

## **IRAQI ARMY: Myths and Realities**

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The role and place of the army in social–political life of modern Iraq and its functions in the frame of Iraqi society have been closely connected with history of formation of the national statehood in the country. As in most of the Arab countries, officership in Iraq had played one of the dominant roles in the formation of independent Iraqi state that predetermined the position of the army in its social–political life in many respects since the 20th century.

The turning point in the history of modern Iraq and its armed services was the July Coup D'etat, 1968 as a result of which the Ba'th Party had come to power in the country. During their 35–year tenure of office, the leaders of this party attended a special emphasis on the army and constantly aspired to strengthen their own positions in armed services, establish a strong system of party control over all army structures in the country. The slogan "Army for war and construction", advanced as far back as the 7th Regional Congress of the Ba'th Party (November, 1968) directed party bodies to hasten "Baathization" in the army and widely purge the managerial staff of armed services. At the same time, the activities of other parties had been banned (1).

The Ba'th Party leadership from the very outset had added to their arsenal the idea of the founder and party ideologist, M. Aflaq that military personnel should not politicize, and gradually could reduce the representation of the military in the bodies of political authority. At the same time, for strengthening of their regime, Iraqi authorities consolidated the army on the inside – in the 1980s all the commissioned and non–commissioned staff in the armed services, as well as in the security services had already become members of the Ba'th Party (2). This provision was legalized in official documents, decisions of regional congresses of the ruling party, in which it was underlined that "from the very beginning, there had been earnestly two problems before the party ... consolidation of party leadership in the army; propagation of the party principles in the ranks of the army, and its purification from all suspected and adventurist elements" (3).

Under the military doctrine of the party and national leadership of Iraq, it considered the armed services as protection from external enemies, and also as a guarantee of internal security and stability of the regime. It being noted that repressive internal functions of the armed services in most cases were becoming more dominant. Suffice it to remember that the use of the army in the suppression of the Kurdish actions, Shi'i population, etc., of the country. External functions of the army were aimed at the security of "center–force" ambitions of the ruling regime on the change of Iraq into a leading power not only in the Arab world, but also in the whole Middle East region. On the path to the achievement of this aim, Baghdad regime regarded acceptable to use all means, including political and military ones.

In order to secure long–range ambitions and aims, there had been envisaged an intensification of military potential of the country, for which long before Iran–Iraq War intensive development and realization of whole system for special military programs on equipping of the army with modern weapons and defense

technology, on its modernization on the basis of creation of highly-mechanized branches had been under way. A special emphasis was focused on the development of proper nuclear programs and creation of conditions for changing of Iraq into a nuclear power. Iraqi leadership started carrying out the policy of diversification of armaments sources and military expenses for military considerably increased.

The character of political aspect of Iraq's military doctrine was proven by the incursion of its army into Iran in 1980 that started the eight-year Iran-Iraq War and Kuwait occupation in August 1990. The Kuwait adventure cost Iraq dear, it undermined not only the military and political positions of the country in the region, but also led to further decrease of its military potentiality, limitation of military programs, and establishment of control over them. UN Security Council introduced a strict system of sanctions against Iraq that deprived it from the opportunity to reconstruct destroyed, defensive industry, and also import of ammunitions. Resolution N 661 (August 6, 1990) and following resolutions envisaged an embargo on the sale or delivery of arms and military materials of all kinds including conventional weapons and means for their production, as well as their spare parts, military technology etc.

A strict barrier was aimed at Baghdad's intentions to establish the production of weapons of mass destruction. UN Security Council's Resolution N 687 (April 3, 1991) resolved that Iraq must unconditionally consent to distract, eliminate or render harmless all chemical and biological weapons under international control, eliminate all ballistic missiles with the range above 150 km. besides, Iraq had to agree not to purchase or develop nuclear weapons (4).

After the suppression of Shi'i uprising in the south of Iraq and Kurdish anti-governmental actions in the North, the main task of the regime became a fight for its own survival gradually getting previous things put in order in the country. For this purpose, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) – superior authorities in the country accepted strategy "preservation of forces and non-participation in conflicts". It meant the maintenance of military capacity on such a level that could be enough for protection of Iraq's internal and external security within the forthcoming period. Gradually, military threat from the outside was becoming less sufficient in comparison with possible anti-regime actions in the very country.

In this connection, a rapt attention of the regime was focused on the army. In particular, it was taken into consideration that regular armed services actually compromised themselves during anti-governmental actions in the spring of 1991, without offering proper resistance to rebels.

