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ISIS in Iraq: What We Get Wrong and Why 2015 Is Not 2007 Redux

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On September 10, 2014, President Barack Obama outlined the inchoate U.S. strategy to "degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group known as ISIL [the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as ISIS or the Islamic State]."[1] At the core of that strategy, in both Iraq and Syria, is a systematic campaign of air strikes against ISIS, coupled with support for local "partner forces" fighting ISIS on the ground. Subsequent analysis and policy attention have focused largely on the campaign in Syria. This is partly due to the challenge of identifying effective local partner forces in the midst of the complex Syrian civil war. But it is also because U.S. policy makers tend to believe that they understand Iraq, after having occupied the country for more than eight years.

I argue that several assumptions or conventional understandings that are guiding U.S. intervention in Iraq are incorrect or, at best, incomplete, in ways that make the emerging strategy against ISIS unlikely to be successful. These include assumptions about the nature of the insurgency, the conditions under which Iraqi tribes might turn against ISIS, and the relationship between Sunni Arabs and the Iraqi government. These assumptions are reinforced in Washington by people with experience in Iraq during the occupation. But successfully countering ISIS in Iraq requires understanding its complex relationship with the Sunni Arab community and recognizing that strategies that worked to reduce violence in 2007–8 might not succeed today.

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This Brief explores three assumptions about ISIS in Iraq that are common in the media and in Washington policy circles and undergird the developing American-led strategy. They are:

1. ISIS is foreign to Iraq, and ideological fissures will splinter the current alliance of convenience between Islamists and secular Baathist insurgents;

2. ISIS is so extreme that it will inevitably alienate Sunni Arabs living under its rule; and

3. Iraq has formed a more inclusive government in order to reach out to Sunni Arabs.

The Brief examines the origin of each assumption in the American experience of occupation and considers why each is no longer correct, if it ever was. It concludes with a discussion of how these problematic assumptions have shaped American strategy for identifying additional local partner forces who might, with air support, take and hold territory from ISIS.

Assumption #1: ISIS is foreign to Iraq, and ideological fissures will splinter the current alliance of convenience between Islamists and secular Baathist insurgents.

ISIS developed out of a string of predecessor insurgent organizations that operated in Iraq between 2003 and 2013, most notably "al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers," commonly known as AQI.[2] Although Iraqis over time increasingly filled the cadres of AQI, the organization's leadership and early fighters were largely non-Iraqi Arabs, including its most well-known leaders, the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (d. 2006) and the Egyptian Abu Ayyub al-Masri (d. 2010), as well as the leaders of the wider al-Qaeda network.

During the occupation, counterinsurgent analysts typically distinguished between violent Islamist groups in Iraq, including AQI, and what they considered to be secular Iraqi nationalist insurgent groups. This latter category included Baath Party loyalists hoping to return to power, as well as what were often informally described by occupation officials as POIs, or "pissed-off Iraqis": former public sector employees and soldiers who had lost their jobs, families who felt disrespected by counterinsurgent activities, and Iraqi nationalists motivated to resist foreign occupation. Islamist and nationalist insurgents often engaged in pragmatic alliances of convenience; but as in most civil wars, "red-on-red" violence between insurgents ostensibly on the same side was common.

After ISIS rapidly seized Mosul and much of Northern Iraq in June 2014, analysts and the media largely portrayed this advance as resulting from a pragmatic alliance of convenience between ISIS and secular Baath Party loyalists, most notably the Men of the Army of the Naqshbandia Order (widely known as JRTN, an acronym of the Romanization of the group's Arabic name) and former officers from Saddam's Republican Guard. The JRTN is reportedly led by Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, the most prominent member of the former Baath regime to have evaded being captured or killed. A New York Times headline dubbed the alliance "uneasy" and said "the two sides are unlikely to coexist if they should attain power in some areas" because "the Baathists, being more secular and more nationalist, have no interest in living under the harsh Islamic law that ISIS has already started to put in place in Mosul."[3] Indeed, Baathism

is often described as a secular, pan-Arab movement historically hostile to Islamism. In subsequent weeks, the media and policy makers paid close attention to the situation in Iraq, watching for any evidence of an expected falling-out between ISIS and its allies, owing either to ideological fissures or to fears that their ally was becoming too powerful. This expectation, however, was based on an incorrect understanding of this so-called alliance.

