

Tactical Structure in World War II

Iraq

Leland Ness

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The Beginning of the Iraqi Army

The fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I did not mean independence for Iraq. Instead, Britain was granted a mandate over the area by the League of Nations in 1920, ruling through a pliant King Faisal I. The Iraqi Army was established in 1920, drawing its officers primarily from those who had served in the Ottoman Army. The growth of the army was steady, from 3,500 men in 1921 to 7,500 in 1925 and then 12,500 in 1932.

In 1930 Britain relinquished its mandate over Iraq, but as a condition extracted a treaty that guaranteed it two airbases, one outside Basra and the other at Habbaniya in western Iraq, and unlimited transit rights for its troops and equipment. Also included in this treaty of alliance was the maintenance of a British military mission to "guide" the Iraqi Army and a stipulation that "the armament and essential equipment of [Iraqi] forces shall not differ in type from those of the force [of Britain]", the latter essentially limiting the Iraqis to procurement from Britain.

King Faisal I died in 1933 and was succeeded by his markedly less competent son, Ghazi. Without a strong royal presence Iraqi politics quickly degenerated into a series of raw power plays, usually based on personalities rather than any discernable ideologies. Indeed, the nascent Iraqi political consciousness was still sufficiently unformed that anti-British animus seems to have been the only common thread, and even there a minority of the parties, probably those feeling not yet strong enough to survive complete chaos, remained pro-British.

A series of coups, counter-coups, and elections of very dubious authenticity kept the Iraqi pot boiling through the late 1930s. The death of King Ghazi in an April 1939 automobile accident saw the appointment, with the Army's backing, of Prince Abd al-'Ilah as regent for the four-year-old new King Faisal II, further reducing the power of the "center". In March 1940 the pro-British government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id was replaced by that of nationalist Rashid Ali al-Gailani in a peaceful transition, probably engineered by Nuri himself, recognizing his weak popular base.

During the 1930s the slow and steady expansion of the army had continued so that by the end of 1936 it fielded two divisions, the First in Baghdad as a base of power and the Second in Kirkuk to keep the Kurds quiet, plus a cavalry brigade as a mobile reserve. Each division was composed of a headquarters, a small signal battalion, three infantry brigades (each of three battalions¹), three artillery

¹The battalions were numbered internally within the brigades, i.e., 1st Battalion/3rd Brigade; 2nd Battalion/5th

"brigades" (actually battalion-size units using then-current British terminology), and a cadre-strength motor transport company. An infantry battalion, the heart of the army, was divided into a headquarters, three rifle companies (each of three platoons), and a machine gun company. Each of the rifle companies was made up of four rifle platoons, each with three rifle sections (armed solely with rifles) and a light machine gun section with a single Lewis gun. The machine gun company had three platoons, each with four Vickers water-cooled machine guns. Battalion armament thus comprised 12 Lewis guns, 12 Vickers guns, and 620 Lee-Enfield .303 rifles.

Divisional artillery consisted of two field artillery brigades and a mountain artillery brigade, each having three 4-gun batteries. In the field artillery brigades two of the batteries were armed with 18pdr guns and one with 4.5" howitzers, both WW I British surplus, and the mountain brigades were armed with a mixture of 75mm (2.95") mountain guns and 3.7" pack howitzers.

Transport was extremely limited, consisting of pack horses in the infantry battalion HQ and mountain artillery (attached from GHQ) and draft horses in the field artillery. The divisions thus had mobility only in the purely tactical sense, with large-scale maneuver clearly out of the question for the army.

The cavalry brigade consisted of three mounted regiments, each of 2 rifle squadrons and a machine gun squadron. These gave the brigade a total of 36 Vickers-Berthier light MGs, 24 Vickers medium MGs and 1,779 rifles.

Smaller assets directly under GHQ control comprised an engineer battalion of two companies, a motor machine gun company (with 16 Vickers guns and 8 Vickers-Berthier), an armored car platoon (two vehicles), four animal transport companies, two field ambulances (at cadre status), two independent infantry battalions, three frontier battalions, and a Royal Bodyguard. The animal transport companies provided the pack animals used by the infantry and mountain artillery units and the draft horses used by the field artillery, and were thus usually not actually at the disposal of the central command. The frontier battalions were similar to the infantry battalions but had only a 4-gun machine gun platoon in place of the normal machine gun company.

Also present were two regional headquarters, the Mosul Area HQ, controlling troops attached from the 2nd Division, and the Euphrates Area HQ, controlling

Brigade, etc. The artillery batteries, however, were numbered sequentially by type until April 1940: thus the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade had the 4th, 5th, and 10th Field Batteries, while the 2nd Mountain Artillery Brigade had the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Mountain Batteries..

troops attached from the 1st Division.

Expansion and Modernization

At this point, the army reached what should have been a crossroads. Given the limited financial means available and the even more limited pool of technologically-literate draft-age males, a decision would have to be made between continued expansion of the army or allocating resources to modernize the existing force structure. The Iraqis opted to attempt both.

Although expansion had continued through the mid-1930s no efforts had been made towards modernization. This was to change with a series of orders placed in 1936.

To modernize the infantry the Iraqis chose the Bren gun in .303 caliber to replace the old Lewis guns, but placed the order with the original Czech firm of ZB, ordering 850 weapons and 15,594,000 rounds, these being delivered over the next two years. They also looked at anti-tank rifles and 3" mortars, but no procurement was made.

