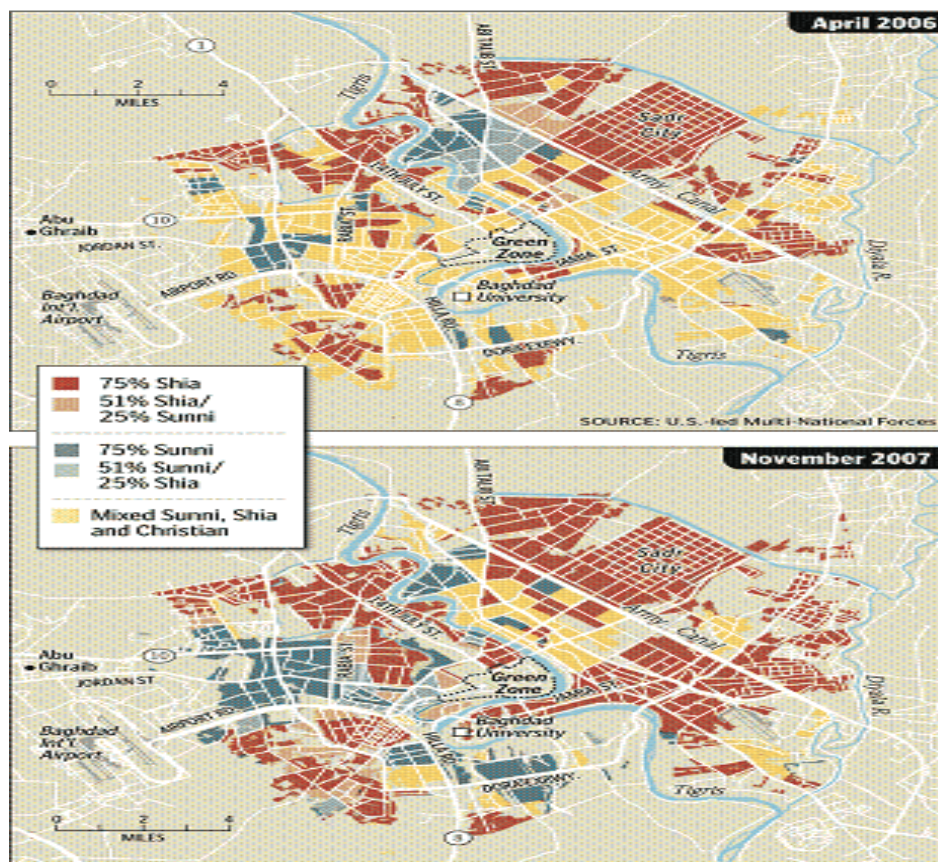




The Politicization of Iraqi Identities, Sectarian Civil War, and the Fight for Hegemony in the Levant



Disclaimer: This is a theater strategic level cultural product prepared by the US Army War College in support of US Central Command and does not necessarily reflect the views of any actual command headquarters. Please refer inquiries to Adam L. Silverman, PhD; Cultural Advisor, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. Contact information: adam.l.silverman.civ@mail.mil or 516-712-5384.



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MEMORANDUM FOR: Commandant US Army War College

SUBJECT: US Army War College Cultural Operations Report: The Politicization of Iraqi Identities, Sectarian Civil War, and the Fight for Hegemony in the Levant

1. This analysis was prepared as cultural operations support for US Central Command and the Office of the Secretary of Defense - Policy. Enclosed you will find an in depth theater strategic level analysis of the socio-cultural dynamics of the politicization of Iraqi identities, the ongoing sectarian civil war in Iraq, and its relation to the proxy fight between Saudi Arabia and Iran for hegemony in the Levant.
2. The Cultural Advisor at the US Army War College, in conjunction with Mr. Gene Martinelli, has prepared this report from open source materials from a variety of sources. Citations will be found as footnotes throughout the text.