Increased purges and the atmosphere of non-confidence and jealousy created in the ranks of the army resulted in that, many officers decided to flee from the country, mainly through Kurdish regions. Part of these officers remained there and took part in the activities against the regime.

1991 to 1997, a number of plots was disclosed with the participation of the high-ranking military, mainly those, who intended to remove the Tikrit clan from power. In summer of 1996, Iraqi special services revealed anti-regime conspiracy with the participation of army officers, in the result of which over 100 persons had been taken into custody or executed.

Because of non-confidence to the "traditional" armed services, at the same time, new military and militarized units had been organized thus creating multistage structure of force machinery. So, on the initiative and under the leadership of Saddam Hussein's elder son, fighting squads so-called "Saddam's Fidains" and "Saddamiyun" were organized in 1994. Moreover, within the "Fidains" a separate "gold battalion", in a sense, Iraqi special purpose service, and later, under the aegis of the "Fidains", also, similar militia for teen-agers- "Ashbal Saddam" had been organized.

Saddam Hussein's jealousy mainly applied to the armed forces. The next "fit" of jealousy had caused an apical crisis, defeating the regime as a result of escape of President's sons-in-law - Hussein Kamal and Saddam Kamal, also some others from the circle close to them (August, 1995) (5). In fact, of officers and employees of special services, Hussein Kamal's multiple entourages had been disgraced or reduced to the ranks or transferred to the army, backcountry districts of the country. During the "purges" in spring-summer, 1996, that had a very deep resonance, there were many originating from the ruling Tikrit clan in the army, security services, and the Republic Guard. At that, Saddam Hussein focused the preventive measures on the groupings ("center of influence"), created around his close relatives (6).

A special attention was given to the purge and renewal of "security zone" around Saddam Hussein. Apart from the President, this question was in progress by the Special Security Service (Jihaz al-Amn al-Hass), headed by Saddam Hussein's younger son Kusay (7).

In the middle of 1990s, Iraqi armed services numbered app. 400, 000 persons. Along with its standing army, the military organization of the country also included irregular troops- People's Army. It was organized as far back as 1970 and represented units of territorial type, functioning under direct control of the ruling Ba'th Party.

The scale of priority inside the armed services was as follows:

- Special Republic Guards;
- Air Force and Anti-Aircraft Defense;
- Naval Fleet and Coastal Patrolling;
- Conventional army units (8).

They had in service about 2,600 tanks, over 2000 guns of field artillery, 5,000 fighting machine infantries, about 300 combat planes, 80 small- and medium-range anti-craft rocket complexes. Armaments belonging to units and divisions mainly included foreign made weapons of outmoded types. Because of the established regime of sanctions, the flow of new machinery and spare parts had been cut off.

In order to maintain combat readiness of ground forces at a proper level, Iraqi General Headquarters of the armed services took a resolution to carry out cuts in them in 1995 (including the Republic Guards).

The influence of international sanctions seemed to be much more tangible in respect of techno-capacious types of military services- Air Force, Anti-Craft Defense, Naval Forces. Out of some 300 combat planes in

service, 130 (mainly old Soviet MiG-21, MiG-23, Su-20, SU-22) had virtually generated flying resources, over 100 of them seemed to have been in faulty condition. As a result, only 70-90 planes (MiG-25, MiG-29, Su-25) and some 100 helicopters capable of solving problems put by at a proper level could be maintained in battle-worthy condition within Iraqi Air Force (9).

Out of the rest of anti-craft missiles (mainly "zemlya-vozdukh" type Soviet rocket systems – SAM-2, SAM-3, SAM-6, SAM-8, SAM-13, and European "Roland-2" and anti-craft guns "ZSU 23-4") and radio aids were of little use for carrying out combat missions after the bombings in January-March, 1991 (10).

The staff of the Air Force and Anti-Craft Defense was subject to reduction—from 25% to 40%. In May-August 1995, the regime under private control of Saddam Hussein made an attempt to restore part of the machinery by the forces of national specialists in the network of "Nida al-Kaid" company (leader's war-cry). In order to finance it, along with the allocation of funds from National Treasury, the authorities had organized to collect donations earmarked for a special purpose from the population.