ISIS is different from its predecessor organizations in several important ways. First, it is led by Iraqis and these Iraqis are almost all former Baathists. The most thorough publicly available information on the leadership structure of ISIS comes from flash drives taken from the home of the organization's military chief of staff for Iraq, who was killed in a raid by the Iraqi military in Mosul in early June 2014.[4] Nineteen of the twenty known top ISIS leaders at that time—including the entire cabinet, those serving in the war office, and the governors of Iraqi territory[5]—were from Iraq; the only exception was a Syrian in charge of ISIS's media relations unit.[6] Approximately one-third of those nineteen leaders were officers in Saddam Hussein's military; several others were officers in Iraqi intelligence agencies.

The self-proclaimed Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has two deputies. The first, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, oversees the Iraqi provinces and was either a lieutenant colonel or a general in Saddam's military intelligence (the *istikhbarat*, or Directorate of General Military Intelligence), and also spent time as a Special Forces officer in the Special Republican Guard. The second deputy, Abu Ali al-Anbari, who oversees Syrian provinces, was a major general in the Iraqi military. Most, if not all, of the nineteen were members of the Baath party.

ISIS's stunning battlefield success is not the result of an unstable alliance of convenience between ideologically incompatible predispositions, one Islamist and one secular. It is a result of ISIS fully incorporating former Baathists into its organizational structure without diluting its ideological commitments. ISIS's leadership ranks include experts in traditional military command and control and logistics as well as seasoned Islamist insurgents. Two months after it called the ISIS-Baath alliance "uneasy," the New York Times recognized that ISIS "is in effect a hybrid of terrorists and an army."[7]

How did these supposedly secular Baathist officers end up as leaders in a radical Islamist organization like ISIS? Several were imprisoned by U.S. forces during the occupation; Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's closest deputies, it is said, were imprisoned with him at Camp Bucca in Southern Iraq. But often overlooked is the consistency of the generational cohort of Baathist officers who have joined ISIS. When analyzing Baathist insurgents, many analysts continue to focus on Saddam's senior military leaders and the organizations they formed in the early days of the occupation, such as al-Douri's JRTN or Younis al-Ahmed's underground movement al-Awda ("The Return").[8] These were prominent insurgent organizations during the occupation but are now led by men in their late sixties or seventies, such as the seventy-two-year-old al-Douri. Yet, many of the ex-officers joining ISIS seem to be much younger. ISIS's former Baathists were born in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Although they are forty to fifty years old today and seasoned insurgents, some were only in their thirties when Saddam's army was disbanded in 2003. These are military officers whose careers were cut short and interrupted just when they were expected to have accelerated. They are not seeking, like al-Douri, to return to power; they were never *in* power. Their formative years were spent fighting, and being imprisoned by, Americans.

Saddam's Faith Campaign played an important role in laying a foundation for this younger generation of military and intelligence officers to smoothly integrate into ISIS years later. Descriptions of Iraq and the Baath Party as "secular" ignore the effects that the Faith Campaign had on Iraqi society. Launched in 1993, the Campaign dramatically expanded religious studies throughout the education system and injected aspects of Islamic law into Iraqi society. Amatzia Baram writes that after 1993, "Islam was suddenly omnipresent: in the schools, in the university, in the media, in the legal system, even in Ba'th Party branch meetings."[9]