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Introduction

The seeds of the current sectarian crisis in Iraq were sown before the US surged troops in 2007 in response to the ongoing Iraqi insurgency. Some of Iraq's current problems stem from the ideologically driven attempt to use Iraq's reconstruction as a laboratory to test the efficacy of politically partisan American political, social, and economic concepts.¹ Other Iraqi problems are directly related to both the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the manner in which Iraq was recreated beginning in 2004 and continuing through the Surge, the 2009 provincial elections, the 2010 and 2014 Iraqi parliamentary/national elections.² The events in Iraq, like those in Syria, are also part of a larger regional struggle for influence and power between Saudi Arabia and Iran,³ as well as more minor players like Qatar.⁴

The purpose of this US Army War College Cultural Operations Report is to examine how Iraqi identity solidified into sectarianism after the US invasion in 2003. We will also examine how the electoral systems, politics, and outcomes, especially those of 2009 and 2010, contributed to this sectarianization of identity. Additionally, we will examine how Prime Minister (PM) Maliki has manipulated these systems on behalf of himself, his party, and his coalition, which has exacerbated the cracking of Iraqi culture. Finally, we will discuss the policy and strategy ramifications arising from a more robust socio-cultural understanding of the ongoing Iraqi sectarian violence and crises in the Levant.

It is important to keep in mind that the ongoing violence in Iraq, whether by the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS), former Ba'athists, including former senior Iraqi military officers, the more tribal and often rural Sunni and Shi'a that Coalition Forces partnered with during and after the Surge, or the Sadrists Jaish al Mahdi (JAM), is all part of a larger set of events within the Levant. The events

¹ Naomi Klein, "Baghdad Year Zero: Pillaging Iraq in Pursuit of a Neocon Utopia", *Harpers*, SEP 2004, <http://harpers.org/archive/2004/09/baghdad-year-zero/>, *CPA Official Documents*, Coalition Provisional Authority, <http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/>, L. Elaine Halchin, *The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA): Origin, Characteristics, and Institutional Authorities*, Congressional Research Service, 6 JUN 2005, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32370.pdf>.

² Joshua Holland, "An Iraqi Perspective: How America's Destruction of Iraqi Society led to Today's Chaos," *Moyer's and Company*, 20 JUN 2014, <http://billmoyers.com/2014/06/20/an-iraqi-perspective-how-americas-destruction-of-iraqi-society-led-to-todays-chaos/>.

³ Philip Giraldi, "Who's Turning Syria's Civil War into a Jihad?", *The American Conservative*, 28 FEB 2013, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/whos-turning-syrias-civil-war-into-a-jihad/>.

⁴ "Iraq Accuses Qatar of Financing Jihadist Groups in Syria", *Foreign Policy's The Cable*, 4 MAR 2013, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/03/04/iraq_accuses_qatar_of_financing_jihadi_groups_in_syria.



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that we are witnessing in Iraq cannot be separated from those in Syria. Just as the flow of Iraqi refugees in Syria after 2004 placed increasing stress on Syrian society and government,⁵ so too have the return of some of these Iraqis, as well as a flow of Syrians fleeing their civil war into Iraq, further stressed and strained Iraq's social, political, economic, and religious institutions.⁶ Moreover, the dispute in Syria is not merely a civil war. It is also a proxy war for influence and hegemony between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The ongoing violence in Iraq also exists within this regional rivalry over whether the Levant will be within both a Saudi and Wahhabi Sunni or an Iranian and Twelver Shi'a sphere of influence.⁷

The Differential Social Organization of the Levant

A society is differentially socially organized when it has developed institutions, social/societal structures, norms, and the resulting identities and behaviors that allow its people to survive living in the conditions that are prevalent and extant in the states within which they reside. These conditions can include, but may not be limited to, a society that is uncertain, capricious, despotic, tyrannical, and/or authoritarian, formally or informally theocratic, as well as poor and economically deprived. Societies and their sub-cultural components develop differential social organization in order to survive in the political, social, religious, and economic environments they have had to live in; *it is a survival mechanism!*

Authoritarian, despotic, and/or tyrannical states are not disorganized or malorganized, rather they are organized in line with the structural conditions that are found there. They are differentially organized, and possess a set of behavioral drivers (values) that are rooted in the social, political, economic, religious, and physical characteristics that exist within these states and the surrounding region. Together they create the conditions for the development of values that are specific to that state, its society, and its sub-cultures.⁸ Once this occurs the normal process of social learning takes over and transmits these alternative forms of organizations - norms, values, institutions, etc - which are then facilitated through associational life, imitation, and reinforcement for

⁵ Faisal al Maqdid, "Iraqi Refugees in Syria", *FMR Iraq Special Issue*, <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/08.pdf>.