A modest start towards improving the artillery park was made with an order with Britain for two old 6" howitzers and a medium artillery section began forming later that year. A second pair of these weapons was ordered shortly thereafter to bring the unit to battery strength. The Iraqi MoD apparently wanted to modernize the field artillery holdings as well, but the 1930 Treaty of Alliance essentially limited them to British weapons.²

More importantly, orders were placed for about 450 two-ton trucks from Ford, these to provide the logistics support so desperately needed by any army that intends to maneuver. Finally, 14 CV.35 tankettes were ordered from Italy to form a new light tank company. To complement the tankettes ten armored shells were ordered from Britain to convert an equal number of Crossley chassis into armored cars.

The trucks were received from mid-1937 to early 1938 and were used to bring the two motor transport companies, one in each division, up to useable strength. The tankettes arrived in late 1937 and after reconditioning to repair water damage sustained on the voyage the light tank company was formed in early 1938 with 14

²In fact, the British Military Mission suspected the Iraqis of ordering further quantities of 18pdr guns in the belief that the British, who were converting their 18pdrs to 25pdrs, would have none to spare for export, thus freeing them to purchase elsewhere. If this was the plan it failed, for the British did dig up some old 18pdrs from their reserve stocks and this weapon continued to form the basis of the Iraqi field artillery to the end of the war.

Fiat tankettes, a van, two trucks, and two motorcycles.

In 1937 Major General Watson, the British military advisor to Iraq, suggested the raising of a mobile force to consist of the cavalry brigade supported by several smaller mechanized units, including the light tank company, an armored car company, the motor machine gun company, and a mechanized battery. The Iraqis took this under advisement but, unknown to the British, proceeded with their own secret mechanization plan with the unannounced purchase from Germany of eighteen 20mm autocannon mounted on diesel trucks. At the same time a new, 7th, infantry brigade was raised and placed under the 1st Division.

As modernization proceeded, slowly, so too did expansion. In early 1938 the decision was made to form a 3rd Division and as a first step the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry Brigades were ordered to form a fourth battalion each. At the same time, substantial orders were placed for additional quantities of 18pdr guns and 4.5" howitzers, as well as 3.7" pack howitzers. As the pack howitzers arrived they were used to re-equip the mountain artillery brigades and the 75mm guns thus made redundant were used to form independent mountain artillery batteries (numbered 17-19) and attached, one each, to the frontier battalions.

The 3rd Division was formed in mid-1938 to face the central portion of the Persian border. It took the 1st Brigade from the 1st Division and formed the 9th Brigade from the excess battalions raised by the 1st-3rd Brigades. For artillery support, it received the 5th Field Artillery Brigade, also from the 1st Division. Thus, by the end of the year the Iraqi Army had the following strengths.

	Authorized		Actual	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
GHQ Troops	615	4,308	483	3,653
1st Division (- Euphrates Area)	296	7,615	236	6,539
2nd Division (- Mosul Area)	339	8,216	265	5,248
3rd Division	192	4,483	134	3,434
Euphrates Area	192	4,801	139	4,237
Mosul Area	198	4,521	169	3,234
Total	1,832	33,944	1,426	26,345
<i>comprising (field units only),</i>				
3 cavalry regiments	81	1,899	66	1,874
11 field artillery batteries	55	1408	48	1,303
6 mountain artillery batteries	30	1,020	30	1,052
2 other batteries	7	109	7	167
engineer battalion	20	645	18	474

2 signal battalions	40	940	37	743
24 infantry battalions	576	15,672	375	11,105
3 frontier battalions	72	1,857	48	975
mechanized force (- mechanized battery)	18	303	20	249
motor transport units	22	444	20	326
2 field ambulances	18	186	15	171

Expansion continued apace, and in the first two months of 1939 the 11th Infantry Brigade was raised for the 3rd Division, although its 3rd Battalion was removed and used as the basis for the new motorized battalion of the mechanized force. Also raised was another field artillery battery for the 5th Brigade, so that the artillery force structure looked as follows, with each battery holding four weapons:

1st Field Art Brigade (1st Div): three bty 18pdr, one bty 4.5"
 2nd Mountain Art Brigade (2nd Div): three bty 3.7"
 3rd Field Art Brigade (2nd Div): one bty 18pdr, two bty 4.5", one mtn bty 3.7"
 4th Mountain Art Brigade (1st Div): one bty 75mm, one bty 3.7"
 5th Field Art Brigade (3rd Div): two bty 18pdr, three bty 4.5"
 Medium Battery (6")

In addition, the ordnance depots held further stocks of weapons, comprising 18 75mm mountain guns, 2 3.7" howitzers, 13 18pdr guns and a 6" howitzer. Equipment under order from the UK but not yet delivered consisted of 21 3.7" howitzers, 24 18pdr guns, 4 4.5" howitzers, and 4 25pdr gun-howitzers, although the 25pdrs were destined never to be delivered.

By the end of February 1939 Bren guns had been issued to all the infantry battalions on the normal scale of one per platoon, while an anti-aircraft section with two of the old Lewis guns on high-angle mounts had been added to each infantry brigade and battalion HQ. In mid-1938 an experimental organization had been trialed in which the number of Bren guns had been raised to three per platoon, this being accomplished by expanding the LMG section in each platoon rather than by distributing them to the rifle sections. The results were considered favorable for in the spring of 1939 orders were issued to apply this change to an initial increment of 12 infantry battalions, with the others to follow as equipment became available.