Saddam's final generation of officers entered the military and intelligence agencies in a decade when religious education and piety were spreading, and the state and Party were actively encouraging its spread among Sunni Arabs. Young Baathists were no longer steeped in secular ideology; all levels of the Baath Party were now required to study the Quran.[10] The AQI/ISIS-Baath nexus might have begun in the prison cells of Camp Bucca after 2005, but the integration of young Baath officers into ISIS was facilitated by the spread of Salafi clerics and ideas in Iraq in the 1990s. Although ISIS may eventually have a falling out with al-Douri's JRTN and older Baathists, a younger generation of military and intelligence officers have fully integrated into ISIS and have come to play leading roles within it. They are committed to the Caliphate, and splits are unlikely.

Assumption #2: ISIS is so extreme that it will inevitably alienate Sunni Arabs living under its rule.

This assumption is based on a particular interpretation of the anti-AQI Awakening movements that emerged in al-Anbar and spread through Sunni Arab–majority areas from 2006 to 2008. The dominant narrative among U.S. policy makers and military officials who served in Iraq during this time is that AQI's brutal tactics alienated Sunni Arabs living under its control. Thomas Ricks, for example, interviewed a U.S. army commander from al-Anbar who suggested that by late 2006, "al-Qaeda might have overplayed its hand: They drove some fence-sitters into the American camp."[11] AQI's rhetoric, its strict interpretation of Islamic law, and its extreme tactics are seen to have led tribal sheikhs to rise up and take control of their areas from foreign terrorists. In this account, the U.S. merely supported these indigenous uprisings, to which they gave a variety of civic-minded names, such as "Concerned Local Citizens" (CLCs) and "Sons of Iraq" (SOIs). This supposed "flip" of the tribes is understood to have been one of the critical reasons for the success of the counterinsurgency strategy—described by Linda Robinson as "a pragmatic approach of flipping all those who could be flipped"[12]—implemented by commander of coalition forces General David Petraeus in 2007.

But a counter-interpretation of the rising up of the tribes against AQI understands the reasons for their flipping as more prosaic. In this account, U.S. military commanders—locally at first, but then in a more systematic and institutionalized fashion, beginning in 2007—effectively allowed a traditional tribal authority, or sheikh, to be the Don Corleone, as it were, of a fixed geographical area in exchange for keeping AQI out. This was an excellent arrangement for local U.S. commanders seeking to reduce coalition casualties. Ricks quotes an Army commander as saying, "Whenever a tribe flipped and joined the Awakening, all the attacks on coalition forces in that area would stop, and all the caches of ammunition would come up out of the ground. If there was ever an attack on us, the sheikh would basically take responsibility for it and find whoever was responsible."[13]

Because U.S. forces were present on the ground, it was also an excellent arrangement for the tribal leader who struck the deal: Typically, the U.S. authorized him to establish checkpoints and conduct patrols, as well as relying on him to provide intelligence. Tribesmen were trained and paid to participate, with selection and payroll going through the designated sheikh.[14] This allowed the sheikh and his supporters to dominate the delivery of oil and cooking fuel, engage in racketeering and smuggling without competition, and control the flow of some jobs and reconstruction spending in "his" territory, the boundaries of which the U.S. military demarcated and helped enforce.[15] Thus, although some tribes rose up against AQI because of its brutality, most "flipped" when they saw how other tribes or clans benefited from openly allying with coalition forces. Because many of the benefits distributed by the U.S. involved authority within a fixed geographical territory, sheikhs feared being left out if nearby or rival groups signed on before them. It was preferable to "flip" early and be the U.S.-appointed Don in an area, rather than live under another's authority or settle for a much smaller territory later.

