognition of the Iraqi identity of the new Iraqi Army from populations in areas where indigenous military units operated and from key leaders within these larger populations. Eliciting this recognition proved necessary both as a means of gaining support for recruitment drives and for gaining social support for the military’s presence in local areas.

The salience of these issues varied as the force structure of the Army developed. In the early phases of development, there was little public awareness of the Iraqi Army because only a few units existed. The main issue during these phases were the high rates of desertion, insubordination, and sometimes outright mutiny of indigenous forces. However, as the Army grew in size and came into more frequent contact with the Iraqi populace, U.S. and Iraqi commanders found that they were often compelled to negotiate with local power brokers over the composition and use of Iraqi forces in order to elicit their recognition of these forces as being Iraqi.

I examine three phases of this development. I begin with the second assault on Fallujah led by U.S. Marines in November of 2004. Although the Iraqi military role was marginal from an operational perspective, it marked an episode in which the legitimacy of the interim government as an agent of Iraqi sovereignty — i.e. its moral right to make just war — and the Iraqi identity of indigenous military forces deployed to Fallujah were debated as Iraqis encountered its violence either directly or through disseminated accounts of the action. In the aftermath of this assault, organizational changes in recruiting, and officer selection and

16 Interview with member of General Eaton’s advisory team, August 21, 2012. He reported that members of the public in western Iraq were often surprised to find out that the Army was being reconstituted.
assignment, occurred as U.S. forces realized the need to produce a credible, autonomous national force that would be recognized as such within and without the ranks. This represents the second phase. Finally, I briefly examine the rise of local militias in Anbar province between 2006-2007 and consider its implications for framing the problem of state formation and legitimation as it was confronted by Iraq’s first permanent government after 2007.

5.5 Sources and Methods

To conduct this analysis, I rely primarily on interviews with U.S. military and government personnel who served in Iraq between 2004 and 2007, who either served as advisers on MiTT teams (Military Transition Team) embedded with newly formed Iraqi units or otherwise had substantive roles partnering with Iraqi forces. I used over 50 interview transcripts from the U.S. Army’s Combat Studies Institute in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Interviewers spoke with former advisers, often within months of their return, to record their experiences working with Iraqi troops. I also had access to a repository of written and recorded interviews kept at the Marine Corps Historical Division in Quantico, Virginia detailing the experiences of Marines who had served in similar postings, as well as command chronologies submitted to the Marine Corps Archives by units deployed to Iraq. Finally, through the assistance of the Peace Operations Policy Program at George Mason University in Arlington, Virginia, I was able to contact many former military and civilian advisers directly and interview them myself. I also did several interviews with former colleagues that I knew personally from my own military service.

These interviews tended to be semi-structured. Obviously, Army and Marine interviewers were not directly concerned with the topic of my dissertation. A drawback is that
entire sections of interviews often dealt with personal experiences that had no bearing on my topic. However, the methodological benefit was that interviewers and their subjects had no knowledge of or stake in my project. Therefore, when subjects — essentially unprompted — bring up issues of legitimacy, recount how they negotiated their roles with Iraqi counterparts, or how Iraqi officers negotiated with peers and ordinary Iraqis over terms of cooperation, this can be interpreted as credible evidence of the existence of the phenomena I am theorizing about. In my own interviews I have made every effort to be open to absence of evidence or contradictory evidence, but the very fact that I had a specific topic for the interview inevitably influenced responses. The methodological benefit in this case was that I was able to ask questions that others might not have thought to ask, which had direct bearing on issues of symbolism and legitimacy. In the aggregate, the two kinds of interviews compensate for each others’ biases to a degree.

Likewise, many of the interviews intersect with each other in surprising ways. The same events and people are often described multiple times from different perspectives. Senior commanders’ narratives, which tended to be more self-congratulatory than lower ranking subordinates, might be contradicted or at least modified by recollections of these subordinates. In other cases, it is possible to get a sense of how Iraqi units developed over time as successive teams of advisers rotated in and out of Iraq. Very often, the same unit is either praised or pilloried by different advisers and commanders, depending on their perspective and its state of development in relation to the broader Iraqi political context.

I supplement this original research with official unit histories, think tank analyses, and Congressionally mandated reports on the progress of the Iraq war in order to get basic data on
the broader trends of force development during this period, such as budget allocations, formation of new units, organization of the U.S. advisory effort, Iraqi military and civilian casualties, major combat engagements, recruitment patterns, desertion rates, and the like. I also use the repository of foreign newspaper article translations that were available from FBIS until its decommissioning at the beginning of 2014. These translations provide information on how Iraqi political elites and intellectuals attempted to frame issues relating to the Army as a state institution and instrument of armed coercion as Iraqis encountered the officially-sanctioned violence of the proto-state. Finally, where appropriate, I use the secondary literature on this period produced by other researchers.

Taken together, these sources provide the basis to trace organizational development of the CMATT forces from their low point in the spring of 2004 to their symbolic conversion to Iraqi Army forces at the beginning of 2005 and subsequent rapid expansion into a 10 division force by the beginning of 2007. The beginning of 2007 is not an arbitrary cut off date. First, it represents the end of the rapid force generation phase of the Iraqi Army. Second, the beginning of 2007 marked the first real exercise of military power by the new permanent government led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to pacify Sadrist enclaves in Baghdad as part of the “surge” engineered by the United States. The emergence of a new regime in Iraq (as opposed to interim authority) marked the beginning of a consciously adopted and applied effort to reconstruct the Iraqi state and its armed forces according to a revised national narrative that drew on the past even as it interpreted it.
5.6 The rise and fall of the modern Iraq Levies in Fallujah

Construction of Iraqi interim government forces in Anbar in the immediate aftermath of the April 2004 debacle in Fallujah focused on recruitment of indigenous forces, mostly from other areas of Iraq, willing to fight Anbari insurgent groups. Forces were initially raised along the same lines as the Iraq Levies. That is, they were hired employees of the foreign military organizations that paid them. U.S. commanders had come to view “putting an Iraqi face” on American military operations as essential and inherently legitimizing. This urgency was driven by both political reasons and tactical expediency.

As concerns the latter, the aborted Fallujah assault of April 2004 was viewed by senior commanders as being a political and public relations rather than military failure.17 The sight of a foreign army assaulting a major Arab city did not play well on satellite news channels or in the capitals of U.S. allies, which as the thinking went, eroded political support for the operation. Thus, an “Iraqi face” was needed to legitimate future U.S. military operations, which appeared to be inevitable given Iraq’s spiral into chaos during 2004.

As related in the previous chapter, the absence of any substantial indigenous counterinsurgent force in the early days of the occupation compelled local U.S. military commanders to stand up their own Iraqi Civil Defense Corps and Iraqi National Guard companies, recruited from local tribes. The socially marginal status of most recruits and officers did little to confer legitimacy on the enterprise.18 Likewise, their training was mostly improvised by local commanders who detached teams from their units to teach the basics of marksmanship


18 Interview with military intelligence officer, ibid.
and small-unit tactics.\textsuperscript{19} In practice, these units were often not regarded as anything more than collaborators and often gave up their weapons without a fight when confronted by insurgents.\textsuperscript{20}

In the meantime, the Fallujah Brigade had dissolved within weeks of its formation, which meant that the Marine Corps would need a reliable force to put an Iraqi face on a likely second assault of the city. The “Shahwani brigades”\textsuperscript{21}, as they came to be known, were a second stopgap project of the Marines in Anbar to generate an indigenous combat force to support their first stopgap project, the Fallujah Brigade. A workable relationship between the two forces could never be established, and the Fallujah Brigade, which had been formed as an autonomous Iraqi force, collapsed under the pressure of the insurgent campaign in western Iraq before any progress could be made.

In an interview with the Marine Corps Historical Division in Quantico, Virginia in September of 2005 shortly after returning from Iraq, a Marine officer recalled his experiences as a battalion liaison officer with the Shahwani brigades. “It was a project of I-MEF,” he said. “The general idea of it was that between 400 and 800 Republican Guard soldiers, other specialists, many of them Sunni, supported patrols of Marine infantry platoons with four to six soldiers. At their high point in September [of 2004], the Shahwani were supporting nearly every

\textsuperscript{19} Personal observations and conversations with deployed military personnel. Also, interview with former Marine Corps adviser, August 27, 2012. The adviser served as an NCO in vicinity of Haditha, Iraq, 2006-2007.

\textsuperscript{20} Personal observation, in vicinity of Hit, Iraq, summer 2004.

\textsuperscript{21} These forces were named after Mohammad Shahwani, the founder of the Iraqi Special Forces during the Ba’thist period. He later fell afoul of the regime and was driven into exile, where he cooperated with U.S. intelligence services. After 2003, he was tapped to lead a new Iraqi National Intelligence Service, and also acted as an interlocutor for U.S. Marine commanders recruiting Iraqi brigades to attack Fallujah.
Marine battalion in Iraq.” The brigades worked directly for the Marines on three-month contracts, and because they were brought in from Baghdad, were relatively immune to the murder and intimidation campaigns carried out by local insurgents that decimated Iraqi National Guard units.

The initial project during my time was a strong commitment to the Iraqi National Guard. These Iraqi National guards were recruited through local sheikhs, in local towns. They had a lot of trouble, because the local insurgents... knew exactly where they lived, what time they went to work, even perhaps saw him during his work if they were able to infiltrate these organizations. The solution we proposed was to have security forces from outside these local areas come in. The Shahwanis became a vehicle for that... Most of them came from Baghdad, some of them came from the rest of Iraq, and they were able to operate effectively with a veil of anonymity.

For several months after the unit’s formation in spring of 2004, it operated at the small unit level with 1st Marine Regiment in Anbar province. Unlike many of the other Iraqis hastily recruited into the security forces, many of the Shahwanis were former Republican Guard members and had a relatively high level of military training. Older, more experienced, sergeants had seen significant combat during the Iran-Iraq war. Unit cohesion, a fundamental element of combat effectiveness in any military organization, was also notably higher than many ING units that seemed to evaporate when faced with the slightest threat. The liaison officer argued that despite their method of recruitment as a locally raised militia paid for and commanded by the U.S. military, substantive commitment to an Iraqi national idea was in evidence among many of the fighters, which was signified in part by military symbols of the past.

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Let me be very clear on this. The Shahwani were not mercenaries. When people say mercenaries, they typically mean people who would work for money for any purpose. The Shahwanis worked for money, no doubt, but they worked for money for a purpose. They were very proud of their unit, they wore special forces patches, they proudly wore Iraqi flags, and they were nationalists to their very heart. Is that true of all of them? Perhaps not, but that is true of any organization.

During the second assault on Fallujah in November of 2004, the Shahwani forces would play a significant role as embedded forces with the Marines. As the liaison officer for one of the Marine battalions assaulting Fallujah, the liaison officer was responsible for integrating them into his battalion’s operations in the city. Each of the battalion’s nine rifle platoons received four to six Shahwanis for al-Fajr (dawn), as the operation was named. Forty or so Shahwanis fulfilled support roles and conducted local patrols independently, and ten more operated with the battalion liaison inside the city. Although reviews of the Shahwanis’ performance were mixed, there were no major defections or desertions.

Lt. Gen. John Sattler, former commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force that assaulted Fallujah in November 2004, told an interviewer, “We didn’t worry about the Iraqi Security Forces, ‘cause we didn’t have any that were worth anything.” However, he recounted a motivational nationalist speech he gave to the Shahwanis on the eve of combat that apparently drew enthusiastic cheers from these forces, and most of his vitriol was reserved for Iraqi National Guard troops who were known to be more vulnerable to insurgent murder-intimidation campaigns, although the Shahwanis were hardly immune from such tactics.23

Colonel Michael

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Schupp, commander of Regimental Combat Team 1 under I MEF command was more critical of the Shahwanis. He remarked:

There was the Schwanis [sic] that were touted as being one step above, and we paid an exuberant amount of money for ’em. And I’ll talk later on about them, but I never—I saw them go with the units, they prepared with the units, but only in squad and platoon sizes. And this was a battalion type operation. And they could barely put a squad or platoon into the field. And there was always some excuse. General Kalis[sic], the leader of the Schwanis [sic], was under some intimidation; his wife and children were kidnapped. So, he was basically out of the picture and completely ineffective as a commander. Locked himself into his rooms and would not come out.24

5.7 National Identity and Locally Negotiated Legitimacy

For its part, the Iraqi Army was represented primarily by specially formed battalions formed around the remnants of the ill-fated CMATT battalions that mutinied outside Fallujah in the spring.25 These were re-designated as the Iraqi Intervention Forces that eventually became part of a nine battalion elite counterinsurgency force that formed the core of the Iraqi Army’s 1st Mechanized Division activated in January of 2005.26

The adoption of various patches and uniforms by Iraqi forces drawing upon past motifs were indicative of a larger struggle over the cultural identity of the armed forces, which took place simultaneously at two levels: the level of intra-elite political struggles in Iraq, and at the popular level among men fighting alongside foreign forces in their own country who sought to identify themselves as soldiers of an Iraqi state that existed only in memory at that point. At the


25 “Interview with Major Scott Nauman”, Combat Studies Institute, ibid., 6.

26 Cordesman, ibid., 188-189.
popular level, self-identification of soldiers was barely regulated by either U.S. advisers or Iraqi unit leaders as I described briefly in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, these soldiers strove to identify themselves as Iraqi through use of preexisting symbols.

In a later interview, the Marine liaison officer related the following to me:

Their C.O. was a hero of the Iran-Iraq war. He may not have been a famous household name, but if he needed to could talk about his role in the Iran-Iraq war and elicit nationalist sympathies from many Iraqis. Being in the military transcended sectarian, religious, and tribal identities. It was an institution that contributed to a sense of merit, that somebody had sacrificed, especially in the Iran-Iraq war. I found the Iran-Iraq war crossed sectarian lines. That special forces patch was similar to the green beret in our society. Everybody in the country knows what it stands for, and any unit that wanted to identify itself as Iraqi special forces would wear it….

As concerned elite politics, the reclamation of the national army reflected the evolution of the Iraqi political sphere since the first Fallujah operation. However haphazard the turnover of sovereignty was in June of 2004, it created a new set of norms to guide interaction between the United States forces and official Iraq. In order to maintain the useful fiction of Iraqi sovereignty, U.S. commanders were obliged to abide by these norms of national sovereignty in their interactions with their Iraqi interlocutors, including the interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi. Despite the weakness of Iraqi forces nominally controlled by the sovereign government, Allawi could leverage U.S. military support to claim a position as the legitimate agent of Iraqi sovereignty commanding the official military forces of a reconstituted Iraqi state.

However, making such claims did not automatically guarantee their acceptance. The Fallujah operation was launched on November 7th immediately following the presidential elections in the United States that saw the reelection of George W. Bush, and in advance of the January 2005 elections in Iraq for an interim parliament that would draft a new constitution. The
weakness of Iraqi forces combined with the obvious correlation of the second Fallujah operation with an American political calendar imposed on Iraq gave the fledgling government’s legions of domestic enemies ample opportunity to denounce it as an American puppet.

Allawi and his top lieutenants responded by publicly insisting that they were in command of the operation and that Iraqi forces were in the lead. U.S. commanders played along with this narrative by assigning the first objective, an undefended hospital outside the city, to Iraqi government forces — something which the Iraqi interim Prime Minister presented to television audiences as a major victory. As he told one interviewer: “I gave instructions to the Iraqi forces to seize the hospital immediately before anything else -- I can say that what took place was quick and forceful. The enthusiasm of our brother Iraqis in the army and the police was something to be proud of also. They are determined to get rid of terrorism and terrorists in the whole of Iraq, God willing.”

5.8 Attempted Legitimation of Force

The act of putting an Iraqi, or at least official, face on the operation, framed the battle for Fallujah as an encounter between the Iraqi state, its army, and the Iraqi people on one side, and terrorists on the other. The implicitly claimed authority to act as a sovereign and wage war on behalf of the Iraqi state was not widely accepted, though. The Association of Muslim Scholars, headed by Sunni clerics with ties to anti-regime nationalists in Anbar governate, admonished

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27 See, Gordon and Trainor, ibid., 117.
Iraqis serving in government forces that “storming the Iraqi cities under the banner of the US forces” would be a “grave mistake”.

Al-Quds al-Arabi ran an editorial dismissing government claims that the al-Fajr was spearheaded by the “real” Iraqi Army.

The defenders of Al-Fallujah are not terrorists, nor are they foreign fighters. They are the good sons of Iraq who refuse to go down on their knees before the occupation or to serve its plans for the region. They are the sons of the Iraqi people and the men of the Iraqi people's armed forces [emphasis added] who have preserved the unity and sovereignty of this homeland and aborted all the conspiracies that targeted and are targeting Iraq.

The paper published a statement by sympathetic intellectuals and activists in the same issue, denouncing the new government as a “body of administrative employees” installed by and subservient to its “colonial masters”. The authors called upon government ministers to quit their posts. “Otherwise, they will…be committing high treason against the Iraqi national interest and…will be considered as accomplices in the war crimes and en masse genocide of our people.”

Clearly, it could not take as a given that official centralized bureaucratic apparatus of government would be recognized as the tangible locus of an imagined Iraqi state’s legitimating authority. In a lightly veiled reference and warning to members of the newly formed security forces, the authors wrote:


29 (Description of Source: London Al-Quds al-Arabi in Arabic -- London-based independent Arab nationalist daily with an anti-US and anti-Saudi editorial line; generally pro-Palestinian, tends to be sympathetic to Bin Ladin)


We want to remind the sons of our Iraqi people that the U.S. Administration, which represents an alliance of neo-conservatives, the extremist Christian right wing, and the Zionist movement, is practicing killing against our people in the belief that it is performing a religious duty and that it is expediting the reemergence of Christ.\(^{32}\)

Such sentiments casting doubt on the legitimacy of the government and its armed forces as authentic national institutions crossed sectarian lines. On November 8th, the day after the operation began, a spokesmen for Muqtada al-Sadr released a statement. Showing characteristic eagerness to demonstrate his inter-sectarian credentials, despite the highly sectarian orientation of his political-military “trend”, condemned the assault and calling on Iraqi government forces to refuse participation.

We vigorously condemn the offensive which the occupation forces are launching in al-Fallujah. We, therefore, call upon the Iraqi people, the National Guard, as well as the Iraqi Army and police forces not to assist the occupation forces in their offensive against the Iraqi people in al-Fallujah. They must not be a tool in the hands of the occupation authorities which do not target a party and spare others. Rather, they target all parties. Finally, I affirm that the attack on this city is an attack on the entire Iraqi people.\(^{33}\)

Interestingly, unlike the statement in al-Quds al-Arabi, the Sadrist statement did not explicitly challenge the Iraqi identity or legitimacy of the government forces, only the legitimacy of their cooperation with the United States and its interlocutors in Baghdad, which also became a characteristic motif of Sadrist rhetoric. Both statements, however, highlighted the obstacles successive Iraqi governments stood up under the U.S. strategic umbrella faced in establishing themselves as agents of state sovereignty in absence of state. The vigorous protestations of

\(^{32}\) ibid.

Allawi and his lieutenants against all evidence that they were in command of al-Fajr — the American code-name Phantom Fury had been changed at their insistence — illustrated this.

Fighting in Fallujah continued into December, with the last pockets of active resistance being silenced in the middle of the month. Closely supervised Iraqi troops had acquitted themselves well enough in the comparatively undemanding tasks demanded of them, but sustaining the claim that they had been the predominant force guiding the operation would have difficult with even the most credulous audiences. Allawi had attempted to adopt the symbolism of an Iraqi Army without the actual substance of a capable military force representing a state. In the run up to the interim elections scheduled for January he again attempted to link his bid for leadership of the Iraqi state to the Iraqi Army, telling Iraqis that national renaissance required that the dignity of the Army be restored — under his command, naturally.³⁴

Although he visited Taji, the new army’s central force generation complex, on the quasi-holy day of January 6th, 2005, observances would have been modest by any standard and negligible in scale when compared to the massive hours-long parades of the Saddam era with their columns of tanks and fighter jets. As other analysts of Iraq have pointed out, symbols lose their power when they clearly are at variance with the structural realities of society.³⁵ The Iraqi Army was simply not impressive or “Iraqi” enough in terms of organization, numbers, ethnic composition, and substantive command authority at the beginning of 2005 to sustain the rhetorical claims made during al-Fajr and in the abbreviated election campaign afterwards. On January 30, 2005, Allawi’s party won only 40 out of 275 available seats in the new interim Iraqi

³⁴ Marashi and Salama, ibid., 207.
³⁵ Davis, ibid.
parliament. Allawi was forced to step aside and was eventually replaced by Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a former exile and leader of the Iranian-sponsored Da’wa Party.36

For their part, the Shahwani forces were summarily dismissed as private contractors whose services were no longer necessary.37 The Iraqi Intervention Forces, which had come into being as quasi-autonomous battalions attached to U.S. command structures, were reorganized into the Iraqi Army’s new 1st Division and appropriated for themselves the Ba’thist era special forces patches once worn by the Shahwanis.38 Nine more divisions would be created in quick succession under the authority of a new entity, the Multinational Security Transition Command - Iraq, or MNSTC-I39. As the new forces were stood up, patterns established during the run-up to Fallujah assumed elements of path-dependency. IIF battalions would remain within 1st Division as a national-level strike force, while the recruitment, leadership, composition, and organizational structure of other divisions would be negotiated locally.

As the junior CMATT adviser who led Iraqi troops near Fallujah recalled:

The whole army was supposed to be mixed Shia, Sunni, Kurdish and get beyond the ethnic terms, but that ambush [outside Fallujah] that happened in ’04 kind of changed things. [It became clear that Iraqi soldiers] will need to fight inside the country, and the contract needs to say you are going to fight inside your own country… As they were going with this recruiting, they actually wanted people to tell them what their unit was going to do. Some of the generals would say — and it’s all within the ethnic strife — you want the Iraqi Army in here in this area, we’re going to fight them if they’re Shia, but if they are Sunni recruited out of our area, then we’ll let them stay and we won’t fight them. And so this came through


37 Interview with Marine liaison officer, ibid.

38 ibid.

39 Pronounced “Min-Sticky”.
negotiations of each specific area of al-Anbar or Nineveh province, or southern Iraq. Each one of them negotiated their own kind of army that they wouldn’t attack, what was acceptable on their terms… 1st Division just remained that anomaly, that national task force, although there might have been a couple of other divisions like that in Baghdad. So, if you wanted to serve in the national army you served in 1st Division, and if you wanted to serve in the army at other levels on your own ethnic terms, than you served in other divisions.40

This logic operated across Iraq. Brigadier General Najim al-Jabouri, a former Iraqi Army officer who served as mayor of Tal Afar during the early counterinsurgency period between 2005 and 2008, similarly remarked during an interview with the author: “If we take the [largely Kurdish] Iraqi 3rd Division as an example in Mosul. They get an order from the Prime Minister, and a contradictory one from Barzani — whom will they obey?”41 This process of negotiated legitimacy of Iraqi forces was assimilated into Iraqi politics as institutional arrangements of the new order were solidified over time. Local power brokers, such as Barzani, negotiated the terms of their cooperation with the post-2003 state building project, which came to be symbolized by the construction of an Iraqi army that reflected Iraq’s balkanized politics.

At the end of the period covered in this chapter the new army formally possessed at least 10 divisions. 1st and 9th Divisions were largely national in character, to the extent this was possible with a provisional government propped up by a foreign army. 2nd and 3rd Divisions were heavily Kurdish, while the 7th Division was recruited on local negotiated basis in Anbar in exchange for cooperation and recognition from the sheikhs in rural areas and neighborhood captains in urban areas. The south of the country had a similar dynamic, according to a former senior adviser who worked there between 2005 and 2006. "There were several Iraqi armies

40 Interview with CMATT adviser, ibid.

41 Masoud Barzani was leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party anti-Ba’thist insurgent group and later President of the Kurdish autonomous region after 2003.
down south,” he said. “You could say that each one operated its area as a semi-autonomous military fiefdom, even though they all have the same uniforms and belong to the same army.”

5.9 Accelerated Force Generation and Building Iraqi Command Structures

The training and force generation infrastructure for the new Iraqi army deployed to Iraq in 2003 as an afterthought proved inadequate to the task of constructing a ten division-plus army. It was only in the middle of 2004 after the aborted spring operation in Fallujah that additional resources were allocated. CMATT and its sister organization CPATT (Coalition Police Assistance Training Team) were retained, but folded into MNSTC-I, which was to be commanded by then-Lieutenant General David Petraeus, who had made a name for himself as an counterinsurgent during his first tour as commander of the 101st Airborne Division headquartered in Mosul.

Simultaneously, the U.S. Army Reserve’s 98th Division submitted a proposal to train and deploy its forces in support of MNSTC-I as part of a wider project to build a Foreign Army Training Assistance Command capable of standing up national armies on a routine basis. The Division was organized and trained to provide initial entry training (IET) to American soldiers. However, the only purpose-built force to build and train foreign armies to that point were U.S. Army Special Forces Groups, which were developed during the Vietnam era to deploy squad-sized elite teams capable of embedding with indigenous forces that were either seeking to

42 Interview with Michael Sternfeld, former civil affairs adviser, May 2012.

43 See, Steven Clay, *Iroquois warriors in Iraq.* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007)

44 See, ibid., 7.
stabilize or overthrow national governments abroad. Which one of these missions the groups took on in a given case depended on U.S. policy.

In the case of Iraq, the size of the force to be generated was too large and the size of the Special Forces was too small to make this a viable option except for the formation of elite commando units. Furthermore, the ambition of the project, which grew exponentially through the middle of 2004, called for a mission focused on developing military institutions and organizational infrastructure on a national scale — something the Special Forces were not designed to do. The 98th Division was ordered to deploy several hundred soldiers as individual augments to reinforce MNSTC-I in August of 2004, which was only staffed at 30 percent strength at the time, and was given five broad “task areas”:

• Task Area 1: Identify and institute professional development training with a timeline of events (2005 through 2008).
• Task Area 2: Advise and support Joint Iraqi Forces for operations and training—staff exercises, mission essential task list (METL) development, yearly training guidance development, and yearly training calendar development.
• Task Area 3: Integrate the Iraqi National Guard into the Iraqi Army—similar to a “One Army Concept.”
• Task Area 4: Develop senior-level Army staff capabilities—Combined Staff (Operations) and Joint Staff (Administration and Logistics).
• Task Area 5: Provide Advisory Support Teams for the Iraqi Army. 45

45 ibid., 32.
All of these tasks were inherently sensitive in the context of Iraqi politics. The same mission tasking noted that the “complexities of training a national army in the multi-ethnic and multi-tribal Iraqi culture had been underestimated.”