⁶ *Syrian Crisis Iraq Impact Assessment: IOM*, International Office of Migration, 4 OCT 2013, <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2013/pbn-listing/syrian-crisis-iraq-impact-assess.html>.

⁷ Adam L. Silverman, *Syria and the Levant: After the Civil War*, US Army War College Cultural Operations Report, MAR 2013.

⁸ Edwin Sutherland (1974), *Criminology*, JB Lippincott Company. This is adapted from Sutherland's original formulation, which was focused on the study of neighborhoods that have high levels of deviance, delinquency, and crime.



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engaging in these different behaviors that are consistent with the differentially organized nature of these societal elements.⁹

Differential social organization will manifest itself within the Levant in several ways. Regardless of the outcome of Iraqi sectarian violence or the Saudi/Iranian proxy war, Iraq's differential social organization will partially determine what actually emerges as a new normal as the Iraqis seek to fully transition from the tyrannical, authoritarian, and/or despotic forms of governance and society that they have been experiencing for several generations into something else. Hopefully this will be a more liberal, democratic, and free social, political, economic, and religious system. The differential social organization in the other Levantine states will drive their abilities to respond to the humanitarian crisis, specifically in responding to inflows of refugees that are the result of the Iraqi sectarian crisis, as well as the officially declared Syrian Civil War. This will be especially important in regard to Lebanon and Jordan, which are already beginning to show signs of stress and instability as a result of the inflow of first Syrian and now Iraqi refugees.

The Iraqis have been living in a society that has been socially, politically, economically, religiously, and physically distorted by over forty years of military and civilian authoritarianism and a decade of war and occupation, in order to protect and preserve the privileges of several different dictators and sects. These have often been the Sunnis, but most recently the Shi'a, specifically the exile Shi'a who had sought shelter and support in Iran¹⁰ and who had limited indigenous support – even from Iraq's non-exile Shi'a.¹¹ Overall the Iraqis are socialized and normalized to this structural and behavioral reality. In many ways these differentially organized response mechanisms created a de facto Iraqi identity of accommodation, opposition, and/or survival to Saddam Hussein's tyrannical rule, albeit a weak one. The switch from Sunni to Shi'a domination, especially exile Shi'a who are supported by Iran, has contributed to the current dispute. And while they certainly have an understanding and appreciation of what freedom and liberty are or could be (depending on their own life experiences of travel, study, and/or living abroad), as Iraqis in Iraq, many, if not most given the youth bulge, have lived only under this set of structural and ideational conditions.

⁹ Akers, Ronald L. and Adam L. Silverman (2004), "Toward a Social Learning Model of Violence and Terrorism." In *Violence: From Theory to Research*. Margaret A. Zahn, Henry H. Brownstein, and Shelly L. Jackson (eds). Anderson Publishing.

¹⁰ Brian Katulis, Marc Lynch, and Peter Juul, *Iraq's Political Transition After the Surge: Five Enduring Tensions and Key Challenges*, SEP 2008.

¹¹ Adam L. Silverman, "Preliminary Results from the Voices of the Mada'in: A Tribal History and Study of one of Baghdad's Six Rural Districts", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, VOL 23, NO 2, JUN 2010.



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Whatever happens in Iraq over the next several months in terms of who will stay in or come to power will be bound within the context of a population that has been treated and ruled despotically and tyrannically. When they do finally break free and set up new systems and institutions and remake their societies, despotically treated populations often set up new tyrannies or take a long time to exorcise the despotic, tyrannical, and authoritarian impulses from their structures, institutions, norms, and values. Additionally, they will coalesce their support around those who assert that they can meet both new and increased societal expectations for political inclusion, economic growth, etc. When these expectations are not met, or are not met in a way that is acceptable, the process is likely to begin again. Similar cycles caused by different social, political, economic, and/or religious conditions have occurred in a number of other states. For instance, Egypt since the fall of Mubarak, as well as several states that have had color revolutions, have all experienced some variant of this process.