These tribal "leaders," cooperating with the U.S. military, were often sheikhs from secondary or minor clans within the tribe. The military's tribal engagement officers spent considerable time trying to distinguish "real" sheikhs from "fake" ones, often failing to realize that their recommendations of whom to support elevated some sheikhs and families relative to others. A sheikh's authority largely derives from his ability to deliver goods and services to his kinsmen. The U.S. supported sheikhs who it thought had authority—but that authority was, in many respects, a function *of* that support: Labeling a sheikh "real" effectively made him so. As with the earlier British occupation of Iraq, outsiders' perceptions of Iraqi society had a major influence on how the state interacted with tribes, and on both intra- and inter-tribal dynamics.[16]

In 2007, then, sheikhs stood up against AQI because they expected coalition authorities to guarantee a flow of resources to them—and this trend spread quickly because those resources were tied to authority within a fixed geographical territory, and they feared missing out. At the time, it appeared as though the U.S. was increasing its commitment to Iraq, even as the costs of the continued occupation to the United States were going up. Although the number of additional troops deployed to Iraq in the so-called Surge seemed small, the number of troops on the street in restive areas doubled, and Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy led U.S. troops to be based amidst the population in an attempt to "win hearts and minds."

Tribal leaders expected the U.S. to institutionalize their access to patronage, thereby guaranteeing its continuation into the future. But Shiite politicians in Baghdad feared that, if that happened, the Awakening militias might develop into military forces that could threaten their control, while Sunni Arab politicians feared that newly empowered Sunni sheikhs could become political rivals and displace them. Indeed, several electoral lists emerged out of the Awakening movements to challenge

established Sunni parties in the 2009 governate and 2010 parliamentary elections. U.S. military officials pressured the Iraqi government to integrate Sunni Arab militiamen into the security services,[17] but the ministries of Defense and Interior both dithered and used extended vetting processes so as to wait out the U.S. pressure. Although some militiamen were absorbed into local police forces and others were paid to continue to man checkpoints, the patronage flows to sheikhs dried up after the U.S. handed responsibility over to the central Iraqi government in 2009. After U.S. forces withdrew from their areas and in the absence of state resources, many of the sheikhs who had participated in Awakening movements were either killed or fled. Many today live in Amman or Erbil.

A similar tribal uprising today is unlikely, because neither the Iraqi government nor distant U.S. authorities can credibly commit to providing a future flow of resources to groups that stand up to ISIS, and any sheikh considering doing so can reasonably expect any support that is extended to be only temporary. The earlier tribal uprisings spread quickly because many benefits were tied to being designated as the authority within a designated territory. Green and Mullen's detailed account of the fight against AQI in al-Anbar in 2006–8 emphasizes how critical it was for coalition forces to build a security environment on the ground before tribes would rise up.[18] Without U.S. or capable Iraqi government boots on the ground in Sunni Arab majority areas, such conferring of authority today would be meaningless. And sheikhs fear that the central Iraqi government will renege in the future on any promises made today.

Iraqi and U.S. policy makers recognize this challenge and are trying to reassure tribes and localities that they will not be abandoned in the future if they rise up now against ISIS. Their principal strategy is to form an Iraqi National Guard to organize militias under an official umbrella, the idea being that a National Guard will help tribal militias coordinate with the Iraqi armed forces in the short term and ease their integration into the police and security forces in the medium to long term.[19] The details of how this will occur, however, have not been worked out.[20] Most critically, the proposed National Guard plan does not in any way tie the hands of future Iraqi governments; it does not provide a credible commitment to the tribes of ongoing access to largesse and employment if they stand up to ISIS now. How can National Guard members today trust that they will not be dismissed—or, more simply, not paid—in the future? This is especially of concern because many politicians in Baghdad, including former prime minister and current vice-president Nouri al-Maliki, openly oppose the National Guard plan.[21] The interior and defense ministers in Iraq's new "unity" government will be critical in easing these fears. (See Assumption #3 below.)