Although the ING was absorbed into the regular army, other units — particularly the more capable units trained by Special Forces operators — ultimately developed parallel to, rather than within, the nascent Iraqi military command structure formed under MNSTC-I auspices. The use of “parallel armies” dominated by ethnic loyalists as regime defense forces had been a distinctive feature of Ba’thist rule, and was used by Saddam Husayn’s successors for the same purpose as permanent Iraqi governing institutions were formed after 2005.

The U.S. augments began arriving in theater at the end of October and were in Taji, Iraq by mid-November to receive in briefs, additional training, and their staffing assignments as the battle for Fallujah raged to the west. It was the beginning of 2005 before substantive work on building the complex indigenous bureaucracy necessary to sustain a new Iraqi army began and adviser teams were pushed out to Iraqi units exiting the training pipeline at Taji. After more than a year and a half since the fall of Baghdad, the Iraqi Army began to be rebuilt in earnest.

The scale of this effort can be seen in the basic metrics that measure the resources devoted to the reconstruction of the army and its subsequent organizational growth. As of January 2005, the Iraqi Army proper numbered 4,100 soldiers. The IIF was more than twice the size with 9,100 soldiers. A small special operations force numbered 674 soldiers, and the ING

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46 ibid.

numbered 40,000 on paper. These forces formally became a part of the Iraqi Army that month on the symbolically significant date of January 6th, although the former ING units retained their unit designations, which produced a hard to follow organizational nomenclature of the Iraqi Army. As for armament, the forces lacked much beyond light commercial trucks and AK-47 rifles. The First Mechanized Brigade, the only armored unit in the country at the time, possessed ten Soviet designed T-55 tanks of the same type that can be seen in archival footage of a military parade during the Qasim era in 1959. The ambitious plan called for the Brigade to be fully operational and upgraded to T-72 tanks by summer of 2005.

“Iraqi force development remained very much a work in progress during the first eight months of 2005, and events showed how much any success interacted with the course of the insurgency and Iraqi politics,” Cordesman writes. The course of Iraqi politics was tortured, to say the least. Following the January 30, 2005 elections it took the new government 2 months to agree on presidency council and prime minister, and until May 8th to select a cabinet and choose a defense minister. 55 members of constitutional committee were not named till May 10, and were given the task of providing a complete draft by August 15 for a nation wide referendum on October 15th.

48 See, Cordesman, ibid., 142.
49 See, Cordesman, ibid., 134.
50 See, ibid., 151.
51 Ibid.
What drove recruitment more than anything else on the social level was financial need of would-be soldiers.\textsuperscript{52} In a post-conflict state in a region where unemployment was typically high in the best of times, the army offered a private the comparatively good wage of $333 per month, financed by the United States.\textsuperscript{53} Anbar province remained an exception in 2005, as tribes largely refused to offer recruits to the new army and ING units had been rendered ineffective by insurgents.\textsuperscript{54} I will provide more on this in the next section, but for the present will trace the effects of the administrative expansion of the institutional development initiative under MNSTC-I responsible for the rapid growth of the Iraqi armed forces after 2005.

\textbf{5.10 Expediency and the Return of Prior-Service Officers}

A large number of officers needed if a new army was to be stood up within a short period, and these officers had to be found, not made. John Martin, a former senior member of Petraeus’ staff in 2005 related to me: “In ’05 we were more pragmatic. You cannot generate a battalion commander in a year. You had to take guys who had been there and then work on a schools system to improve their skills.”\textsuperscript{55} By the late spring of 2005, the leadership cadre of 10 divisions had been formed, with ownership of leadership positions within the divisions more or less evenly split between Iraq’s main ethnosectarian communities and most of the manpower provided by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Personal observation and interviews with U.S. advisers.
\item \textsuperscript{53} See, Cordesman, ibid., 161.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Personal observation.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Interview with author in Washington, D.C., April, 2012.
\end{itemize}
former ING battalions. The admission of large numbers of prior service officers brought with it memories of the old army and state. U.S. commanders generally either assumed or hoped that these officers would return to military service in the new army with their professional military educations and skills intact but without these memories or the normative commitments to the imagined Iraqi state that might accompany them.

As a group, senior U.S. officials and commanders in Iraq viewed the historical memory of the Iraqi Army either as irrelevant or as a nuisance to be controlled, using the influence conferred by American material and organizational resources. New divisions were created in numerical sequence without any reference to Iraqi military history, while it was assumed that legitimation of the armed forces would be fostered through roughly proportional integration of ethnosectarian groups into new units administered and led according to rational-bureaucratic criteria. This reflected the views and priorities of the overall commander of the U.S. war effort in Iraq, General George Casey. To the extent that he considered issues of legitimation, his approach was highly functionalist — i.e. the creation of units and their designation as official Iraqi units made them legitimate. His stated goal was to build forces that would fight the growing insurgency independently so that U.S. forces could quickly withdraw from Iraq, but exactly what entity these forces would fight for and what they would represent was never specified except in the vaguest terms.

It is difficult to assign the entire blame to Casey, given that Iraq lacked a permanent government for most of his tenure in Iraq, and that he was hardly

56 See, Cordesman, ibid., 161-162.

57 Such views were related to me by both Eaton and Martin.

alone among leaders of the war effort in his thinking. Nonetheless, the overall orientation of U.S. defense policy in Iraq during this period served to push the issue of legitimation of force to the local level. It was left to local commanders and comparatively junior advisers to figure out how to reestablish command relationships and authority within the new forces, and how to elicit acceptance of these forces in the areas in which they were deployed.

Captain Smith, the Marine intelligence officer referred to in the previous chapter, explained how the prestige associated with military service in the pre-2003 army against Iran and later the United States conferred legitimacy on officers with credible experience. The local police chief in Fallujah (note INP and local) at the time wore his old Iraqi Army uniform on a daily basis, because it commanded respect from soldiers and townspeople. He and other senior members of local police and military units also frequently displayed their military medals in their offices for visitors to see for the same reason.

Something we didn't see with ICDC and ING was discipline that sometimes came with the Iraqi Army — that hard discipline and corporal punishment. But '06 was when I started to see it again, because you had guys like General S. and General H. with the Iraqi police, and some of it with the new Iraqi Army, was the respect given to superiors. General S. and General H., because they were former military, demanded and got respect from their policemen and then their soldiers. You know, guys would pop to attention, they'd do the open handed (British style) salute, they'd stand there and say 'Yes, Sayyidy, Yes Sir', it was the way it was meant to be.\(^{59}\)

The picture provided by Captain Smith suggests that the obedience these officers commanded derived largely from the prestige derived from their service in the previous military, which, in the imagination of many, represented the Iraqi state. Authority flowed from this remembered history of Iraqi statehood rather than from the formal power of a new military

\(^{59}\) Interview with author, ibid.
hierarchy founded by an occupying force. The failure of senior United States commanders as a group to appreciate how the historical memory of the Army might serve the broader mission of simultaneously legitimating command authority within the new military forces and stigmatizing insurgent groups deprived them of a potentially useful tool in a long and bloody counterinsurgency campaign.

I think it would have gone a long way, at least had we not been so ignorant in naming these units [according to a simple numerical sequence]. That's the signal that we sent, that we didn't have an understanding of what it means to them, I think. Because we didn't care about what they thought. We cared about what we thought… They created these units out of thin air and assigned a number to them, and then expected that a soldier would just put on a uniform and take pride because they are defending 'Iraq'. There was nothing behind it driving these guys. I remember that being one of the main points -- first that we did not come in and do what they thought we would do, which is re-purpose them -- just take them, take all their gear away, inventory everything, and then put them back to work. Just punish the guys who were really bad, and then get on with training.⁶⁰

In a revealing interview recorded by a Marine Corps field historian outside the neighboring city of Ramadi in September 2006, a Shiite Iraqi interpreter working for the Marines — the same one quoted in the introduction of this dissertation — explained why he thought many of the Iraqi units serving in Anbar suffered from disciplinary problems. “You have a guy who was a lieutenant in the 1980’s and emigrated or left for some reason,” he said, “And now, when he comes back he is told ‘here you go, you’re a 3 star general.’ How come? Where is the experience? How is he going to lead? This person will not get respect from his battalion or his

⁶⁰ ibid.
brigade, because we knew his background, where he had been, and we knew the limit of his experience.”

The legitimate leaders of the army, according to the interpreter were the members of the former military caste that had once dominated Anbar and the Iraqi state, not exiled “dissident” officers that came to populate the upper ranks of the military since the U.S. led invasion. The disbandment of the army in his thinking, was profoundly misguided because the institution itself was legitimate despite the crimes of the regime it served. Evidence of such attitudes was encountered by many U.S. advisers.

5.11 Prestige, Leadership, and Historical Memory of the Iraqi State

In one telling example, an adviser recalled to me how an Iraqi major confronted a police commander who told him to get his “dirty Shia army” out of the predominantly Sunni city of Ramadi. The major retorted, “I am a Sunni and I will shoot your mother if you don’t obey they authority of the Iraqi Army.” Likewise, the resilience of networks of solidarity and recognition forged in the previous era within military institutions was seen during the same 2005-2006 period in Habbaniya, 20 miles to the west of Fallujah.

Once the site of a major RAF installation during the monarchy era used to pacify restive tribes through “air policing”, it had become the headquarters of the new Iraqi Army’s 9th Division. When MNSTC-I made the decision to improve the new army’s armor capability by

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61 Marine Corps Historical Division, Quantico, Virginia, recorded interview by Captain Steven Winslow on September 11, 2006 in vicinity of Ramadi, Iraq. Name of interviewee withheld by author.

62 Interview with author, Washington, D.C., August 21, 2012. This is the same CMATT adviser referenced in Chapter 4, who served in Iraq in 2004, 2006, and 2009.
replacing Qasim-era T-55’s with more recent upgraded T-72’s donated by Hungary, the embedded U.S. advisors immediately suspected the division commander intended to use the new tanks as a stalking horse to reconstitute the Republican Guard. The team leader, Major Longbine, recalled to an Army interviewer:

When they made the decision to build the 2nd Brigade of the 9th Division, they decided that that brigade was going to get T-72s instead of T-55 tanks…The new brigade was going to get T-72s but they were going to take all our guys who have T-72 experience. Well, who are those guys? Guys who were in the Republican Guard and guys who were Sunnis. So this T-72 brigade they were building was going to be an all-Sunni brigade. We think that’s what General Bashar was really trying to do. We could never prove it and we didn’t let him take our guys. We fought with him for several months about that and every time he tried to do it – he was very sneaky. We viewed it as very sneaky but it might have just been the way he did business. But he would say, “Oh no, we’re not going to take them.” Then the next day, they’re filtering over there, and we’d catch them on orders from one of General Bashar’s guys.63

Longbine’s replacement, who arrived in late 2005 with a new team, sided with General Bashar.

The exchange with the same Army interviewer went as follows:

Interviewer: A few other MiTT members I’ve interviewed have said that a problem they saw as the 9th Division stood up was that there was this huge push to stand up these T-72 battalions and man them with all former Republican Guard guys because they were familiar with the T-72. They didn’t want that to happen, though, because it would appear as if we were just reconstituting the Republican Guard. Did you see any effects of that?

Nichols: This is just my personal opinion, but the biggest mistake we made bar none was to disband the Iraqi Army. The reason I say that is because there are a lot of hard feelings about that within the Iraqi Army…The Republican Guard is a professional army. Sure there were some moral issues going on there, but the Republican Guard has their s**t together. They know how to do LOGPACs, they know how to pay each other and they have discipline. It’s a good unit. I’m glad they were Republican Guard. They were professional.

63 Laurence Lessard, “Interview with MAJ David Longbine”, Operational Leadership Experiences. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, November 1, 2006)
Interviewer: Did they lose any legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi populace by being known as former Republican Guard?

Nichols: No. In fact, the Iraqi civilians were very excited every time they saw the tanks and the BMPs. It was a pride thing. They like to see the Iraqis out there. In fact, they hate the Iraqi Police and I think we should disband the Iraqi Police. They’re an utter failure. All they are is a sanctioned, armed extension of the Shi’a militias. They’re bad. I have nothing good to say about them. My Iraqi Army guys would not patrol with the police.64

Of course, it is difficult to know exactly what local Iraqi feelings were towards the 2nd Armored Brigade based on a single impressionistic account. Habbaniya is located deep in the west of the Anbar governate where natural support for Ba’thist era military institutions would likely run high. Whether the Brigade was perceived as a reconstituted elite Iraqi unit or an entirely new entity by members of the local populace would require a detailed public opinion survey that unfortunately does not exist to my knowledge.65 What is reasonably clear from the adviser accounts is that clear lines of Iraqi authority based upon prior service in the Republican Guard quickly took hold, because the moral right of the unit’s senior commanders to demand obedience was not questioned by others who had formerly served under them in the previous era. The ultimate referent of authority was the Iraqi state — but just not the one being constituted at that time in the Green Zone.


65 Many surveys do not differentiate between the Iraqi Army and other indigenous military or police forces, and generally provide only broad measures of confidence or approval averaged across Iraq, or at most, broken down along broad ethnosectarian lines. See, for example, the Iraq Knowledge Network poll of 2011 sponsored by the UN in cooperation with the Iraqi government. Nonetheless, some results are interesting. A poll in conducted by the Program in International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) in early 2006 found that 88 percent of Sunni Iraqis approved of attacks on U.S. forces, but only 24 percent of this group approved of attacks on Iraqi government forces. By contrast, only one percent of Kurds and 3 percent of Shia Iraqis approved of attacks on Iraqi forces. Views of these latter two groups were more moderate vis-a-vis attacks on U.S. troops, although significant support for such attacks among Shia existed. See, “What the Iraqi Public Wants,” WorldPublicOpinion.org, January 31, 2006.
A U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who served as a senior adviser to the Iraqi Ground Forces Command (IGFC) between 2006 and 2007 summed up this logic as follows:

You could build an organization, but you couldn't build institutional knowledge. That structure was the hard part to build. The organization's character, norms, ways of doing things, how it acts -- that's what we got rid of when we disbanded the army…From '05-'07 the senior leadership of the [US] Army was oblivious, and was focused on imposing American ideas of freedom and democracy on the Iraqi military, but you can't force that stuff. The basic mentality was “we beat you, so you have to accept this.” We would have been much better off just telling them to do things the way they think they should be done, and we would be around to make sure things didn't fly off the rails.66

As the new army grew and its senior ranks were filled with many prior service officers, advisers found themselves suppressing many of the everyday cultural practices of the old army. The lieutenant colonel remarked:

We were the ones who suppressed the culture of the old army. All the buildings had the 8 pointed star of the Ba’th Party on it and we said, ‘you can’t use that’. It’s like me with my [unit] patch that goes back to …World War II, and somebody saying we’re going to reconstitute the division in a new army, and now your patch is going to have a picture of ‘Hello Kitty’ on it or something like that. That’s what it is like to take away the identity of an army.67

The old army’s character, norms, and ways of doing things — for better or worse — were carried into the new organization in subtle ways, however, according to this officer. The reintroduction of administrative organization and practices inherited from the British in the 1920’s became a subtle, yet persistent, everyday assertion of Iraqi identity within the new army.68

66 Phone interview with author from Amman, Jordan, October 4th, 2012.

67 ibid.

68 ibid.
One of the most prosaic and everyday ways in which this occurred were the pervasive frictions between U.S. advisers and Iraqi officers on matters of rank and etiquette. In a reversal of General Eaton’s unceremonious dismissal of officers and bussing them back to Baghdad, Iraqi commanders insisted upon deference from those American advisers whom they outranked. These advisers frequently described being relegated to the role of a junior staff officer by their Iraqi charges in interviews and memoirs.69

5.12 The Problem of Legitimate Force in Anbar Province

In the final section of this chapter, I examine how force was legitimated in Anbar province between 2005 and 2007, focusing specifically on the nexus between military forces of the nascent Iraqi state and society. As is well known, a sustained effort to engage Anbar sheikhs and bring them into the nascent political system produced a sharp drop off in violence over this period. Facing an intractable insurgency, U.S. commanders and advisers made political compromises to elicit recognition from local power brokers of the official Iraqi government and its armed forces while riding the wave of a tribal rebellion against foreign “emirs” seeking to impose jihadi rule. During this period national government was a distant inchoate entity, and regional governments were literally under siege by insurgents.70

69 See, for example, Seth Folsom, In the Gray Area: a Marine Advisor Unit at War. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2011), and Wesley Gray. Embedded: A Marine Corps Adviser Inside the Iraqi Army. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2013)

70 For example, the command chronology for 3rd Bn, 8th Marines, deployed to Ramadi, Iraq (the capital of Anbar province) between February and September of 2006 does not make any mention of any interaction with Iraqi security forces of any type until May of that year, when local police recruitment and training began. The battalion focused on kinetic operations against insurgent groups and maintaining tenuous control of the city’s government center, which was under constant insurgent attack. 1st Bn, 6th Marines, the follow-on unit that relieved 3/8 in September, designated indigenous force development as a priority, giving local control of key areas to Iraqi police and army units while maintaining “overwatch”. Chronologies available at the U.S. Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, Virginia.
U.S. forces attempted to present Iraqi government forces as a reconstituted national army, but eliciting recognition for this claim proved difficult in Anbar. “We constantly tried to make that part of our IO [Information Operations] campaign, that this is your national army, that these are your sons, and brothers, and fathers, and grandfathers, but it wasn't catching on out West, because they were not getting the recruits out West,” said Captain Smith, the intelligence officer. “Whatever recruits we were getting were coming from the South, so we couldn't say, "These are your sons," [because they would say] "No, they're not.”

As the situation in Anbar deteriorated between 2003 and 2007, U.S. commanders sought to strike local bargains for recognition in order to address the larger issues of recruitment, weak discipline, desertion, and absence of broad based respect for or cooperation with the new security forces in wide swathes of Anbari society. After several years of ongoing bloodshed in Anbar province, U.S. Marine commanders sought after 2006 to trade cooperation and recognition in exchange for political concessions and support for local power brokers. The 3rd Brigade of the Iraqi Army’s 7th Division was formed in reference to these bargains, and became known as a predominantly Sunni unit that operated almost exclusively in Anbar, even though it was officially presented as part of an Iraqi national force rather than a local militia.

As a result of these efforts, tribes became more willing to allow men to join police and army after middle of 2006, although former drew majority of recruits. However, as one senior civilian adviser remarked, the measure of tolerance negotiated for the new Iraqi Army did not necessarily translate into meaningful gains with the local populace for Shiite dominated units.

71 Interview, ibid.
72 Author phone interview with Carter Malkasian, former civilian adviser to 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF), Anbar Province, Iraq. Conducted April 23, 2012 in Washington, D.C.
It was recognized by many (Marine) officers that the Iraqi Army was not any better positioned than they were to understand what was going on at the local level. As far as what markers made it apparent who was Sunni and Shia, those are things that were apparent to Iraqis but for us were hard to discern. More than sectarian differences, the Shia were not from the area and simply did not know who was who. Those were things that the police and local forces were much more attuned to... [The problem of course is that] such forces are good at finding insurgents for the same reasons they are more likely to be tied to the insurgents.\(^73\)

What ultimately turned the tide in Anbar between 2007 and the withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of 2011, was the local recruitment of tribal militias. While desertion was endemic in the new army during this period, the new tribal militias proved popular locally and suffered few of these problems despite the modest resources expended on them.\(^74\) Those present in Anbar at the time credit this to several economic, cultural, and political factors. The militias were used to protect tribal smuggling routes against foreign jihadi encroachment, to free local tribes from alien cultural strictures imposed by foreign jihadi leaders, and to serve as a local counterbalance to security forces dominated by Iraqi Shi’ites outside Anbar, who were often perceived as cultural outsiders bent on Sunni disenfranchisement.\(^75\)

Whatever their utility in providing immediate security gains in Anbar, the militias served to illustrate and reinforce the fragmented nature of authority in Iraq during this period. Iraqis themselves understood the implications for the reconstruction and legitimation of a new Iraqi

\(^73\) Malkasian, ibid.


\(^75\) Malkasian, ibid. Also, phone interview with former senior I MEF staff officer, conducted January 5th, 2011 in Washington, D.C. See also, Montgomery and McWilliams, ibid.
From the Iraqi Army’s perspective, they looked at it – and they had a point – as that you can’t have a functioning, stable government unless the police and the army are the sole purveyors of the legitimate use of force within that society. You can’t have these vigilante gangs running around doing operations outside the control of the government and still build a legitimate government – and again, they did have a point. Nevertheless, it was very effective at quelling the violence in those areas. The one dissenting view that we had was from probably the most able officer in the battalion. His view of it was that this was the only thing that could potentially work to reduce the violence. His logic was that the government of Iraq was not viewed by the Iraqi populace as legitimate. Therefore, the police and the army were not viewed as legitimate. By placing the use of armed force with the Sons of Iraq, who were accountable to the sheikhs in the area, the sheikhs were the one aspect of that society as far as ruling and power went, that were still viewed, and always had been viewed, as legitimate by the people. So by empowering the Sons of Iraq who were accountable to the sheikhs, they had more legitimacy in the eyes of the population in those areas than the uniformed security forces did.76

5.13 Conclusion

The micro processes of state formation and its more macro-level effects were both visible products of a multibillion dollar infusion of American military aid to Iraq in the middle of the previous decade. Even minus a developed set of governing institutions, the generation of ten Iraqi divisions had a constitutive effect on the state, in that it served to structure its discursive field. In this case, the discursive field of the state is not an abstraction, but is visible in a partially developed organizational structure through which power and claims of authority were articulated. The pragmatic necessity of institutionalizing authority within newly formed military units opened the door for thousands of prior-service officers to enter the new armed forces and to occupy its positions of formal command. It also brought new organizations claiming the

76 MAJ Brad Helton, “Interview with MAJ Chad Quayle”, Operational Leadership Experiences. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, September 19, 2008).
imprimatur of the Iraqi state into contact with society at large, with its diversity of authorities.

The expansion of the military organization and the return to service of large numbers of prior service officers created discursive spaces around its material structures in which the state could be progressively reimagined. It likewise created new centers of initiative and resistance in the broader Iraqi political society with divergent views of what these new forces represented, and what obligations of assent and recognition this did or did not place members of the political community. The battle for Fallujah in November of 2004 was not just for physical control of terrain, but also for control of this emerging discursive space. Did the new Iraqi forces represent legitimate authority, or were they merely the armed adjunct of a “body of administrative employees” working for their “colonial masters” in Baghdad? Of course, the provisional government claimed the former, but its dubious provenance as an appointed body, and the obvious weakness and dependency of its forces, made it difficult to establish the credibility of this claim.

The U.S. military messaging that “these are your sons” did not evince assent as much as it did resistance to the new forces. The new army, which was seen as relatively even-handed in its application of force by comparison with the police death squads, nonetheless encountered significant resistance from local power brokers who were nominally subject to government authority. This was mostly seen in the initial refusal to assent to recruitment of young men into the new army. Aside from a few specialized units, the composition, leadership, and mission of the new national military was negotiated at the local level.\(^7^7\) In the case of Anbar province, the

\(^7^7\) The senior I MEF staff officer recounts several instances in which negotiations were conducted with prominent tribal sheikhs to secure their public “blessing” of new Iraqi military units.
heartland of the old Sunni-dominated military caste, explicit provision for a locally raised brigade was made. Most remarkably, control of endemic violence and armed resistance to government authority was only (temporarily) gained through American sponsorship of local vigilante gangs, which bolstered the authority of the Anbar sheikhs at the expense of the official state.

The overriding reality of this period, which LTC Quayle understood from his interactions with Iraqi officers, was that no matter how much they did to elicit popular acceptance of the new forces through negotiation with local communities, the very fact that they had to do this indicated that the new state lacked legitimacy. Power is never absolute and authority never operates freely of resistance. Nonetheless, the moral right of the functionaries of “the new Iraq” to exercise the authority of the state by virtue of their status as legally designated servants of the state, and to demand respect for its laws, had not been established. Furthermore, routinizing authority in this way would be impossible until the state was reestablished and recognized as the authoritative representative of the nation. This would require power to produce “meaningful referents invested with sovereign authority”, such as a national army that successfully and continually produced an image of itself as representing the state and its authority to legitimize organized violence.

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78 In an article on Iraqi Army operations in Anbar during this period, Malkasian writes, “The population opposed the Iraqi Army primarily because of its Shi’a identity. Sunnis disliked the Shi’a-dominated Iraqi government. The government’s insistence on denying Sunnis police power and economic wealth convinced them of its oppressive intentions… Polling in 2006 found that 77 to 90 percent of the people viewed the government as illegitimate.” See, “Will Iraqization Work?”, in Nicholas Schlosser, ed., U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2004-2008: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography. (Washington, D.C.: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2010), 168.

A telling indicator of the depth of the legitimacy crisis facing the new Iraq was that individual officers frequently enjoyed personal prestige and command authority based on their reputations from the old army and their service to the old state, as described above. However officers newly commissioned under the auspices of the new state, *especially* those assigned a senior rank from the outset, enjoyed no such authority and were often marginalized within their organizations. One could say that a discursive field of the state had been given form by the new army, but was dominated by other centers of authority and initiative outside the official state and its organizations. It was still the old state, not the new one, that commanded respect.
Chapter 6: Monopolizing Legitimate Force

6.1 Beginnings of Symbolic Reconstruction

Among the reams of documents generated by the U.S. led occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2011 is an obscure clutch of paperwork detailing a contract to renovate the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, built under Saddam’s patronage in the early phases of the Iran-Iraq war. The $1.8 million contract would include funds to install a new electrical system to handle the demands of the powerful lighting system designed to highlight the memorial at night, repairs to a fountain and the concrete tiles used to line the plaza surrounding the monument. In addition, funds were to be used to purchase 420 dress uniforms divided between the branches of the armed services and a “flower and sword” detail, to outfit the ceremonial guards who perform on state occasions.

A report written by an American inspector detailed the various contracting snafus endemic to U.S. funded reconstruction projects in Iraq. Records kept by the U.S. military unit responsible for funding the project were haphazard at best, and oversight was less than thorough. Predictably, the quality of the work was also haphazard. The fountain was empty when inspectors arrived, polished concrete slabs used to line the plaza were unevenly laid, grouting showed sloppy workmanship, and the electric system repairs were rudimentary. However, a few ceremonial guards the inspectors were able to locate — the very same soldiers who had

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2 Ibid., 11-12.
performed ceremonial duties under the old regime — reported that they got new uniforms, although they did not know how many uniforms were actually delivered.\(^3\)

The report concluded the project was 75 percent complete, noting that it had accomplished its basic purpose, and the monument had “again become a symbol of Iraqi pride”.\(^4\) As evidence of project completion, the report provided pictures of the monument illuminated at night and a picture of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki accompanied by an honor guard while laying a wreath at the Unknown Soldier Monument on Army Day, January 6, 2007.\(^5\) (Actual date listed is Jan 7, 2007). Of note are the uniforms themselves, which were identical to those worn by ceremonial units prior to 2003, not to mention the use of the monument itself. Both of these elements signify the continuation of a national narrative extending into the distant past, which itself is embedded in the history of the Iraqi state.

