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FROM THE EDITOR

With a constellation of Iraqi forces making slow but sustained progress toward the outskirts of Mosul, Zana Gulmohamad compares the challenges in liberating and securing the city with those faced by Iraqi forces in Fallujah earlier this year, based on interviews with key Iraqi players. Liberating Mosul, he argues, will be much more difficult because of the Islamic State's determination to hold onto the seat of its "caliphate," but harder still will be securing and rebuilding the city because of the conflicting agendas of the forces arrayed around Mosul.

If and when the Islamic State is dislodged from Mosul, it is likely to pivot back toward guerrilla warfare and terrorism. In our cover story, Michael Knights and Alex Mello argue there is a danger that the group could regenerate in the sectarian tinderbox of Diyala province, by escalating attacks against Shi`a in the region so as to provoke the region's powerful Shi`a militias to retaliate against Sunnis, and plunge Iraq back into civil war. A decade ago, this strategy revitalized the Islamic State of Iraq after it was dislodged from Anbar province during the "surge."

In our interview, Lieutenant General (Ret.) Charles Cleveland, former commanding general of U.S. Army Special Operations Command and now a senior fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center, focuses on the challenges ahead in special warfare.

In our feature commentary, two veteran U.S. intelligence officials—Andrew Liepman and Philip Mudd—reflect on the lessons learned from the 15-year counterterrorism campaign.

Brian Fishman revises the origin story of the Islamic State based on declassified documents that shed new light on why al-Qa`ida supported Abu Musab al-Zarqawi before 9/11.

Paul Cruickshank, *Editor in Chief*

Losing Mosul, Regenerating in Diyala: How the Islamic State Could Exploit Iraq's Sectarian Tinderbox

By Michael Knights and Alex Mello

The Islamic State may be driven out of Mosul in the coming months, which would effectively destroy the group's pretensions of administering a caliphate in Iraq. But the Islamic State has vowed to fight on, and if the past is prologue, the group may eye an opportunity to regenerate in Diyala province, Iraq's sectarian tinderbox. By escalating terrorist attacks against Shi`a targets there, the group could create a spiral of sectarian violence that it could exploit to make a comeback. The strategy almost worked a decade ago. After the U.S. surge cleared Islamic State of Iraq fighters from Anbar province, the group made significant gains in Diyala by carrying out a terrorist campaign against Shi`a targets designed to plunge the country deeper into civil war.

Mosul may be liberated from the Islamic State in the coming months, presenting Islamic State militants in Iraq with a new set of challenges, opportunities, and decisions. For insurgency-watchers pondering Iraq's near-future, there may be value in focusing on Diyala province, named after the river by the same name that runs from eastern Baghdad to the Iranian border. Diyala is not unlike a time machine, offering a kind of glimpse into the future, even as the Islamic State had already transitioned back to an insurgency in the province by the start of 2016. Diyala also offers an intriguing window into the other war in Iraq against the Islamic State—the one being fought primarily by Iranian-backed Shi`a militias with practically no involvement of the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR). The war in Diyala gives insight into what future counterinsurgency operations of the Iraqi state might look like in cross-sectarian, multi-ethnic areas if CJTF-OIR support is discontinued and Shi`a militias take the lead.

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Diyala's Role as a Base for the Insurgency

Since 2003, Diyala province[1] has served as a fallback location for the *takfiri*[a] predecessors of the Islamic State—the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and before that al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI). As Diyala-based coalition interrogator Richard Buchanan noted in 2014, "The recovery and refit area for the Sunni insurgents was always Diyala province. The insurgents who were married moved their families there, and their wounded would be often moved there as well."[2] When the U.S. surge cleared Anbar in 2007, ISI fell back into Diyala and very nearly took over the entire province. In the second quarter of 2007, an average of 418 attacks hit Diyala each month, mostly against Shi`a targets, and the government lost its ability to expend more than two percent of its budget or to distribute salaries or food rations.[3] In Baqubah, the provincial capital, ISI controlled the city center, and the U.S. military was forced to lead major urban combat operations to clear the city of ISI fighters.[b]