As a result of bombardments in the course of the so-called operation "Desert storm", Iraqi Naval Forces had suffered irreplaceable losses and Naval Fleet practically had been missing. Within it, there were basically light patrol boats made in Iraq, which carried out a task on patrolling of waters, directly bordering to the Iraqi coast of the Persian Gulf, water areas of the Iraq ports and the Shat-el-Arab River in that part, across which extends the border between Iran and Iraq.

Apart from the technique of the armed services, the regime was also engaged in the decision-making connected with the strengthening of moral – political spirit in the army, maintenance of its implicit loyalty and allegiance to the leadership. For this purpose, staff transfer of the officers in the armed services, touching practically all parts had been widely undertaken. The principle of recruitment of the senior officers at all levels was conducted on the basis of deep loyalty to the Ba'th regime and personal fidelity to Saddam Hussein. Special emphasis was laid on the appropriate appointments of those who originated from the ruling "at-Tikriti" or other clans from the province of Salaheddin.

Over the past years, the General Headquarters and most part of its divisions had been practically renewed, Air Force, Naval Force Commanders, and Commander-in-Chief of the Frontier troops had been replaced on their posts, a new organizational-regular structure had been introduced in the troops of the Republic Guards, according to which numerous staff changes had been made (11).

According to the data provided by the International Institute of Strategic Researches, in 1998-1999, defense spending of Iraq amounted to \$ 1, 43 and 1, 5 billion respectively, that was much for such a blockaded country (12)

Under conditions of the sanctions, the armed services had gradually conceded the role of the powerful defender of the regime to various security bodies. The most powerful structure among Iraq's special services was the Special Security Service (SSS) (Jihaz al-Amn al-Hass) headed by Saddam Hussein's

younger son Kusay and who had the power to deal with the coordination of activity of all Iraqi special services on safeguarding of the President and superior leaders of the country and the party. The Special Security Service was formed in the middle of the 1980's, following one of the serious attempts on Saddam Hussein as the security services had failed to coordinate actions. Employees were recruited basically from the "at-Tikriti" clan and the tribe so-called "ad-Duleym". Number of the employees grew from 1,000 persons in 1990 up to more 5,000 persons. Primary function of the SSS was to protect President Saddam Hussein from attempts of the army officers. For this purpose, the SSS not only watched all presidential establishments, but also kept a look-out, conducted reconnaissance in the environment of other special services and army. The SSS battalions closely cooperated with the Special Republic Guard that was liable to provide the service with heavy armament in case of serious attempt of revolution.

The second place due to importance was held by Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) (Dairat al-Muhabarati al-Amma), engaged in vigorous activities, both inside Iraq, and abroad. Twenty-eight divisions of the IIS included all traditional guidelines for action of intelligence and counterespionage (work with the local population, protection of public and party organization men, safety of delegations arriving in Iraq, watching of foreigners located in the country, external intelligence, spread of the agents into the lines of opposition and liquidation of its leaders, secret export-import transactions).

Common Security Service (CSS) (al-Amn al-Amm), notwithstanding all data available, basically supervised questions concerning internal security, was sometimes involved in realization of small-scale operations outside of Iraq. The CSS was formed as far back as the royal regime and was then part of police forces in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The CSS's term of reference provided for economic and political crimes. Before revolution of 1968, the CSS staff included professional policemen and army officers. In 1980, the post of the CSS leader was held by Saddam Hussein's cousin A.H. al-Majid who carried out "ba'thization" of the service and strengthened it with the party staff. Because of the confusion of S.Ibrahim with Saddam Hussein's stepbrother and arrest of a number of CSS personnel in 1996 on suspicion in the attempt on the President, its ascendancy strongly decreased.

For the information gathering and processing on the air and with the use of special electronic means, Electronic Intelligence Service (EIS) was organized in Iraq. During Iranian-Iraqi war, for it, special modern equipment from abroad (basically from France and Japan) was sent. According to some data, the EIS totaled about 800 employees and had at least five large overland stations of electronic intelligence in different parts of Iraq.

Apart from national special services in Iraq, also special party bodies had been organized – Security Service of the Ba'th Party and Military Bureau of the Ba'th Party. The previous had foxholes in all party organizations and was engaged in maintenance of the control of sentiments and loyalty of the party members. The latter carried out the role of political and educational body in the army, kept up party discipline and loyalty of the officers. Nominally, Saddam Hussein directly headed the Ba'th Party Military Bureau, in practice it was supervised by his deputy. In 2001, Kusay Saddam Hussein was elected deputy head of the Military Bureau.