Finally, the leaders of ISIS learned from mistakes that they and their predecessors made in 2006–8 and took steps to deter tribes from rising up against it. ISIS has reached a series of understandings with tribes operating in territory it claims.[22] In August 2014, ISIS made a deliberate example of the al-Sheitat tribe in Syria's Deir ez-Zur province. A segment of the Sheitat reneged and rose up after a kinsman was publicly executed.[23] In retaliation, ISIS shelled Sheitat villages and then rounded up and executed all surviving men and boys they could find older than fifteen. ISIS posted on one of its blogs photos and videos of Sheitat men being beheaded, crucified, and executed in mass shootings. The videos are shocking: ISIS fighters mock the tribesmen before savagely decapitating them one after another like sheep. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that 700 tribesmen were killed, including 100 fighters and 600 civilians.[24]

The photos and videos, which circulated widely in Syria and Iraq, served their deterrent purpose: Tribesmen know how ISIS would respond if they confronted them. ISIS has also made an example of Iraqi tribes allied with the Iraqi government, such as the Albu Nimr clan of the al-Dulaim tribe, which saw several hundred of its members executed in late October. The Albu Nimr had previously fought AQI; and as with the massacre of the Sheitat, ISIS recorded and shared humiliating and gruesome executions on social media. The inability of the U.S. or Iraqi governments to protect tribes who fight ISIS is readily apparent.

Assumption #3: Iraq has formed a more inclusive government in order to reach out to Sunni Arabs.

In his speech on countering ISIS, delivered two days after the Iraqi parliament approved Haider al-Abadi as the country's new prime minister, President Obama stated that "additional U.S. action depended upon Iraqis forming an inclusive government, which they have now done."[25] The final years of Nouri al-Maliki's premiership had been marked by the arrest of several prominent Sunni Arab parliamentarians and the emergence of a sustained Sunni Arab protest movement. The perception in Washington was that a new prime minister was needed who would be willing and able to reach out to Sunni Arabs, particularly the secular nationalist insurgents and tribes who, it was hoped, could be flipped against ISIS.

But the new Iraqi government, sworn in on September 8, 2014, is not significantly different from the previous one; there are few, if any, new faces. The new president, Fuad Masum, was a confidant of the outgoing and incapacitated president, Jalal Talabani; they were two of the four co-

founders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. The new prime minister shares a background with the outgoing one: Both were long-time members of the banned and persecuted Islamic Da'wa Party, and both spent decades in exile before returning to Iraq in 2003. Maliki is now one of Iraq's vice-presidents and retains considerable influence in the prime minister's party and coalition. The new speaker of parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, was allied with the party of the former speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi. In other words, even within the constraints of Iraq's confessional power-sharing conventions (*Muhassasah*), the same parties and coalitions remain in key positions. The vast majority of cabinet appointments are long-time politicians from Baghdad's isolated "Green Zone." The new government, then, is not a significant departure from the old one; years earlier, President Masum had even supervised Maliki's master's thesis in Arabic language and literature in Erbil.[26]

But might Abadi be able to reach out to Sunni Arabs in ways Maliki would or could not? In particular, did he appoint individuals to head the key security ministries who would be committed to integrating new National Guard units in the future? In truth, Abadi tried to make such appointments, but he failed. On September 16, 2014, Abadi nominated Riad Abdul Razak Gharib, a former labor minister from the Shiite State of Law bloc, for minister of the interior and Jaber al-Jaberi, a Sunni Arab Islamist close to several dissident politicians, to head the Ministry of Defense. That same day, the Iraqi parliament rejected both nominations.

The opposition to Abadi's nominations for the security ministries was led by his supposed Shiite allies in the Badr Organization, a political party that was formerly the military wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). It took over a month for the Interior and Defense posts to be filled, and when they were, the new ministers were not Abadi's preferred candidates. The Badr Organization demanded the Interior Ministry, and they got it. It was a position they had previously held and to which they felt increasingly entitled, since Badr militias had reinforced the Iraqi army in the fight against ISIS. The head of the Badr Organization was unacceptable to both Sunni Arab parties and the Americans, but another member of Badr was appointed.[27] The new defense minister, Khaled al-Obeidi, is a Sunni Arab from Mosul and is close to the al-Nujaifi family, but he has little sway back in ISIS-controlled Nineveh province. He represents established Sunni Arab politicians already present in the government in Baghdad. Instead of bringing in (or back in) Sunni Arab leaders alienated by Maliki, positions in the new Iraqi government rewarded Kurdish and Shiite groups who were already on the front lines fighting ISIS.