The attractiveness of Diyala to Sunni militant groups is partly geographic. Diyala is a hub, connecting many militant operating areas; Tarmiyah and other *takfiri* bases in southern Salah al-Din province lie to the west. The desolate Jallam Desert and Hamrin Mountain range lie to the north, providing access to northern Iraqi provinces and ultimately Syria. The violent, ethno-sectarian melting pots of Tuz Khurmatu and Kirkuk are to the north, linked to Baghdad by Highway 2, which runs through northern Diyala. In the south, Diyala wraps around the eastern Baghdad metropolitan area, including the key *takfiri* target of Sadr City, a largely Shi`a metropolis of two million people. Running down the Diyala River Valley (DRV) is the pilgrim route of Highway 5, which brings Shi`a visitors from Iran to Iraq and back throughout the year.

The terrain of Diyala also makes the province an ideal location for insurgents seeking to shelter from security forces. In most rural areas of Diyala, it is impossible to drive for more than two kilometers without meeting a canal or irrigation ditch, complicating counterinsurgency raids. The 90-kilometer Diyala River delta is lined with dense palm groves that extend for one to three kilometers on either side of the river, making this one of the largest rough-terrain corridors in Iraq, twice as big as the hard-to-secure palm groves between Ramadi and Fallujah. The river is sparsely bridged, presenting a serious obstacle to motorized security forces, but is easily traversed by small boat at dozens of points, making monitoring and interdiction difficult for security forces.[4] For these

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a   Use of the term *takfiri* in this article refers to Sunni insurgent groups that justify violence against some Muslims and all non-Muslims because their religious beliefs are not compatible with their groups' ideology. Key *takfiri* groups in Iraq include the Islamic State, Islamic Army of Iraq, and Ansar al-Sunna/Ansar al-Islam.

b   Operation Arrowhead Ripper, launched on June 18, 2007, was the culminating point. See Kimberly Kagan, "The Battle for Diyala," Iraq Report IV, *Weekly Standard*, May 7, 2007.

Diyala province, Iraq (Rowan Technology)

reasons, the Islamic State and its predecessors have repeatedly built bases for fighters and their families north of the river in the remote groves of Diyala, a completely different concept from their nesting within pre-existing, semi-urban Sunni areas in Iraq.[5] Rural Diyala is currently a true terrorist safe haven.

Equally important, the human terrain of Diyala is attractive to *takfiri* militant groups. Around a 60-percent majority of Diyala residents are Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkmen, with the remainder split between Shi`a Arabs and Shi`a Turkmen (25 percent) and Kurds (15 percent).[6] Sunni Arab majorities live in the provincial capital of Baqubah (population 627,000 in 2007) and the DRV farming districts of Muqdadiyah (population 248,000 in 2007).[7] There are Shi`a majorities in Khalis (population 319,000 in 2007) and Balad Ruz (population 135,000 in 2007) districts (plus Abu Sayda subdistrict in Muqdadiyah). Iranian-backed Shi`a parties like Badr—formed by Iran during the Iran-Iraq War from Iraqi Shi`a prisoners of war and oppositionists—have worked hard since 2003 to wield disproportionate influence over the Sunni majority,[8] cooperating with Kurdish allies to dominate the provincial council,

governorship, and police force for all but six of the last 13 years.[c] Sunnis also fear that the demographic balance may be shifting slowly against them through displacement by unstable conditions, Shi`a militia harassment, and drought.[d] In 2013, Diyala's main Sunni bloc ran its provincial election campaigns on the theme of an "existential" threat detailed in a Shi`a militia campaign to "exterminate the people of Diyala."[9] Meanwhile, the Kurds claim the right to evict Sunni settlers brought by Saddam Hussein's regime

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c   A good example is Diyala police chief Ghanem al-Qurayshi, a Badr-affiliated former military officer who worked from 2005-2008 to reduce Sunni involvement in local security forces. See Dahr Jamail, "'Provincial Saddam' Goes, Finally," Inter Press Service, August 14, 2008. At the district level, the situation was no better. The Muqdadiyah police chief, another Badrist, ran an extensive car stealing and arrest extortion racket that principally targeted local Sunnis. See Joel Wing, "How Iraq's Civil War Broke Out In Diyala Province: Interview With Former Interrogator Richard Buchanan," Musings on Iraq, July 28, 2014.

d   It should be noted that Shi`a have an equally justified fear that Sunni militants are trying to cleanse them from the province.