With the purpose of supervision over the state of sentiments in the clan– tribe environment, Iraqi leadership formed the Sheikhs Bureau of Tribes (Maktab of Sheikhs) following the war in the Persian Gulf, called for consolidating the activity of tribe ruling bosses that were loyal to regime, on the suppression of opposition views, revealing and handing of dissidents out of the tribes on relevant authorities. The sheikhs of the Bureau regularly received money rewards and were often involved in contraband trade.

For creation of top elite army divisions from the elite of the Republic Guards, Saddam Hussein generated a Special Republic Guard (SRG) – the most reliable squad of defense of Baghdad and its strategic establishments, the last line of army defense of the Ba'th regime. The SRG included three brigades located in town along southern, northern and western highways, leading to Baghdad.

As used here, it is necessary to note, that the major role of the army in the life of Iraq's modern society was also recognized by Americans. Moreover, despite of numerous conversations about new democratic Iraq, Washington could give preference to establishment of an analogous military regime, only this time under US control. Some informed sources asserted that "the place of Saddam Hussein could be occupied by a general originated from Arabian Sunnite clan (13)". Thus, the representatives from circles close to Saddam Hussein no longer took into account. Another scenario, according to some experts on Iraq, had few prospects of success (14).

However, the opinion of the well-known Iraq military official T.al–Yasiri presents certain interest here which asserted that despite of seeming consolidation of Iraqi force structures in the hands of the leadership of the country, in practice they represented three large competing groupings or, as he said, " three armies". "First – Special Security Bodies – SSB, Emergency Forces (Kuvvat at–Tavaria), Special Guard (al–Himayat al–Hassa), second – Republic Guards, third – conventional military forces". "Numbering" was given in accordance with "the degree of attention of leadership, trust of effectiveness" (15).

An apparent threat of US–led large–scale operation against Iraq for the purpose of removal of the regime made authorities of the country establish a contingent of reservers' and volunteers' army, capable of rendering assistance to combat units and helping maintain internal order. The retired military at all levels were conditionally divided into "near reserve" (al–ihtiyat–al–qarib) and "far reserve" (al–ihtiyat–al–baid). There was modernization of the structure and directives of the office of special day (Dairat yaum an–Nahva), to which party personnel, employees of special services and officers involved in military training of "People's squads" had been imputed (16).

Within the frame of permanent maintenance of troops, in particular, RG (divisions "Navukhdonosor", "Khammurapi", "al–Madina al–Munavvara", "Kuvvat Allahu Akbar"), on war footing from time to time there used to be held relocation of divisions, local military maneuvers in the zones adjoining to the territory of Jordan, Syria and Kurdish provinces (17).

The success of consolidation of the army and special services in the hands of his family became introduction of Kusey Hussein into the regional leadership of the Ba'th Party with a next appointment,

promoted as Vice–Chairman of the Military Bureau (naib amin sirr al–maktab al askariy li hizb al Ba'th) (18). In fact, also taking into consideration all other posts and entrusted sites of Kusay, it meant that he was becoming the second person in the top Command of Armed forces, head of all party structures in the army, head of presidential and government guards, the main coordinator for the activity of special services, top leader of the Republic Guards.

On the eve of the beginning of the military operations, many prognoses were given for removal of Saddam Hussein's regime by US–headed coalition in respect of military and political aspects, results of the war in Iraq. To our opinion, in the context of considering the role and place of the army in modern Iraqi society, military aspect of the problem and participation of the armed forces in operations are of apparent interest.

As far as military operations and their main objective – removal of Saddam Hussein from power are considered to be final, then we can already absolutely state that the prognosis related to the successful conducting of the military operation led by US and British armed services due to their absolute military–technological superiority have been completely proven. The proposition often repeated in favor of superiority of Iraqi army, was either high moral spirit of its personnel, brought up in the spirit of national Ba'th ideology and ideas, or allegiance to the "chief leader" Saddam Hussein. However, after the military operations have stopped we can say that the army in total seemed to have not been ready for conducting military operations during steady and massive involvement of aviation and other modern means of defeat. The level of training of officer corps failed to meet standards, but constant and multiple purges and repression contributed not to the formulation and mastering of pure military skills and habits, but it resulted in its physical fright and maybe, in that condition thought of its survival.