How does this affect the likelihood of Sunni Arabs turning on ISIS? In an October 2014 report, Amnesty International named the Badr Organization as one of the Shiite militias involved in the abduction and killing of Sunni Arab civilian men.[28] According to Amnesty, Shiite militias tend to consider Sunni men from areas where ISIS operates as terrorists or terrorist supporters and, with the consent or, at times, cooperation of government forces, kill civilians "seemingly in revenge for IS attacks and at times also to extort money from the families of those they have abducted."[29] The Badr Organization, as we have seen, now control the Interior Ministry, which will be the state institution tasked with vetting recruits to the Iraqi National Guards. As a consequence, Sunni Arab tribesmen can reasonably expect a highly politicized process of security checks.

A fundamental problem in Iraq since 2003 has been the lack of unifying national-level Sunni Arab leaders. While Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani successfully coordinated Shiite politicians and voters with respect to several key issues and ballots, Sunni Arabs remained fractured and unable to present a unified front.[30] This remains a core challenge for Abadi or any leader seeking to form a more inclusive government. Shiite and Kurdish politicians do not feel pressure from a unified Sunni Arab bloc to make concessions regarding key issues or posts, and any new Sunni Arab leaders brought into the government threaten those Sunni Arabs who have served in Parliament for several years, such as those involved in Saleh al-Mutlaq's National Dialogue Front, the Iraqi Islamic Party, or Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord party. The Iraqi government has not significantly changed, and there is little prospect of a cohesive Sunni Arab front demanding to have a greater say.

Conclusion

The assumptions guiding U.S. policy toward ISIS imply that the Islamic State is inherently a self-limiting organization. Ideological fissures, it is thought, will shatter the alliance of convenience between ISIS and secular nationalist insurgents. Sunni Arab tribes will tire of ISIS's brutality and its strict interpretation of Islamic law and will rise up against it. Iraq's new government will successfully reach out to long-disenchanted Sunni Arabs, and the new Iraqi National Guard will smooth the integration of nationalist insurgents and tribesmen, who will "flip" and join the fight against ISIS.

From this perspective, U.S. strategy in Iraq is partly a waiting game: Prevent further ISIS gains and wait for Sunni Arabs to turn against it. Attention can focus, rather,

on countering ISIS in Syria. But if these assumptions are incorrect, as I have argued, ISIS will instead be consolidating its hold over large swaths of Iraqi territory and deepening its ties to the Sunni Arab community.

In fact, ISIS's military success in Iraq has more to do with its integration of ideologically like-minded young Baathists into its ranks and leadership than with dependence on an unstable alliance of convenience with older, secular Baathists. Additionally, ISIS's leaders learned from mistakes its predecessor organizations made during the U.S.-led occupation. When ISIS took Mosul—with the help of other organizations—it rounded up dozens of former military, intelligence, and Baath officers in the city, thereby eliminating potential rivals who might strike a deal with the central Iraqi government and lead a resistance. This included at least one released Baath leader from the U.S. Army's infamous "Most Wanted" deck of cards: Saifeddin al-Mashhadani (the three of clubs). Haider al-Abadi, a parliamentarian when Mosul fell and now prime minister, recognized ISIS's logic in taking preemptive action in the city. He told Reuters, "ISIL knows very well they can't stay if these groups move against them. They are not giving them the opportunity."[31] At the same time, ISIS installed former Baathists as governors in Mosul and elsewhere. Instead of replacing a local administration, ISIS co-opts key parts of it.