The Analytical Cultural Framework for Strategy and Policy (ACFSP)

The ACFSP has three component parts: **identity**, **political culture and social institutions**, and **resilience**. **Identity** seeks to provide the focus and clarity on the “who am I,” or in this case of societal/state level analysis, the “who are we” question. Identity is formed when individuals collectively coalesce around a set of commonalities, which can be either objective or subjective. These can be based on ethno-national, ethno-religious, ethno-linguistic, gender, class, caste, kinship (family, clan, tribe, etc.), locality, nation, region, religion, and/or other ideational constructs. Once a substantial number of individuals create, learn, and adopt a given identity or set of identities, structural and institutional development begins to take place. The **Political Culture and Social Institutions** lens seeks to capture the political, social, religious, economic, kinship/familial, military, and other structures within a given society. It refers to the socially constructed systems that provide patterns and boundaries to the daily life of the identities in question. As they develop, grow, stabilize, and in some cases atrophy and/or disappear over time they then influence the identities; locking in identity or forcing it to change depending on the circumstances. By privileging political culture, it recognizes that the decision making institutions are often the most important at the strategic level. An understanding of **Resilience** provides strategic thinkers, analysts, and decision makers with information focused on how malleable is any given society to external or internal political, economic, social, diplomatic, informational, and/or military pressure. Moreover, resilience also refers to any given society’s institutional ability to cope with these internal and external pressures, as well as other manmade or natural ones. In regards to the socio-cultural study of potential Iraqi outcomes the most important ACFSP analytical components are identity and political culture and social institutions.



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Iraqi Electoral Manipulation and the Unmaking of Iraqi Identity

The removal of Saddam Hussein, the dismantling of his government, and the US imposed ban on former Ba'athists participation in the new and/or future Iraqi governments or military were the primary drivers behind the unraveling of Iraqi identity into full sectarianism.¹² This dynamic of unraveling, where differential social organization, identity, and political culture all collide, was further reinforced by the 2005 and 2010 Iraqi parliamentary/national elections, as well as the 2009 Iraqi provincial elections. In all three cases, PM Maliki, in conjunction with the exile Shi'a parties that were part of his coalition and had no real indigenous and non-exile Iraqi support, sought to further marginalize the former Ba'athists, as well as more rural and tribal Sunni and Shi'a in an attempt to consolidate power and coup-proof himself. These efforts were essentially an attempt to institutionalize the increasingly sectarian nature of Iraqi identity and capitalize on these divisions and the upheaval of the 2006 through 2008 insurgency.

The largely tribal and more rural Sunni, as well as their Shi'a relations and allies, largely sat out the 2005 Iraqi elections. The boycott of the elections was most pronounced in Anbar Province and was intended to demonstrate solidarity against what was believed to have been an unjust process, specifically the use of a closed list election process. As a result a large proportion of Iraqi Sunnis, and some Iraqi Shi'a, especially those who had not gone into exile, were locked out of representation within Iraq's interim government. This was despite the interim government being formed as a unity government.¹³ The results, as well as a concerted effort by al Qaeda affiliated groups to manipulate and capitalize on the situation by mobilizing these locked out communities, gave birth to the Sunni insurgency. Moreover, US responses to the al Qaeda/tribal alliance began to demonstrate that wittingly or unwittingly Coalition Forces, and especially the American authorities, were willing to support and protect a government built around political parties that had been supported and funded by Iran as exile Shi'a opposition to Saddam Hussein.

This alliance between al Qaeda in Iraq and the tribal Sunni did not break until the al Qaeda elements tried to replicate the activities they had utilized in Afghanistan. Iraqi tribal relations are not like Afghan, and specifically Pashtun, kinship dynamics, which are diffuse and decentralized.¹⁴ When al Qaeda in Iraq

¹² Holland, 2014.

¹³ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraqi Elections, Government, and Constitution*, Congressional Research Service, 20 NOV 2006, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/76838.pdf>.

¹⁴ *My Cousin's Enemy is My Friend: A Study of Pashtun "Tribes" in Afghanistan*, US Army Human Terrain System - Afghanistan Research Reachback Center, SEP 2009.