The timing of the renovation and the Army Day ceremony is also of note. After a tumultuous period that began after fall of Baghdad in April of 2003, Iraq’s first permanent government headed by Nuri al-Maliki was approved by its first permanent parliament on May 20, 2006. Approval for the renovation project was granted in an undated Multinational Corps - Iraq memorandum that appears to have been signed sometime during this period, with the tender being submitted in July, 2006 just weeks after Maliki formally took power.\(^6\) The project was

\(^3\) Ibid., 17.

\(^4\) Ibid., 18.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 6.
declared complete on January 10, 2007 just days after the new Prime Minister participated in the
wreath laying ceremony at the monument.

Illustration 6.1. Source: Multi-National Force-Iraq via SIGIR
Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki lays a wreath at the Monument to the Unknown Soldier on Army Day, January 6, 2007 in advance of a major military offensive.

The wreath laying ceremony represented the end of an extended period of cultural
destruction that began with the U.S. Marines’ widely broadcast destruction of the Saddam statue
on Firdus Square. During this period between 2003 and 2007, the commemorative tree of Iraq
endured persistent neglect and destruction. The tomb of Michel Aflaq, the Syrian Christian
founder of Ba’thism, was taken over by Coalition forces and used as a gym. The monument to
Iraqi officer martyrs in Basra was destroyed, as was a monument to Iraqi military pilots. The Swords of Qadisiya were partially dismantled in 2007, apparently as part of the wave of revision of monumental art initiated by the newly installed Maliki government, before eventually being reconstructed in 2011. The Martyrs’ Memorial and Unknown Soldiers Memorial fell into disrepair. Interestingly, the monument to Saddam’s cousin and brother-in-law, General Adnan Khairallah, who served as Minister of Defense during the Iran-Iraq war and found a prominent (posthumous) place within the Ba’thist state ceremonial as a martyr after his assassination or accidental death in 1989, was left intact until September of 2007.

In addition to physical degradation, surviving sites were stripped of national meaning as they ceased to be used for ceremonial purposes, serving as backdrops for U.S. troops’ souvenir photos instead. The looting of the symbolic basis of statehood along with its physical

7 The destruction of the pilots’ monument mirrored an assassination campaign carried out by Badr Corps activists against Iraqi pilots who served during the Iran-Iraq war. Several hundred were killed after 2003, essentially wiping out any possibility of reviving the Iraqi Air Force. Many Badr activists were subsequently offered commissions in the new Iraqi Army under Maliki, which exacerbated existing antagonisms between the old officer corps and the new regime. Phone interview by the author with Dr. Michael Knights, Washington, D.C., December 19, 2011. Also, interviews with exiled Iraqi scholar, Amman, Jordan, 2012.


infrastructure created the situation described in the preceding chapter, in which the formation of the putatively national armed forces took place in the absence of the state. Force generation proceeded instead on the basis of negotiation with local non-state actors, such as the tribal sheikhs of Anbar. This was in many ways an illustration of locally oriented sociological frameworks of legitimacy in practice, which created a multiplicity of armed organizations legitimated according to local conditions with only the thinnest veneer of official sanction over them.

Although efforts had been made by Iraq’s interim governments to nationalize the CMATT forces as a symbolic successor to the 1921 army and to frame its actions in patriotic terms, there is little else in the media record, observable relics of cultural production, or in recollections of advisers to suggest a coordinated bureaucratic effort to use these forces to reshape the state imaginary in any systemic way. Beginning in 2007, however, the pendulum began to swing the other way as previously abandoned or ignored monuments were endowed with national meaning again by the new government. This did not represent a return to the status quo ante, but rather a concerted effort to redefine the parameters of political community and rewrite the national military narrative by creating a new state atop the ruins of the old one.

6.2 Reconstructing State Symbolism and Editing National Narratives

In this chapter and the next I document how the newly empowered elites — specifically Maliki and his inner circle of Da’wa Party allies — sought to create a broader narrative of the state rooted in a mythical past in order to frame the actions of its forces in terms of national authenticity, heroism, and sacrifice, and to institute the identity of these forces as the national
army of Iraq possessing a long and glorious military lineage. Within this narrative of statehood, there is a progressively intensified and varied effort to concentrate political power as part of a “memory project”\(^\text{10}\) presenting a distinct view of events in Iraqi history as the basis for legitimation of the state and its military forces. This occurred in reference to the political and military demands of the present. Symbolism was used in attempts to justify both the empowerment of a new cadre of ruling elites under disputed constitutional arrangements, and the large military operations necessary to maintain this arrangement in power.

Symbolism was deployed in conjunction with the growing physical capabilities of the military, and its deployment against rival armed political parties and insurgent groups which, in several cases, had displayed characteristics of proto-states.\(^\text{11}\) During this period between early 2007 and spring of 2013, there were two successive arcs of violence: the first, between 2007 and 2010, was driven by intra-Shi’a rivalries. After the U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011, the central government sought to expand its reach into majority Kurdish and Sunni areas in the north and west of Iraq, respectively. In this chapter I trace the first of these, which encompassed operations to seize control of Baghdad and Basra from Sadrist militias between 2007 and 2009. Fardh al-Qanun and Sawlat al-Fursan were in response to challenges from within the regime’s own broader Shia-Islamist coalition for primacy in Iraqi politics, most significantly from

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\(^\text{11}\) In the early days of the occupation, Muqtada al-Sadr set up a shadow government. See, “Iraq’s Muqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer?”, Middle East Report No. 55, International Crisis Group, July 11, 2006. The autonomy of the Kurdish north is enshrined in the Constitution, as is its “regional guard”, also known as peshmerga, which received federal funding from Baghdad despite its primary role as a defense force against Arab Iraqi encroachment.
Moqtada al-Sadr and the militias affiliated with his “trend” and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), although Sunni-affiliated groups were targeted as well.

Unlike the early and desultory U.S. efforts at constructing symbolism and meaning, the Iraqi regime’s efforts after 2007 were not constructed out of whole cloth but rather were constructed in reference to extant symbolic repertoires of Iraqi statehood. Thus, after presenting the necessary background context regarding Iraqi politics and the circumstances and immediate objectives of the military operations, I will show how the regime attempted to use texts, music, monuments, shrines, and observances inherited from the past to frame its exercise of power and claims of authority in the present. This was a way of presenting mundane acts of administration and organized violence in transcendent terms of belonging and compulsory political unity. More than this, it represented a concerted effort to turn the armed forces a symbol of the state, thus making them a “meaningful referent” of sovereignty that could be used to distinguish legitimate force from illegal violence.

This was not only a matter of framing, but also a way of encouraging performance that might be productive of identities and state imagination as Iraqis within and without the security structures encountered the regime’s power and claims of authority. As seen in the previous chapter, the discursive field of the new state had begun to emerge in the three years prior to the election of a permanent Iraqi government, as officers were recalled to service, the military organization was expanded, command structures rebuilt, and the forces were deployed throughout Iraq. Memories of Iraqi statehood permeated the emergent discursive space created through the process of force development, and produced a limited bottom-up process of legitimation based upon localized negotiation. In particular, the experience of the Iran-Iraq war
served as an important marker of prestige and legitimacy within the new military organizations created under the rubric of the national army. The renewed official interest in state symbolism, not seen since the end of the Ba’thist era, seemed to reflect an imperative to monopolize control of these symbols and determine the ways in which others would encounter them.

The emergent regime articulated claims of legitimate authority both through the use of force and through a highly symbolized justificatory rhetoric of morally binding political solidarity. In the closing section of this chapter we can then consider how these discourses were encountered by other centers of initiative and resistance within the emerging discursive field of the state, and what effects this produced. Specifically, we can ask to what extent the combination of an expanded official military organization, its deployment across wide swathes of Iraqi society, and justificatory discourse and symbolism worked to convert power to authority. What image of the state was produced, and did this affect to some degree an imaginative transformation of this official military organization as an institution bearing the identity and authority of the state? How, in a Foucauldian sense, did would-be subjects of the new state produce authority that bound them to power in identifiable ways or placed them in opposition to its claimed authority? Before addressing these questions further, I will detail the sources and methods that I am using.

6.3 *Sources and Methods*

I draw upon several sources for this chapter and the next. The archives of foreign news translations formerly available through the World News Connection database are useful for getting samples of political discourse from different factions during a given conflict. Selection
of articles for translation was based on official U.S. policy analysis needs, so the sample is not necessarily representative. It is, however, very large and serves the broader purpose of getting data on the substantive content of political discourse during periods of conflict from a diverse array of activists ranging from regime officials to *jihadi* field commanders. I did fourteen separate searches, each covering several weeks of coverage depending on the subject. Subjects included major military operations, symbolically significant dates, and specific actions such as the disbandment of the Iraqi Army by CPA Order No. 2 and the bombing of the Askari shrine in 2006 that is blamed for intensifying sectarian strife in Iraq. I also did several random searches to sample discourse during relatively ordinary periods as a control.

When analyzing major military campaigns involving U.S. and Iraqi forces, I typically placed the beginning of the date range several days prior to the start of the operation and several days after its conclusion in order to capture variation in the form or content of discourse before, during, and after a given operation. My approach to symbolically significant dates varied, depending on whether the date represented a one-off occurrence, such as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraqi cities, or an annual holiday. As concerns the latter, I searched news coverage in early January every year between 2004 and 2013 in order to capture the significance accorded to the Iraqi Army’s January 6th anniversary in public discourse over time. Because prominent public figures typically released statements on this day, it was possible to track how the volume, form, and content of public discourse on the armed services as a national symbol changed during this period. Iraqi newspapers often publish under the patronage of prominent politicians and political parties, so the statements often indicative of their position on the legitimacy of the new army.
In this chapter I also draw heavily on the Ministry of Defense (MoD) weekly *khaymat al-Iraq*, which was first published in August of 2007. The date of its first publication is analytically significant in and of itself, as its emergence as an official mouthpiece roughly coincides with the new regime’s efforts to define and monopolize legitimate force in Iraq. *Khaymat al-Iraq* is hardly an objective news source, but its status as a regime mouthpiece is what makes it valuable in the context of this study. It provides information on the political discourse of the regime with its frequent use of historical motifs to frame the actions of the military, as well as a large number of reports on ceremonial events. The volume of information on regime discourse and military ceremonial is more than can be processed by a single analyst, even with the help of a research assistant. I began by reading the first several issues to familiarize myself with publication and also to see what the editors found particularly important to communicate to a new audience.

I then adopted an approach that combined sampling with a subject search of all available issues. In order to establish a baseline understanding of the topics covered by the newspaper and the substantive content of its messaging, I used a random number sequence generator to produce a random sample in which each number corresponded with an issue number of the newspaper. Reading 20 randomly selected issues allowed me to get a representative sample of six years of publication between 2007 and 2013 rather than a mere five months as would have been the case if I attempted to read them in order. This helped me further refine my understanding of what themes the regime chose to emphasize during various points in the post-2007 development of the Iraqi state and its armed forces.

I then used this knowledge to search every available issue between December 15, 2010 and January 6, 2013 for descriptions of ceremonial commemorations of the history of the Iraqi
armed forces. In this way, it was possible to find out what themes assumed importance in the official discourse of this period and begin to construct explanations for observed patterns. Two themes emerged as dominant motifs of discourse: martyrdom and human rights. Martyrdom was often accorded to ethnosectarian and ethnonational groups victimized by the Ba’thist regime, but comparatively rarely accorded to individual soldiers who died as members of the new armed forces. Over several years, only a handful of soldiers are prominently featured as martyrs and accorded state recognition, which prompted the question of why these instances more than others were seen as significant. However, this changed over time as the new regime struggled to assert its authority as agent of the Iraqi state. This moralistic aspect of authority claims was further elaborated in extensive discourse of human rights, with the new army as its primary exemplar.

Descriptions of both forms of the state’s military ceremonial were important in that they showed how the regime sought to repurpose, modify, and use the commemorative structures and practices of the past in order to frame its audience’s view of the present. In each case, I recorded the date and issue number of the newspaper, the subject of the commemoration, the senior official or commander present (as a proxy for significance), and the page number and approximate length (also as a proxy for significance). This allowed me to conduct a basic pattern analysis of commemorative practices that allowed me to place them in temporal and political context.

In addition to the aforementioned sources, I also collected evidence from videos, newspaper articles, and social media posted online. Although I did not apply a rigidly conceptualized template to these searches, they followed from the more systematic work with WNC and MoD publication archives. In many cases, it was possible to find materials that filled
out the outlines provided by earlier research with detailed descriptions or images of events, or even footage of the event itself. For example, the complete television coverage of the 2012 Army Day anniversary parade broadcast by the official Iraqiya channel is available online, and provides a wealth of information about symbolism and rhetoric articulated through the Iraqi state’s military ceremonial. Coming immediately on the heels of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, it was particularly important.

To summarize, form, content, and intensity of official discourses changed over time as the new government pursued its statebuilding agenda in a contentious political environment marked by bitter controversies, high-stakes gambits, and violent clashes between opposing factions. For reasons I will elaborate on further in this and the next chapter, martyrdom and human rights came to dominate the symbolic discourse of the regime. The regime’s military partnership with the United States conferred certain advantages upon it in terms of firepower and raw capacity for the use of organized violence for political ends, but it also made the problem of monopolizing legitimate force that much more complicated.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{6.4 Political Context and Symbols of Power}

The fundamental force driving Iraqi politics after 2003 was the struggle to define the moral and ideological basis for the new order. Because the apparatus of the state was smashed and remained in pieces for years after the fall of Baghdad, the political struggle was not over existing institutions but rather over development of political and military institutions that were

created in situ under conditions of Hobbesian anarchy in which different visions of political order competed for primacy. Although avenues of Iraqi influence on the process of institutional construction existed from the beginning, control of financial, military, and intellectual resources necessary to support the official “legitimate” state-building project sponsored by the United States were controlled by American policymakers and commanders.

The United States initially underestimated the size of this task, as evidenced by the lack of attention, as well as the trivial funding and intellectual effort allocated to “Phase IV” stability operations. However, facing the very real threat of strategic defeat by early 2004, all the financial, military, and intellectual resources the United States could muster were directed towards defining and ensuring the survival of a state-building project. The fundamental problem of legal philosophy identified by Hobbes remained unresolved, namely how recognition of sovereign authority would be established. U.S. policymakers essentially assumed that American revolutionary ideals manifested in an ersatz Enlightenment republicanism brought to Baghdad at the end of a tank barrel would provide the basis for this authorization in post-Ba’thist Iraq, but this proved to be unfounded.

The question then became which Iraqi personalities and factions would be empowered under the new order as determined by privileged access to U.S. favor and resources, support from regional patrons, comparative robustness of vote-buying mechanisms, and the intrinsic appeal of their political programs among Iraq’s main electoral groups. The various diplomatic and political intrigues of this process are well-documented and need no further elaboration
Nuri al-Maliki, a mid-ranking Da’wa Party activist emerged as a compromise candidate for Prime Minister who was seen as posing little political threat to other more established players. Whatever the wisdom of such a position, it can be plausibly argued that almost any configuration of likely Shia-Islamist alliances favored by electoral institutions and demographics of post-2003 Iraq would have produced a similar political orientation of the Iraqi executive.

The de facto moral purpose of the new Iraqi state under the rule of Shia-Islamist alliances became de-Ba’thification: shorthand for elimination of Iraq as a strategic competitor to Iran accomplished through the disenfranchisement of the political-military caste who viewed Iraq in qawmi terms as the Arab world’s Eastern Wall against Iran, and themselves as carriers of this cultural and historical identity of statehood. A large and capable national army was not necessarily inimical to such purposes, but ideologically and organizationally it would need to be oriented towards suppressing qawmi and jihadi resistance to de-Ba’thification. This presupposed a reconstruction of the symbolic complex of the state that appropriated motifs from the past using an established repertoire of symbols, but changed much of its cultural and ideological content to link the state imaginary with power’s preferred narrative of Iraq.

The partial destruction then reconstruction of the Swords of Qadisiya described above was emblematic of this process. Likewise, the aforementioned Unknown Soldiers Monument

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was repaired at U.S. taxpayer expense, presumably with the assent — or more likely encouragement — of the new Iraqi government, and the Martyrs’ Memorial was reopened with a renovated underground museum that avoided mention of the Iran-Iraq war, focusing instead on the martyrdom of the Ba’thist regime’s many Iraqi victims in Shiite and Kurdish regions, as well as the special role of the al-Sadr clerical family in resisting Ba’thist rule. Not surprisingly, a substantial number of Iraqis, particularly Sunnis with no connection to a prominent Shi’ite clerical family, viewed this type of repurposing as a travesty.

A new national calendar centered around the 1921 founding of the Iraqi Army also began to take shape, along with official observances and military ceremonial affecting a remembered historical aesthetic. Official military publications including the aforementioned weekly newspaper and quarterly professional journal appeared in 2007, which reflected a distinct view of Iraqi history and the basis for legitimation of the state and the force necessary to institute and preserve it. Finally, a flag closely resembling the Ba’thist era flag minus explicit symbols of Ba’thist ideology and Saddam’s personality was adopted in 2008. The reconstruction of symbols of Iraqi militarism paralleled the radical expansion of the armed forces from a ragtag force barely capable of tagging along behind U.S. forces to an organization of several hundreds of thousand

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15 An intriguing portrait of this repurposing was provided by the Afaq TV Iraqi news channel, which ran a report on a group of elementary school students’ visit to the Martyr’s Monument in early December of 2011. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGoLFCEIEls. December 1st was established as Martyrs’ Day under the Ba’thist regime during the Iran-Iraq War. It was not clear whether the timing of the visit was coincidental or not. After 2003, it was not clear that the monument would be retained in any form. U.S. troops initially desecrated the monument, using it as a backdrop for gag photos and making it off-limits to Iraqis. Also, a significant constituency within the Shi’ite clerical establishment was believed to advocate its destruction. See, Faruq Yusuf, “‘The Martyr’s Monument’, Politicians From the Hawza Seek to Remove Masterpiece From Baghdad Skyline”, al-Sharq al-Awsat, January 25, 2006.

soldiers possessing increasingly heavy armaments, commanded by an indigenous political-military elite.

However, as shown in the previous chapter, the exigencies of rebuilding the Iraqi military amid a raging insurgency made it necessary to bring former officers into the new army. Issues of the MoD weekly newspaper *khaymat al-Iraq* frequently advertised for prior-service officers in specialties as diverse as military music and artillery to (re) join the (new) army.\(^\text{17}\) The Iraqi Prime Minister himself estimated that up to 70 percent of officers in the new Iraqi Army had served before 2003.\(^\text{18}\) This presented the Maliki regime with a quandary: The army necessary to preserve the new order could only be constructed at the hazard of empowering members of the very political-military class de-Ba’thification was intended to disenfranchise.

Furthermore, among members of the old officer class, military service in a *qawmi* cause — the Iran-Iraq war — served as the basis for self-identification, as well as prestige and legitimation of command authority within the ranks of the new army. This was repeatedly seen in the experience of U.S. advisers and was surely known to the national-security cadre of the new regime, many of whom had served in the Badr Corps during the Iran-Iraq war. The old officer class viewed the Badr Corps as an Iranian-organized fifth column and was in many cases not on speaking terms with its cadres that made their way into the upper reaches of the new Army and defense establishment.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{17}\) The very first issue of *khaymat al-Iraq* carried notices soliciting prior service officers and NCO’s on page 6 alongside requests to local television stations to run crawlers announcing reporting orders for recently commissioned officers. Evidently, regular channels did not exist to transmit military orders.


\(^\text{19}\) Interview with LTC Joel Rayburn, February 27, 2012.
The potential reemergence of revanchist-nationalist cliques within the military potentially hostile to the regime and its broader program of state development was not mere fantasy, as the reconstitution of a Republican Guard dominated tank unit in 2006 within the new Army’s 9th Division demonstrated. The localized nature of many divisions, such as the Sunni dominated 7th Division recruited in part from local tribes as part of a political compromise to secure local tolerance and cooperation with the new military organizations, meant that commanders and local power brokers often had close social ties. Networks of support also radiated beyond Iraq’s borders to surrounding capitals of Sunni-dominated Arab states that viewed Iraq’s tilt eastward towards the revolutionary Shiite regime of Iran with alarm.

In Amman, Abu Dhabi, and other Arab capitals, one could find large communities of retired or exiled officers that maintained regular face-to-face or telephone contact with one another and with sympathizers still in Iraq. In Amman, the exile-dominated Iraqi Center for Strategic Studies regularly held conferences and published academic articles critical of the new regime’s security institutions and policies. Although it attracted a number of prominent former regime elites, it also served as a landing pad for Iraqis who fell afoul of the new regime and some liberal intellectuals. Other conferences in the region regularly attracted well-known personalities from the exile community who had served in the military or security sector.

These extended social networks served to maintain political solidarities and cultural orientations forged during the Ba’thist era, and also served as a conduit to internal Iraqi politics. The Marines’ outreach to Anbar sheikhs during the Fallujah crises and later during the Awakening frequently went through Amman. Likewise, members of this community that I
socialized with in Amman seemed to be on the phone constantly at all hours of the day with associates in Iraq.

Social media outlets after 2003 quickly became a means for virtual social networks to organize around the cause of preserving the memory of the “real” Iraqi Army that had been disbanded by Bremer in 2003. Commemoration of victories in the Iran-Iraq war, which became increasingly taboo as Iraq’s new leadership cadre took power, continued to be held in virtual spaces. Such networks focusing on preservation of historical memory and military culture extended throughout the Arab world as many senior former officers were forced into exile.

The regime also faced overt military challenges from insurgent groups, terror cells, and rival Shiite militia forces that lacked the official status of the state but aspired to play a leading role in Iraqi politics nonetheless. In contrast with military operations of 2004 and 2005, from 2007 onwards the Iraqi Army played a sizable role in security operations and had significant influence on their conduct. Just as with the earlier assaults on Fallujah and Najaf, major engagements in Baghdad, Basra, and Sunni-dominated areas of western Iraq placed the Iraqi government in the position of having to justify military operations against its own citizens. The key difference from 2007 onwards was that basic institutions of sovereign statehood existed, even if this was often a juridical formality rather than social and political reality.

6.5 Political Challengers and Symbolic Contestation

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To summarize, at the beginning of 2007 the new regime of Nuri al-Maliki faced several ideologically based challenges that threatened its hold on power and ability to pursue its political program of continual de-Ba’thification.

- The relative scarcity within the officer corps of the new army of officers possessing requisite technical skills, experience, and professional legitimacy to command an effective fighting force.

- The threat, real or perceived, of development of revanchist social networks of former officers forming anti-regime cliques within important military units supported by extended networks of opposition intellectuals and former officers.

- Sadrist militias that controlled large populations of Shi’ite Iraqis and openly challenged the state’s (theoretical) monopoly on legitimate force.

- Jihadi and nationalist insurgent groups.

- Continued dependence on the United States and Iran for political and military support.

To meet these challenges, the new regime needed to conduct military operations in partnership with foreign patrons while simultaneously legitimating its right to wage just war as the sole agent of authentic Iraqi state sovereignty. Furthermore, it needed to stigmatize other armed movements and support networks operating outside the framework of state authority. Specifically, it needed to do the following:

- Stigmatize or marginalize the Eastern Wall metaphor that was central to the qawmi national military narrative.

- Create an alternative national military narrative emphasizing watani nationalism as interpreted within the framework of Shia-Islamist rule, and demonstrate its moral-ethical superiority over alternative nationalist discourses using motifs of martyrdom and human rights.

- Marginalize those groups competing to define and control the authentic military narrative of Iraq and claim themselves as its inheritors.

- Present the CMATT Iraqi forces as the inheritor of the 1921 Iraqi Army’s mantle and therefore an authentic summarizing symbol of Iraqi unity and independence as these concepts were defined by the regime.
The challenges facing the regime and the demands these placed upon it intersected with material measures of military capacity such as manpower and weaponry. However, I have already shown in the previous chapter that these issues do not exist independently of questions of cultural identity and authenticity. To secure recognition of its claims as an authentic agent of Iraqi sovereignty, the new government needed to demonstrate that its claims to the mantle of state nationalism represented by the 1921 Army were legitimate, and by extension, that all other competing claims were illegitimate. The rhetorical argument presented time and again through texts and symbolic discourse was that its narrative of Iraqi identity and history was intrinsically superior as a normative basis of compulsory political unity and binding authority. Any number of technocratic arrangements might plausibly serve as a mechanism for preference aggregation and service provision in Iraq, but only a normative stance gives purpose to authority, justifies its claims, and allows for its legitimate defense by force of arms.

The question of authenticity was especially complicated in the Iraqi context, given a political culture that was acutely attuned to sabotage of the state from within, dating to the earliest days of modern Iraqi statehood. In a country whose borders were drawn by foreign powers and contained a multiplicity of ethnicities and religious traditions, political struggles took on overtones of ethnic chauvinism as Iraqis sought to determine who exactly was authentically Iraqi. This dynamic became particularly acute following the downfall of Brigadier Qasim in 1963, as Sunni chauvinists charged that Kurds, Shi’a, and Christians were not *asil*, or authentically Iraqi. Although Shi’a could and did assume senior posts in the Ba’thist regime, which strove to present an image of ethnic unity, this was only possible to the extent that they

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21 See, Davis, ibid., 132. This paragraph draws on his discussion of *al-shu 'ubiyun* discourse found on pages 4, 131-133, and 184-188.
assimilated into an official Pan-Arabist state culture that regarded political Shi’ism as a form of subversion.22

By the beginning of 2007, the newly formed government had the levers of the state at its disposal as well as strategic backing from the United States and Iran. It used these to redefine authenticity, and to stigmatize the shu’ubiyyun discourse that had marginalized many of its members.23 The new government used these resources to construct symbolic dimensions of military power by which it could secure its claim to the legacy of the Iraqi Army, and with it, an authentic Iraqi political identity. It conducted an extended counterinsurgency campaign in which millions of Iraqis ultimately encountered a new vision of Iraqi statehood, which despite its novelty, looked to the past for legitimation. The new regime sought to leverage its material advantages and juridical status as the governing authority of Iraq with symbolic dimensions of military power in order to gain substantive state sovereignty.

6.6. Symbolic Tree

What did the visit of the Prime Minister to the Monument of the Unknown Soldier on Army Day 2007 mean? The visit could be read in several ways. Perhaps it was a pro forma visit to show “Iraqi pride” to the Americans who paid for the monument’s renovation. It might be seen as outreach to reconcilable elements of the former national security elite or as a relatively low-cost means for Maliki, who spent much of his long exile in Iran and fought against the Iraqi

See, Davis, ibid., 4.