into northern Diyala areas like Jalula, Saadiyah, Qara Tapa, and Mandali.[10] These identity issues have worked to sustain recruitment by Sunni insurgent groups like AQI/ISI, the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI), 1920s Revolution Brigades, Hamas al-Iraq, Ansar al-Sunna, and the neo-Ba'athist Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia (JRTN) and Al-Awda (Return) groups.[11] [e]

Nonidentity-based human terrain factors have also favored militant groups in Diyala. The eastern parts of the province, such as Muqdadiyah and Balad Ruz districts, are exceedingly poor, with 51 percent and 48 percent of households falling into the lowest wealth quintile in Iraq (compared to a national average of 21.7 percent).[12] The Sunni tribes, regularly brought in since the 1970s to service the government's newly irrigated farmlands, are smaller and more fragmented than in Anbar, rural Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, or Nineveh. Most rural families are highly dependent on irrigation systems and the generators that power them, a factor that insurgents have frequently exploited.[13] The harvesting cycles in Diyala have also made it very easy for strangers to come and go without notice, blending into the inflow and outflow of seasonal agricultural workers.[f] All these socio-economic conditions have made it relatively easy for insurgents to control Diyala's rural populations.

Why Didn't the Islamic State Capture Diyala?

With all these circumstantial factors in the Islamic State's favor, it might be intuitive to ask why the movement failed to overrun the security forces in Diyala completely in 2014. The provincial capitals of other Sunni Arab-majority provinces—Mosul, Ramadi, Tikrit—were all captured by the group and held for sustained periods, but not Baqubah. Likewise the Iraqi Army divisions in Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din collapsed entirely but not the 5th Iraqi Army division in Diyala. What accounts for the difference, and how does the explanation impact the Islamic State's future in Diyala?

One cluster of factors relate to the Islamic State's low starting base of operations in Diyala when Mosul fell in June 2014. In comparison to Nineveh, where there was an average of 347 security incidents per month in the first five months of 2014, there were only 71 per month in Diyala.[14] In the week before Mosul fell, there were a staggering 208 attacks versus 32 in Diyala.[15] As RAND's extensive study of captured ISI documents noted, Diyala was only periodically a priority for AQI/ISI: it generated no funds and was, in fact, a net drain on the budget.[16] The province is far from Syria, from where the Islamic State staged and supported its attack on Mosul.[17] Moreover, the Islamic State did not have a good level of control over its most dangerous adversaries in the province—other insurgent groups. There are solid indications that the Islamic State was still actively fighting Ansar al-Sunna and JRTN elements in the summer of 2014,[18] even as these groups maintained uneasy truces with the Islamic State or were defecting to the Islamic State in other provinces.

But a more important factor was the level of resistance the Islamic State faced from Shi`a paramilitaries and the Kurdish peshmerga. This tough resistance was lacking in nearby rural Kirkuk, where five Arab-populated districts fell to very small Islamic State patrols because the 12th Iraqi Army division had disbanded without a fight. In Diyala, the resisting power of the 5th Iraqi Army division was bolstered by the strong cadre of Badr commanders in the force and by the existing presence of major Shi`a militia forces in the province such as Badr, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous, AAH), Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Moqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam (Peace Companies), and Sayyid al-Shuhada.[19] From June 13, 2014, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki appointed Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri as the provincial security chief in Diyala. Reinforcements from Badr and special forces units of the army and Ministry of Interior quickly reached al-Ameri at his base in Camp Ashraf, north of Baqubah.[20] Iran also provided direct military support to the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces in Diyala, extending a security zone 50 kilometers into Iraqi territory and flying dozens of Iranian Air Force F-4E Phantom and Su-25 close-air support missions in support of the Hashd al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF).[21] These forces successfully limited the expansion of Islamic State control in Diyala.