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personnel tried to break into the Iraqi tribal leadership through marriage, other alliances, cooption through the provision of resources, and intimidation they found a kinship dynamic that was much more resilient than in Afghanistan. Moreover, the bungling way in which they handled this simply angered the Iraqis. This created the opening for the Anbar Awakenings. After several attempts reaching back to 2004-2005, the Anbar tribes managed to achieve support from the US for an alliance.¹⁵

A concerted effort was made by Coalition Forces to ensure that the next round of Iraqi elections, for provincial government positions in 2008 and delayed until 2009, would not have the same result of both self-inflicted and externally directed disenfranchisement. Unfortunately the negotiations for establishing the 2008 provincial election rules took place at the same time as the ill-fated attempts to negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Moreover, they both fell prey to the same set of machinations by an exile Shi'a-dominated Iraqi government. This government, as a result of both how the 2005 election was conducted and the election's results, had brought to power a coalition of exile Shi'a groups, aligned with a small Sunni exile group, and the Kurds. The bulk of this unity government, aside from the Kurdish members, had absolutely no indigenous Iraqi constituency or support. As a result of the machinations of the parties in power the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) established a very peculiar set of rules for the provincial elections: open list/proportional representation (OLPR) system.

The Provincial Elections Enabling Law, passed 24 SEP 2008, established a hybrid election system: open list/proportional representation. This was intended to remedy the electoral and political shortcomings of the closed list system that was used in the 2005 elections, which contributed to the boycott of those elections. Unfortunately, this type of rarely used electoral system was not what US officials had been pushing for. The adoption of this type of election procedure was one of many Iraqi administrative rebellions against the US occupation in 2008. OPLR systems, while better than the closed list system, are not a significant improvement over the closed list system. In OPLR systems the number of people running from one party, for each open seat, affects the outcome. This occurs by weighting the results against those in smaller parties, who cannot stand a full roster for election, or individual candidates. Consequently, an individual candidate's ability to be elected is smaller than if they had run in just an open list system, even if they personally receive a larger percentage of the vote than

¹⁵ Scott Horton, "Talking to Terrorists: Six Questions for Mark Perry," *Harper's Magazine*, 23 MAR 2010, http://harpers.org/blog/2010/03/_talking-to-terrorists_-six-questions-for-mark-perry/.



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candidates affiliated with a party.¹⁶ One result of this structural inequality in the relative weight of each ballot is that the electoral system is still skewed in favor of those individuals affiliated with large political parties who currently hold office.¹⁷ Think of this as the electoral equivalent of a cycling team protecting the team's and the team leader's position from the other teams in the peloton. Candidates affiliated with parties running a full slate of candidates for open seats have a greater chance of winning because the candidates below them "push" them forward on the electoral roster, like cycling teams do before a break out.

As the outcome of the election was announced it became clear that many Iraqis, who were bombarded with unqualified media reports of an open election, had their expectations raised, only to have them dashed when they saw little to no change in the actual elected representation in the provincial governments. This actually led to a small scale and localized return to fighting by the Anbar Awakenings members who had either run or supported their compatriots. A deal was quickly struck to change select outcomes in Anbar as if the election had solely been open list.

What was as significant, if not always clearly reported, was that PM Maliki had begun rounding up Awakenings and Sons of Iraq personnel who were forming political parties and/or running for office. This was part of a larger effort by PM Maliki against both the Awakenings and the Sons of Iraq. He had heard what we had chosen to ignore, that as far back as the Fall of 2007 the Awakenings leaders were clearly saying that once the US was out of the way they were going to settle scores against the Shi'a, specifically the exile Shi'a.¹⁸ The anti-Awakenings and anti-Sons of Iraq activity would continue unabated over the next several years. It became a persistent way for PM Maliki to try to disenfranchise potential rivals and further fortify himself against a potential coup. As is often the case, eventually what a despotic government does to keep control also becomes the way in which it loses control. This seems to be the case with Iraq. By attempting to isolate the tribal and more rural Sunni, and their non-exile Shi'a relations and allies, and keep them from attaining power, PM Maliki further enflamed their sense of disenfranchisement. This significantly contributed to a hardening of the sectarian identities that had come to the fore with the US invasion and occupation. Maliki's rational actions to protect himself, his government, and his party fertilized the seeds the US had planted for an extended period of instability and violence in Iraq.

¹⁶ Sam Parker (as "Iraqologist"), *Not So Open*; abumuwaqamma.com, 25 SEP 2008.

¹⁷ UN Factsheet 4: Free Vote Open List Proportional Representation,

¹⁸ Marc Lynch, "Sunni World", *The Prospect*, 13 SEP 2007, <http://prospect.org/article/sunni-world>.