22 Shu’ubiyyun, according to Davis, refers to “Arabized Persian Shi’a who formed the core of the ‘Abbasid bureaucracy”, and allegedly worked to undermine the medieval Baghdad Caliphate from within. “The [Ba’thist] regime’s message to Iraq’s Sunni Arab minority was that the Shi’a, who were untrustworthy and duplicitous under the ‘Abbasids, were suspect in the modern era as well,” ibid. Contemporary discourse of predominantly (but not exclusively) Sunni insurgents and exiles bears the imprint of this discourse, as one often hears the view that the new constitutional order is a thinly disguised vehicle for a Persian takeover of Iraq.
Army during the war, to buff his nationalist credentials. Still another interpretation is that it was a considered effort to both monopolize a symbolic power resource, legitimize the transference of the state to a new cadre of ruling elites, and claim a moral right to make just war on behalf of the reimagined Iraqi state.

As should be reasonably clear by now, I believe the latter interpretation offers the most complete explanation for Maliki’s visit. As shown above, the mere fact of Maliki’s ascent to power through a political process imposed by the United States did not make his government sovereign. There was, of course, the awkward fact that the survival of this government depended largely upon U.S. military power. However, if this was the only issue preventing the emergence of “genuine state sovereignty”\textsuperscript{24} in Iraq, then the technocratic, train-and-equip strategy advocated by MNF-I commander Gen. George Casey would have worked. However, absent a broad consensus over the nature of genuine state sovereignty in Iraq, simply organizing uniformed armed formations did nothing to resolve the larger issue of legitimate force: namely, the substantive content of these claims and why such claims made by the “official” government should be privileged above others in a given context.

Legitimacy was thus contested based upon the moral status of the claims themselves, and the right this claimed moral superiority conferred upon those in positions of command to impose a particularly construct of authentic Iraqi sovereignty on others within the broader political community, through force if necessary. In the remainder of this section, I will show how the new regime modified and used the commemorative complex inherited from the Ba’thist era to

\textsuperscript{24} Marten, ibid., 4. She writes, “‘Genuine state sovereignty’ refers to the ability of the state to enforce a consistent set of rules over the entire territory it claims.” Original emphasis.
articulate its account of Iraq using an established repertoire of symbols — many constructed during the Ba’thist era — while stigmatizing or marginalizing other competing accounts. This occurred in conjunction with aggressive efforts to politicize the command structures of the military organization inherited from CMATT and the constant necessity of justifying the use of these forces within Iraq to suppress alternative constructs of political sovereignty that were competing for supremacy within Iraq. Even though the underlying motivations of the regime in any given instance were often parochial and partisan, claims of authority were made in reference to a reimagined Iraqi state. Thus, the claims were theoretically binding on all Iraqis within the territorial bounds of the state.

Any new government coming to power at the beginning of 2007 that accepted the basic framework of Iraqi politics provided by the Constitution and buttressed by the U.S. military would be confronted with the commemorative complex of Iraq inherited from the previous regime and its significant residual power within Iraqi politics of symbolism and memory. The new regime could choose simply ignore it, leaving monuments physically intact but otherwise exclude them from any official ceremonial. However, this presented the risk of competitors seeking to appropriate the mantle of the Iraqi state using it for their own purposes. The numerous statements and commentaries from nationalist opposition groups dominated by former regime elites to this effect, which were cited in earlier chapters, are evidence of this.

Likewise, the regime could choose to demolish or otherwise desecrate the physical vestiges of this complex and disavow its underlying narrative as Ba’thist, but this might also undermine its already suspect nationalist credentials. It could also attempt to replace it, as the

\[25\] See, Kubik, ibid., 3. Kubik uses similar analysis of Polish communist regime from which this is partially adapted.
CPA and CMATT had attempted to do with flags that were never flown, medals that were never worn, and berets that were discarded at the first opportunity. Although the Da’wa Party had credentials as a long-time opponent of the Ba’thist regime, it lacked “revolutionary authorization”\(^\text{26}\) that might have accrued to it if it had been directly responsible for overthrowing the regime. Without this authorization, its power to produce a credible image of the state with entirely new symbols was limited.

Finally, there was the option of repurposing the commemorative complex of Iraq, which is the strategy the new regime pursued. This offered the advantages of using a repertoire of existing nationalist symbols representing a narrative that extended into the distant past, thus avoiding the fraught question of the legitimacy of the 2003 overthrow of the Ba’thist regime, while simultaneously creating space to redefine how the meanings of these symbols were (publicly) interpreted within Iraqi political society. Much like the successive coup leaders of the 1960’s claimed that their putsches were intended as necessary correctives to return Iraq to its true revolutionary course first set in 1958, the Maliki regime could present itself as an anti-imperialist entity seeking a similar corrective in order to return Iraq to its historical roots. Whether Iraqis who were profoundly alienated from the post-2003 state found such a narrative credible or not was not as important as whether it could serve as a unifying construct of symbolic discourse that the regime could use to secure dominance within the broader Shia-Islamist ruling coalition and justify more-or-less continual de-Ba’thification.

\(^{26}\) See, Arato, ibid.
Thus began the regime’s reconstruction of the commemorative tree of military symbolism that it had inherited partially intact. As referenced in chapter three, this tree was composed of seven cultural objects.

- scripture (biographies, eulogies, poems, plays and commentaries)
- music (anthems, hymns and inspirational songs)
- icons (uniforms, insignia, unit patches, decorations)
- monuments (obelisks, temples and war memorials)
- shrines (sacred sites such as birthplaces, residences, and cemeteries)
- naming practices (streets, cities, towns, countries and states)
- commemorative observances (holiday rites).

Here, I address each of these in order (save for “monuments” and “commemorative observances”, which I have already addressed) to show how they were manipulated by the new regime to accomplish its purposes.

**6.6.a Scripture**

Scripture, taken to mean the reams of paeans to Saddam Husayn, plays and movies glorifying the qadisiyat or other heroic episodes of military greatness were entirely discarded by the official state, and left to revanchist online forums to propagate. However, after 2007 the regime moved to reestablish state capacity to produce official texts to communicate preferred interpretations of symbolically important events and occasions, as well as to address controversies arising from the use of force. This included the MoD website launched in February of 2007, weekly newspaper *Khaymat al-Iraq* (Tent of Iraq), launched in July of 2007, and *Bilady* (my country) a quarterly professional military magazine launched in 2006.

The historical orientation of these publications was clear from their first issues. In each issue, *Khaymat al-Iraq* profiled each Iraqi Minister of Defense, beginning with Jafar al-Askari in
the first issue and Nuri al-Said in the second. These key Sharifian officers of the monarchy era held a number of senior ministerial posts and both died untimely deaths during military coups. Historical articles too numerous to list detailed the development of the national army, its key personalities, and its commemorative traditions up until the 1960’s. Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, who led the 1958 coup that deposed the monarchy, has also reappeared frequently in official publications, once again referred to with his revolutionary title of “Za’im” (leader) and portrayed as a progressive leader in Iraqi political life. This contrasted sharply with his portrayal under Ba’thist rule as a interloper who subverted the genuine nationalist aims of a popular anti-imperialist revolution. Not surprisingly, the Ba’thist leaders who followed him have been consigned to historical oblivion, and only the most oblique and derogatory references are made to them. Likewise, the Iran-Iraq war is only mentioned as “the era of military adventurism and dictatorship”, and commemoration limited to accounts of repatriation of its victims’ remains.

6.6.b Music

Websites and social media pages for individual units have proliferated in the last several years, providing a forum of members and supporters to post messages, pictures, and patriotically themed music videos glorifying the Army. Less formal forms of music have also been

27 See, for example, Khaymat 35, 3, May 7 2008, and 138, 4. This builds on residual memories of Qasim as a progressive leader. A statue of Qasim was erected in July, 2005 on Baghdad’s Rashid Street near the place where a young Saddam Husayn and co-conspirators attempted to assassinate Qasim in 1959. See, “Baghdad Statue Commemorates Founder of Iraqi Republic,” al-Iraqi, July 16, 2005. The event was attended by a handful of elderly Baghdadis, according to the report.

28 See, The Iraqi Army 60th Anniversary, ibid.

propagated through unit websites and social media pages. Music videos singing the praises of the Army or one of its units fighting against terrorists can be found online.\textsuperscript{30} The aesthetic and lyrics of these videos typically reflects \textit{watani} nationalist motifs, but are generally more prone to overt Shi’a sectarianism than more official outlets. The Freedom Monument built during Qasim’s rule and described in chapter two is a favorite backdrop for lip-synching singers as are the Swords of Qadisiya. The latter monument of course is closely associated with Saddam and the Iran-Iraq war, but its use in the videos appears to be more an act of appropriation of a symbol of statehood and military power rather than an expression of latent Sunni Pan-Arabism.

The Saddam-era Iraqi national anthem, “The Land of the Two Rivers” which had been written in 1981 and was full of Ba’thist and Pan-Arabist language, was replaced in 2004 by order of the CPA in a rare display of cultural acuity with a popular anthem of Arab nationalism titled, “My Homeland”, after Paul Bremer heard it at a concert.\textsuperscript{31} Composed in 1934 by a Palestinian poet, it became popular throughout the Arab world. Despite the fact that the Palestinian cause was a central rallying cry of Pan-Arabism, the lyrics convey broad themes of \textit{watani} nationalism focusing on independence and national pride. It has been retained to date, although a

\textsuperscript{30} See, http://www.isof-iq.com/, in 2013 the website of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) still carried the slogan “Men of Difficult Missions”, carried over from the Ba’thist era, and featured its own music video singing the praises of the “Golden Division” as a national defense force. Its soldiers still wear the special operations patch described in chapter five that the Shahwani forces raised by U.S. Marines in Fallujah had adopted. ISOF was initially raised under Ministry of Defense auspices, but under PM Maliki was subsumed into an extra-constitutional command structure called The Iraqi Counterterrorism Bureau. Also see, http://jihadology.net/hizballah-cavalcade/, by Phillip Smyth, hosted at jihadology.net by Aaron Zelin of King’s College, London, for assorted music, symbols, and social media postings of national forces and sectarian militias.

parliamentary committee for redesign of the national flag and anthem and was still debating changes as of 2012.\textsuperscript{32}

Military music, which disappeared with the dissolution of the old Iraqi Army and its various military bands, gradually began to reappear as the armed forces were reconstituted. In 2004, four military bands were formed at each of the four military colleges through which new army officers were commissioned. However, it was only in 2007 that the first director of military music was named. In 2008, a full-scale directorate of military music was created that implemented reforms within the music schools through the following year. Then in 2010, military bands for the Air Force and Naval academies were created.\textsuperscript{33} The red and navy blue ceremonial uniforms worn by members of newly created bands were identical to those worn by their predecessors.

Decisions as to the music that should be played by these bands were politically and symbolically significant, as different pieces evinced different eras of state politics and thus were bound up in the larger contest to determine which cultural forms of Iraqi state sovereignty were authentic. During Ba’thist rule, many American and British marches and anthems that had become popular during the monarchy and early republican eras were superseded by compositions from Egypt that bore the cultural imprint of Nasserism and Iraqi compositions with Pan-Arabist and Ba’thist themes. When a concerted effort to repurpose Iraqi military music traditions after 2007 was made, the new ruling elites looked to the pre-Ba’thist era. Thus, when the Maliki regime staged its ambitious military parade to commemorate Army Day on January 6, 2012, just

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
weeks after the celebrated departure of U.S. troops, the military band played the “traditional
Iraqi” marches “Stars and Stripes Forever”, “Semper Fidelis”, and “Marching Through Georgia”,
which reflected the earlier era of Western influence.34

6.6.c Icons

Just as the musical traditions of the Iraqi Army were selectively purged and repurposed, a
similar logic was applied to the national military costume — i.e. the Iraqi Army service and dress
uniforms for combat personnel. As indicated above, the overall appearance of these uniforms
closely resembled the ones of the old Army. Branch insignia, designating whether a given
service member has been designated as a specialist in infantry, tanks, artillery, logistics or some
other, have largely been retained, as have skill badges, such as the wings used to designate the
wearer as a pilot or parachute qualified.35 Khaymat al-Iraq carried numerous accounts of the
various official commemorations celebrating the founding of one or another military branch in
the 1920’s and 1930’s, which served to further tie the new armed forces to the iconography of the
old, thus implying an unbroken historical lineage between the two.36

The distinctive red shoulder tabs used to symbolize graduation from the staff academy
have also been retained. Again, this is a small but significant detail that implies continuity
between the past and present. In 2003, a senior Iraqi officer might be told he should accept a
commission in the New Iraqi Army as a captain. The reemergence of the red stripe as a signifier

34 E-mail correspondence with retired Iraqi general and military historian.
35 The author reviewed insignia from contemporary photographs of Iraqi military personnel with retired officers.
36 See, for example, “The military engineer corps celebrates its 78th anniversary,” Khaymat al-Iraq, September
28th, 2011, No. 194, 1. The official ceremony was attended by Iraqi Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Babaker Zebari.
of experience and training brought with it the retention of the accompanying rank and privileges, and carried with it an implicit rejection of foreign overlordship. It also implicitly legitimated the military institutions of the Ba’athist era as belonging to the Iraqi nation, not merely the regime in power during that period. For example, the reconstituted War College, used to train general officers, continued to trace its lineage to 1977, when it was founded as the Hasan al-Bakr Defense University named after Iraq’s “Father Leader”, whom Saddam deposed in on July 16, 1979.37

The connection between symbolism and substance could be seen in the fight for possession of the military academy that conferred the coveted red stripes. The national military educational establishment was a prize in Iraqi politics of the transition era because of the prestige, rank, and patronage conferred through its organizations. The war college was closed for a time in 2008 by the Army Chief of Staff Babaker Zebari because it had become corrupted by patronage, according to Lieutenant General Dubik (ret.), the commander of MNSTC-I between 2007-2009. The Baghdad Military College (BMC), which claims a lineage extending back to 1923, itself became infiltrated by Sadrist militias during this period. Dubik recalled how this culminated in a special operations raid against the College ordered by Iraqi Chief of Staff Babaker Zebari:

We had some problems over there during my time, because there was an inter-Shi’a debate over who would run the military academy. And the Iraqi group that was there was linked into some of the Shiite terrorist groups. Sometime, I don’t remember when, spring of 2008 we had to clean all of that out. Again, the Iraqis did this, I had to bring the intelligence to their attention. But Babaker ordered a special operations raid on the academy, killed and

37 See,“The War College: The Defense University For Military Studies Celebrates the Convocation of its Third Class of Officers”, Khaymat al-Iraq, March 6, 2013, No. 263, 3. For an official Ba’th era account of the founding of the University, see, The Iraqi Army 60th Anniversary, ibid.
carted off the ne’er-do-wells — some of them ran away, some got killed, some got captured — and they put in a whole new group to get going.\textsuperscript{38}

Control of the material infrastructure of the BMC facility was important, but what made it an indivisible resource was its symbolic value as a recognized institution of the state authorized to commission Iraqi officers. Interestingly, three other military academies were created in Iraq’s regions to give each of Iraq’s three main communal groups its own commissioning source during the early phases of military reconstruction, reflecting the generally fragmented authority that characterized the national army. The government of Nuri al-Maliki attempted to close three of these at the end of 2009 so that the original Baghdad academy would remain as the sole commissioning source and the others providing training courses only. The decision was controversial, especially in Kurdistan, and was still being implemented as of late 2012.\textsuperscript{39} The rank and branch insignia, the red tabs, and the close overall resemblance of the new uniforms with the old all served as iconographic markers that tied the past to the present. In addition, subtle markers showed those subject to the organizational incentives and constraints of the military hierarchy, which version of the past should be tied to the present.

An emblematic example of this are the military medals, which show the wearer’s individual place within the national military narrative. These are no longer used, and have not been replaced with any new system of military orders, awards, and decorations, making the Iraqi Army nearly unique among other armies. As one serving officer explained to me, wearing the

\textsuperscript{38} Author interview with Gen. Dubik, ibid.

medals identifies one “as a man of the Saddam time”\footnote{Interview, ibid.}, even though they are still officially authorized for wear — save the bravery and wound medals awarded during the Iran-Iraq war. Replacing these was never a very high priority for the U.S. occupation authority, although the training command did create medals for bravery, wounds, merit and achievement. These never achieved widespread use or recognition, however. Likewise, foreign medals awarded to Iraqi soldiers during the occupation period are seldom, if ever, worn.\footnote{Interview with Iraqi Ground Forces Command U.S. adviser, ibid. The U.S. armed services published any number of accounts of Iraqis being awarded U.S. achievement and commendation medals for bravery in the early years of the American intervention in Iraq. The author witnessed a similar dynamic during tour in Afghanistan in 2005, when military advisers were tasked with nominating worthy Afghan soldiers for U.S. awards in order to demonstrate that indigenous forces were fighting for their country.} Of course, there were pre-Ba’thist medals for bravery and merit that might have been used, but there seems not to have been any general awareness among U.S. commanders and advisers that these existed or might have symbolic significance.\footnote{The history of the pre-2003 bravery award is illustrative of the gradual change of a visual symbol over time. It was initially adapted by the government of King Faysal I from a British medal awarded to Indian colonial troops for distinguished service. His successor Ghazi made additional changes to the device, but retained royal imagery. After the republican coup in 1958, the distinctive 8-point republican star was adopted as the shape of the device, although the red and navy color of the suspension ribbon was retained. The small insignia of Qasim was removed following his murder in 1963 and replaced with a republican eagle. A medal of “Supreme Worthiness” was created during the Gulf War using the same suspension ribbon with a differently shaped device, although the old bravery medal was retained as well.}

This innovation in de facto uniform regulations illustrates how the national military narrative of Iraq was selectively edited through the manipulation of symbols of militarism inherited from the previous regime. The Iraqi Army, according to this telling — propagated endlessly in official publications — was founded on the sacred date of January 6th, 1921. Although formally under British tutelage, the army succeeded in breaking the chains of colonialism and imperialism binding both it and the Iraqi nation in 1958. In doing this, the army
claimed the right to dignity and recognition that is the birth right of all Iraqis. Moral -- if not tactical -- victories against Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973 sealed this glorious history of the army until the dark decades of idolatry, dictatorship, politicization, and military adventurism under the deposed regime (which is almost never mentioned by name). Now reborn, the Iraqi Army once again is made up of the sons of all the Iraqi People, eschews adventurism and human rights violations, fights tirelessly to stamp out the remnants of terrorism, and defends constitutional guarantees of pluralism and democracy.

The root metaphor of the Eastern Wall, which was central to the moral purpose of the Iraqi state in the Ba’thist era and the national military narrative of victory in the Iran-Iraq war, has been simply erased through selective pruning of the military iconography of Iraq. Up through the transition years of 2007 to 2009, if not later, informal commemoration of the Iran-Iraq war and other elements of the national military narrative stigmatized by the Maliki regime continued, according to Dubik.

[There is less open commemoration of Ba’thist era military history] because of all the political sensitivities, but all of that will come back. There isn’t any doubt all of that will come back, because they do have a long history… If you walk into a regimental headquarters today you will see all sorts of plaques and awards, but that is all since 2003… But when you talk, when you have dinner with them, it’s ‘yeah do you remember the Iran-Iraq war’, or ‘do you remember when we were subduing the Kurds we did this or that’, so I have full confidence that all of this stuff will come back.43

The intrinsic appeal of the new discourse that articulates the revised national military narrative among members of the officer corps was less important than the regime’s ability to compel members to conform to the norms of dress, appearance, and public speech it

43 Interview with Gen. Dubik, ibid.
presupposed. The Prime Minister’s office subversion of the chain of command through creation of extra-constitutional institutions, placement of hard-core loyalists in key positions in the *de facto* chain-of-command, and well-documented end runs around parliamentary oversight provided the bureaucratic muscle necessary to enforce its preferred cultural codes within the armed forces bequeathed to it by the United States. Open propagation of an alternative discourse based on a rival national military narrative were foreclosed by such means, while power appropriated the summarizing symbols of inherited from the past.

However, it is important to note that this process was not completely centralized and had bottom-up, as well as top-down aspects. Indeed, the bureaucratic infrastructure for minute regulation of such matters was comparatively underdeveloped, and often delegated to subordinate Iraqi units. Open glorification of the Iran-Iraq war and display of its symbols, particularly the various medals introduced during the war, was proscribed in a number of formal and informal ways. However, there was an abiding interest in the symbolic forms of the past and what they represented. Certain uniform items associated with the monarchy and early republican era began to appear again in the past few years. The “faysaliya”, a distinct military cap unique to Iraq introduced by King Faysal I could be seen being worn by a number of senior officers during ceremonial occasions, but this appears as largely a matter of individual preference rather than centralized directive. Likewise, exactly what this cap should signify and what statement it is making have not been codified to my knowledge. It was often worn by Brigadier Qasim in his

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44 E-mail correspondence with senior U.S. military adviser in Baghdad, Spring 2013.
official photographs, but he decreed that other officers should wear a more conventional leather-brimmed barracks cap, which he introduced during his brief reign.45

Other small but significant changes in iconography signaled a distancing from the U.S. forces that created the new army. Beginning in April of 2013, the Ministry of Defense replaced the seal introduced during the CPA era with a seal that closely resembled the one used by the Ministry before 2003. A green triangle in the center of the seal, used before 2003 as the Air Force insignia, had the year 1921 imprinted on it. The seal was prominently displayed on all official MoD publications and social media sites, although the substantive content of the national military narrative propagated through these outlets had changed markedly to reflect the disenfranchisement of the former Sunni-dominated elites and their qawmi nationalism. These acts were not mere symbolism but represented hardball politics that variously imposed and appropriated a culturally and historically specific symbolic discourse of statehood.


The Ba’th era seal of MoD, the CPA seal, and the post 2012 seal.

45 E-mail correspondence with retired Iraqi officer and military historian, ibid. For example, see the posting on the official Facebook page of the Iraqi Army commemorating the 90th Anniversary of the Baghdad Military College on May 20th, 2014.
6.6.d Shrines and Cemeteries

The role of the army in protecting religious pilgrimage to Shiite shrine cities in the Iraqi south and massive annual religious observances commemorating the martyrdom of Ali and Husayn received wide coverage through every media outlet available to the new regime.\(^{46}\) Visits and statements of senior military and civilian leaders regarding security preparations received were often detailed. Likewise, the military’s ability to protect the shrines themselves, particularly the Askari shrine in Samara believed to be bombed by Sunni extremists, is a point of pride. Other analysts have noted that the regime is particularly sensitive to any event that suggests that its forces are incapable of accomplishing this task, as failure to protect devout believers directly impinges upon its prestige.\(^{47}\) To take this observation further, protection of Shia religious culture by the national army served to define the Iraqi state in markedly different terms than it had been under the Ba’th regime, as Shi’ite pilgrims encountered the national army as a security-providing force on their way to Karbala and other holy sites.

The emphasis on protection of the Shi’ite pilgrimages had another intra-Shia dimension tied to the Dawa Party’s bare-knuckle conflict with Sadrist militias that operated under the rubric of the Mahdi Army. Although Sadr himself was known in U.S. policy circles as an anti-American firebrand who made his career denouncing the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, his anti-occupation stance was actually a later political adaptation of the initial purpose of the

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\(^{47}\) Knights, 2011, ibid.
militias, which centered around Shiite shrines and rituals. Rayburn writes, “…the Jaysh al-Mahdi, or Mahdi Army, was a loose paramilitary club whose initial raison d’être was not armed resistance against foreign troops, but rather the protection of Shia pilgrims during the annual processions honoring the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn in Karbala and Najaf.” By appropriating the protection of the pilgrimages to its forces, which claimed the military lineage of the Iraqi state, the new regime was simultaneously sidelining a political competitor and claiming a scarce political resource for itself. Service provision, in this case, was not a politically neutral act, but had direct bearing on the legitimation of the new state.

The destruction or repurposing of *qawmi* nationalist shrine sites progressed along the same general line that appropriation of military iconography did. Those shrines devoted exclusively to Ba’thist figures, such as the tomb of party founder Michel Aflaq, were destroyed, allowed to fall into disrepair, or desecrated. However, the discourse of appropriation, selective recall, and exclusion applies to other relics whose meanings are more ambiguous. The Mafraq cemetery in Jordan is one small but intriguing example of this phenomenon. During the Iran-Iraq war, the once-humble, privately owned cemetery at Mafraq was made into an elaborate monument underlining Iraqi claims to leadership of the shared Arab cause, and the connection between sacrifices in Mafraq during the Arab-Israeli wars and the Persian Gulf.

The wars of 1948 and 1967 commemorated in Mafraq are part of an Iraqi nationalist narrative that is broadly accepted in Iraq, but has particular resonance among the class of former


elites now largely excluded from participation in domestic Iraqi politics and society. In recent years, official commemorations have been held at the cemetery on January 6th, which marks the founding of the Iraqi Army in 1921. These have been attended by Iraqi embassy officials in Amman and retired officers, and received media coverage. Even in relatively benign ceremonial contexts, cracks in the facade of national unity are often visible. It is no small irony that many of the retired Iraqi officers typically invited to attend were exiles and would likely not be able to attend similar events inside Iraq. This fact hints at the significant ambiguities that characterize the boundaries between shared belonging and division, which persist in the post-2003 era.