The new battalion organization provided for a headquarters group (with administrative, transport, and signal platoons and an AA section), three rifle companies (each of four platoons, each in turn consisting of three rifle sections and a 3-gun Bren section), and a machine gun company (with two 4-gun platoons of Vickers guns). In the absence of further orders for Vickers guns the expansion had forced dilution of these weapons from twelve to eight per battalion and in

compensation a Bren tripod was assigned to each Bren section for greater long-range accuracy. In addition, the expansion was straining the pool of available officers and the Iraqis had to accept a British suggestion that one platoon in each rifle company be commanded by an NCO instead of a lieutenant.

The Outbreak of War

Expansion slowed somewhat during the rest of 1939, being limited primarily to completion of the 3rd Division with the normal range of division base elements, such as motor transport, signals, etc. Thus, at the outbreak of WW II in 1939 the strength of the Iraqi Army was

	Authorized		Actual	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
GHQ Troops	637	4,593	569	4,205
1st Division (- Euphrates Area)	262	7,141	232	7,642
2nd Division (- Mosul Area)	337	9,343	286	8,053
3rd Division	282	9,200	226	6,158
Euphrates Area	182	5,287	156	5,430
Mosul Area	190	4,700	160	3,907
Total	1,890	40,264	1,629	35,395

The order of battle at the time was

1st Division

Baghdad	Division Headquarters
	3rd Infantry Brigade (- 1 bn)
	1st Field Artillery Brigade (1st, 2nd, 3rd & 6th field batteries)
	1st Division Troops
Nasiriyah	7th Infantry Brigade (- 2 bns)
Basrah	II/7 Infantry Battalion
Amara	III/7 Infantry Battalion
Samawa	III/3 Infantry Battalion

2nd Division

Kirkuk	Division Headquarters
	4th Infantry Brigade (-1 bn)
	5th Infantry Brigade
	3rd Field Artillery Brigade (4th, 5th, 10th & 11 field batteries)
	2nd Division Troops
Arbil	II/4 Infantry Battalion
Zakho	1st Frontier Battalion (attached)
Sulaimaniya	2nd Frontier Battalion (attached)
Rowanduz	3rd Frontier Battalion (attached)

3rd Division

Baghdad	Division Headquarters 1st Infantry Brigade 3rd Division Troops
Qaraghan	3rd Cavalry Regiment (attached) 9th Infantry Brigade 5th Field Artillery Brigade (7th, 8th, 9th & 15th field bties, 1st mtn bty)
Mansuriya-al-Jabal	2nd Cavalry Regiment (attached) 11th Infantry Brigade

Mosul Area

Mosul	6th Infantry Brigade 2nd Mountain Artillery Brigade (2nd, 3rd & 4th mtn bties)
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Euphrates Area

Diwaniya	2nd Infantry Brigade 4th Mountain Artillery Brigade (4th & 5th mtn bties)
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GHQ Troops

Baghdad	Mechanized Force Cavalry Brigade (- 2 regts) Royal Guards Medium Artillery Battery
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During October and November 1939 the III/11 Infantry Battalion was raised, to replace the unit converted to a motorized battalion, while additional Bren guns were issued to bring the number of 36-gun battalions up to fifteen, comprising all nine in the 3rd Division and one in each of the other six brigades. At the same time, a start was made on the forming of second-line infantry battalions designed for guard and lines of communications duties to free regular infantry units for campaigning. The first such battalion, I/14, was raised in November 1939, followed by I/15 and II/15 in December 1939 and January 1940, and III/15 in March 1940. Each of these had a peacetime strength of 24 officers and 686 enlisted and was armed with 14 Lewis guns (one per rifle platoon plus two in the battalion AA section) and 8 Vickers guns in the machine gun company.

Arrivals of additional weapons also allowed the expansion of the artillery arm. During September-November 1939 the 16th Field Battery (18pdr) and the 17th Field Battery (4.5") were raised, followed shortly by the 18th-21st Field Batteries (18pdr), along with the 7th and 9th Field Artillery Brigade HQs. At the same time the 17th, 18th, and 19th Mountain Batteries, each with four 75mm guns, were raised by expansion of the earlier Frontier artillery platoons, each to support a frontier battalion.

Reorganization of 1940

The cavalry arm raised two mounted squadrons in January 1940 as reconnaissance troops for the 1st and 2nd Divisions. Each of these consisted of four rifle platoons, each of three rifle sections and a Bren gun section.

On a higher level a new headquarters, that of the 4th Division, was formed in early 1940. This was to control the second-line units being raised, so it was originally formed with only the division headquarters, the HQ of the 14th Infantry Brigade, and the I/14, I/15 and II/15 Infantry Battalions.

The Spring of 1940 also saw initial moves at tactical reorganization. The artillery reorganized, adopting internal numbering within the brigades (e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Batteries of the 3rd Field Brigade) with the 4th battery in each field brigade to be armed with 4.5" howitzers and the other three with 18pdrs. In the infantry the Chief of General Staff agreed to rearm all first-line infantry battalions with 24 Bren guns (two per platoon), but retaining the organization of 3-gun platoons to allow for absorption of the extra 12 guns when they became available. The purpose of this was to balance the infantry formations available through the army.