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In the run-up to the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary/national elections the major question was if “the powers that are - Dawa, SIIC/Badr, the Kurdistan Alliance, and the Iraqi Islamic Party – would be able to further consolidate their power and positions against the powers that aren’t - the Sawha/Sons of Iraq/traditional and tribal Sunni and Shi’a, as well as the Sadrists?”¹⁹ While the 2010 Iraqi elections were run on a straightforward party list system, no single party won an outright majority. As is the case with most parliamentary systems, the party with the largest plurality was given the chance to form a governing coalition. This was Ayad Allawi’s Iraqiya Party. Before Allawi could form such a coalition, PM Maliki, whose government had already excluded over 500 candidates from the 2010 elections, then reinstated some of them, declared three of the winning members of the Iraqiya slate to be terrorists, issued arrests warrants for them.²⁰ This turned Allawi’s winning plurality into a losing one – Maliki’s list now had a greater number of elected individuals.²¹ PM Maliki’s efforts to retain power only served to further exacerbate the already strained sectarian relations. Moreover, the outcome of the election reinforced the impression that the new Maliki led government, like the previous one, would be made up of an exile Shi’a majority, whose real patron was Iran. Given that the ultimate resolution of the election and the formation of the governing coalition was done in Iran, under the auspices of Iran’s Supreme Religious Authority, it is easy to understand why Iraqi Sunnis, as well as the non-exile Shi’a, felt they had been locked out of governing in post-occupation Iraq.

Iraq 2014: Sectarian Revolt, Extremist Violence, and the Reordering of Iraqi State and Society

The current events in Iraq, pitting the government of PM Maliki against former Ba’athists locked out of the process by Coalition Provisional Authority decrees; traditional, tribal, and rural Sunnis and their non-exile Shi’a allies and relations; and the jihadi forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and al Shams, is a direct result of the unraveling of Iraq’s socio-cultural cohesion. This began fully with the US invasion in 2003, but was foreshadowed by earlier US attempts to promote both the Iraqi Kurds and Shi’a to rebel against Saddam Hussein. The manipulation of

¹⁹ These are the classifications used by Professor Marc Lynch at his blog Abu Aardvark and Dr. Sam Parker when he blogged at Abu Muqawama. Despite the Sadrists control of at least 10% of parliament Lynch and Parker persuasively argue that they were largely locked out of power due to the aftermath of the Basra campaign, anti-Sadr edicts, and Iranian influence on Muqtada al Sadr himself.

²⁰ Full disclosure – Both contributors know two of these three elected, but now fugitive, Iraqi parliamentarians: Brigadier General (ret) Qais Shather Khemees al Jabouri and Kadem Attiya al Shamori.

²¹ Ned Parker, “In Iraq, Newly Elected Lawmaker Target of Arrest Warrant”, *The Los Angeles Times*, 1 APR 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/01/world/la-fg-iraq-accused2-2010apr02>



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Iraqi electoral systems by the Iranian aligned and supported exile Shi'a parties and their leaders, PM Maliki and Ayatullah Hakim, as well as the use of the power of the state to settle scores against the Awakenings and Sons of Iraq, further contributed to the unraveling. Moreover, the attempts to keep these movements weakened and locked out of the political system have all furthered the unraveling of Iraqi national identity into sectarian and tribal associations.

There are really three different challenges to the legitimacy of the Iraqi state. The first is violence by the former Ba'athists. It is led by the Sufi al Douris and includes former Saddam era Iraqi soldiers who are members of the Sufi Naqshbandi Order.²² The second challenge, which is related to and seems to be partially allied with the first, is from the Sunni and Shi'a of the former Awakenings and Sons of Iraq movement. Many of these Iraqis are also locked out of post-occupation Iraqi government because of prior affiliations, through jobs or military service during Saddam Hussein's long, tyrannical rule. These are both part of a straightforward rebellion against the status quo represented by the exile Shi'a party at the center of PM Maliki's governing coalition.