Interpreted in this context, the Mafraq cemetery allows the current government a space where the ritual unity of Iraq may be performed according to its preferred script with a constituency that even in exile has the capacity to influence events in Iraq. Conversely, for exiled elites, the cemetery may serve as a focal point for commemoration and valorization of a nationalist narrative integral to their identity -- and thus political cohesiveness. As such, Mafraq is one of the many symbolically meaningful sites where Iraqis are attempting to frame and institutionalize views of the past through use of symbols and performance of commemorative rituals, which will serve to influence how they identify themselves and conceptualize their place within the broader national community.50

6.6.e Naming Practices

Elaborate naming practices were a hallmark of the Saddam era. Names for weapons and military units typically had ideological or political significance. Baram writes, “Mesopotamian

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50 Based on interviews and cemetery visit with retired Iraqi officers in February, 2013, adapted from the author’s February, 2013 blog post in The New Middle East blog, hosted by Dr. Eric Davis. Available at: http://new-middle-east.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-mafraq-cemetery-commemoration-of.html.
themes and names of personalities connected with the Abbasid golden age in Iraq as well as with the history of the Shi’a also filtered into military apppellations.\textsuperscript{51} The regular army as well as the Republican Guard had Hammurabi divisions. Other army units were named for Nebuchadnezzar and Gilgamesh. Interestingly, the Musa Kadhim battalion was carried over from the the monarchy era, and tanks and missiles were given heroic names from other Shiite imams.\textsuperscript{52}

Until the collapse of Iraqi forces in Mosul in the summer of 2014, the official symbolic discourse of the military was almost entirely devoid of overt Shiite references. There were occasional anecdotal reports of sectarian imagery displayed at checkpoints and other ISF installations, but these appear to be Ministry of Interior forces. Ships commissioned for the Iraqi Navy were given names that suggested past Islamic military glories, such as \textit{fatiha}, which translates as “conquest” but has religious overtones that hearken back to the early Islamic expansion out of Arabia before the Sunni-Shiite schism was institutionalized. Mostly, units are simply given numerical designations or else have secular military names denoting ferocity such as “Desert Lions”, and the like.\textsuperscript{53}

The few exceptions were not necessarily indicative of broader sectarian or political messages. For example, during the sectarian war of 2005-2007 the Muthana Brigade of the 6th Division was known by U.S. advisers to collaborate with the Mahdi Army in ethnic cleansing operations in the vicinity of Abu Ghraib.\textsuperscript{54} However, the brigade takes its name from a medieval

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Baram, ibid, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{53} See, “The Iraqi Security Forces Order of Battle,” a regularly updated blog by D.J. Elliott and C.J. Radin, hosted by \textit{The Long War Journal}, available at: \url{http://www.longwarjournal.org/oob/}. The order of battle tracks creation and organization of Iraqi military and police units through open source reporting.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Gordon and Trainor, ibid., 385.
\end{itemize}
Muslim military hero al-Muthana ibn Haritha, who led troops against the Sassanid Persian forces at Qadisiya in 636 A.D. In modern Iraqi history, the name was associated with the Pan-Arabist officers’ organization of the 1930’s named “the Muthana Club” that supported the anti-monarchy “Golden Square” coup of 1941. Likewise the Qadisiya of 636 was adopted by Saddam as a key scenario to frame the Iran-Iraq war. In fact, the use of symbolism not that different from the name of the original Iraqi army battalion that took its name from a revered Shi’ite imam in 1921 despite not having a single Shiite officer in it.55

Given the regime’s keen interest in military history, it is somewhat surprising that the Musa Kadhim battalion and other storied unit names not exclusively associated with the Ba’thist era have not been resurrected. In more recent MoD publications, however, imagery and texts connecting the Army to the ancient pre-Islamic glories of Iraq have again started to appear, although not in the volume seen during Saddam’s rule. Some minor facilities — lecture halls and the like — have been named after military martyrs killed in the post 2003 period. Likewise, graduating classes from military training establishments have occasionally took the names of martyrs or been used to communicate political messages on symbolically significant occasions, such as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. In its July 20, 2011, Khaymat al-Iraq described the death of an Iraqi Army officer of the 1st Rapid Intervention Force, and promised readers that it would begin henceforth to profile military martyrs on a recurring basis in a column called “Stars of the Martyrs”.

56 However, the column never appeared again despite the high death rate of Iraqi soldiers. As I will argue in the next chapter, the regime did not take significant interest

55 Conversation with Dr. Abbas Kadhim, 2014.

in presenting the Iraqi soldier as a symbol of national martyrdom until the spring of 2013, when 
backlash over an Army massacre threatened regime survival.

6.7 Imposing the Law

Baghdad in early 2007 was beset by sectarian warfare among warring militias, which 
included even nominally government forces such as the Iraqi National Police. The Iraqi Army 
was less overtly sectarian, but to date had played only a marginal role in joint U.S.-Iraqi 
operations to clear Baghdad of the influence of sectarian militias having sent only two battalions 
to participate in Together Forward II, an operation initiated in the fall of 2006.\textsuperscript{57} Various groups 
committed to organizing armed formations in Iraq continually sought to justify their actions in 
moralistic terms, and openly challenged the legitimacy of the official government and its security 
forces. The predominant government force in Baghdad at the time, the Iraqi National Police 
(INP), had uniforms and official U.S. diplomatic and military support, but was otherwise nearly 
indistinguishable from ordinary sectarian death squads.\textsuperscript{58}

The imprimatur of the Iraqi government, in and of itself, was not sufficient to elicit 
recognition of its forces as legitimate from anybody besides U.S. officials who continued to 
dutifully voice their support for government forces of all stripes during this period. The 
government itself remained riven by sectarian rivalries that extended to individual ministries. In 
the Interior Ministry, which nominally controlled the INP death squads, different Shi’a political

\textsuperscript{57} For a detailed description of the campaign, see, Gordon and Trainor, ibid., Chapter 10, “Together Forward”, 
204-219.

\textsuperscript{58} For a first person description of police death squad activity and its grisly aftermath, see, Jenn Vedder, “Interview 
with MAJ David Hansen”, \textit{Operational Leadership Experiences}, September 29, 2010. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: 
Combat Studies Institute.)
parties controlled different floors of the ministry building according to Gordon and Trainor’s account. The write, “The ministry headquarters was a battleground in its own right; while SCIRI ran the ministry, other mostly Shiite political parties, like Dawa and the Sadrists, ruled its different floors like fiefdoms.” Moreover, different political parties had their own militias, as politics took place both within government institutions and on the streets in running gun battles.

Thus, on the eve of Fardh al-Qanun, Maliki was faced with the following question: Why should claims of legitimacy made on behalf of Iraqi government forces enjoy privileged status? Amid competing claims of legitimacy, what would make the government’s claims both distinguishable from those of non-state competitors and credible? He and others at the apex of the official power hierarchy sought to elicit recognition of the Iraqi Army as Iraqi to influence how these questions were answered.

Fardh al-Qanun began in February of 2007, a month after the wreath-laying ceremony at the newly refurbished Monument to the Unknown Soldier. Although the operation was spearheaded by U.S. troops sent to Iraq as part of General Petraeus’ “surge”, the regime presented the operation to the Iraqi public as being led by Iraqi forces, much as Alawi had presented the Fallujah assault more than three years previously. The claim was not completely accurate from the standpoint of operational analysis, but the symbolism was more credible than it had been previously.

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59 Gordon and Trainor, ibid., 185.

60 Ibid.
In March of 2008, a second operation launched at Maliki’s initiative codenamed sawlat al-fursan or “Charge of the Knights”, which was framed as an extension of the “Imposing the Law” initiative. The division-strength assault on Basra was launched on Maliki’s personal initiative with only the barest planning, thus perpetuating another Iraqi military tradition. U.S. supporting arms assets and advisers were only brought in on an urgent basis to strengthen the spine of the Iraqi Army, but the operation was unmistakably Iraqi. In both Baghdad and Basra, the Iraqi Army was encountered by as an autonomous national force for the first time. The neglected commemorative tree of Iraq received renewed attention from the regime as it sought to influence the interpretation of these events by placing them in a nationalist frame of its own making.

The imagination of the state as inherited from the previous era was mobilized through the use of a recognizable symbolic discourse that allowed the regime to claim privileged status for its use of force as an agent of authentic Iraqi sovereignty. The very name of the operation, Imposition of the Law, implied disinterested application of state military power on behalf of an inclusive national community, rather than pursuit of parochial sectarian aims. The beginning of the operation marked the beginning of the creation of a new rhetoric of the state articulated in large part through the use of a symbolic discourse recognizable from the Iraqi past. When he ran for reelection on a law and order platform two years later, Maliki named the coalition dawlat al-qanun (State of Law) in reference to fardh al-qanun, which had become a shorthand for claims of state authority.

In the early days of the Baghdad operation, the new government was not the only claimant to the mantle of the state and its army, but having possession of the CMATT forces
juridically legitimized as the Iraqi Army conferred advantages on the emerging Maliki regime, because its claims of statehood would be recognized by the United States, which still held the preponderance of military power in Iraq in 2007. Without U.S. military and diplomatic and political support, the entire material edifice of the state would collapse and Maliki’s regime along with it. At the same time, the regime sought to elicit a broader recognition of its claims within Iraqi political society as a sovereign actor possessing the exclusive moral right to make just war. The initial reaction of key actors within this society to the Baghdad operation showed how blurred the lines of legitimate force were in Iraq at the time. The political process itself, which had been enshrined in a hastily drafted constitution that lacked broad support, was somewhat akin to a permeable membrane that political actors passed back and forth through as it suited their interests by maintaining elements of their broader political organizations on both sides. 61

Predictably, the large Shi’a religious parties and Kurdish nationalist parties that had the most to gain from the new order emphasized the constitutionality of the operation, while others emphasized the new government’s collaboration with the United States.

In a veiled reference to Sadrist militia infiltration of the security forces, a spokesman for Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf “called today for the implementation of the Law Enforcement Plan on all without any exception including the murderers who enjoy an official cover,” according to one report. 62 The question of who or what should be a target of the security crackdown was a politically fraught one that Sistani dodged with characteristic agility, managing to open the door for operations against his Sadrists rivals while maintaining a position of

61 For description of Sunni political activists’ use of this tactic, see Rayburn, ibid., loc. 1570.

equanimity above the fray and making a nod towards critics of the new regime, which was hardly immune from accusations of sectarian bias. “No party has the right to harbor any murderer,” said an imam giving the Friday sermon at the Najaf mosque controlled by Sistani. “The government has promised to restore the dignity of law and it should fulfill its promise… [and] the law is above all and should be imposed on all political entities whether they are members of the government or not.”

Sunni activists representing constituencies that sought a place in the new government emphasized that the crackdown should be non-partisan, given concerns that it would be targeted at Sunni communities while leaving the Sadrists largely untouched as previous campaigns had. Nonetheless, they did not reject the security forces out of hand as being fundamentally illegitimate.

I would like to tell all rulers, here in Iraq and elsewhere, to serve the interests of their citizens and to act out of justice. … Any security plan has to be implemented equally in all the areas where the Iraqis are exposed to harm… Rulers have to protect people's lives, property, and honor. … [A]rresting innocent civilians and storming residential houses based on fabricated information is a matter that has to be avoided. Filling prisons with detainees and keeping them there without trials based on legal and constitutional procedures is another red line. Inflicting harm on mosques and the innocent is one more red line. I swear that we will not remain passive should any such act take place. We will make our demands and keep an eye on how things go. If we happen to notice any legal violation, we will hold those standing behind it responsible, regardless of the agency they come from.

This stance contrasted with revanchist discourse, and was aimed squarely at cultural ownership of the armed forces as the embodiment of the national military narrative of Iraq.

63 Ibid.

The “General Command of the Armed Forces - Iraq Liberation Army”, thought to be inspired or led by Iraq’s former vice-president Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri and other senior members of the old regime, released a statement on October 1st, 2007 announcing the unification of revanchist insurgent cells under the banner of the old Army, renamed “The Iraqi Liberation Army”. Save for a brief reference to sharia law, its rhetorical content and form was revanchist and hewed closely to Iraqi conventions that crossed boundaries of time and sectarian identity.

This name shows our proud history of the Iraqi Army which was, and still is, a symbol of the national unity and one of the main pillars of the Iraqi state since the day of establishment. On this occasion we call on the sons of our armed forces and our people to gather around the army command, the legitimate organization which obtains its strength from the people of different sects and nationalities and represents the hope and salvation for all Iraqis in their great crisis, and will purge the land of two rivers from the occupation and its quislings. We also call on all factions of jihad and resistance and national forces to fight the occupier and to unify their word and ranks and to cooperate with our armed forces for the sake of liberating the precious homeland. We reaffirm that the 'General Command of the Armed Forces - Iraqi Army' is an Iraqi professional military organization which has no connections with any party or political trend and it is committed to the regulations and instructions of the Islamic Shari'ah and the vital interests of the homeland and the nation. It is also committed to the unity and sovereignty of Iraq and rejects all attempts to division.65

The association with al-Duri should give one pause about accepting the inclusive language at face value. It is also notable that the language used is almost identical to rhetoric used by the official government to describe its army. In both cases, inclusive language carries an undertone of coercive threat, indicating that there is a compulsory aspect to political unity under the auspices of a state and its army, whatever the configuration of ruling elites.

Nonetheless, it can be seen as belonging to a wider discourse of Iraqi statehood. More radical Sunni Islamist groups were explicitly sectarian and made no reference to the Westphalian Iraqi

nation-state as an ideal construct or referent of political authority, and condemned other Sunnis who chose a path of limited cooperation with the official government.

Day after day, the truth about the ugly face of the Safavid government of Al-Maliki is becoming clearer to the world, and its deceitfulness is getting exposed to everyone far and near, especially after the world has witnessed the brutal crimes which were carried out by this government against the defenseless Sunnis in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq under the pretext of implementing and enforcing the law. Now, after the collaboration of the government with the Safavid militia and the criminal bunch it has become clear to everyone that the series of violations of honor of the Sunnis in Baghdad, Tall Afar, and other cities has begun. All of this is happening for the Sunnis in Iraq, while no one has heard anything except the cries of condemnation that are sent out with some hesitation from those who claim to be representatives of the Sunnis in the government of the apostates when they are actually partners with the Safavid rejectionists in the crimes that are committed against the Sunnis by the agent government because they were among the first to give this mockery government its legitimacy and to support it by their participation in the so-called political process and their joining in the Safavid-Crusader political project. Only God with His power and might can change the heart of a man.  

The beginning of the official government military campaign in early 2007 under al-Maliki marked the beginning of what would become an expansive effort of the new regime to contest this ideological ground with its political rivals through the use of rhetoric and symbolism, such as the visit to the Monument to the Unknown soldier shortly after its renovation to commemorate Army Day.  

Although driven to ground or in exile, Maliki’s fixation on this threat almost to the exclusion of all others was well-documented by U.S. advisers and Iraqi politicians that worked closely with him. Given his determination to see de-Ba’thification through to the end, it is hard to imagine that he would willingly cede control of the national


military narrative to al-Duri and his supporters. The physical infrastructure of the Iraqi state had been stripped bare in 2003, but the Army as a symbol of independence and unity remained intact even after its formal dissolution. It was a resource that could be useful to the new regime, and likewise be dangerous if left in the wrong hands.

Muqtada al-Sadr himself disappeared from public view shortly before the onset of the operation in early 2007, giving rise to rumors in the Iraqi media that he was in Iran. However, he made a number of statements through proxies in which he gave support to the operation. Shortly after the operation began, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was quoted in a report saying, “Muqtada al-Sadr is keen to stabilize the situation and see the security plan succeed in Iraq and he gave the green light to the government to arrest anyone breaking the law, and this is a positive attitude.”68 Through his mouthpiece Ishraqat al-Sadr, he published statements by “tribal sheikhs and notables of Sadr City” supporting the plan on February 20, 2007.69 However, in al-Zaman newspaper published five days later as the operation against Sadrist strongholds progressed, the headline read “Al-Sadr: No Good Expected From Security Plan Controlled by Enemies”.70

In what would become a familiar pattern for al-Sadr when faced with competition from official government forces, he acknowledged the legitimacy of these forces while condemning collaboration with “occupation” forces. This conveniently ignored the reality that Iraqi government forces were not capable of challenging the Sadrist militias on their own in 2007, in large part due to the fact that many of the security forces members — particularly in the police --


70 Ibid., February 26, 2007.
were Sadr loyalists. U.S. military leaders and diplomats had begun to make a concerted effort at this point to pressure Maliki to root out Sadrists and other militia loyalists from the Iraqi security forces, which further incentivized Sadr to stigmatize any cooperation with U.S. forces. Thus, Sadr was able to simultaneously acknowledge the Iraqi identity of the security forces, while condemning rivals in the government as collaborators and instigators of conflict among Iraqis. This basic pattern continued throughout the 2007-2008 period as government efforts to monopolize legitimate force expanded from Baghdad to the south of Iraq.

Movement activists went to extensive lengths to propagate the myth of simple Iraqi soldiers who refused to harm their people despite the machinations of more sophisticated agent-collaborator politicians who sought to use them for the sake of narrow political agendas. This recalled the Saddam era article in *Thawra* described in chapter three, in which the good Iraqi soldiers had invariably refused to be political pawns of degenerate regimes. Sadrists apparently went as far as staging defections of Iraqi Army soldiers for the foreign press during the initial phases of *sawlat al-fursan*. A leading Sadrist sheikh in eastern Baghdad claimed to an AFP correspondent that groups of soldiers had come to his office to lay down their arms in response to Sadr’s appeal for peace and calm after “[they] heard the screaming of Marjiya (religious schools) and Muqtada’s call for peace and calm…” According to the sheik, the surrendering soldiers said, “We can't fight our own people. When we first joined the army it was to defeat terrorism and not to point the guns against the chests of our people”. The sheikh

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71 See, Rayburn, ibid., and also Gordon and Trainor, ibid.
publicly forgave the soldiers and allowed them to keep their weapons before giving the soldiers copies of the Quran in front of a group of foreign press photographers.\textsuperscript{72}

The same logic also worked in reverse. Pressed to lay down their arms, Sadrist activists repeatedly invoked the partnership between U.S. forces and the new government as reason not to comply. “Sadr has told us not to surrender our arms except to a state that can throw out the occupation,” Haider al-Jabari, a member of Sadr movement's political bureau, told AFP.\textsuperscript{73} The only such state that would meet these criteria, of course, would be one commanded by Sadr and his loyalists. In fact, the decentralized nature of the Sadrist trend allowed for doublespeak, whereby Sadr or his public emissaries could call for peace and respect for the law, while more militant elements could continue attacks on both U.S. “occupiers” and and their “collaborative auxiliaries” in the official government forces, as they did during the government military campaign in the south.\textsuperscript{74} The picture was made murkier by the penetration of the Sadrist trend of some of these forces, particularly the police.

\textbf{6.8 Conclusion}

To what extent had the new regime been successful in producing an imaginative transformation of the new armed forces by the end of its first two years in power? How distinct


\textsuperscript{73} See, “AFP: Al-Sadr's Followers Refuse to Lay Down Arms as Deadline Passes,” ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} See, “Al-Mahdi Army Claims 'Mujahidin Now Control Three-Quarters of Al-Kut’”, \textit{World News Connection}, March 25, 2008. The Shi’ite militant group statement on “a jihadist website” condemns the “criminal” Rapid Intervention Forces originally formed for the assault against the Sunni militant stronghold of Fallujah (described in chapter 4), while granting police forces immunity from attack because they were not fighting against the Mahdi Army.
was the boundary between legitimate force and illegal violence? The symbolic complex of the
Iraqi state had been reclaimed and selectively restored or repurposed by Maliki and those close
to him. Likewise, the basic infrastructure of the military, such as the Baghdad Military College
and the prestigious Staff Academy were in the hands of the new government after a protracted
and sometimes violent struggle. Intractable opponents such as al-Duri and other former regime
loyalists continued to reject the new state as illegitimate and its armed forces as impostors, but
the jihadi wing of resistance had been seriously weakened by local Awakening militias. But a
realization that the new constitutional order would likely survive, or at least was the dominant
framework for conduct of state politics for the time being, compelled others to at least
conditionally accept the CMATT forces as the national military force of Iraq, which possessed
the right to claim the nation's military lineage and obligations of loyalty emanating from it.

  Sadr, the main target of the military assaults in the center and south of Iraq, could not
directly brand the forces arrayed against him as illegitimate. Moderate Sunni opinion was
likewise not inclined to directly challenge the emerging idea of the Iraqi state and the claims of
authority being made on its behalf, as these were directed against a Shi'ite movement closely
associated with Iran, which remained a threatening cultural and political other to many of its
members. At the same time, the U.S. sponsored Awakening movement had produced a large,
loosely structured association of local militias that formed a hedge against encroachment from a
Shi’ite dominated government in Baghdad.

  In the middle of 2008, the ceremonial complex of the new state was still underdeveloped.
Nonetheless, with the modest means at its disposal, the new regime had begun to present an
image of a new state that was identifiably Iraqi. This aligned fortuitously with lengthy military
campaigns against a Shi’ite sub-culture and militia movement that many Iraqis of various stripes, not only Sunni nationalists, regarded with suspicion and distaste. Over the ensuing three years between the Basra victory and final withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of 2011, the official rhetoric of the regime trumpeted “the security achievements” and “destroying the remnants of terrorism”. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraqi cities in June of 2009 was timed by the Iraqi government to coincide with the anniversary of the 1920 uprising, and framed as a victory over imperialism. The encounter with the state for many Iraqis became the ubiquitous encounters with the concrete barrier and soldiers at various checkpoints dotting major Iraqi cities.

Many of these barriers were painted with scenes depicting Iraqi culture and history, as well as nationalistic themes using the Iraqi flag as a dominant motif. The paintings were part of an organized beautification campaign paid for by the U.S. Army, the Iraqi government, and foreign NGO’s beginning in 2008. As Caecilia Pieri has pointed out, the artwork was not a spontaneous expression of nationalist or other cultural sentiments, but part of an official ordering of space in Baghdad around sectarian fault lines and military checkpoints. Less closely regulated forms of art such as posters and postcards sold at local souks were more overtly sectarian, commonly depicting images of Shi’ite imams and the like.

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75 Rayburn attributes Maliki’s turn against the Sadrists to an infamous incident in which Sadrist militiamen killed religious pilgrims in Karbala in a careless crossfire with government troops. With public opinion swinging against Sadr, Maliki was able to launch a military operation to marginalize him further. See, Rayburn, ibid, loc. 482.

76 See, “The Evacuation From the Cities”, in Rayburn, ibid., loc. 719. “[Maliki] declared the withdrawal day of June 30, 2009, a national holiday, and in a nationally televised address labeled the departure of U.S. forces with the same negatively charged word, jel’a’a, that Gamal ‘Abd al-Nassir had used to describe the ‘evacuation’ of the British from the Suez Canal zone in 1956.”

This bifurcation of discourse between official nationalism and informal or tacit support of sectarianism from within official circles was widely observed in Iraqi political discourse of the period.\textsuperscript{78} The intra-sectarian battles between the Iraqi Army and Sadrist militias of 2007-2008 masked this underlying characteristic of Iraqi politics, and the sectarian orientation of senior Iraqi leadership. The decision to attack Sadrist militias was the outgrowth of an internecine fight with a former ally, rather than a reflection of some broader commitment to inclusive state nationalism. Likewise, the presence of U.S. troops and the emergence of a less ideological, more pragmatically oriented American political-military leadership after the U.S. Congressional elections of 2006 that witnessed the loss of Republican control of the Senate, served a political purpose as a check on the most blatant sectarian excesses. The defeat of the Sadrists on the streets of Basra and “the security achievements”, as hindsight has now shown, were not deeply rooted in any more fundamental transition in Iraqi state development. The overt sectarianism of the regime undermined the logic of state formation, making it increasingly difficult for a relatively weak Islamist party to claim the authority of the state. Ironically, as the state became weaker as a referent of authority, the appeals of an increasingly distressed regime to this authority became more strident. This dynamic quickly emerged after the last U.S. military convoy crossed the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border in December of 201

\textsuperscript{78} See, Haddad, ibid.
Chapter 7: Denouement

7.1 The High Water Mark

January 6th, 2012 was officially the 91st anniversary of the Iraqi Army. In Iraq, as elsewhere, the 91st anniversary of anything does not carry any special connotations as a 75th or 100th anniversary might. Within the emerging justificatory narrative of the Maliki regime, however, the anniversary had special significance. The last U.S. troops had left Iraq less than a month previously, crossing the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border on December 18th, 2011. The regime presented this as a triumph against imperialism on par with the 1958 revolution that deposed the British-sponsored monarchy. December 31st, the official deadline for the U.S. withdrawal was designated as a new national holiday.

*Khaymat al-Iraq*, the official Ministry of Defense weekly, released a special double issue for the anniversary, taking pains to tie the auspicious withdrawal of foreign troops under Maliki’s leadership with the Army anniversary. Above each page, a tagline read: “On the Day of Iraq and the Celebration of the Army.” The graduating class of soldiers at the Baghdad Military Training Center, was named in honor of the occasion as the “Day of Fulfillment” class. The flag carried by the class in its graduation parade would be passed down to future classes, according to the article.\(^1\) The graduating class of officers at the Baghdad Military College, parading in the traditional cadets’ uniform of past eras, was named the “Day of Iraq” class.\(^2\)

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Another feature article detailed the remarks of the Ground Forces Command leadership on the occasion explained that Army Day was the Day of Fulfillment and vice versa. The ground forces commander, General Ali Ghaydan, optimistically spoke of turning internal security of Iraq over to the Ministry of the Interior, in order to focus the army’s attention on external threats while reasserting Iraq’s place in the region and the world. “We are working to build an army which has its place in the Middle East,” he said, noting that the current army had begun modestly but had grown to 14 divisions.³

In Baghdad, troop formations and armor paraded under a large banner reading, “Side by Side to Build and Save Iraq”.⁴ The special double edition of the official military weekly *Khaymat al-Iraq* carried congratulatory statements from the Iraqi Prime Minister and President, plus statements from numerous senior officers highlighting professionalism, non-partisanship, and technical competence as the foundation of the new Iraqi Army. The television broadcast on the official Iraqiya channel depicted an elaborately choreographed event on the grandest scale the government could muster, complete with military bands, banners, troop and armor formations reminiscent of the parades of the 1980’s to demonstrate national military might. Only a few stray insurgent rockets launched from across the Tigris river disrupted the image of state power.⁵

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⁴ See, ibid., 1.

The official rhetoric of the parade, as narrated by a live announcer and broadcast on national television, cast the army as both the embodiment of Iraqi history and tradition, and defender of pluralism, human rights, democracy, and constitutionalism.

The parade to celebrate the Iraqi Army’s 91st anniversary marks the day which is the day of loyalty of the Iraqi people. It is the day which the American troops retreated as result of the heroic Iraqi fighters and their leadership, and their commitment to preserving Iraqi honor, guarding the nation, and preserving the multi-party and pluralistic democracy of Iraq… Today we are enjoying the results for their efforts for national unity, and their sacrificing efforts for history, civilization, and the younger generation of Iraqis who were patient and will eventually gain the victory. Yes it is a special day of success for our elders, as well as the youth and women, because of the martyrs who sacrificed their souls to keep them and the honor of this land safe while fighting terrorism.⁶

This narration was given as columns of soldiers marched underneath the Swords of Qadisiya and past the very same reviewing stand constructed during the Ba’thist period and used by Saddam to review parades of enormous scale on national occasions. Tellingly, each formation represented a regional operations command rather than a specific battalion or regiment. This represented a significant organizational change that was originally intended as a coordination mechanism, but in practice served to concentrate direct control over the military in the hands of the Prime Minister.

If the ritual presentation of the Iraqi Army composed of regional commands represented one of the regime’s several initiatives to concentrate physical power under its command, the substantive content of the narration itself represented an effort to monopolize the symbolism of the state as the ultimate referent of authority, which might guide and legitimate the use of this

⁶ Official Iraqiya television broadcast.
power. The parade rhetoric reflected several broad themes emphasized in regime discourse, which had become increasingly salient over the course of Maliki’s tenure in office.