In late 1940 the 7th Infantry Brigade was transferred to the 4th Division and the remainder of the 14th Brigade formed. Thus, by the end of 1940 the division consisted of its HQ and the 15th (second-line) Brigade at Diwaniya, the 7th (first-line) Brigade at Basra, and the 14th (second-line) Brigade at Nasiriya. The division, being a guard force, had no divisional troops, although the 4th Mountain Artillery Brigade was attached to it from the 1st Division. The two newest battalions in the division (II/14 and III/14) were raised on a new TO&E even weaker than that used for the prior second-line units. In this case one platoon was deleted from each rifle company and the machine gun company reduced to a platoon to give a total peace strength of 22 officers and 521 enlisted, with 11 Lewis guns and 4 Vickers guns. To form these new units the existing second-line units had to be stripped of some personnel, thus reducing them temporarily (or so it was planned) to the same organization as the newer ones.

Thus, by the spring of 1941 there were two types of infantry brigades. They both had a small brigade HQ of five officers and 15 enlisted to command three infantry battalions. In the first-line brigades an infantry battalion consisted of a headquarters, a HQ company, three rifle companies and a machine gun company. Each rifle company consisted of four rifle platoons, each in turn made up of three rifle sections and a Bren section. The Bren sections were defined as

2-gun units, although some were making the transition back to 3-gun units. The machine gun company had two platoons, each of four Vickers guns. Total war strength of a first-line battalion was 26 officers and 820 enlisted with 154 pack horses. Heavy weapons consisted of two Lewis guns (in the AA section of the HQ company), 24-36 Bren guns, and eight Vickers guns.

In a second-line brigade an infantry battalion consisted of a headquarters, a HQ company, three rifle companies, and a machine gun platoon. Here a rifle company was made up of only three platoons, each of three rifle sections and a one-gun Lewis gun section. Heavy weapons totaled eleven Lewis guns (including the two in HQ company) and four Vickers guns.

Drawn Into the Maelstrom

By this time, however, the political situation in Iraq had deteriorated even further. Following Italy's declaration of war on the Allies in June 1940 the British had placed continuing and heavy pressure on Iraq to break off diplomatic relations with that country. Rashid Ali had resisted, but the regent and the foreign minister favored giving in to British demands to secure other concessions from Britain. An apparently trivial issue, Iraq was led to the brink of civil war and in January 1941 the regent demanded Rashid Ali's resignation. A new government was formed with the express mandate of improving relations with Britain, but on 1 April 1941 Rasid Ali and a handful of army officers staged a coup, ousted the regent and the new government, and took control of the country.

The British wasted no time responding and on 18 April the HQ of the 10th Indian Division with its subordinate 20th Indian Infantry Brigade landed at Basra, ostensibly exercising the British right of "passage" through Iraq. The Iraqi counter-move was the signing of a secret treaty with the Italian ambassador (acting as agent for Germany as well) under which Germany and Italy recognized Iraqi sovereignty over Syria and provided credits for the purchase of armaments "necessary for the conduct of a war against the British Empire."

To further demonstrate his resolve Rashid Ali ordered a new military HQ formed, the Western Command, to control the 1st and 3rd Infantry Divisions and the Mechanized Force. On 29/30 April 1941 the Western Command apparently decided to invest Habbaniya airfield and the 4th Infantry Brigade was ordered from Kirkuk and the Mechanized Force from Baghdad, both to the plateau overlooking the airfield. On 2 May the 1st Infantry Brigade was ordered from Baghdad to Ramadi to block any British attempt to relieve the airfield from Transjordan. On 2 May the 11th Infantry Brigade moved to Falluja to back up the investing force. Also brought in to support the investing force were the 3rd and

7th Field Artillery Brigades, part of the 1st Field and 6th Mountain Artillery Brigades, and two 20mm AA/AT batteries. Simultaneously, reserves were recalled to bring units up to war establishment strengths.

The British force in Habbaniya consisted of a flying school, half a battalion of infantry, six companies of Iraq Levies, and a company of eighteen elderly RAF armored cars. On 1 May they received a confusing message from the commander of the investing forces stating that they were only there on a training exercise but that any British aircraft attempting to take off would be shot down. Severely outnumbered, with only a battalion equivalent in Habbaniya and a brigade in Basra, the British felt compelled to strike first.

Training aircraft from Habbaniya began bombing Iraqi forces on the escarpment overlooking the airfield on the morning of 2 May and ME Command organized "Habforce" in Transjordan for the overland relief of the airfield. For reasons still not clear the Iraqi forces did not attempt to storm Habbaniya, which they should have been able to take, but instead contented themselves with shelling it with artillery and firing at the attacking British aircraft with their Lewis AA MGs and the 20mm guns.

Initially the Iraqi forces appear to have held up well but after two days of bombing the 4th Infantry Brigade, shaken, had to be replaced on the plateau by the 11th Infantry Brigade and the 7th Field Artillery Brigade. These units, in turn, had to be withdrawn on the night of 5/6 May due to "shaky morale and high casualties"³ caused by bombing and a successful British infantry raid, and British reconnaissance flights on 6 May found the escarpment to be empty.

An improvised mobile column, consisting of four armored cars, the II/1 Infantry Battalion in requisitioned vehicles, and the 5th Field Artillery Brigade sortied from Falluja to retake the heights but was stopped and dispersed by air attack. The same day, 6 May, the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade landed in Basra to reinforce the units there. There then followed a period of quiet as the British unsuccessfully attempted to find a diplomatic way out of this fight in the Mideast they really did not need.