The third challenge is that of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams. The actions of ISIS seem to have provided the most recent catalyst and created the opportunity for the other two groups to challenge the status quo. ISIS may garner many of the most enticing headlines, but the real fight in Iraq is between the former Ba'athists and the Awakenings/SOI against the Maliki government. This fight is about what Iraqi state and society will become going forward. The violence, as unpleasant as it is to contemplate, is part of the process of state and societal formation. It will be used to determine who gets to be an Iraqi and who gets excluded. Moreover, as was the case in the over a thousand years of state and societal formation and reformation in Europe, as well as the often violent first 150 to 200 years of the US, the process is likely to be iterative. One or more groups will achieve some level of victory, form a new government, establish new rules, and attempt to consolidate their gains. Given the depth and breadth of the differential social organization of Iraq it is likely that this process will not all happen at once.

It is also likely that ISIS, while creating the opening for the former Ba'athists and the tribal Sunni and their non-exile Shi'a allies and relations to take action, is really the sideshow of the activities in Iraq. ISIS's main strength comes not from Iraqis, but from a variety of non-Iraqi fighters. Its vanguard appears to be 1,000

²² "Iraq Crisis: ISIS Allies Turn on Jihadis, 17 Killed in Clashes Near Kirkuk", *The Telegraph*, 21 JUN 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10916360/Iraq-crisis-Isis-seize-Syria-border-crossing-as-Obama-blames-Iraqi-government-for-sectarian-divisions-latest.html>.



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hardened, radicalized Chechens.²³ Moreover, as is so often the case with the reactionary jihadi movements, their attempts to impose their extreme understanding of Islam over the areas they control often serves to alienate the Muslims they claim to have liberated. Additionally, it violates the rules pertaining to ijma or consensus, which governs how each community of Sunni Muslims interpret and establish Sharia for their community.²⁴ Given that Iraqi Islamic practice is highly intertwined with Iraqi kinship and tribal dynamics,²⁵ ISIS is likely to wear out its welcome as quickly as al Qaeda in Iraq did. While ISIS most likely believes that it has mobilized the former Ba'athists, tribal Sunnis and their non-exile Shi'a allies and relations, the reality is more likely to be that the latter groups are using ISIS and will run them out of Iraq once they begin to try to impose their purified version of Islam just as they did with al Qaeda in Iraq beginning in 2006.

Implications for US Policy and Strategy

Simply put, it is exceedingly difficult for an outside actor to remake someone else's society. It is possible, and often quite easy, to break another culture and its systems of governance, society, economics, etc., but it is very hard to rebuild it from the outside. Even within the same general state and society this is a very tenuous proposition. For instance, it took almost 100 years after the end of the American Civil War to actually codify the Civil War Amendments into statutory law and it then took the directed power of the state to force this new reality into being. This took place within the same, supposed, society and engendered both hostility and prolonged low-level political violence. Even now these issues, which are really issues of who is an American, are not fully settled, as seen by attempts to legislatively, judicially, and practically roll back the civil and voting rights successes that took so long to put in place. If, as Americans, we cannot even completely reconstruct ourselves after 150 years, let alone the hundreds of thousands dead on Civil War battlefields and as the result of anti-minority, anti-immigrant, and anti-labor extremism and violence, it is unlikely that we or anyone else can remake Iraqi society, and the Iraqi state, from the outside.

²³ "Who are the ISIS Militants?", *The BBC*, 16JUN2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27797667>.

²⁴ W. Patrick Lang, "Powerpoint on Islamic Religion in Iraq", *Sic Semper Tyrannis (A Committee of Correspondence)*, 20 JUN 2014, http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_semper_tyrannis/2014/06/ppt-on-islamic-religion-in-iraq.html.

²⁵ Adam L. Silverman, "Preliminary Results from the Voices of the Mada'in: A Tribal History and Study of one of Baghdad's Six Rural Districts", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, VOL 23, NO 2, JUN 2010.



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There is also the matter that no one in Iraq really trusts us. From the point of view of the Ba'athists, we are the invaders and occupiers that overturned the government they belonged to and stripped them of their positions, jobs, and status. We turned them out of the Iraqi Army and forbade them from ever being able to fully participate in the governance or protection of their own state. In the case of the Sunnis and non-exile Shi'a from the Awakenings and Sons of Iraq, we betrayed them to PM Maliki and the Government of Iraq by failing to heed their warnings about Maliki's true intentions of wanting control over the Sons of Iraq program as a way to identify and target Sunni and non-exile Shi'a opposition. Additionally, we empowered the exile Shi'a parties in a way that privileged them over the Iraqis who had stayed behind and had to live with Saddam Hussein's long, tyrannical rule. ISIS, an ultra-reactionary and extreme offshoot of al Qaeda, has no interest in working with us for theological and ideological reasons.