The Islamic State briefly threatened the western side of the capital Baqubah—the newer and poorer residential areas[g] like Gatun, Muallimeen, and Mafraq—on June 17, 2014, with Iraqi SWAT teams carrying out the preemptive execution of around 50 detainees when insurgents threatened to overrun the Mafraq police compound.[22] In Buhriz, to the south of Baqubah city, insurgents overran and held the local police station for several hours before being pushed out by Shi`a militiamen supported by Iraqi Army Aviation Mi-35 helicopters. The clearance of Buhriz was accompanied by the torching of civilian houses and mosques, the execution of up to 30 military-aged males, and the displacement of much of the local population.[23] Outside Baqubah, the scattered 5th Iraqi Army division forces and PMF units secured Khalis and regained contact with all the DRV towns by early July.[24]

The Islamic State seems to have concentrated its efforts in northern Diyala, specifically the towns "Arabized" by the Saddam Hussein regime such as Jalula, Saadiyah, and Qara Tapa, within what ISI called the Azim sector.[h] In the spring of 2014, the Islamic State was clearly preparing to evict Iraqi Army forces from these areas, readying the battlefield in a manner similar to its lead-up to the Mosul offensive. These shaping operations included attacking bridges with car bombs in order to obstruct security force reinforcement of the area; use of platoon-sized assaults to overrun police stations; and larger assaults on headquarters involving very large, water-tanker suicide VBIEDs and follow-on infantry assaults.[25] Much of the Islamic State's reinforcements in Diyala in 2014 seems to have been

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e   The author received a detailed map-aided briefing on concentration levels in the insurgent areas of control. AQI/ISI dominated in western and northern Baqubah, the Hamrin area, Iranian border areas, and the groves of the DRV. Ansar al-Sunna had strongholds near Balad Ruz. The other former regime and Iraqi *takfiri* groups were mainly located in eastern Baqubah (where there were Republican Guard communities) and in Muqdadiyah and Hamrin.

f   The province is the center of citrus and date farming in Iraq and is a major producer of cereals.

g   These areas were historically strong AQI/ISI operating areas, adjacent to the ISI Tarmiyah sector on the west side of the Tigris and next to Hibhib, where Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006.

h   This refers to Uzaym/Udaim, a river running parallel to the Diyala, including Udaim town and dam, Qara Tapa, and Deli Abbas, a key launch-pad location within the Diyala River delta north of Muqdadiyah. See Patrick B. Johnston, Jacob N. Shapiro, Howard J. Shatz, Benjamin Bahney, Danielle F. Jung, Patrick Ryan, and Jonathan Wallace, *Foundations of the Islamic State: Management, Money, and Terror in Iraq, 2005–2010* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), pp. 85-89.

Screen capture from video released in August 2016 by Diyala Media Bureau, Islamic State

fed into the northern fight against the Kurds for control of Jalula, which the Islamic State seized in a massive deliberate assault on August 11, 2014, that employed 20 suicide vest bombers. This northern preference seems to have been based on the Islamic State's alliance with local tribes in the Lake Hamrin area, arguably the only place in Diyala where AQI/ISI and later the Islamic State maintained a strong, pre-existing base of support in 2014. When Kurdish forces moved forward to replace a collapsing Iraqi security forces (ISF) presence in late June and July, the Islamic State quickly struck deals with anti-Kurdish Sunni tribes such as the Kerwi and strongly supported a joint operation against the Kurds.[i]

Islamic State Regeneration since 2015

Between the fall of Mosul in June 2014 and January 2015, the Iraqi Army and various Shi`a militias working under the rubric of the Hashd al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF) recaptured territory in Diyala. In January 2015, the Tigris Operations Command declared the liberation of Diyala province.[26] But Badr's "mission accomplished" moment in Diyala only marked the beginning of a new phase of the local conflict with the Islamic State and one in which the insurgents have partially regained the initiative. The Islamic State has fallen back into the ungoverned spaces of Diyala: the dense palm groves of the DRV between Muqdadiyah and Baqubah; the inhospitable wastes of the Iranian border; and the Hamrin Mountains, where parallel striations, or ridgelines, greatly slow motorized security forces, giving insurgents plenty of time to relocate or set ambushes.