During this time the Iraqis halfheartedly consolidated their positions. The 1st Infantry Brigade (less one battalion but reinforced by one battery of the 1st Field Artillery) established themselves in Ramadi, some 15 miles west of Habbaniya, where they remained for the rest of the campaign. The 3rd Infantry Brigade set up in Falluja, six miles east of Habbaniya and the site of a key bridge on the

³Hamadi, Dr. Walid M.S., Rasid Ali al-Gailani, p.122. In fact, morale was probably more of a problem than casualties.

Habbaniya-Baghdad road. The 11th Infantry and 7th Field Artillery, still shaken from their ordeal on the escarpment, were withdrawn to Mansur and replaced by the 6th Infantry Brigade from Mosul and the 5th Field Artillery Brigade from Jaloula as the Western Command reserve at Khan Nuqta, midway between Habbaniya and the Iraqi capital.

Some assistance also arrived from the Axis forces, in the form of an Me-110 fighter squadron and an He-111 bomber squadron (each of 12 aircraft) arriving in Mosul on 15 May, followed by an Italian fighter squadron of CR.42 biplanes at Kirkuk. The Vichy forces in Syria also provided a trainload of arms, including a battery of 155mm howitzers, but these latter do not appear to have been used.

Hostilities broke out again on the 19th, when two companies from Habbaniya attacked Falluja under air bombardment. The garrison fled and the bridge seized without damage. The Iraqi response was to send the 6th Infantry by hired transport to retake Falluja. This unit put in a much better performance and, supported by the tankette company, gained footholds in the town before being driven back out. In the south, the 10th Indian Division moved slowly north from Basra, hindered only slightly by sporadic fighting from the Iraqi 7th Infantry Brigade at Ali Gharbi.

By now the advance elements of Habforce had reached Habbaniya and it was time to advance on Baghdad. On May 28th a force of about 2,000 British set off east from Falluja to Baghdad, brushing aside ineffectual opposition at Khan Nuqta and finally halting at the canal banks about 12 miles west of the capital city. The Iraqis had formed the defenses of the city into two sectors: the northern sector some six kilometers in length and comprising the 9th Infantry Brigade, the 1st and 9th Field Artillery Brigades, and the remnants of the Mechanized Force; and the western sector 10 kilometers long comprising the 4th Infantry Brigade, the rebuilt remnants of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, the 5th Field Artillery Brigade, and the 6" howitzer battery. In general reserve were the cavalry brigade of three regiments and the 6th Infantry Brigade (less one battalion). This force was a show, for on the 28th the Iraqi Supreme Command had already decided that Baghdad was lost and that they would have to evacuate to the northern part of the country to defend around Kirkuk. On the 29th, however, Rashid Ali and his compatriots fled to Iran and the remaining Iraqi leadership sued for a ceasefire.

Looking Back at a Brief Campaign

Iraqi performance had been abysmal. With only a few exceptions they had been unable to even slow down numerically inferior British forces. Logistics support had been poor, gunnery inaccurate, and infantry units of battalion size often

simply dissolved into the desert at the first sign of impending combat.

Poor morale and technical incompetence explain much of the poor showing. The reports of the British Military Mission to Iraq before the war speak repeatedly of untrained, disinterested officers. This was particularly true of the mechanized force, which should have been the crack mobile reserve, but which was "greatly handicapped by the fact that two out of the four units are commanded by inefficient and idle commanding officers; the force commander himself being equally unfitted for his position"⁴

In terms of organization and equipment the army also contained a number of serious weaknesses. There were no anti-tank weapons in the army other than the three batteries of 20mm light dual-purpose guns. Several proposals had been raised before the war to remedy this shortcoming, including the purchase of anti-tank rifles and mounting a portion of the 18pdr guns on truck chassis as mobile AT guns, but none had come to fruition. In fact, the British used no tanks in the occupation of Iraq, but they did manage through a clever ruse to convince the Iraqi high command that a tank force was advancing on Baghdad, and this presumably contributed to their decision to call off the war.

Another shortcoming was the complete absence of mortars. An infantry battalion should have had at least two, and preferably four or six, medium mortars as organic fire support. As it was the infantry brigades were forced to rely exclusively on the recently-expanded field artillery for its high-explosive support. Smoke support was entirely unavailable, no such ammunition being held by the artillery.

Signals were another weak point. Communications between brigades and their higher HQs appear to have been carried on primarily over the civil telephone net because it had proven impossible to buy telephone wire once the war started. Radios were purchased from Britain in the late 1930s, but deliveries appear to have been slowed considerably by the outbreak of the war, and the sets that were delivered seem to have been missing many components.

The British hit "Reset"

With the end of the campaign, the British Military Mission began "advising" the Iraqis on a new, reduced army structure, this time from a position of considerable strength. The formations were immediately reduced to their peacetime levels of manning. Further, one platoon in each rifle company and cavalry squadron was

⁴*Quarterly Report No.32 on the Iraqi Army and Royal Iraqi Air Force for Quarter Ending 31st August, 1940*, PRO FO 371/24551, p.5.

abolished from the TO&E, bringing the average infantry battalion strength down to 250-300 men, and the strength of the army overall down to about 25,000. In addition, the divisional cavalry squadrons were eliminated and their personnel returned to the cavalry regiments.