Additionally, the Maliki government does not trust us, did not want the US to stay in Iraq past 2011, which is why they slow walked the SOFA agreement, and is beholden to Iran. The Iranians do not want us complicating matters for them in attempting to maintain and consolidate their near abroad and Shi'a sphere of influence in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. They, and especially their most powerful, influential, and effective field commander and strategist, Major General Qassem Suleimani, do not trust us. From his perspective the US made him lose face by rejecting the Iranian overtures to the US he pushed for and made on behalf of his government between 2001 and 2003.²⁶

The Kurds are also not interested in our help. They have quietly moved into Kirkuk, appear to have cut a side deal with the Erdogan government,²⁷ and are moving to formalize the fait accompli on the ground – the independent state of Kurdistan.²⁸ All US intervention could do is complicate the long game they have been playing towards full self-determination, independence, and statehood.

What the US does have to be concerned about, however, is the instability that accompanies the crisis in Iraq and the Syrian Civil War does not spread further throughout the Levant. While the Cold War era Domino Theory turned out to be more myth than reality, the analogy is better suited for current events in the

²⁶ Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander", *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?currentPage=all.

²⁷ Sophia Jones and Ryan Grim, "Turkey Would Support Iraqi Kurds' Bid for Self Rule, Spokesman Says in Historic Remark", *The Huffington Post*, 17 JUN 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/17/turkey-kurdistan_n_5504309.html?utm_hp_ref=tw.

²⁸ "Iraq's Kurdish Leader Says its Time for Self-Determination," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 JUN 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraqs-kurdish-leader-says-its-time-for-self-determination/25432870.html>.



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Levant. The humanitarian crises caused by these two related conflicts, as well as the enormous number of refugees, have the ability to destabilize Lebanon and Jordan. Either state could destabilize if it becomes overwhelmed by the humanitarian demands made by the needs of the refugees. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the Emir of Qatar is attempting to prosecute his disagreement with Saudi Arabia by continuing to fund the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Levant and the Greater Middle East.²⁹ These activities have the ability to weaken the Hashemite Monarchy in Jordan, as well as continue to exacerbate the Syrian Civil War. Should Lebanon or Jordan appear to falter, both the Israelis and the Turks will have to move to protect their own interests and try to contain the crises. Moreover, the effects on the always precarious Palestinian Authority could further enflame the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. It could also jeopardize the new and fragile agreement between Fatah and Hamas by further increasing the tensions between the two groups.

As a result of these realities, the US should establish a policy of containment in order to prevent the Levantine dominos from falling. It should attempt to contain the crisis, as well as the proxy war for hegemony between the Saudis and the Iranians, within Syria and Iraq. As such it should adopt a strategy that includes providing appropriate humanitarian assistance, but should avoid providing significant military support. This includes providing military support to the Syrian rebels. Many of those now fighting in Iraq had been fighting in Syria. As such it will be virtually impossible to provide substantial material support to the Syrian rebels, while preventing it from making its way into the hands of the various factions fighting in Iraq. The US should also provide significant support to the Jordanians, Lebanese, Turks, Israelis, and, perhaps, the Arab Gulf states. This should include not just foreign internal defense support, but also significant amounts of military, law enforcement, and civilian types of building partner capacity assistance. By doing so the US will be able to better enable these states and societies to resist the potential contagion that is currently ongoing in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the US should engage with its regional partners to pursue a policy of containment. This would leverage the diplomatic lever of power in order to better prevent the crisis from spreading beyond Syria and Iraq. The US should also engage with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar in order to try to reduce their current conflict and its negative influence throughout the region. Finally, this should all be tethered so as to achieve the effect of containing the rebellions, sectarian disputes, and civil wars that are currently raging in Iraq and Syria. Doing so would help to mitigate and retard the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran for hegemony in the region.

²⁹ Christa Case Bryant, "Behind Qatar's Bet on the Muslim Brotherhood", *CS Monitor*, 18 APR 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2014/0418/Behind-Qatar-s-bet-on-the-Muslim-Brotherhood>.



Contributors

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