Sunni Arab tribesmen will not rise up against ISIS unless the Iraqi government can credibly commit to support and reward in the future those who pay the high costs of fighting ISIS today. The tribal uprising in 2007–8 spread rapidly because the presence of U.S. troops allowed sheikhs to have authority in geographically demarcated areas, which is unlikely to be an option against ISIS now. The formation of the Iraqi National Guard is an attempt to make a credible commitment to integrate tribesmen and former insurgents into the security services, but the inability of Abadi to wrest control of the Interior Ministry from the Iranian-backed Badr Organization makes it unlikely that Sunnis will trust that the vetting process will be fair or that the National Guard will be properly funded and adequately supported in the future.

Given the successful integration of Baath-era military and intelligence troops and officers into the ranks and command structure of ISIS, which has made it an effective fighting force, the battle against it will be long and difficult. And as Iraqi Sunni tribes are unlikely to turn against ISIS, and Iraq's new government is incapable of pursuing an "inclusive" policy that might persuade the tribes to do so, it will be very difficult for the U.S. to find effective Iraqi allies for the war against the Caliphate. This means that the burd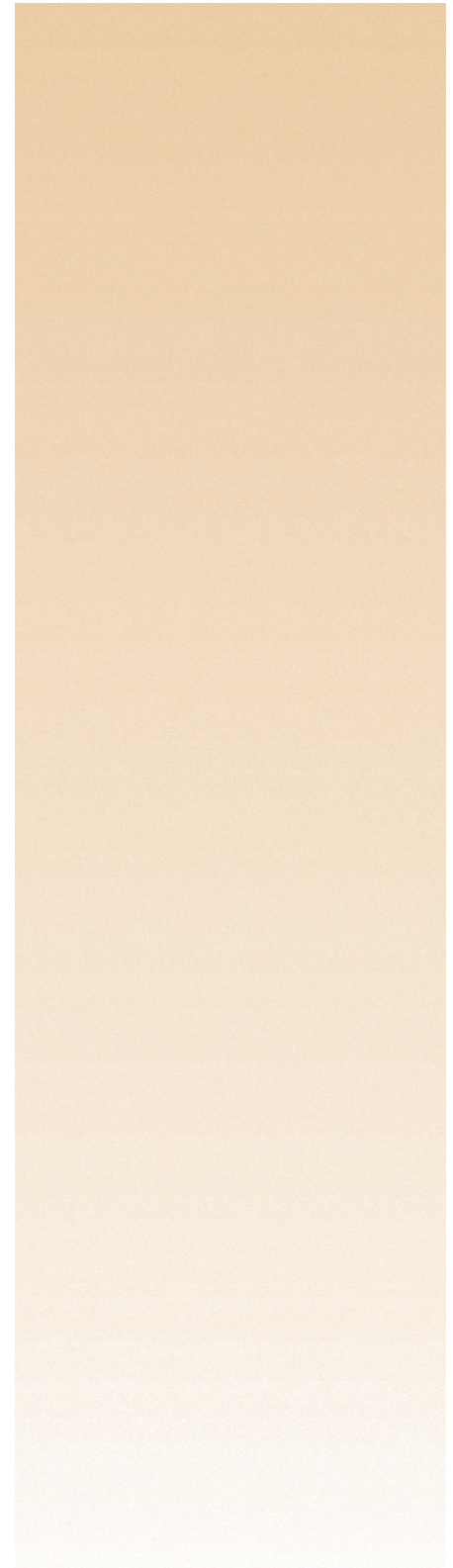en of fighting in Iraq will again fall primarily on the United States. Whether America can and should assume this enormous task, however, is beyond the scope of this Brief.

Endnotes

1   The White House, "Statement by the President on ISIL," September 10, 2014.*

2   The group was never named "al-Qaeda in Iraq," despite the coalition's and media's widespread use of the acronym AQI. It later changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq.