The Islamic State's use of historic Diyala River delta bastions

such as Zaghaniyah, Qubbah, Mukhisa, and Abu Karmah is particularly problematic for the security forces. In the riverside groves to the north of these areas, the Islamic State has returned to the old AQI/ISI habit of creating major defensive bunker complexes, bomb-making factories, supply points, and training camps.[j] In August 2015 insurgents extended their presence into the DRV groves south of Baqubah, with IED cells operating from bastions on the west bank of the Diyala River between Baqubah and Khan Bani Saad.[27] The Islamic State is increasingly hard to ignore in these areas because they are using the groves to launch an escalating drumbeat of effective IEDs[k] and mortar strikes[l] on local villages and security outposts and, lately, also larger assaults on outposts and fixed checkpoint positions. In the first of many similar assaults, an ISF outpost in the groves near Muqdadiyah was attacked on July 15, 2015, by a platoon-sized Islamic State cell in a sustained engagement that lasted for several hours.[28] By December 2015, platoon-sized Islamic State fighting cells were conducting night raids

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j   In August 2015, ISF cleared a large insurgent training camp, refit and support base, and IED-manufacturing site deep in the groves near Mukhisa. See Ali Salem, "Diyala destroys the camp Zarqawi used to recruit and train extremists," *New Sabah*, August 21, 2015.

k   In a recent example on January 11, 2016, Islamic State fighters infiltrated across the Diyala River from Sherween (north of Abu Sayda) to set up two daisy-chained roadside IEDs that were used against a Sunni tribal militia working with the ISF, wounding one fighter. All incident data is drawn from the authors' geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) dataset. The dataset brings together declassified coalition SIGACT data plus private security company and open-source SIGACT data used to supplement and extend the dataset as coalition incident collection degraded in 2009-2011 and was absent in 2012-2014.

l   These are typically mortar salvos of five to seven rounds that appear to be carefully surveyed. Firing against static and unprotected targets like checkpoints or civilian villages, the attacks frequently cause fatalities and multiple injuries. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

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i   The Kerwi tribesmen are long-time inhabitants of the Lake Hamrin area and include a high proportion of former military officers as well as farmers. "Diyala Governor Splits Sunnis to Defeat Impeachment Bid," *Inside Iraqi Politics 134*.

on ISF in the Buhriz area, just four kilometers south of the provincial capital.[m] By October 2016, DRV towns like Qubbah and Abu Karmah were being isolated by Islamic State patrolling and snap checkpoints, a potential precursor to an overrun.[29]

The Badr-led security effort in Diyala has struggled to come to grips with the Islamic State rural bastions. Some areas such as the Mandali and Nida areas on the Iranian border and the shores of Lake Hamrin appear to have been yielded to the insurgents, and ISF only goes in temporarily during ineffective clearance operations.[30] The groves around Mukhisa—dubbed the "Kandahar of Diyala" by local security officials[31]—have been the scene of painful, IED-initiated ambushes[n] against ISF patrols attempting to push into the bush. The Tigris Operations Command is bulldozing and burning back the ancient palm groves to protect better the extension of fixed security checkpoints and patrols along the roads.[o] Retaliation against the local Sunni population has been a regular occurrence over the last three years[32] and is likely to increase as Iraqi Army and PMF frustrations and casualties grow.[p]

A Strategic Terrorist Campaign

The Islamic State may not place much priority on the control of Baqubah and southern Diyala, but the movement will find the province immensely useful if it wishes to resurrect the idea of fomenting a Shi`a-Sunni war in Iraq by drawing sectarian retaliation onto the Sunnis and driving them toward the Islamic State for protection. This was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's specific intent in his February 2004 letter to Ayman al-Zawahiri.[33] The Islamic State has already begun to bait Badr and the PMF with local car bombings. VBIEDs have targeted Shi`a civilians and PMF in Baqubah, Khalis, Muqdadiyah, and also in the Shi`a-majority agricultural towns of Balad Ruz and Kan'an. Such attacks can be highly lethal; on July 17, 2015, a massive ice truck VBIED hit a market in Khan Bani Sa'ad, killing over 120 Iraqis.[34] The Islamic State has also upped its attacks on electricity transmission pylons and gas pipelines that are intended to increase Baghdad's power supply.[q]