The first of these was a rhetoric of human rights and pluralism. The second major theme focused on a new official frame of national martyrdom, which presupposed a opposing binary of martyrs and terrorists. A third emphasis, often interwoven with the first two themes, was legality and constitutionalism. Finally, there was the constant drumbeat of historical commemoration on any number of anniversaries, which tied the new forces to a reimagined historical lineage of the old Army using the discursive themes given above. Taken together, this discourse legitimated, and gave coherence and purpose to the use of military force in Iraq as the regime attempted to consolidate its grip on the state. In the short period between December of 2011 and January of 2012, a number of major ceremonial events were staged by the regime, which emphasized these themes and tied them to a revised national narrative of liberation, military grandeur, and the morally privileged status of Shi’ite and Kurdish Iraqi identities.

7.2 Symbolic Discourse as a Means of Constructing Identities and Interests

Much evidence, which I will discuss immediately below, indicates that this legitimating discourse was primarily self-referential — i.e. a matter of power justifying itself to itself rather than to its subjects. As Rodney Barker writes in *Legitimating Identities*, the activity of self-referential legitimation is constitutive of the ruler’s identity, understood as his identification of himself as a special person possessing the right to rule others and command their obedience. (In the context of my study, this activity of legitimation extends to the right to authorize the use of legitimate force as one has defined it and brand other forms of violence as illegal.) “The claim of
rulers to special status or qualities, and the actions they take in cultivating this claim, are the central part of endogenous legitimation, of the self-justification of rulers by the cultivation of an identity distinguished from that of ordinary men and women,” he writes. Thus, “Self-legitimation in the form of the cultivation of a distinguished identity may be a goal in itself.”

A reviewer of the work noted that “successful legitimation requires the mutual confirmation of identity among rulers, peers, servants, and subjects; in confirming the special identity of the ruler, others confirm their own non-special status. It is thus not merely identity that is confirmed, but relationships among identities.”

The imaginative transformation of the CMATT forces was necessary in order for Maliki himself to adopt the identity of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Iraq. His adoption of this title and its frequent use even in settings not directly tied to issues of military leadership indicate the importance placed upon this identity and the authority it might confer. Minus the nationalization of the CMATT forces as the Iraqi Army, insistence on such a title and its ubiquitous use within the sphere of state politics would have been meaningless.

Maliki’s authority, and that of his immediate subordinates, was predicated upon the production of distinct identities, which were constituted in reference to a specific identity of the government military forces as the legitimate heir to the Iraqi national military lineage and narrative of statehood. This presupposed a public commitment within Iraqi state structures to a historically specific set of interests, and normatively prescribed obligations of deference and


obedience, which were articulated, represented, and performed through participation in a distinct symbolic discourse of state militarism. This presented a reimagined *watani* nationalism symbolically constructed within a Shia-Islamist political framework.

As Hansen and Stepputat have it, “…each institutional field that sees itself as a part of the state must devise elaborate institutional rites, schemes of classifications, hierarchies of competence, achievement and honor to retain order and a distance between itself and ‘society’ as well as other parts of the state.”

This symbolic discourse of identity formation and legitimation was elaborated to an extraordinary degree in Iraq as the Maliki regime sought to realize a broader Shia-Islamist appropriation of the Iraqi state, with its leading members at the apex of its hierarchy of authority.

This campaign would inevitably produce violent confrontations as it met resistance from groups with antagonistic visions of Iraqi statehood and political unity. Therefore, the monopolization, to the extent possible, of *legitimate* force was vital to the enterprise undertaken by the new regime. This activity of legitimation was seen in the post-occupation period, first of all, in the extensive efforts of Maliki and his top lieutenants to connect themselves to Iraq Day and Army Day through elaborate ceremonies in which commanders of all major units, and soldiers by their thousands, ritually demonstrated their recognition of the rulers’ claimed special status. Other major ceremonial occasions, which assumed greater scale as U.S. troops prepared their departure, displayed a similar dynamic. This applied to even relatively obscure occasions that nonetheless might serve to reinforce the regime’s preferred narrative of itself and the Iraqi state.

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9 Hansen and Stepputat, ibid., 6.
The U.N. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25th was marked with an elaborate official ceremony attended by the Prime Minister, who in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces rhetorically linked it to the impending Day of Fulfillment. On December 1st, a state ceremony marking the imminent departure of U.S. troops was held in Baghdad and was attended by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and the senior Iraqi leadership, and was also woven into this narrative of liberation and fulfillment of destiny. Two weeks after the Army Day celebration on January 6th, another major event marked the anniversary of the 1991 People’s Intifada, as the post Gulf War uprising against the Ba’thist regime was officially known and commemorated. This coincided fortuitously with the lunar Muslim calendar and the ceremonial opening of the road to Karbala for Shi’ite pilgrims for the Arba’een commemoration of the martyrdom of the Imam Ali, which was attended by the acting Minister of Defense (a Sunni) and the Army Chief of Staff (a Kurd), as well as other senior military commanders, and featured on the front page of the same issue.

What is remarkable about all of these ceremonial occasions was their rarified official nature and the emphasis they placed upon the recognition of official identities, narratives, and
state institutions. At the Army Day parade, Maliki and his top lieutenants appeared on a reviewing stand enclosed in bulletproof plexiglas. The audience appeared to be made up of members of foreign diplomatic delegations, and the parade itself was cordoned off from ordinary Iraqis. There was not even ritual popular participation, such as costumed women from different Iraqi ethnic groups throwing rose petals at soldiers and the like. The People’s Intifada ceremony, organized by the Ministry of Education, was similarly rarified, as was the opening of the road to Karbala, with the accounts given in *Khaymat al-Iraq* focusing on the presence of senior officials and their remarks, with no indication of popular participation despite the fact that it was popular participation in Iraqi life and politics that was being commemorated in both cases.\(^{14}\)

One may also assume that *Khaymat al-Iraq* itself, with its endless accounts of such official occasions, did not have a wide readership outside Iraqi officialdom. The ritual performances at these events were primarily by officials for other officials, and only secondarily for the broader Iraqi public. The claim, “We deserve the positions”, was made first of all by Maliki to himself and his near subordinates, and between these subordinates and the key members of the regime’s power structure — particularly in the military and in a number of extra-constitutional coordinating bodies that were turned into powerful instruments of a shadow government controlled by Maliki during his tenure. The ritual performances carried within themselves a justificatory narrative, which was constitutive not only of the identities of the new cadre of ruling elites as elites of one rank or another, but also of their identities as representatives

\(^{14}\) The role of the Ministry of Education in promulgating official nationalist narratives has been a hallmark of Iraqi politics of the state since the days of Sati al-Husri, a Pan-Arabist nationalist ideologue of Yemeni extraction who served as General Director of Education in the 1920’s under Faysal I.
of a certain idea of Iraq, which justified and legitimated their power, and the exercise of authority extending from it.

By January of 2012, power had developed a capacity to “examine and reflect on [itself] in normatively integrative and theoretically adequate and sustainable terms,”\(^{15}\) within the discursive field of the state, which included claims to its right to authorize legitimate force. Of course, groups such as exiled officers in neighboring Arab countries and hard-core jihadi opposition still regarded the regime and its army as impostors or apostates, but these groups were not the primary targets of legitimizing discourses anyway. My argument is not that the Iraqi state was somehow more legitimate to more people at the end of 2011 than it had been previously in some measurable way. Rather, it is that legitimation as an activity of the state was more centralized, more coherent ideologically, and more purposeful than it had been in earlier periods of state formation after 2003. Moreover, the intensified period of the activity of legitimation coincided with, and was constitutive of, an extended political-military campaign to pacify armed resistance to the new order.

In retrospect, January of 2012 proved to be the high-water mark of both the Maliki regime and the state idea it represented — i.e. strategic realignment to the east, valorization of a Shi’ite Islamist cultural identity of Iraq, and permanent disenfranchisement of predominantly Sunni qawmi nationalist elites that had dominated the previous order. A year later, the parade scheduled for the Army Day commemoration was cancelled because the troops were needed to stave off insurgent gains and could not be spared for a staging of state ceremonial. In the course of this year, the language of stateness that power spoke to itself and its subordinate elements

\(^{15}\) Thornhill, ibid., 176.
started to unravel, and its capacity to examine and reflect on itself in a sustainable fashion was progressively eroded to the point of acute existential crisis seen in 2014.

The pursuit of an agenda of parochial politics and sectarianism enabled by an intensified discourse of legitimation ultimately undermined the national identity of the army and its command structures, and with it, the capacity to produce a theoretical distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence. In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the evolution of two primary strains of official justificatory discourse within the power structures of the new state as it occurred between 2006 and 2014. These two strains, as identified above, were human rights and national martyrdom. This discursive process was constitutive of the identities both of the army as a national symbol and of political-military elites as its commanders. The human rights discourse of legitimation predominated until the spring of 2013, after which time martyrdom and vengeance came to predominate with significant consequences for the Iraqi state as the continuing basis of sovereign political authority in Mesopotamia.

As will be demonstrated below, the emerging institutional identity of the army contained within itself a culturally and historically specific representation of the state and the moral authority of its new rulers to demarcate the line between legitimate force and illegal violence. A certain narrative capacity of power in reference to itself was generated by this process, although the narrow and exclusionary nature of its implementation ultimately undermined this capacity. Senior regime figures generally avoided explicit sectarian language in public, but the substantive content of their narrative of Iraqi statehood, and the legitimating basis for military force it presupposed, unmistakably valorized some Iraqi identities while stigmatizing others and marking them for destruction — by force of arms if necessary. The risk, of course, was that 14 divisions
of highly inconsistent quality might lack the strength or willingness to complete the task that was set for them. From here, it was only a short distance to the military debacle at Mosul and Sistani’s *fatwa*.

7.3 Human Rights and Pluralism

An obscure page of the history of the post-2003 Iraqi state can be found in the July 8th, 2006 issue of *The Advisor*, which was the official newsletter of MNSTC-I during the six years of its existence. As is the norm in such publications, the story presented an upbeat optimism about the mission of U.S. forces, and the capabilities and disposition of Iraqi forces to assimilate American lessons in the intended fashion.

RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq — The Center for Military Values, Principles and Leadership, which is said to be the key to a more cohesive and qualified Iraqi military, opened July 3 in Rustamiyah. “This center will have standards and education that will make Iraqi ground forces an even more professional and capable force,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ken McCreary, Coalition director for the center. For more than two years, Coalition personnel have worked alongside the Iraqis to develop a stronger fighting force. “This center has been built to help those forces become even better,” said McCreary.16

In fact, as I have made reasonably clear in previous chapters, the Iraqi Army was a mess in 2006. It was not even necessarily clear that the new Iraqi Army was indeed Iraqi, even to many of its own leaders. Other less laudatory reports on the Center were doubtful that it would become something more than a pet project of then-MNSTC-I commander Lieutenant General David Petraeus.17 Indeed, Petraeus’ successors did not accord much significance to the Center,

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and there was some doubt that the Iraqis themselves would maintain it after 2008, when they were due to assume budgetary authority for it.\textsuperscript{18} 

Thus, when researching this dissertation, it was something of a surprise to find that the Center not only survived the Iraqi budget axe, but was prominently and repeatedly featured in Ministry of Defense publications as a defining institution of the new Iraqi Army over a period of several years. Likewise, command visits by the Directorate of Human Rights, commemorations of UN Human Rights Day, and other such occasions were given prominent coverage in \textit{Khaymat al-Iraq}. This, despite the problematic record of the Maliki government in matters of military professionalism and human rights.

Serious commitment to human rights in the sense that Amnesty International might understand the concept was not a hallmark of Maliki’s tenure, with many credible accusations of mass arrests, torture, imprisonment without trial, and even imprisonment \textit{despite} acquittal in court.\textsuperscript{19} What then explains the prominent place given to these military organizations in the Ministry of Defense’s own publication for its own officials? It is difficult to dismiss this as window dressing for a gullible popular audience, because \textit{Khaymat al-Iraq} was not directed at a popular audience. Nor is it likely that it was intended for a foreign audience, given the absence of an English-language edition or other discernible effort to make foreigners aware of its

\textsuperscript{18} Such was the opinion of Petraeus’ successor as MNSTC-I commander, General Dubik. Author interview, ibid.

existence. It is propaganda that the regime directed at itself to constitute the identity of its key actors, and to construct a self-referential narrative of its own legitimacy and the right to exercise the authority of the state.

It its first week of publication in August of 2007, the newspaper’s lead article rebutted accusations of human rights abuses of terrorism suspects detained by the armed forces. It went on to assert that the remnants of the Ba’th Party that were in the old army had not returned to the new army, noting that insurgent groups have officers of high ranks serving in them that are supported by foreign countries. As if to emphasize the contrast, the newspaper detailed the capture of insurgent hideouts in Diyala province, which revealed the existence of an illegal state infrastructure complete with weapons caches, kangaroo courts, prisons, and execution chambers, all run by foreign fighters and Ba’thist sympathizers until their capture by Iraqi forces.

In the following year, numerous stories appeared in the paper on a range of human rights related topics, or framed historically oriented pieces in terms of progressive democratic rule the supposedly guided the new order. The January 6th, 2008 issue, the first to cover Army Day, provided the following paean to the new armed forces:

After the 1920 revolution, the Army supported the people of Iraq and the homeland, and was the tongue (voice) of all Iraqi people, the hope of people in difficult times and during difficult missions. The Army was an example to the Iraqi people of nationalism and identity. We can see this in events 1936, 1938, 1941, 1956, and the July revolution of

20 In multiple interviews with mid-level and senior U.S. officers there was at best vague awareness that the Ministry of Defense had its own newspaper. The NTIS news translation service translated a description of Army Day 2012, but otherwise did not regularly translated its content.

21 See, August 15, 2007, No. 5, 1 and 5.
1958.22 Through this [pre-1963] historical period, during the confrontations, revolutions and uprisings from sons of the Iraqi people, when the army went to the streets, the people embraced the soldiers and stopped the conflicts without any bloodshed from the army. This was before the time of political distortion and dictatorship that changed the army's line of march and involved the army in military adventures. The [Ba'thist] system took the freedom and dignity of the army, and drove a wedge between the army and people. Now, the army and people are once again together, the army is from the sons of the people, providing security, safety, from the Barbarian attacks of takfiri [Sunni radical groups]. The Army is reborn to be the hand of Iraq which provides freedom, democracy, and a new life. It is neutral politically and socially and only seeks to conserve, protect, and save the unity of Iraq and be the foundation of building the new state.23

The motif of a return to humane democratic values and respect for human rights subverted by the previous regime, but held in trust in the soul of the army during an age of darkness, was common in this piece and many others. As such, it echoed a motif of earlier Iraqi discourses of state militarism, in which the ruling regime was always in the role of guiding the Army along its true path away from politics and partisanship.

Even relatively mundane topics such as the establishment of the military court system or the expansion of press freedoms (the latter including a photograph of a television reporter in front of the nusba al-huriya monument commissioned by Qasim) were the subject of lengthy feature articles.24 Qasim himself was rehabilitated in a similar fashion. According to one account of the 1958 revolution, “Iraqis went to the streets to support the truth and cleanse the streets of injustice, and to spread the flag of freedom and raise republican flag and remove the

22 These events are: The Bakr Sidqi Coup of 1936 against the government that left the monarchy intact. The “golden square” coup against the Regent Abdullah in 1941, which was also lauded by the Ba'thist regime. The flood rescue of 1956, which was commemorated with a campaign medal issued to all participants. The July Revolution of 1958 by Qasim that ended the monarchy. Ba'thist historiography gave credit to a Ba'thist co-conspirator, denounced Qasim as a dictator, and then put forth the July 17th, 1968 coup as the culminating event of the Republican revolution.


shadow of royalty and feudalism.”25 This, the author wrote, ushered in a tragically brief period of democratic freedoms under Qasim, the promise of which was only now being realized in the present era. By 2009, news reports and features on human rights, rule of law, constitutionalism, and the various agencies and centers responsible for their defense within the military were seen in almost every issue of khaymat al-Iraq.

In nearly all cases, the contrast was drawn between the new regime’s enlightened commitment to human rights and democracy, which reflected true Islamic values and international norms, and the barbarity of the Ba’thist era. One issue in late 2009 carried a page one report on official commemorations of International Human Rights Day on December 10th. A statement by the Army Chief of Staff Babaker Zebari was printed underneath the lead story detailing the Prime Minister’s new six-point security plan and a sidebar denouncing supporters of the old regime as “criminals against honor”, who violated every principle of decency known from all holy books and international law.26

Our army gives importance and attention to human rights. We must remember this day as part of a culture of civic values and human rights. Dictatorships are not interested in humans as God created them... The new Iraqi army has a Human Rights Division and a Center for Values and Principles, unlike the old regime. It holds workshops and conferences to increase the cultural dimensions of the Iraqi Army. We endure terrorist attacks against the people, but as a security organization but we respect human rights, and ensure that officers, soldiers, and all commands continue their work according to principles of human rights.

The impression conveyed from this article and many others is one of constant activity in the sphere of human rights, which the regime took pains to convey. A year later, Khaymat al-

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26 Ibid., December 11, 2009, No. 110, 1.
Iraq trumpeted an anti-corruption drive launched to honor International Human Rights Day, with Zebari in attendance at the ceremonial kickoff. The next issue gave an account of another ceremony to commemorate the 62 year anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights, which was attended by the acting Minister of Defense. The issue carried an account of an inspection of Baghdad area defense installations by a team from the Center of Values and Principles, as well as an event held under the slogan: “Human Rights as the Civilized Approach to Building the Iraqi Army as the Bulwark of a Democratic System.” The legal adviser from the Directorate of Human Rights attended the event and gave a detailed accounting of the numerous inspections of detention centers and the like over the previous years, which was reported in full.27

The same issues carried a front-page sidebar on the martyrdom of the Imam Ali, and features describing security preparations for the commemoration of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn and meetings between the Army Chief of Staff and Shi’ite clergy. As I have noted above, there is little evidence to suggest that these texts were intended to persuade political opponents or Iraqi citizenry at large to adopt official viewpoints on matters of governance. Rather, the endless repetition and weaving together of motifs of human rights, democracy, Islamic values, and martyrdom was constitutive of both a language of stateness and of the identities of Iraqi political-military elites authorized to speak this language to each other. Through the continual production and use of this discourse, a new cadre of ruling elites

27 Ibid., No. 157 and 158.
appropriated the “apparatus” and “idea” of Iraqi statehood to themselves, and jealously guarded it against their rivals who stood outside the pale of authentic Iraqism.28

7.4 Martyrdom Redefined

The idea of Iraqi statehood represented in justificatory human rights discourse of the regime was intrinsically divisive when applied to the entire Iraqi body politic. The 1991 People’s Intifada had been officially known during the Ba’thist era as the Page of Treason and Treachery. Haddad points out that Sunni Iraqis, even those who did not support the Saddam regime itself, generally regarded the uprisings as an illegal insurrection that threatened the state and justified the use of military force to suppress them.29 By constructing an official narrative valorizing the uprising as a people’s intifada, the regime was institutionalizing a particular identity of the state, which necessarily shaped which identities could be legitimated within its power structures. Sunnis, and even former senior Ba’thists, could and did take positions of power within the new regime, but power was conditional upon accepting a certain basis for its legitimation.

This activity of legitimation occurred in tandem with bureaucratic maneuvering and hard-nosed power politics that subverted the very same constitutional checks and balances praised in the justificatory rhetoric of the regime. Rayburn writes:

Maliki and his Da’wa allies had traveled from the obscurity of exiled opposition to a share of power in Baghdad. Once there, they had used the power of the U.S.-led Coalition and

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28 This draws on Tripp’s discussion of communal politics and the state, ibid., 4.

29 Haddad, ibid., 65-86.
the Iraqi military to gain an advantage over their major Shi’a political rivals. In the next phase, they would seek to steal the other Shi’a parties’ local bases of support and gain control of the state outright… By 2012, with the Iraqi military, intelligence community, independent entities, and judiciary under their virtual control, the [Maliki faction] had succeeded spectacularly in sweeping away the numerous checks and balances written into the Iraqi constitution only seven years before.  

Most controversially, the regime pursued murder charges against Tariq Hashimi, one of two Iraqi vice presidents and one of the senior Sunni figures in official Iraqi politics. It announced the charges less than 48 hours after the last U.S. forces left Iraq. Hashimi’s bodyguards were arrested in a broad sweep, but Hashimi himself succeeding in fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan. Somewhat awkwardly for the Iraqi regime’s image as a sovereign political authority, Kurdish regional authorities refused to hand Hashimi over based on a technicality, and allowed him to flee to Turkey. This episode, in conjunction with other perceived usurpations, set off a wave of anti-government unrest in Sunni majority areas of Iraq, which ultimately led to the collapse of state authority in western Iraq and the loss of territory to the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Shams [Levant] (ISIS).

As the new regime’s efforts to appropriate the Iraqi state to itself entered a new phase in the post-occupation era, the encounters between those claiming the authority of the state and would-be subjects of this authority became more contentious. The ensuing violence and armed clashes undermined the image of the Iraqi state as a (theoretically) non-sectarian entity by involving the new Iraqi Army in controversial campaigns associated with the broader Shi’ite Islamist appropriation of the Iraqi state. This contrasted with the campaigns of 2007-2009, which were directed primarily against the Da’wa Party’s Sadrist rivals, and enjoyed a measure of

30 Rayburn, ibid., 36.
broad support across communal lines. Over the course of two years the basis of state legitimation as an activity of the regime came to reflect the imperatives of a garrison state. The human rights record of the regime was never strong to begin with, but as sectarian-colored confrontations intensified, martyrdom and vengeance emerged as the primary motifs guiding the justificatory discourses of power in Iraq.

The official discourse of martyrdom reflected regime political imperatives to reinforce the basic premises of compulsory political unity and binding authority in inclusive terms that belied the reality of a sectarian political agenda. As will be seen below, the regime sought to portray its soldiers as fighting on behalf of an inclusive Iraqi state against nefarious sectarian designs of terrorists, Ba’thist holdouts, and their foreign sponsors. The resistances these efforts encountered ultimately produced a very different image of the Iraqi state and its armed forces.

Comparatively scant attention was paid to sacrifices of Iraqi soldiers until after the withdrawal of U.S. forces at the end of 2011. Before 2012, only handful of personal death notices with condolences were published in Khaymat al-Iraq. Only a few military deaths were mentioned and only received brief news coverage. In one sense, the deaths of Iraqi soldiers were sufficiently common as to not warrant major notice. But it is remarkable that in the endless coverage of parades, graduations, military exercises, dignitary visits recorded for posterity by Khaymat al-Iraq before 2012, references to martyrdom almost always pertained to the abuses of the Ba’thist period against (predominantly Kurdish or Shi’ite Iraqi) civilians or major Shi’ite clerics rather than the sacrifices of Iraqi soldiers during current operations.

When a suicide bomber killed a junior officer and sergeant during preparations for the annual ‘ashura commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, which took place less than two
weeks after the lavish commemoration of Army Day and Iraq Day in early 2012, it was initially accorded little official attention. A small notice was printed in the 18 January 2012 issue of *Khaymat al-Iraq*, which focused on other security preparations for the celebration as well as extended coverage of the military’s participation in an elaborate commemoration of the 1991 People’s Intifada sponsored by the Ministry of Education. This was followed in the next week’s issue with a sidebar announcement that the Iraqi government had officially recognized the officer and soldier as martyrs.³¹

The next week, however, *Khaymat al-Iraq* gave its readers full-page coverage of the funeral observances for the martyred service members, and of the visitation of high-ranking officials to pay respects to the al-Jaboury’s family.³² It is likely that Jaboury represented the ideal of sectarian unity, as his name is common among Sunnis, and he died while providing security for a major Shi’ite religious observance. Three weeks later, in otherwise routine coverage of the graduation of an army patrol leaders’ course, it was noted that the soldiers had voted to name their graduating class in honor of the Martyr Lieutenant al-Jaboury. The course honor graduate made remarks citing al-Jaboury as an example to be followed by all within the ranks of the army.³³ Two months later a monument to al-Jaboury was officially unveiled. Remarks emphasized themes of unity and sacrifice for democratic values, echoing earlier official observances.³⁴ Apparently, Sergeant Ali Ahmad Muqadami, a Shiite martyr whose death was

perhaps less politically useful, was allowed to quietly fade into obscurity, drawing no official mention since the funeral months earlier.

7.5 Hawija and its Aftermath

The production of Iraqi soldiers as martyrs and its centrality in the official discourses of legitimation of the new Iraqi state grew more intense a year later after the so-called Hawija incident, on 23 April 2013 as the simmering feuds between Army forces and anti-government protestors provoked by anti-Sunni prosecutions that began after the U.S. withdrawal erupted into violence near the town of Hawija, in northern Iraq. In the wave of mutual recriminations that followed, several other violent incidents occurred, culminating in the deaths of five off-duty Iraqi Army personnel seized by unknown assailants near Ramadi, a Euphrates river city west of Baghdad and the capital of Anbar province. Violent confrontations between security forces and protestors, peaceful or otherwise, were hardly unknown in Iraq before this incident, but in the volatile political environment of post-occupation Iraq, the repercussions threatened to overwhelm the government.

The clear sectarian overtones of the clashes shook the regime, which was eager to wrap the incident in a nationalist narrative of an anti-terror campaign. Despite its tactical insignificance, the Hawija incident presented a serious threat to the Maliki regime in that it presented a resonant image of the Iraqi Army as little more than a glorified sectarian militia fighting its own citizens, which ran directly counter to the image the regime had been assiduously cultivating of itself and the army as both legitimate heirs of the Iraqi state and agents of inclusive nationalism. Following the incident, the regime went to great lengths to mobilize its
base of political support from within Iraqi political society by eliciting the participation of key members of its ruling coalition in the presentation of an elaborate nationalist counter-narrative of martyrdom, heroism, and sacrifice. The murder of five soldiers outside Ramadi provided the pretext for the regime to frame the violence in terms of national martyrdom.

The contentious episode suggests an important aspect of political power in the context of Iraq, and more broadly, violently contested political transitions in conflict zones of the international periphery: the capacity of political authority to embed military operations in a specific symbolic discourse of state sovereignty and to elicit public support from key components of political society. On April 30th, a few days after the initial clashes, the Iraqi Media Network, which operated as a holding company for official Iraqi news outlets, announced a campaign to support solidarity with the armed forces. Leading public figures as well as religious and tribal leaders similarly eulogized the dead soldiers and the Iraqi Army, thereby casting their lot with the regime.

Such voices likewise pilloried Speaker of Parliament Usama al-Nujayfi, who had made a controversial statement saying that the Iraqi Army had become an instrument of oppression against the Iraqi people in the immediate aftermath of clashes in Hawija. Some attempted to lay the subsequent murders of the Iraqi officers at his feet. One of the few other voices to directly criticize the Army was the governor of Kirkuk province, where the precipitating events occurred, who told a delegation from the Committee on Security and Defense and the Committee on


Ibid.