As a further step, the infantry depots were abolished and the third battalion of each brigade converted to a training battalion. In an unrelated development the Vickers guns were removed from the MG companies of the frontier battalions and replaced by lighter and more easily handled Bren guns in September, but this was reversed a few months later.

Thus, by the end of 1941 there were four separate organizations for infantry battalions:

1. in 2nd Division and Mosul District (4th, 5th and 6th Brigades):
 - Battalion HQ
 - HQ Company (includes AA section with 2 Lewis guns)
 - 3 Rifle Companies (each 3 rifle platoons each with 3 Bren guns)
 - Machine Gun Company (2 platoons each of 4 Vickers guns)
2. all other infantry battalions
 - Battalion HQ
 - HQ Company (includes AA section with 2 Lewis guns)
 - 3 Rifle Companies (each 3 rifle platoons each with 2 Bren guns)
 - Machine Gun Company (1 4-gun platoon and 1 2-gun section of Vickers guns)
3. frontier battalions
 - as (2) above, except that 2nd Frontier Battalion uses VB instead of Bren guns
4. training battalions:
 - Battalion HQ
 - HQ Company (includes AA section with 2 Lewis guns)
 - 3 Rifle Companies (each 2 platoons each with 2 Bren guns)
 - Machine Gun Company (1 platoon of 4 Vickers guns)

In addition, plans were afoot to convert the 7th Brigade to a "mine-watching" configuration to guard the minefields in the Shatt-al-Arab and the lower Tigris. Under the initial plans the two line battalions of the 7th Brigade would be composed of an administrative HQ company and four line companies, each of which would consist of four platoons, each armed with two Lewis guns on AA mounts.

As finally approved in late 1941 the mine-watching organization was modified and extended to only one battalion, II/7 with its HQ at Fao. The new TO&E called for a battalion HQ of five officers, 4 warrant officers, and two privates, plus a headquarters company of one officer, 12 NCOs and 68 privates, and four line companies. The headquarters company was made up of a command platoon (including a 6-man military police section and a 7-man AA section with two Lewis

guns) and a 43-man signal platoon. Each of the line companies consisted of a headquarters (the commander, a warrant officer clerk, two NCOs, and four privates) and four platoons. A platoon was made up of the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, a Lewis machine gun team of a corporal and three privates, a cook, and three sections each of a corporal and eleven privates, all armed with rifles. The battalion's total armament was thus 66 pistols, 711 rifles, and 18 Lewis machine guns.

Due to losses of 3.7" howitzers during the campaign, primarily those of the mechanized force, the mountain artillery brigades were reduced to two 4-gun batteries apiece. The field artillery, having lost only one 18pdr gun, was temporarily unaffected by the reductions.

Under the new organization the army had the following outline order of battle:

- 1st Division
 - 1st, 2nd and 9th Infantry Brigades
 - 5th & 7th Field Artillery Brigades
- 2nd Division
 - 4th & 5th Infantry Brigades
 - 2nd & 3rd Frontier Battalions
 - 3rd & 9th Field Artillery Brigades
- 3rd Division
 - 3rd & 11th Infantry Brigades
 - 1st Field & 6th Mountain Artillery Brigades
- 4th Division
 - 7th, 14th & 15th Infantry Brigades
 - 4th Mountain Artillery Brigade
- Mosul District
 - 6th Infantry Brigade
 - 1st Frontier Battalion
 - 2nd Mountain Artillery Brigade
- Mechanized Force

Modest Improvements 1942

The initial British intention was clearly to create a force capable of internal security duties to reduce the need for a British garrison, but one not strong enough to again challenge their supremacy. This policy, however, began to change in early 1942 when concern about a German invasion south through the Caucasus reared its head. Although it is unclear why the British thought the Iraqis would be any more effective against the Germans than they had been against themselves less than a year earlier, modest efforts were begun to modernize the army.

They provided 32 captured German 7.92mm anti-tank rifles and these were used to form four 8-gun anti-tank platoons, one for each of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd

Divisions and the Mechanized Force. Also provided were a small number of Italian 20mm Breda light AA guns to replace weapons lost in the campaign. Transport "companies", each of 35 trucks were formed for eight of the infantry brigades, but the trucks were worn and the companies were usually held at division level to conserve their usage.

In the Mechanized Force one of the two motorized infantry battalions was abolished as there were trucks to carry only one. In compensation, the British agreed to provide 40 Chevrolet TG.130 armored cars to form a new armored car "regiment" for the mechanized force. The Iraqis manned this at about half strength to conserve on rare trained mechanics and drivers, planning to expand it to full size on mobilization. The British expressed skepticism, however, that personnel could be found to bring it up to strength if needed. Henceforth the Mechanized Force would consist of a motorized battalion (three rifle companies and one MG company), the armored car regiment, a light tank detachment (initially the eight surviving Fiat light tanks), a battery of 3.7" howitzers, an anti-tank platoon, and detachments of engineers, signals, motor transport and medical.

Further retrenchments were ordered in the autumn of 1942. The 1st Field Artillery Brigade was converted to a training unit, allowing the abolition of the four artillery training depots. Each field brigade was now to consist, as far as possible, of two gun batteries (each four 18pdr) and two howitzer batteries (each four 4.5"). The number of mountain artillery brigades was reduced from three to two but expanded in size from two batteries to three, thus keeping firepower the same while reducing command overhead. The number of mountain batteries supporting the frontier battalions was reduced to two due to the inability of anyone to find either spares or ammunition for the old 75mm guns. Thus, the 19th Battery supported the 2nd Frontier Battalion, while the 18th Battery was split into two 2-gun sections, one for each of the other frontier battalions. At the same time the 2nd Cavalry Regiment was converted to a training regiment to reduce personnel load.