Mass-casualty attacks are effective in stirring local sectarian and tribal tensions in cross-sectarian areas like Diyala. Following a January 11, 2016, double bombing in a café in Muqdadiyah that killed over 46, including a local Badr commander, roving bands of Badr and Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) fighters cruised the city, using loudspeakers to call on Sunni families to leave or face execution. Militiamen also torched Sunni-owned shops and houses and firebombed seven Sunni mosques, despite the curfew in place and the deployment of Diyala police reinforcements.[35] Another suicide bombing of a Shi`a militia funeral in a village outside Muqdadiyah in February 2016 resulted in over 50 fatalities, including several AAH and Badr commanders. The attack was followed by clashes between police and militias at the Muqdadiyah police headquarters when militiamen attempt to storm the jail and execute detainees.[36]

The Islamic State has also used Diyala as a base to launch attacks on Baghdad, particularly Shi`a-majority east Baghdad, which is accessible at multiple points from Balad Ruz and Baqubah districts.[r] On July 3, 2016, a suicide car bomb detonated in front of a shopping mall in Baghdad's Karrada peninsula, sparking a fire that killed over 300 Iraqis, one of the deadliest single attacks in Iraq since 2003.[37] The Iraqi Ministry of Interior indicated the car bomb had been constructed in Diyala and passed through a checkpoint near Khalis before driving on to Baghdad. A wave of three car bombs in Sadr City and east Baghdad in early May 2016 was also traced back to Diyala.[38] If further car bombings spark sectarian reprisals in Baghdad or elsewhere, or skew the shape of sectarian politics and electioneering or security force appointments, then the Islamic State may be able to quickly move past its battlefield defeats with a highly consequential strategic terrorist campaign.

The Future of the Islamic State in Diyala and in Iraq

The Islamic State would undoubtedly prefer to control Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, or Tikrit than rural Diyala, but the group is rapidly being denied that option. Diyala has always been a fallback, a place to hide and recover, which suits exactly the Islamic State's current needs. The exclusion of coalition forces from Diyala due to Badr's stranglehold on the Tigris Operations Command will make it far harder for ISF to penetrate the Islamic State's rural bastions, which historically required U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance plus special operations, precision-strike capabilities, and local Sunni militias. Without determined sectarian and ethnic peace-building efforts, the identity politics of Diyala will keep the Islamic State and allied movements stocked with recruits in the years to come and deny the security forces vital intelligence on the enemy.

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m   An Islamic State photo report released in December 2015 showcased the operations of a platoon-sized Islamic State unit in the Buhriz area raiding the houses of ISF personnel and carrying out battlefield extrajudicial killings. See imagery in "IS' Diyala Province Releases Photo Report on Raiding Enemy Sites in Buhriz," SITE Intelligence Group, December 2, 2015.

n   In another recent example on July 12, an ISF patrol on a rural road four kilometers east of Mukhisa was hit with an IED and engaged with small-arms fire from insurgents in groves. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

o   In May 2016, the Tigris Operations Command began implementing a new security plan for the area supported by the deployment of provincial SWAT units from Baghdad and Wasit, pushing new roads into the groves along the Diyala River, setting up new fixed checkpoints on the farm roads linking the villages, and stepping up patrolling. See "Security forces in Diyala open road amid orchards to control the areas Daesh," Alhurra Iraq, available on Youtube.com, May 17, 2015.

p   In the first three quarters of 2016, the number of openly reported ISF and PMF casualties in frontline fighting in Muqdadiyah district were 40-50 killed and 80-90 wounded. Diyala is less open to journalists than other parts of Iraq, and considering that ISF casualties are generally underreported, the above numbers likely represent a half or a third of actual security force casualties. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

q   Since 2013, the Islamic State has carried out a persistent multi-year campaign on electricity pylons carrying Iranian voltage to Iraq and more recently has struck Iranian pipeline crews working on a pipeline to bring Iranian gas to Diyala power stations (and eventually to Baghdad). On December 13, 2013, 15 Iranians were shot dead along with three Iraqis in one such attack on pipeline teams. More recently, ISF captured an Islamic State cell on April 26, 2016, in Imam Ways (north of Muqdadiyah) involved in IED attacks on pylons and repair crews. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

r   Along with the Tarmiyah area just north of Baghdad city, the Baghdad Operations Command views Diyala as the chief source of the car bomb threat against the capital. Author (Knights) interview, Baghdad security official, 2016.