Ibid.
Human Rights of the Iraqi House of Representatives that, ‘had the provincial administration and the police conducted a dialogue with the demonstrators they would have reached a solution, but the Army stormed in, which is not a way to deal demonstrators, as it would have been better to listen to their demands.’ He added that, ‘the opening of fire in Al-Hawija caused a savage massacre. The incident confirms our belief in the need for not assigning tasks to the Army in cities because that is a big mistake.’ He did not, however, dispute the basic Iraqi identity of the Army, only its utilization. (Many regional governors had chafed for years at the use of Army troops in domestic order roles, so the Kirkuk governor’s statement is typical in that regard.)

Overwhelmingly, regime supporters charged that the killing of the soldiers was intended to incite sectarian violence, and pointed out that the murdered officers were local to Ramadi—the implication being that they were Sunni Iraqis. During Friday sermons, religious leaders across sectarian lines issued fatwas forbidding targeting members of the Iraqi Army with violence. Many Sunni religious leaders made incendiary statements that were highly critical of the government and its handling of the crisis, but by in large, they shied away from publicly branding the new Iraqi Army as a hostile sectarian force.

The Commander of Iraqi Ground Forces General Ali Ghaydan called on the Sunni Iraqi tribes to ‘confront the criminal actions carried out by terrorist elements in the name of the Iraqi tribes,’ reminding viewers of the official government channel that the soldiers who were killed were ‘sons of genuine tribes that represent all spectra of Iraq and are an extension of al-Anbar

38 Ibid, April 28, 2013. Originally reported in Al-Ta’akhi.

39 Phone interview with Dr. Michael Albin, former Rule-of-Law Advisor to Anbar Provincial Council, on role of provincial political elites and institutions, July 11, 2011.

40 World News Connection, ibid.
tribes and other tribes that have an honorable history, which is a source of pride for every honest and zealous Iraqi.” Abdallah Jasim, member of the Arab Tribes Council provided a typical statement of support, saying, “Everybody should know that Kirkuk is a red line and that our tribes will be the strong and faithful supporter of the valiant Armed Forces and the impregnable bulwark against all covetous sides.”

Meanwhile, full military honors were rendered to the dead officers, with the honor guard dressed in ceremonial uniforms drawing upon the stylistic and visual symbols of Iraqi military history dating to the monarchy era with rifles slung at reverse arms with the muzzles facing rearwards to signify mourning as per British (and Iraqi) military tradition. Senior officials, parliamentarians, and clerics were on hand, including the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, signaling the importance of the occasion. What was remarkable about the proceedings was that they were one of the first highly publicized military funerals performed since the collapse of the old regime in 2003, despite the fact that thousands of Iraqi soldiers had already perished in near-anonymity while serving in the new army. The funeral for the two servicemen killed during ‘ashura observances a year earlier never assumed national prominence, despite being featured in official publications. In spring of 2013, however, recognition of the Iraqi Army as a credible national institution was at stake in a way it had not been previously.

Attendance and participation was, in the first instance, a signal of recognition that the uniformed men presenting military honors were representing Iraq, and that the honors


42 Ibid., May 1, 2013.

43 Al-Hurra broadcast, viewed by author, April 28, 2013. The network is an Iraqi satellite TV channel funded by the U.S. Congress.
themselves represented a historical narrative of the state and nation that both the living and the flag-draped dead in their coffins were part of. The public remarks made by the political elites in attendance were remarkable only for their unremarkable adherence to a pro forma template of official Iraqi patriotism, itself evidence that there was a shared awareness among them about the nature of the occasion and what one must say publicly in such situations. In following behind the procession, they became participants in a particular performative discourse of Iraqi identity and state sovereignty.

In the weeks that followed, *Khaymat al-Iraq*, carried extensive coverage of commemoration of the dead soldiers as martyrs and the valorization of their families’ patriotic sacrifices. The week following the funeral, the Army Chief of Staff and acting Minister of Defense attended such a ceremony for the families, where they presented gifts and made remarks connecting the deaths of the soldiers to national honor and the survival of the Iraqi state.44 This provided the symbolic framing used to justify a major military campaign named ‘Revenge of the Martyrs’, which targeted Sunni insurgent groups.45 On this and other occasions, a ubiquitous emphasis on the non-sectarian character of the Army and its allegiance to new principles of non-aggression and respect for human rights could be observed. This often served as a veiled and sometimes not-so-veiled critique of the previous regime, which allegedly corrupted the Iraqi Army with narrow politics and a perverted ideology of sectarianism and idolatry.


45 See, “We Have Decided to Embark Upon Crushing Attacks Against All Places in Which There is Terrorism or Terrorists,” *Khaymat al-Iraq*, August 14, 2013, No. 284, 1.
Membership in the Iraqi political community became contingent upon acceptance of the forces originally created under CMATT auspices as the Iraqi Army – hence the ceaseless exhortations from regime officials demanding or encouraging public proclamations of support of the Army from all segments of Iraqi political society. Conversely, the issue of the ‘immunity’ of the Army from attack based on its claimed status as a legitimate national military force figured prominently in the public discourse of violence and martyrdom. The new regime sought to monopolize the legitimation of violence and co-opt other actors within the sphere of state politics to accept its vision of Iraqi statehood after it took power in 2006. Even though the most politicalized fighting was often done by specialized troops outside the direct purview of the regular army, the new Iraqi Army emerged as the primary vehicle used to legitimate regime-sanctioned military violence and the regime’s claims to act as the rightful agent of Iraqi sovereignty.

Criticizing the Army and its actions outside prescribed norms invited criticism and ostracism from official Iraqi political society. Speaker of Parliament Usama al-Nujayfi had been subjected to a barrage of criticism from ruling circles branding him as a tool of foreign interests and sectarianism after he accused the Army of acting as an instrument of repression. Nujayfi almost immediately issued a statement condemning the killing of Army soldiers in Anbar province, where Ramadi is located. By contrast, opposition figures at the boundaries of Iraqi


political society – those not opposed to a secular Iraqi state but who refused to fully accept the legitimacy of the current political order – felt free to speak in much more strident language.

Coverage of the Hawija incident and its aftermath on the Rafidain satellite channel, which is associated with the Association of Muslim Scholars and its militant wing, the 1920 Martyrs Brigades, invariably referred to the Iraqi Army as the ‘Maliki Forces’. It presented its coverage of fiery speeches given by anti-regime Anbar sheikhs under an on-screen logo reading, ‘Revolution of Honor, Revolution of Dignity’. Typical of statements from the anti-regime satellite channels and websites was that of Jordan-based Iraqi Sunni Cleric ‘Abd al-Malik al-Sa’di, who had been one of the primary ideologues of the 2004-2007 Sunni insurgency in Anbar province, but had — until the Hawija incident — accepted the necessity of working within the existing political system:

I say to Al-Maliki and his defense minister, as well as the leaders in his army and party: The harmful incidents, which you carry out one after another against peaceful Iraqis, have made the honorable ones a cohesive nation. This cohesion has led to unity and sense of responsibility. It has confirmed to them that this hateful Safavid Persian government wants to hand over Iraq to Iran and to liquidate you, O Iraqis, and erase your national, religious, and Iraqi identity…. Shame and disgrace to those who were the tool of evil and a butcher's knife in the hand of this tyrant of Iraq.

Welcome to the soldiers, who do not heed the orders of these butchers to take part in slaughtering their Iraqi brothers, but lay down their arms out of fear of God and His punishment in the Hereafter and to avoid the vengeance of the widows and the families of the martyrs that will take revenge on the bloodthirsty criminals soon. May God reward you, who have submitted your resignations from the government and the armed forces and joined your fellow demonstrators.49

48 Television broadcasts viewed by author April, 2013.

The virulent language notwithstanding, Sa’di was among the clerics who, in the wake of the Hawija incident, stated that the Iraqi Army should be immune from insurgent attack.\textsuperscript{50}

The regime’s recent push for advanced weaponry from the United States was part and parcel of its efforts to co-opt often reluctant partners into accepting its demands for recognition as the sole legitimate agent of Iraqi sovereignty. During his official visit to Washington, D.C. in late October of 2013, Maliki was asked to discuss the key accomplishments of his premiership. After a pro-forma recitation of security improvements and social welfare initiatives, he spontaneously and emphatically offered the following: “We were able to build a new Army and give it weapons to defend the Iraqi people, but it is not just weapons we are proud of. We built a military ideology\textsuperscript{[emphasis added]} that does not talk about adventures and aggression against it neighbors. The army is for defense of Iraq and its sovereignty, not targeting other countries as was done by the previous regime.”\textsuperscript{51}

This military ideology presupposes a completely different moral purpose of Iraqi statehood than existed previously. Thus criteria of inclusion and exclusion from the politics of the state and access to power have changed in conjunction with both the growth of the Army’s operational capacity and the capacity to legitimate it as the rightful bearer of arms on behalf of all Iraqis and their state. The latter dimension of military power operates predominantly in the realm of symbolic politics, but is nonetheless fundamental to the use of military force in Iraq today.

\textsuperscript{50} “Highlights: Iraqi Press”, \textit{World News Connection}, April 24, 2013. Originally reported in \textit{al-Mada}.

\textsuperscript{51} USIP event, ibid.
If national sovereignty were simply a matter of aggregating weaponry and personnel while securing the material and moral support of powerful external patrons, there would be little reason to re-construct a national army as a historical entity with a lineage extending back in time to 1921. Likewise, an episode like Hawija, which cost a relative handful of military lives, would pose little risk to the new Iraqi state and therefore not require the elaborate response it received. The regime’s ceaseless efforts to claim the military history of Iraq for the new army, and the equally strident efforts of its most irreconcilable opponents to deny the authenticity of these claims, indicated the symbolic importance of the Iraqi Army née CMATT Forces. For those seeking authorization to rule in the name of the Iraqi state, it was essential that these forces be imagined as a symbol of the state rather than as a tool of the regime.

7.6 Conclusion

By the middle of 2013, months before Maliki’s visit to the United States soliciting military support, the confident official discourse of “the security achievements” that characterized the period of apparent stabilization between 2009 and the end of 2011 was already a distant memory. Likewise, the remaking of the national calendar around the anniversary of the Iraqi Army that had been ambitiously undertaken in 2012 was faltering as the Iraqi body politic began to fracture, perhaps irreparably. The euphemisms of sectarian and communal strife also began to leach into the official militarist discourse of the regime despite efforts to paper these aspects of the intra-Iraqi conflict over with inspiring stories of cooperation and sacrifice across sectarian lines.

52 During his USIP appearance, Maliki blamed the deterioration on the spillover effects of the Syrian Civil War. He ardently defended his government’s efforts at reconciliation and integration of former officers into the Iraqi Army.
In a front-page account of Maliki’s command visit to the command center leading the “Revenge of the Martyrs” operation.

…we stand by the sons of these areas in the vicinity of Baghdad who are exposed to the pressure of terrorism to tell them that we are with you, but we want you to take a brave and clear decision. We will stand by your side… but the heroic sacrifices [of our soldiers] will continue because we have arrived at point of no return with this rampant terrorism in Iraq and the region…

In other words, you in the Sunni areas of Iraq are either with us or against us. From this point forward, the theme of martyrdom and vengeance became prevalent in the official discourse. The human rights discourse as an element of legitimation diminished markedly. International Human Rights Day, prominently featured in previous years with high ranking official delegations taking part, was not mentioned in December 2013 issues of *Khaymat al-Iraq*. Mention of the Day of Iraq, prominently featured on the eve of U.S. withdrawal two years previously, was confined to an academic conference on the Arabic language in Iraq. When the Iraqi Army 7th Division commander was killed in combat in the spring of 2014, an operation codenamed “Revenge of Commander Mohammad” was launched in response. Just as the “imposing the law” motif was used to frame the anti-Sadr operations of 2007-2008, the vengeance motif was used to frame operations after the middle of 2013.

Elaborate and widely publicized military funerals, which had been a rarity before the Hawija incident, became a more prominent part of the state ceremonial. Likewise, frame grabs from Hellfire missile targeting pods became a recurring visual motif in an official discourse that


was increasingly focused on the enemies apparently attacking it from without and within. The January 6th, 2014 issue was grim, rather than celebratory, with the headline, “In Commemoration of the 93rd Anniversary of the Founding of the Brave Iraqi Army, Our Armed Forces Smash Nests of Terrorists in the Anbar Desert.” The central image was a grainy black and white screen grab of an ISIS convoy being targeted and color photographs of Iraqi officers inspecting the burnt remains of the vehicles after the strike.

The scope of legitimation progressively narrowed during the period extending from the Hawija incident in spring of 2013 to the military crisis of fall 2014. The focal point of official discourse shifted from a broader Shia-Islamist tinged revival of the original populist revolutionary state of Brigadier Qasim, to the eradication of (mostly sectarian-based) terrorism as defined by the regime and vengeance on behalf of a growing cohort of martyrs. This degenerative process ultimately left power in Iraq with no larger purpose than to preserve itself and its core social constituencies from physical destruction.

Only a year earlier, Maliki had given an extended lecture to a conference held on the eve of Army Day 2013 attended by senior civilian and military leadership. The theme was military culture and the moral foundations of legitimate force. Anticipating the later remarks he would make to an American audience, he contrasted the new army with the old, which he faulted for acting as a tool of aggression. He also commented at length about the nature of command authority within the Army. He said that the process of control should emerge from an organizational culture of constant conversation and enlightenment between leaders and led, and that this culture should be non-sectarian in the Army.55

The reality that emerged over the following year diverged sharply from this ideal. The degeneration of symbolic discourse of military power correlated with the erosion of the military organization through combat attrition, the hollowing out of leadership through politicization of the officer corps, and the resulting breakdown in troop discipline. By the middle of 2014, the Iraqi government had only a few reliable units under its command — primarily the ISOF brigade originally trained by U.S. Special Forces and the Iraqi Intervention Forces created in the early days of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Officially, these remained as national units, but one began to frequently see sectarian imagery in press accounts and social media postings that indicated the erosion of their identity as Iraqi forces.

As the military position of the Iraqi government became increasingly precarious, the organizational capacity to mobilize symbolic dimensions of military power necessary to produce a distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence weakened. The regime did not cease to give an account of itself, but the locus of legitimating activity became progressively less centralized, less coherent ideologically, narrower in its purpose and more explicitly sectarian than it had been previously.

Kirk Sowell, an analyst, wrote:

To a stalemate in Anbar was added the fall of Mosul, Iraq’s largest Sunni-majority city in the northwestern province of Ninawa, in early June 2014, at the hands of the jihadist Islamic State and a mix of nationalist insurgent groups. In response, Shia Iraq transformed into a garrison state, with civilian leaders wearing uniforms. Shia militias openly mobilized to face the Sunni challenge, taking over the role of official security in many areas.56

The imaginative transformation of the CMATT forces, which had seemed secure even as late as the beginning of 2013, began working in the opposite direction. After the fall of Mosul and the

56 See, Kirk Sowell, “Iraq’s Second Sunni Insurgency,” The Hudson Institute, August 9, 2014.
collapse of two army divisions, force came to be legitimated on narrow basis where distinction between what had been illegal militias and the national army was lost. The organizational, ideological, and cultural bases for claiming a state monopoly on legitimate force were severely — and perhaps permanently — damaged as a result.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Recapitulation

In the spring of 2013, I visited the newspaper archive housed at the University of Jordan in Amman with my Jordanian research assistant. The room was poorly lit, equipment consisted of three microfilm readers dating to the 1970’s, and the shelves were mostly bare. The archive contained a scattering of old microfilm records from the various Arab regional capitals of Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad. The librarian was helpful and showed us the archive’s modest collection of Iraqi newspapers, which were limited to official regime publications of the 1980’s and 1990’s. I asked why, despite the profusion of Iraqi newspapers after 2003, the library did not have any of them. Surely these would be of some interest, particularly to Jordanian scholars whose country has so much at stake in the future of Iraq.

Her answer: The Iraqi state no longer existed so there was no longer any point in subscribing to Iraqi newspapers.

The nominally Iraqi entity located on Jordan’s eastern border had evidently ceased to be of any interest to the university library staff once it had been stripped of statehood — never mind that this entity had enjoyed formal sovereignty since mid-2004. Attempts to locate faculty at the university with active research programs focusing on contemporary Iraq were similarly fruitless. As seen from the Jordanian perspective, the national narrative of Iraq was suspended until further notice. I found the absence of any interest in post-2003 Iraq astounding. My research assistant barely blinked. These attitudes were not dissimilar to those that I encountered among the coterie of former Iraqi officers I interacted with in Amman during that time. By in large, they believed that the agglomeration of opportunists and Iranian agents that came to power in Baghdad after
2003 were collaborators in the destruction of the Iraqi state, and thus lacked standing to claim special status as authoritative agents of the state qualified to continue its narrative.

The opinions of Jordanian scholars or exiled Iraqi officers were generally of little concern to the authorities in Baghdad during the previous decade. However, the new rulers in Baghdad were obsessively concerned with securing their own status as rulers of an Iraqi successor state. Eliciting recognition of a successor state as the ultimate referent of sovereignty, which might substantiate their claims of political authority became an increasingly important activity of Iraq’s rulers over time. In essence, they were seeking to regain a capacity that had been lost with the destruction of the previous state — to speak and act authoritatively on behalf of Iraq, to narrate its history, to name its enemies, and to act against them. Early efforts to indigenize local political authority in the absence of a state floundered, as did ill-fated U.S. efforts to construct a state literally out of whole cloth with flags and uniforms that symbolized little besides foreign occupation.

From this perspective, the lackluster forces raised under U.S. tutelage were ultimately more important to Iraqi leaders for their symbolic potential than they were for their (mostly) marginal military capacity. As such, the theoretical and empirical focus of my dissertation outlined above parts ways with much of the transitions literature, which focuses on democratization. The failure of democratic institutions of governance was not foreordained in Iraq, and even in the current state of affairs the failure is not necessarily permanent. However, despite the presence of energetic constituencies for democratization and at least a few politicians inclined towards liberalization of Iraqi politics, the failure of institutions of democratic rule to
immediately take root after 2003 was overdetermined. Therefore, democratization has not been a central concern of my dissertation.

Likewise, the basic empirical and theoretical thrust of this dissertation runs counter to much of the bellicist literature on the state, exemplified by the work of Charles Tilly. Although I share the emphasis on the concentration of military capacity under the state rubric, the material and organizational basis of the state is of less concern to me than the specific cultural constructs that shape how people interact with the claimed authority of the state and interpret its meaning and significance in everyday life. Thus, my concern has been whether those who sought to rule Iraq after the fall of Baghdad were able to establish a new Iraqi state as the ultimate referent of sovereign authority, while securing their claimed right to speak and act authoritatively on its behalf. Investment of material resources and organizational growth was important, but insufficient in and of itself to reestablish the Iraqi state. The sustained activity of legitimation was necessary along with policies to embed military organizations in cultural constructs of state sovereignty.

In my introductory chapter, I proposed that state formation should be seen as taking place through a discursive process of legitimation, whereby the state as a symbol of the political community is progressively recognized as the ultimate referent of sovereign authority. This development enables claims of authority by those who successfully present themselves as rightful agents of the state. At the same time, it carries inherent constraints upon this authority, as it is rooted in a particular vision of the state that must be continually reinforced. After 2003, Iraqis were confronted with the interpretive task of determining whether the ruling cadre of new elites installed under U.S.-led occupation and the symbols they used to represent their authority
indeed referred to “Iraq”, and whether the new governing structures, including the army, were rightful heirs of the old state, which had served as the ultimate referent of political sovereignty for decades, even for many Iraqis who opposed specific regimes which commanded the state at any given time.

The new elites, for their part, tested the limits of their fragile authority as new institutions of the state were established and defended by force of arms under the strategic umbrella of foreign powers. For this cadre of elites who lacked any recognized standing as leaders of Iraq, it was critical to elicit recognition of CMATT forces as an Iraqi national force that had rightfully inherited the mantle of the Iraqi Army. This imaginative transformation of an otherwise unremarkable military organization raised under foreign auspices was necessary in order to produce an image of the state as a symbolic referent of ultimate political authority, and to establish legitimate force as a recognizable category of state practice that could be used in defense of the government and its institutions. Therefore, the memory of an Iraqi Army that was nearly synonymous with Iraqi statehood throughout most of its history quickly emerged as both a scarce power resource and site of contestation.

The essential role of military in statebuilding lay in its potential to symbolically represent an “Iraq” remembered in history, which might serve as a referent for claims of supreme political authority, including the authority to use legitimate force. Realizing this potential required an imaginative transformation of the CMATT forces in order that they might be recognized as the Iraqi Army. Therefore, I asked whether the primary instrument of this demarcation — the new Iraqi Army — was recognized within its own ranks and the populace at large as an authentic national force that represented this state and its constituent political community. By extension, I
also asked whether the named military operation led by uniformed troops of the Iraqi Army came to stand for legitimate force and national defense, and if so, then at what times and places did this occur. Finally, I have sought to provide an assessment of how Iraqis of all stripes made and encountered claims of state authority after 2003, and how these encounters in the aggregate served to either demarcate or elide a clear and enforceable distinction between legitimate force and illegal violence, symbolically represented by the new national army.

Producing an imaginative transformation of military force was at first an afterthought in the wake of the destruction of the Ba’thist regime, but became increasingly important as both Americans and Iraqis urgently sought to indigenize Iraqi sovereignty. The increasing official investment in the commemoration of the customs, history, and traditions of the Iraqi Army followed from this political-military imperative of legitimation. The verb “commemorate” itself derives from the Latin *commemorat*, or “brought to remembrance”, which is useful to consider when analyzing the politics of post-2003 Iraq. How the Iraqi state was brought to remembrance, which narratives were allowed to enter the official discourse, and their propagation through the military symbolism of the Army became critical to state consolidation and survival. Activities of state legitimation involving the new military forces occurred at both the popular and elite levels, through everyday practices and routine claims of authority, elaborately staged state occasions, and finally, the use of physical force.

The Maliki regime made initial gains in positioning itself as an authentic agent of Iraqi state sovereignty between 2007-2010. However, this unraveled in absence of U.S. forces to moderate the regime’s sectarian excesses after 2011 and Maliki’s repetition of Saddam Husayn’s military personnel policies of the sanctions era, which favored clan loyalty over military
competence. Like many of his predecessors, Maliki ultimately offered the symbolism of national community and statehood without the substance of inclusive politics and a modicum of bureaucratic rationalization within the military organization itself. The distinction between the new Iraqi Army, religious militias, and regime defense forces that emerged in the first few years of Maliki's tenure later evaporated as he pursued maximalist positions along sectarian lines that exacerbated military pressure from domestic and trans-national insurgent groups.

8.2 Substantiation of arguments

I substantiated these arguments in the empirical chapters of my dissertation. In chapters two and three, I used narrative analysis and process tracing to show how the Iraqi Army first emerged as an outgrowth of the British imperial project in Iraq in the 1920’s, which was neither symbolically or militarily important in its initial phases. As the costs of Empire became prohibitive, British authorities sought to indigenize Iraqi authority and military capacity in much the same way that their American successors did eight decades later. The expansion of the Army, the granting of nominal independence in 1932, the destruction of detested out-groups associated with pro-British collaboration, and the destruction of the monarchy itself in 1958 produced a national narrative and revolutionary legacy that factions within Iraq's highly militarized politics sought to monopolize in order to legitimize the many coups of the 1960's.

After taking power through a bloodless intra-Ba'athist coup in the early 1970’s, Saddam Husayn radically expanded the army and cast himself in a historical drama of his own making as an Iraqi field marshal who possessed both impeccable military qualifications and the natural genius of command. The ideological mobilization necessary to launch and sustain the Iran-Iraq
war, and to retain power after the Kuwait fiasco, produced a “thick calendar” of state-sponsored commemoration with an accompanying “commemorative tree” of diverse architectural and artistic representations of the official narrative of Iraq. As garish and superficial as many of these appeared to be to outsiders, for many millions of Iraqis they represented a long history of meaningful encounters with the Iraqi state and the military violence undertaken under its auspices. At the same time, the military suppression of popular uprisings during this era in Kurdish and Shi’ite-majority areas also produced a powerful counter narrative to the official account of Iraq.

The Iraqi state as it had theretofore been created as an historical entity was destroyed in 2003 by force of arms. My initial inquiry into the aftermath of state destruction and the partial re-emergence of sovereignty in Iraq was guided by a working hypothesis derived from the study of post-regime memory politics: cultural relics and ideological constructs of statehood can outlive the structures that originally produced them, and have an independent causal effect on successor state formation. Each of the chapters dealing with post-2003 Iraq served to test this hypothesis and elaborate its theoretical underpinnings. Rather than making a relatively small number of like observations of many cases, as is done in studies focusing on probabilistic relationships between variables, I made (or collected) many diverse observations of one case: the attempted state legitimation of post-2003 Iraq. I did this in order to construct a narrative analysis that would identify and explain the key processes of state formation and legitimation in Iraq in ways that might also apply to a broader universe of cases.
8.3 Data, Observations, and Evidence

I built the evidentiary foundations of this study using several different kinds of observations. I directly interviewed over 50 Iraqi and American subjects as key informants, who were in a position to closely observe and influence events in Iraq, to share their interpretations of these events, and finally to explain their own normative priorities (or inadvertently reveal them). Additionally, the staff of the Marine Corps Historical Division allowed me to listen to audio recordings of interviews made by Marine Corps field historians with Marine military advisers in Iraq. I partially transcribed 14 of these interviews. Most of them were recorded in-country within days of the events described. One such interview was interrupted by a car-bomb. For its part, the U.S. Army has a searchable database of hundreds of interviews made with its soldiers and officers shortly after their return to the United States from Iraq. I reviewed 57 such interviews made with officers assigned to advisory billets with the Iraqi Army. My methodological justification is not that any of these subjects were somehow representative of some larger population. Rather, it is that they were important because of who they were and what they saw.

Additionally, I gathered hundreds of Iraqi mass media accounts of actions and public statements made during critical periods of Iraqi state development, when the government attempted to construct or assert its claims on a monopoly of legitimate force in Iraq. I then conducted a systematic analysis of the official Ministry of Defense newspaper, Khaymat al-Iraq, in order to trace the evolution of official commemorative practices from 2007 onwards. I supplemented all of the above observations by culling visual evidence from a diverse array of
sources, from official publications to eBay sales of Iraqi military regalia, which allowed me to construct an analysis of how symbols of the past were being incorporated into the contentious politics of the present.