3   See, for example, Tim Arango, "Uneasy Alliance Gives Insurgents an Edge in Iraq," *New York Times*, June 18, 2014.*

4   See Ruth Sherlock, "Inside the Leadership of Islamic State: How the New 'Caliphate' Is Run," *The Telegraph*, July 9, 2014,* and "Video: Who Are ISIS's Top 20 Leaders?" *Al Arabiya News*, September 19, 2014.*

5   The twenty comprise the Caliph (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), his two deputies, seven members of his cabinet, six governors of Iraqi provinces, three members of the war office, and one spokesman. Other reports claim that ISIS has twenty-four governors—twelve in Iraq, twelve in Syria—of which we have the names of six from Iraq. Note that several of the individuals on the initial list have been killed.

6   ISIS is much more likely to use non-Iraqis in media and public relations roles, perhaps seeking to appeal to potential recruits.

7   Ben Hubbard and Eric Schmitt, "Military Skill and Terrorist Technique Fuel Success of ISIS," *New York Times*, August 27, 2014.*

8   See, for example, Shane Harris, "The Re-Baathification of Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, August 21, 2014.*

9   Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 314.

10 Ibid., pp. 254–58.

11 Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009), p. 66.

12 Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), p. 252.

13 Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 67.

14 A former U.S. military tribal engagement officer describes this strategy in Daniel Green and William Mullen, *Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with al-Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), pp. 28–31.

15 It is not a coincidence that one of the early leaders and the most prominent figurehead of the Awakening movement, Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, was widely considered to be an oil smuggler. AQI's interruption of cross-border smuggling routes, or its efforts to compete with established smugglers, probably played an important role in some early tribes' turn against them.

16 Toby Dodge. *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

17 Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, pp. 254–61.

18 Green and Mullen, *Fallujah Redux*.

19 The Iraqi Prime Minister and U.S. President both highlighted the National Guard idea as part of their outreach efforts to Sunni Arab communities. On the Iraqi government's plan, see Osama Mahdi, "Abadi Government: Reconstruction of the army, reconciliation, pardons, and easing extraction," *Elaph*, September 9, 2014 [in Arabic].* In his speech on ISIS, Obama said, "We'll also support Iraq's efforts to stand up National Guard Units to help Sunni communities to secure their own freedom from ISIL's control." The White House, "Statement by the President on ISIL".*

20 "Iraq's Unified 'National Guard' May Be Impossible," *Al-Monitor*, September 16, 2014.*

21 "Maliki: The Establishment of the National Guard Beginning to Divide Iraq," *Erem News*, September 14, 2014 [in Arabic].*

22 Ryan Lucas, "With Incentives and Brute Force, IS Subdues Tribes," *Associated Press*, November 27, 2014.*

23 Liz Sly, "Syria Tribal Revolt against Islamic State Ignored, Fueling Resentment," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2014.*

24 "Islamic State Group 'Executes 700' in Syria," *Al Jazeera English*, August 17, 2014.*

25 The White House, "Statement by the President on ISIL".*

26 "Iraq and the Islamic State: Engaging the Enemy," *The Economist*, August 16, 2014.*

27 Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of Badr, had recently been quoted in a New Yorker magazine article expressing his feelings for the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force. "I love Qassem Suleimani!" he says. "He is my dearest friend." Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander," *The New Yorker*, September 30, 2013.* A good case can be made that Amiri never intended to take the Interior Ministry position, but that proposing him and then replacing him with another Badr official helped make it look like Abadi stood up to his coalition allies and got "his" nominee approved.

28 *Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq* (Amnesty International, October 2014).*

29 Ibid., p. 5.

30 David Siddhartha Patel, *Islam, Information, and the Rise and Fall of Social Orders in Iraq* (unpublished book manuscript, 2014).

31 "Islamic State Rounds Up Ex-Baathists to Eliminate Potential Rivals in Iraq's Mosul," *Reuters*, July 8, 2014.*

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