What concerns strong and positive features of Iraqi army, experts had mentioned their skills to mask and disperse military and other establishments of great importance. But the first strike on Baghdad in the morning on March 20, when at the order of military and political leadership of Iraq all the systems of management and communication, anti–craft defense radar went over to military time, they were immediately discovered by US intelligence services and fully eliminated. It was a serious miscalculation of Iraqi Military Command that had perceived the first, rather limited strike of US Air Force as the beginning of large–scale air operations.

It was proposed that much more resolute resistance could be offered to English–American troops by Units of the Republic Guards (seven divisions) and units of task force (26,000 persons). Upon completion of military operations, many people wouldn't keep from asking this question: "Where have the Republic Guards gone?" Of course, such an important military force could not have disappeared, even more so, the losses had been insignificant. At present, we can say that it was crushed as an organized military force, the manpower of which either had left for their homes, or gone into irregular units. Maybe, in order to maintain army, especially, its elite subdivisions, Iraqi military and political command preferred to order the commanding officers to abandon all resistance. To us, only for this purpose Baghdad's defense had not been organized and severe street fighting of which all experts spoke and which frightened to some extent coalition forces, had failed.

It can be assumed that after a lapse of time, as soon as the picture of Iraq's future reconstruction is clarified, a great deal of special formations and those that have preserved the backbone of military forces will be rehabilitated as an army of new Iraq in any or another form. A lot will depend whether American–English coalition has set forth an aim to finally break Iraqi military machinery or not. But, at this stage, the forces were unable to act as a mighty force trained according to modern methods to conduct combat operations, and that which is capable of offering resistance to American–English coalition forces although it had great strength and there were enough, but old armaments.

In contrast to the army, special services, in our opinion, managed to discharge their professional liabilities and duties imposed on them. To date they could ensure security of superior party and state leadership of Iraq. Numerous rumors about the death of Saddam Hussein and his sons, and his close relatives have not been confirmed yet. Apart from catch and voluntary surrender, no massive discovery and rendering of former Iraqi party and national officials has not happened, and judging all this, it is not expected in the nearest future. Large segment of rank–and file members from wide and developed network of Iraqi special services, to us, have already been dispersed among the population, and to discover them will be real difficult.

Though we have tried to analyze the role and place of the army in modern Iraq in this article, we would like to say a few words about the Ba'th Party, ruling Iraq since July 1968 (in February–November 1963 it also ruled the country for a short period of time). The last 35–year old history of modern Iraq is fully and completely connected with the activity of this party, and only it individually and exclusively defined the country's social–economic and political development, as well as home and foreign policy.

The present collapse of one –party dictatorship Ba'th Party regime, which closely merged with the system of administrative and industrial management, has brought to substantial vacuum of power in the country. But solidly confirmed ideas and ideological doctrine, accurately developed and organized structure, and difficult political way and "stages of splits, mistakes and defeat" (19), through which the Ba'th Party has passed enables to forecast in part that after a certain period of "silence", this party will be able to restore its lost positions. The similar prognosis can also be met in the Turkish researcher G.Bachik, who had likened the Ba'th Party to the former communist parties in Eastern Europe (20). We do base our statement on the fact, that none of the political forces from wide spectrum of opposition parties or groups or organizations today has such clearly defined ideological and organizational bases, vast experience in political struggle either underground or under legal conditions. Anyhow, in case of formation of a multi–party system in Iraq, the Ba'th Party (the essence would not change because of that) will be able to be involved in political life of the country. But, to date no attempt to break up Iraq's party and political system is observed and even in this case deeply conspiratorial party structures will be able to establish their activities and ties with new leadership of the party after a short period of disorganization.

So, the war is over and Saddam Hussein's regime is on the decline, but events in Iraq and around it have not come to a logical end yet. Today one thing is clear – Iraq's future will not look like its past, and the present–day situation is a temporary occurrence and a march to another new Iraq. If the USA is able to

realize all the problems put by in corpore, then Iraq will become one of the key pro–American elements of a new strategic architecture of the Middle Eastern region.

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  3. *The Arab Nation is indivisible and it mission immortal. Socialist Arab Ba'th Party. Iraqi Region. January, 1974. Helsinki , 1975, p.112.*
  4. *S/RES/687(1991), 3 April 1991–The United National and the Iraq–Kuwait Conflict, p. 193–198.*
  5. *Two of Saddam Hussein's sons–in–law – H. Kamal, the minister of industry and mineral resources and his brother H. K. Hasan, chief of his body–guard service fled from Iraq to Jordan on August 8, 1996 and they were obliged to return on February 19, 1996 and executed three days later.*
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