Another change was undertaken to improve the efficiency of the mine-watching force. Until now only the II/7 Infantry had been trained, organized, and equipped for this role, meaning that there was no relief unit available. To provide rotation of units the I/7 Infantry was relieved of its line of communications duties between Kut and Urna by the II/2 Infantry and reconfigured as a mine-watching unit. This, and some procedural changes in operations, served to increase the efficiency of this operation noticeably. With this increase in strength a new headquarters, the Shatt-al-Arab Command, was formed to control this function.

The army then entered a period of relative stability. The 1st and 3rd Divisions exchanged their 3rd and 9th Infantry Brigades briefly in mid-1942 and again in 1944, but there were no other significant changes to the order of battle other than the dissolution of the Shatt-al-Arab Command in mid-1943 and the return of the 7th Brigade to the 4th Division. This latter move was prompted by the British decision to discontinue the minewatching duties, noting that

The two battalions of the Iraqi Army continued indifferently to perform this unexciting and boring task under mediocre conditions, until early May, when the Royal Navy decided that its continuance was no longer necessary, provided it could be resumed at 14 days notice.⁵

The fallacies of trying to support a four-division force on a personnel base of about 30,000 did not escape the British Military Mission, who repeatedly pressed the Iraqis to consolidate units to form a more compact and capable field force. By the end of 1942 the average actual strength of the 33 infantry battalions had fallen to 429 officers and men, with those of the 2nd Division being somewhat larger and the rest, especially those of the 4th Division, smaller. After deducting for personnel assigned to guard duties at various locations and those detailed to other duties (including as servants to officers and civil officials) actual field strength was probably about half of that number, leaving them ineffective as fighting units. The British Military Mission recommended reducing the number of infantry battalions to 18, but this never came to pass as it would have entailed a reduction in officer slots.

A Nominal Member of the Allies

On 16 January 1943 Iraq officially declared war on Italy, Japan and Germany after a brief but intensive propaganda campaign designed to reassure the populace no actual sacrifices would be required of them. In private, however, the Prime Minister informed the British Mission that he would offer them two divisions, one for service in combat with British troops and the other for lines of communications duties. The Chief of the British Mission managed to persuade him that two brigades would be a more appropriate contribution, and in late February the Mission was able to report to London that "the Prime Minister has formally offered one Iraqi Brigade for service anywhere in a British formation and one for service in the L. of C."⁶

⁵*Half-Yearly Report No.42 on the Iraqi Army for the Period Ending 20th September 1943*, p.5, in PRO WO 208/1585.

⁶*Quarterly Report No.41 on the Iraqi Army for Quarter Ending 28th Feb. 1943*, p.1, in PRO WO 208/1585.

1st Division	(Baghdad)
1st Infantry Brigade	(Musaiyib)
2nd Infantry Brigade	(Baghdad)
9th Infantry Brigade	(Baghdad)
2nd bty/5th Field Artillery Brigade [4 18pdr]	(Baghdad)
1st AA Battery [6 German 20mm guns]	(Baghdad)
1st Anti-Tank Platoon	(Baghdad)
2nd Engineer Company	(Baghdad)
3rd Engineer Company	(Baghdad)
1st Labor Company	(Baquba)
1st Signal Battalion	(Baghdad)
1st Motor Transport Company	(Baghdad)
2nd Division	(Kirkuk)
4th Infantry Brigade	(Kirkuk)
5th Infantry Brigade	(Kirkuk)
Sulaimaniya Garrison [2nd Frontier Bn & 19th Mtn Bty]	(Sulaimaniya)
Rowanduz Garrison [3rd Frontier Bn]	(Rowanduz)
3rd Field Artillery Brigade [3 bty 18pdr, 1 bty 4.5"]	(Kirkuk)
9th Field Artillery Brigade [2 bty 18pdr, 2 bty 4.5"]	(Kirkuk)
2nd AA Battery [6 German 20mm guns]	(Kirkuk)
2nd Anti-Tank Platoon	(Kirkuk)
4th Engineer Company	(Kirkuk)
5th Engineer Company	(Kirkuk)
2nd Labor Company	(Kirkuk)
2nd Signal Battalion	(Kirkuk)
2nd Motor Transport Company	(Kirkuk)
1st Pack Transport Company	(Kirkuk)
2nd Pack Transport Company	(Kirkuk)
3rd Division	(Baghdad)
3rd Infantry Brigade	(Jaloula)
11th Infantry Brigade	(Mansour)
1st Field Artillery Brigade (Cadre) [3 bty 18pdr]	(Jaloula)
7th Field Artillery Brigade [2 bty 18pdr, 2 bty 4.5"]	(Mansour)
6th Mountain Artillery Brigade [3 bty 3.7"]	(Jaloula)
3rd AA Battery [4 Italian 20mm guns]	(Baghdad)
3rd Anti-Tank Platoon	(Baghdad)
1st Engineer Company	(Jaloula)
7th Engineer Company	(Jaloula)
3rd Labor Company	(Baquba)
3rd Signal Battalion	(Baquba)
3rd Motor Transport Company	(Baquba)
Mosul District	(Mosul)
6th Infantry Brigade	(Mosul)
Zakho Garrison [1st Frontier Bn]	(Zakho)
2nd Mountain Artillery Brigade [3 bty 3.7"]	(Mosul)
Shatt-al-Arab Command	(Basra)
7th Infantry Brigade	(Basra)
4th Division	(Diwaniya)
14th Infantry Brigade	(Nasiriya)
15th Infantry Brigade	(Diwaniya)
5th Field Artillery Brigade (-1 bty) [2 bty 18pdr]	(Diwaniya)
Royal Brigade of Guards	(Baghdad)
Cavalry Brigade	(Baghdad)
Mechanized Force	(Baghdad)