8.4 Developing the Concept of Research and Initial Theorization

My conceptualization of the state and theory of state legitimation emerged in relation to the evidence as I encountered it through empirical observation. The need to explain seemingly anomalous events and behavior within a consistent analytical framework drove theorization. If one simply uses auxiliary hypotheses to explain away anomalies the entire research program degenerates as it fails to generate novel empirical content consistent with the core assumptions of theory. This Lakatosian approach favors the rigorous “cultivation of theoretical ideas” through immersive study of a given empirical problem or context, rather than “the rigid execution of prescribed methodological procedures”. Thus, “research decisions were made in light of emerging theoretical questions.”

During the conceptualization phase of my research, which began several years ago, I initially did not see my planned study on Iraq as delving deeply into the politics of memory and symbolism. Rather, my initial research was guided by the rationalist literature of comparative institutions. To the degree that such literature covers the postcolonial world at all, it tends to focus on the question of why national institutions in places like Iraq did not develop according to “international norms” supposedly exemplified by leading Western democracies. This literature has made a number of important contributions to our understanding of comparative political

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1 Puttephatt et al., ibid.
development, but I felt that simply treating Iraq as a case of deviance from established norms would contribute little that was new or interesting to our understanding of the state or statebuilding.

After several frustrating months of lots of reading and little conceptual progress, I decided to visit the Middle East Reading Room at the Library of Congress, more out of the desire to find something to do with myself rather than from a preexisting idea of what I expected to find there. I hoped the collection might include some authentic Iraqi sources that dealt with the Iraqi Army in some way. What I found was a leather bound commemorative volume from the early 1980’s in Arabic, celebrating the 60 year anniversary of the Iraqi Army as it embarked upon a war with Iran that would become one of the 20th century’s bloodiest conflagrations. The frontispiece had a full color photograph of Saddam Husayn in the full military regalia of an Iraqi field marshal, along with a flowery statement from the dictator recounting the historical lineage of the Army and its importance as a symbol of Iraq and its people. Subsequent chapters presented a stylized history of the Iraqi Army beginning with the military service regulations inscribed on the Code of Hammurabi in the 18th century B.C.E. to the modern Iraqi state and its wars.

This was the beginning of a new direction in my research. I largely abandoned the framework of comparative institutions in favor of a more ethnographic exploration of memory and symbolism, and its role in the creation of the Iraqi successor state. My examination of the anniversary volume was my starting point. The imagery and texts suggested that even at the height of his power, Saddam Husayn sought to make himself in the Army’s image by seeking the authority of its “elaborate institutional rites, schemes of classifications, hierarchies of
competence, achievement and honor”,² without which the historical drama he imagined for himself and his country made little sense and lacked justification. Furthermore, it suggested that the Army was an important national institution with its own history and corporate identity that predated the Ba’thist era, and we might suppose, survived it despite the dissolution of its organizational structure in 2003. Research took on a new purpose from that point onward: to see whether my initial interpretation of an Iraqi cultural relic was supported by available evidence, and whether it might serve to convincingly explain something useful about the nature of the state, the constitutive role of politicized memory and commemoration, and the ways in which would-be rulers seek to manipulate mnemonic symbols in order to construct their own claims of authority.

With the assistance of another analyst of Iraq, I was able to get in touch with the principal author of the anniversary edition, who was still alive and living in Amman, Jordan as an exile. I eventually met him in person, and through him was able to meet with a wider circle of former Iraqi officers. It was hardly surprising to find out that many of them took pride in their military service and continued to identify themselves closely with the Army years after their active service ended, and regarded it as a symbol of an authentic national state to which they and all other Iraqis belonged or should belong. Likewise, many social media sites run by conservative nationalist sympathizers could be found that continued to commemorate the old army in virtual reality, as did various think tanks and study centers scattered among capitals of the Arab world. I had not initially expected that conservative nationalist sentiment would run as deep as it did

² Hansen and Stepputat, ibid., 6
through some parts of Iraqi society, and that it would be so closely tied to a vision of the Army as an apolitical symbol of Iraq.

More unexpected, however, was the degree to which Iraq’s new rulers — many of whom fought on the Iranian side of the Iran-Iraq war — apparently sought the prestige and authority of the old Army in much the same way that Saddam Husayn in his field marshal’s uniform had. I encountered this strain of Iraqi political practice in a number of different ways. This was first of all through the statements and publications of the new regime, which meticulously documented the official commemorative practices and symbols associated with the Army in texts and images. Similarly, Iraqi mass media accounts carried not only the official narratives, but the reaction of other Iraqis to official claims regarding the authority of the government (as the representative and agent of the state) and the legitimacy of its practices of organized violence. I also witnessed this aspect of Iraqi officialdom firsthand in events staged by the government through its diplomatic arm in Washington, D.C. A surprising number of U.S. advisers I interviewed were also cognizant of the role the symbolic capital of the old army played in Iraqi society and politics, and offered insights into its significance.

8.5 Empirical Puzzle and Organization of Study

Explaining why commemoration of Iraq’s army and military past assumed the prominence they did within a state building project initially based on the idea of a “new” Iraq unencumbered by its history became the central theoretical puzzle informing my research. By tracing the organizational development of the new Iraqi armed forces in relation to the political development of governing institutions and the indigenous factional struggles to control them, I
was able to build a theory that explains how the politics of memory and manipulation of symbols relate to the emergence and legitimation of the state as a locus of authority. The exceptional circumstances of the Iraqi case were ideal from the perspective of theory development, in that radical policy “treatments” had been administered to the Iraqi body politic by a powerful exogenous agent — the United States and its coalition partners. The state was first destroyed, before having its legal sovereignty, governing apparatus, electoral system, and armed forces gradually restored by increments.

I used this progression to impose a certain structural framework on my study, which informs the chapter organization of the material dealing with post-2003 Iraq. Each succeeding chapter deals with a different stage of this process, showing how Americans and then Iraqis attempted to reestablish state sovereignty in Iraq in their own image. Governments cannot govern through terror alone, especially ones of such doubtful means and provenance as were formed in Iraq after 2004. In conditions of Hobbesian anarchy, the control of endemic violence and armed resistance to the new constitutional order became the paramount task of the provisional and then permanent Iraqi governments.

This could only be done by establishing legitimate force as a category of state practice, while stigmatizing other forms of ubiquitous organized violence not sanctioned by the official government as being immoral or illegitimate. Or put another way, the government needed to elicit recognition that its officially-sanctioned practices of organized violence carried the imprimatur of the state, and that the state itself was an authoritative and authentic representative of the nation. This was no easy task in a country awash with uniformed militias and multiple claimants to the military lineage of the Iraqi Army, of which the CMATT forces were but one.
I make this argument from the standpoint of one who observes actors in a drama, and then uses interpretive methods to discern how their character, goals, and preferences are revealed by the necessity of making choices under pressure and within structural constraints. Such observation has the potential to reveal the underlying rules of the political game, and how actors understand and interpret those rules — or seek to manipulate them to their own advantage. The evidence indicates that it was not immediately clear to either American officials and military commanders or many of their chosen Iraqi interlocutors — many of whom had spent decades in exile under Iranian or Syrian protection — that the historical memory of the state they destroyed might affect their plans for a new Iraq. However, it soon became apparent that the discursive field of Iraqi state politics that they embarked upon had already been structured by memory and normative commitments. The establishment of a national military whose legitimacy and authority was broadly accepted proved to be impossible without taking this into account.

8.6 Summary of Conclusions

In developed democracies where security has long been established as a public trust, it is taken for granted that warfare is the exclusive preserve of the state and its uniformed services. Such was the view of many of the U.S. commanders who were initially tasked with rebuilding the Iraqi armed forces. It is easy to criticize their performance. That said, they did not have the benefit of their successors’ hindsight, and that many Iraqis placed in positions of power by the top architects of the war lent their support to the creation of a tabula rasa army. Indeed, many of the best informed analysts have commented is difficult to envision a scenario in which the United States could have simultaneously secured cooperation from the major Shi’ite religious parties
and mujtahids, while leaving the command structure of the army intact. Assessing the comparative merits or wisdom of the disbandment of the Iraqi Army is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, the premise of the Iraqi religious parties’ support for the invasion was that the Iraqi state would be delivered to them afterwards — something that could not be done if the military elites of the previous regime were left in place.

Regardless of such caveats, establishing the legitimacy — and basic professional competence — of the new armed forces proved to be a vexing problem that continues as of this writing. In chapters four through seven, I traced the process of state legitimation, focusing on the key feature of this phenomenon, which was establishing legitimate force as a category of state practice. As this process evolved over time, different theoretical issues came to the fore, and thus each of these chapters focuses on a different aspect of state legitimation. In chapter four, I develop a theory of memory in politics in order to explain the abject failures of early efforts to raise an army and deploy it against armed groups resisting the establishment of a U.S. sponsored constitutional order. In chapter five, I elaborate this theory further in order to show and explain how localized legitimation of the new armed forces occurred in the absence of state authority. In chapter six, I show that the memory of the Army was recognized as a power resource by Iraq’s first elected permanent government in 2007, which assiduously sought to monopolize it as a means of securing its position within a new state of its own imagining. In chapter seven, I show how the claims underlying this project of state legitimation were endangered by a clash between the new army and militant protest groups that was tactically insignificant, but symbolically devastating in ways that continue to reverberate in Iraqi politics.

3 Usually translated as “sources of emulation”. Senior Shi’ite religious figures whose prestige often allows them to make politically influential pronouncements regarding the legitimacy of policies or politicians who support them.
Each of these chapter narratives presupposes a theoretically relevant counterfactual. If symbolic dimensions of military power as I have outlined them were merely peripheral, we would not have witnessed the mutinies and rebellions associated with the early efforts to raise new indigenous security forces in a cultural and historical vacuum. Likewise, when local units sought legitimation, there would be no discernible pattern of identification with the pre-2003 Iraqi state. Any agglomeration of functional symbols would do. In actual practice, symbols manufactured by the Coalition or its intermediaries with no reference to Iraqi remembered history and political culture failed to resonate.

If the memory of the Iraqi Army was not seen as a power resource, the permanent government of Prime Minister Maliki would not have taken such ambitious steps to claim this legacy through commemoration. Finally, if the establishment of legitimate force as a category of state practice was not central to the new government’s claims of authority, this government would not have named its political coalition as it did after an extended military campaign designed to assert a monopoly on legitimate force. It also would not have devoted so many resources and much of its energy developing a capacity to justify and reflect upon itself and its right to rule. Its reaction to the bloody Hawija incident is likewise inexplicable without a theory of state legitimation and legitimate force. Below, I will briefly elaborate on these points chapter by chapter.

**8.7 Chapter summaries**

The early post-invasion policies of the United States represented a test of the hypothesis that memories of state can survive the state structures that produced them. Briefly borrowing the
language of quantitative analysis, we can say that the null hypothesis was that cultural relics and ideological constructs of statehood, particularly Iraqi statehood, were essentially meaningless and would have no significant effects on the political development of the post-Ba’thist Iraqi entity, whatever form it ultimately assumed. The summary dismissal of the Army, the empowerment and appointment of indigenous ruling elites by executive fiat, mass disenfranchisement of Iraqis tainted by even the most tenuous associations with the Ba’th Party, the imposition of new governing institutions through a truncated constitutional process, and the casual disregard for symbols of Iraqi statehood all derived from this essential guiding logic of U.S. policy.

Chapter four essentially shows that we can reject the null hypothesis. A treatment condition was applied to Iraq by an exogenous actor using the full might and influence of a global superpower. American commanders and advisers sought to rebuild an Iraqi military force under the assumption that Iraqis lacked a history of meaningful encounters with the Iraqi state. Although individual Americans often demonstrated a great deal of cultural acumen even without extensive formal training, they were generally undermined by the prevailing command climate that dictated policy to what was assumed to be a blank slate. The misadventures of senior American officers and their teams of advisers, seen in the mutiny on the road to Fallujah and other episodes of rebellion or non-cooperation from members of newly formed indigenous security forces were the predictable outcomes of policies that assumed a nation of autistic amnesiacs who possessed no independent memories of, or ideas about, statehood.

For those who study the politics of memory in post-regime states, rejection of the null hypothesis is hardly a remarkable result. It does, however, clear the way for us to consider how
the memory of the Iraqi Army influenced the trajectory of state formation in Iraq after 2003. In chapter five, I locate the origins of the discursive field of the new Iraqi state. Although a nominally sovereign provisional Iraqi government was announced in mid-2004, the U.S. led assault on Fallujah at the end of that year demonstrated that this government was wholly reliant on foreign military support to enforce its writ and guarantee its survival. In the aftermath of Fallujah it was clear that a small gendarmerie as had been envisioned in 2003 would be insufficient to hold the country together. A much larger ten-division force that would eventually include heavily mechanized units was planned from the beginning of 2005.

Iraqis began to encounter the state more frequently and in new ways, but this did not immediately produce an expansion of the reach of the nascent successor state. The Marine Corps regimental records and U.S. Army post-deployment interviews show that Iraqi forces were not a regular part of military operations in much of Iraq until the middle of 2006. Efforts to recruit and deploy a new army on a national basis floundered on the shoals of internal Iraqi politics. U.S. commanders and their Iraqi interlocutors were unable to recruit or operate freely in much of Western Iraq until late 2007, as they were unable to negotiate a provisional Iraqi national identity of the new forces until that time. Major units, such as the 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army Divisions originally envisioned as integrated national forces, took on an ethnic (Kurdish) character and became enmeshed in local politics. To confuse matters, the Peshmerga militias were given quasi-official status as “Regional Guard” forces, and received funds from Baghdad. (This became a particularly awkward point in late 2012 when the Iraqi Army “Maliki Forces” faced off against the Peshmerga near the disputed city of Kirkuk.)
Initially, the government’s willingness and ability to field the forces that had been recruited and trained at great expense was in doubt. A much publicized initiative to deploy newly formed battalions to Baghdad in mid-2006 fizzled when the newly formed permanent Iraqi government, wary of alienating political allies, slow-walked participation of indigenous units and so provided only a fraction of the total promised to U.S. commanders.

Even so, the appearance of new, nominally Iraqi units alongside U.S. forces confronted millions of Iraqis with routine claims of state authority. The contentious question of whether these forces indeed represented a legitimate Iraqi state produced locally fragmented discourses of the state. As Hansen et al. have it, “stateness does not merely grow out of official, or ‘stately,’ strategies of government and representation. The attribution of stateness to various forms of authority also emerges from intense and often localized political struggles over resources, recognition, inclusion, and influence.”

Iraqi Army units were initially placed under the U.S. military command hierarchy as they were formed, as the indigenous command structure had been dissolved after the fall of Baghdad. For this reason, the armed forces did not emerge immediately as a coherent national-level organization, even as individual units sought national status within their geographic areas of operations.

Oftentimes, local U.S. and Iraqi commanders were compelled to secure a public blessing from local power brokers recognizing their Iraqi forces as being Iraqi in order to recruit locally and deploy Iraqi Army units against insurgent strong holds. The most successful forces of this period were not national forces at all, but the local tribal and ethnic forces recruited in Sunni and Kurdish areas of Iraq. Among the regular forces, officers with recognized ties to the old Iraqi

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^4 Hansen and Stepputat, ibid., 9.
state and its armed forces enjoyed a prestige and authority lacking among peers without this 
legitimating qualification. Their authority derived from this recognition, as was seen in the 
bizarre episode involving the formation of Iraq’s first post-Ba’thist T-72 tank battalion with 
former Republican Guard personnel. To the bewilderment and consternation of American 
advisers (and perhaps wary Shi’ite Islamist Iraqi politicians as well), the unit quickly took on a 
coherence and discipline lacking in other units. One might speak of the Iraqi state being a 
referent of authority, particularly in majority Sunni areas, but often this applied to the old state 
rather than its successor.

In chapter six I document how Iraq’s first permanent government pushed to appropriate 
the symbolic legacy of the Iraqi state through a radical expansion of ceremonial and 
commemorative discourses articulated through the armed forces, which were bequeathed to it by 
foreign occupation. The ill-planned and haphazardly executed Iraqi assault against Basra in 2008 
illustrates this argument. The arms of the official government prevailed only with significant 
assistance from U.S. forces, driving the Sadrist militias of Basra underground without destroying 
them. However, the symbolism of the assault was significant, as it was clearly an initiative of 
the new government, led by its military forces, in which the prestige of the Iraqi state was 
invested.

Having provided the policy impetus and preponderance of forces into a major military 
assault, the Maliki regime subsequently sought to capitalize on its partial success with 
symbolism and rhetoric linking the regime to the Iraqi state and its armed forces. Indeed, the 
name of the coalition that Maliki formed in 2009 for electoral battle with Shiite religious party 
rivals, “State of Law” or dawla al-qanun, intentionally evoked the designation of the “Imposition
of Law” or *farḍh al- qaṇūn* military campaigns in 2007 and 2008. It was not the absolute monopoly of *physical* force that was important, which was only partial in any case, but rather the regime’s success in establishing the erstwhile CMATT forces as a symbol of Iraq and *legitimate* force capable of assuming the identity and role of the Iraqi Army. Sadr, for his part, was forced to re-brand his Mahdi Army as a cultural organization dedicated to educational initiatives after being confronted with the political stigmatization of illegal militias.

Even at this high water mark of Maliki’s tenure as Iraqi Prime Minister when talk of "the security achievements" pervaded official discourse, the imaginative transformation of the CMATT forces into a national army was only partial, with its effects being felt most intensely within the bare-knuckled intra-Shia power struggles of Iraqi politics. Nonetheless, these political effects were real. Recognition of the CMATT forces as the Iraqi Army placed the ubiquitous violence of post-2003 Iraq into the discursive frame of national statehood, within which a recognizable set of normative structures specific to Iraqi political culture guided rhetoric and action in the public sphere. This dynamic produced a compulsory political solidarity of statehood in which erstwhile political enemies were compelled to publicly adhere to common positions regarding the identity of the state and its security interests in order to maintain their identity as Iraqi rulers.

Public denunciation of the Army as a band of quislings, apostates, or sectarian thugs became impossible for those seeking to participate openly in the politics of official electoral and legislative institutions. This rhetorical constraint also had practical implications, as it made it more difficult -- but not impossible -- to openly defy or resist government forces by organized violence, as Sadr discovered in the wake of Basra. As long as the new government forces were
recognized as a national force, they were (theoretically) immune from attack from members of
the national community and possessed authority to demand cooperation from all Iraqi citizens
and political factions regardless of political, ethnic, or sectarian affiliation. This strengthened the
hand of the Prime Minister, who invariably was referred to in official discourse as the
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

As such, the assimilation of the lineage of the Iraqi Army by the new forces was itself
constitutive of the political identity of Iraqi elites seeking command of the state. Much of the
extensive effort to wrap the new forces in the symbolism of Iraq's military past on the part of
Iraq's new rulers was self-referential -- by themselves and for themselves to constitute their own
special status as agents of the Iraqi state. Seemingly no military graduation ceremony,
conference, or anniversary commemoration was too obscure not to merit a visit from a senior
government official or military officer. Such visits received extensive coverage in publications
like Khaymat al-Iraq, which we might surmise lacked extensive readerships outside the very
same official circles being reported on.

For these reasons, the otherwise obscure Hawija incident detailed in chapter seven, which
involved the loss of a relative handful of Iraqi military personnel in the spring of 2013, took on
political significance far out of proportion to its tactical significance. The scenes of Iraqi troops
firing on protestors were incendiary and threatened to expose the Iraqi Army as a sectarian
militia indistinguishable from other semi-legal or illegal armed groups that infested Iraq at the
time. By extension, it threatened to strip Maliki and his circle of their status as Iraqi leaders and
expose them as mere sectarian entrepreneurs. Indeed, the Hawija incident marks the beginning of
the unravelling of both the new Iraqi Army as a national force and the tenuous status of Maliki as
a national leader, which had been (partially) established by "the security achievements" that followed in the wake of Basra. This was seen in extensive efforts within official circles to frame the incident in terms of national martyrdom by using commemorative practices and symbols of the old army.

### 8.8 Significance

This story, in and of itself, is intrinsically interesting. Nonetheless, we need to ask why maneuverings of the heretofore obscure Iraqi officers and politicians of a very nearly failed state should be of any concern to political scientists. My answer is that an account of the origins of the new army, and the tireless efforts of Iraq's new rulers to elicit recognition of its claim to the historical lineage of the old army, illuminates a central problem of the diverse literatures on the state — namely, the construction of state sovereignty and its institutions. In my dissertation I have closely examined this phenomenon as it took place in a specific demarcated territory located on the periphery of the international system. The utility of this approach has been to use an analysis of a specific indigenous politics of statehood to shed light on a host of other issues that have been (or perhaps should be) of central concern to our field.

It should be clear from the account of Iraq I have given above that anarchy is not unique to the sphere of international relations and that sovereignty is not the natural condition of nominally sovereign territorial units. This would be an unremarkable conclusion save for the fact that the sovereign state is taken for granted in much of the international relations and comparative politics literature. It is also taken for granted within much of the U.S. policymaking (and implementation) apparatus, as evidenced by the unexpected but predictable difficulties
American forces encountered in their initial efforts to remake Iraq. Following other recent scholarship, I have chosen an approach that historicizes national sovereignty as a cultural construct specific to European development, which came to be symbolized in the ubiquitous European-style national military uniform, national flags, and other ceremonies and regalia. These forms of cultural expression first emerged in Europe in the late 18th century and were then adapted globally as trade and imperialism expanded. These cultural forms presupposed certain ideas about political organization, collective identity, and defense.

Iraqi national narratives, as is the case with many other postcolonial states, have drawn heavily upon these symbols and understandings of sovereignty they represent. As in other postcolonial states, the army emerged as most important symbol of a nationalist narrative of national dignity and independence. Successive Iraqi regimes of all stripes -- monarchial, military, Ba'athist, and Shi'a Islamist -- have attempted to control the Army and appropriate the nationalist narrative it was claimed to embody to themselves as a means of legitimating their claim to the Iraqi state and sovereign authority claimed on its behalf. The militarization of Iraqi politics from its earliest emergence of the modern state after World War I has remained as a distinctive feature of the Iraqi state throughout its existence. My dissertation points to the need for more attention among political scientists to how these legacies structure international relations between major powers and the postcolonial periphery, and also continue to influence the trajectory of intrastate conflicts that have become a focus of peacebuilding and civil war literatures.

In Iraq, indigenous constructions of state sovereignty have rarely, if ever, produced an approximation of the gently accommodating and localized political authority envisioned by
scholars who favor sociological views of political legitimacy. Tribes, clans, nations, and religious authorities have been cajoled, corrupted, created out of thin air, and crushed as it suited commanders of the modern Iraqi state over the course of its history. Although adapted to local conditions, the fundamental idea of state sovereignty as inherited by Iraq generally prevailed in political thought, and continues to hold the imagination of many Iraqis today. The crux of this idea is that the state should be the ultimate referent of supreme political authority, the authority of its agents should extend uniformly throughout its territory, and membership in (and solidarity with) the political community -- and assimilation into its official culture -- as defined by rulers in Baghdad was compulsory for all. The Iraqi Army was the institutional embodiment of this strain of political thought that has dominated Iraq for nearly a century as it assimilated key social constituencies into its ranks and suppressed multitudinous revolts from Iraqi populations that challenged Baghdad’s authority.

A recent informal conversation with the former Iraqi military attache to the United States who served under the Maliki government illustrated to me the continued power of state imagination in Iraq. We met at a conference held at the Iraqi Embassy’s cultural center to commemorate the 94 year anniversary of the Iraqi Army in January of 2015. Our discussion centered around the re-emergence of political and religious militias in Iraq that were mobilized to stave off an ISIS advance on Baghdad in the fall of 2014.

"The members of these militias are Iraqi, but they forget that they should be part of Iraq, not some other entity," he said. "The religious clerics and politicians that are encouraging this and trying to take the power for themselves should stop." He envisioned a gradual process of reintegration of these power structures into the Iraqi state, citing the U.S. National Guard as an
example in which loosely organized local militias were eventually brought within a nationalized power structure. By his understanding, the Iraqis organizing or fighting as members of semi-official militias were not fully Iraqi unless they were integrated into the state and its military structures. He advocated a less self-referential practice of legitimation for the Iraqi Army that might close this separation. "The Army does not need these commemorations for itself. It needs to bring itself closer to the people, and then we will not have these problems."

This conversation illustrates central elements of the relationship between sovereignty and legitimacy, which is just beginning to attract serious attention within the International Relations literature, and which I intended to contribute to in this dissertation. First, that state sovereignty is a historically and culturally specific phenomenon, and second, that the institutionalization of state sovereignty on the international periphery requires contextual analysis in order to properly understand how cultural forms developed in the European context are realized locally. These points are relevant to the broader debate described in the introduction between theorists advocating "normative" versus "sociological" understandings of legitimacy.

My dissertation suggests that both positions require revision. Normative understandings presuppose that "genuine state sovereignty" is a "self-referential value", rather than a set of culturally specific practices that are always brought into being within specific social contexts. The global domination of the West has obscured this latter point, even from many scholars of international relations. The sociological critique of normative understandings of sovereignty, has sought to rectify such misapprehensions by emphasizing the diversity of local practices of political authority, which we observe in non-Western contexts. However, such critiques have often overlooked the problem of "stateness" -- or when and why such practices assume the
imprimatur and authority of the state. Likewise, they often do not give sufficient attention to the power of the state idea itself, which remains a powerful part of political imagination in much of the postcolonial world.

If for no other reason than it is currently recognized as the basic political unit of global society, the state and the state idea are almost never completely absent from the political field, even in reaches of the world where these appear weak. In the absence of a state during the middle part of the previous decade, Iraqis sought its authority as they struggled to define and assert collective goals through military mobilization. The various activities of state legitimation that took place in Iraq in conjunction with military mobilization and commemoration point us towards a more sophisticated understanding of the modern national state, its theoretical underpinnings, and its institutions. Rapid aggregation of military capacity under the auspices of a powerful strategic patron does not, in and of itself, produce the state. It is the production of military organization as a symbol of the national state, theoretically separate from parochial ethnic and partisan loyalties and interests, which is vital. It is a particular way of imagining armies, rather than of organizing them, that makes the modern state project unique.

In Iraq, disparate communities separated by sect, language, and ethnicity existing within arbitrarily drawn geographic boundaries have long contested this symbolic ground. Successive generations of rulers have both demanded and sought to elicit allegiance to and acceptance of the Iraqi state as they envisioned it, and have claimed that the armed formations they controlled represented “all the sons of Iraq”. Iraq’s new rulers have not abandoned these practices. Rather, they have followed their predecessors in seeking to appropriate the the Army, imagined as a symbol of the state, to their own views and purposes. Although the Iraqi Army’s future
intellectual and (least of all) military hegemony is not guaranteed, this institution remained central to maintaining the political project of Iraqi statehood even after its organizational disbandment in 2003. This speaks to the residual symbolic power of the imagined Iraqi state and its army in a fractious society not lacking for competing ideas about collective organization and solidarity.
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