Clearly, the Allies could have no use for a force with, charitably put, marginal combat capabilities and requiring full logistics support. In mid-March the offer was politely declined. Within a few months, however, the Iraqis began discussing renewing the offer, this time of a single brigade to serve in Syria, not coincidentally a country over which Iraq claimed sovereignty. Although they had no immediate intention of accepting this offer the Military Mission encouraged the formation of such a unit, comprising an infantry brigade reinforced by pack transport units, a mountain artillery regiment, and an engineer company, in the hopes that it would spur further modernization of Iraqi training methods.

When the call went out for volunteers the returns were disappointing. This was soon rendered academic, however, for in the late summer of 1943 the Kurds rose in revolt against the inept and grasping local officials of the Baghdad government. From October through December the army was forced to intervene in support of the police, the force consisting of four infantry battalions, two mountain batteries, two armored car squadrons, and a mounted cavalry squadron. All thoughts of an external force were scrapped and the Iraqi Army was destined to play no role in the war against the Axis.

The army's mobile reserves for the period 1943-45 consisted of the cavalry brigade and the mechanized force. The former consisted of the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Regiments (each of a headquarters, 3 rifle squadrons, and a 6-gun Vickers MG squadron) and the 2nd Training Regiment. The brigade rarely served as a complete unit, the two line regiments being based at Jaloula and Mansour, respectively, while the brigade HQ and the training regiment were located in Baghdad.

The mechanized force consisted of a motorized infantry battalion, an armored car "regiment", a motorized artillery "brigade", a tank detachment, an armored car detachment, and service elements. The motorized battalion consisted of three rifle companies and a machine gun company, all carried in 12-ton trucks. Unfortunately, insufficient trucks were available so a platoon (with three rifle sections and a Bren section) had to be split up into two trucks, a tactically unsound procedure.

The armored car regiment fielded 35 armored cars in three line squadrons. Two of the squadrons participated in the operations in Kurdistan, acquitting themselves quite well. The armored car detachment was the former armored car company, manning the ten old Crossley vehicles, of which only 6 ran due to lack of spares. The tank detachment was the former light tank company, equipped during 1942-43 with the surviving eight Italian tankettes. In mid-1943, however, the British donated three Crusader cruiser tanks and six Mk VI light tanks, thus relegating the tankettes to driver training duties.

A new type of unit to be formed in 1943 was the anti-aircraft regiment. This was formed with two, later three, batteries each with eight 3.7" British guns. Due to the difficulty of providing trained personnel, however, the battery never reached a

high state of readiness.

From its abysmal showing in the 1941 campaign the Iraqi Army apparently did improve through the remainder of the war. The British Mission commented favorably on the cavalry, armored car and mountain artillery units that participated in the Kurdish campaign of 1943, although the opposition here was less organized and lightly armed. The Military Mission was undoubtedly correct in its assessment that an Iraqi brigade would need at least four months of intensive training before it was ready for employment even in secondary roles in an active theater. It would also have required a very careful selection of officers to weed out those large numbers of incompetent and idle types who had been chosen for their political reliability rather than their abilities. This, however, was an action the Iraqi government was unable or unwilling to undertake throughout the war.

Sources

Several works in English have dealt with the campaign in Iraq from the British perspective, the standard being the Buckley book. Until recently, however, there has been nothing published from the Arab perspective. This has been partially remedied by Dr. Hamdi's book which, although based extensively on British archival material, does make use of Arabic secondary sources.

Buckley, Christopher, Five Ventures (London, HMSO, 1977)

Hamdi, Dr. Walid M.S., Rashid Ali al-Gailani, the Nationalist Movement in Iraq 1939-1941, A Political and Military Study of the British Campaign in Iraq and the National Revolution of May 1941 (London, Darf Publishers, 1987).

The indispensable primary source for the Iraqi Army during the 1930s and 1940s is the set of reports of the British Military Mission to Iraq. These reports, which covered training, organization, deployment and roles of the army, were submitted quarterly through Report No.41 (28 Feb 43), when they became semi-annual reports. Unfortunately, there is no single set in the British archives, but an almost complete set can be assembled from various files in the Public Record Office.

PRO FO 371/21853: Quarterly Reports 22-25 (Mar 1938 - Nov 1938)

PRO FO 371/23217: Quarterly Reports 26-28 (Feb 1939 - Aug 1939)

PRO FO 371/24551: Quarterly Reports 29-32 (Nov 1939 - Aug 1940)

PRO WO 208/1585: Quarterly Reports 35-41 (Jul 1941 - Feb 1943)
Half-Yearly Reports 42 & 43 (Sep 1943 - Mar 1944)