Neither Badr nor the Kurds seem likely to adopt effective counterinsurgency approaches such as the reconciliation and Sunni empowerment initiatives that suppressed AQI/ISI in Diyala in 2007-2009. In May 2015, the pan-Shi`a and Kurdish blocs colluded with some Sunni factions to replace the Sunni provincial governor Amer al-Majmai[s] with Badr's own Muthanna al-Tamimi, a Shi`a politician.[39] Though Badr has offered to support a Sunni provincial governor after new local elections (due in 2017),[40] the likelihood is that Badr will continue to dominate local politics and security. Where Sunnis feel divided and powerless in the political sphere, the lure of armed opposition will grow.

Badr has various options if it seeks to secure the support of Diyala's fractured Sunni population. Albeit for its own factional motives, Badr is starting to crack down on rival militia AAH,[t] the militia most regularly linked to sectarian massacres, criminal rackets, and highway checkpoint shakedowns.[u] Hadi al-Ameri has also splintered and co-opted some Sunni tribes by facilitating—or withholding—the return of internally displaced persons to their homes.[v] Badr is also allowing some returned tribes to serve as Hashd al-`Asha'iri (tribal mobilization forces) in order to penetrate Islamic State rural bastions.[w] But outside of these rural northern Diyala hotspots, Badr is still rejecting alliances with Sunni fighters. For instance, nearly 3,000 original pre-2011 Diyala "Popular Committee" fighters[x] have been demobilized since the fall of Mosul,[41] suggesting Badr prefers to blanket Sunni areas with Shi`a militias rather than trust Diyala Sunnis with weapons. Unlike in other Sunni-majority provinces where Sunni leaders command the Hashd forces, the Diyala PMF are led by provincial councilman Qasim al-Maamuri, a Shi`a ally of Badr.[42] The Kurds do not allow any Arab paramilitary forces in the areas they control and have even stated that no members of the Kerwi tribe, which backed the Islamic State, will be allowed to return to Jalula.[y]

Diyala offers a look into the near-future of Iraq's security situation in areas where ethno-sectarian tensions are neglected or even exacerbated by government policies and the presence of uncontrolled militias. The Islamic State's partial regaining of the initiative, very quick recovery, and transition back toward insurgency and strategic terrorism in Diyala is instructive, though it may not be matched in other provinces due to the unique mix of geography and human terrain in each Iraqi governorate. If Diyala continues on its present path, it is likely to become the Islamic State's main safe haven location in Iraq, back-to-back with other key operational locations like Tarmiyah, the Jallam Desert, the Hamrin Mountains, the Iranian border, and the eastern approaches to Baghdad. **CTC**

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s   Al-Majmai was himself a puppet of the Shi`a parties in Baghdad, replacing another Sunni governor, Omar al-Humayri, ousted by a Badr-led intrigue. The authors wish to thank Kirk Sowell and Nate Rabkin of the *Inside Iraqi Politics* team for their outstanding work on the collation and analysis of political trends in Diyala.

t   On September 21-26, 2016, Badr paramilitaries and AAH paramilitaries were fighting for control of the sub-district center of Abu Sayda. In Tuz Khurmatu, meanwhile, Badr moved against AAH locations within the town. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

u   For example, on February 23, 2013, leaflets signed by AAH threatened families living in Muqdadiyah unless they left their homes in 48 hours. Authors' SIGACT dataset.

v   Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri personally accompanied 400 Sunni families returning to Mansouriyah in May 2016. See "Diyala Governor Splits Sunnis to Defeat Impeachment Bid," *Inside Iraqi Politics 134*, July 11, 2016.

w   Badr seems to have made good progress with the Azzawi tribe, a major grouping in the Hamrin and Muqdadiyah area, with the Tigris Operations Command nominally led by an Azzawi figure, Major General Muzhir al-Azzawi. Jabbouri confederation Hashd al-Asha'ir fighters also work with Badr in northern Diyala, as they do in the Tikrit and Kirkuk areas.

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x   This was the highly successful Diyala version of the "Sahwa" (Awakening). Numerous Sunni paramilitary volunteer groups flipped from anti-coalition insurgency to anti-AQI/ISI operations in 2007-2009. For a useful reference, see Multi-National Division–North PAO Press Release No. 20061210-09, "Sheiks continue discussions of security, stability for Diyala," Dec. 10, 2006, and Multi-National Division–North PAO, "Sheiks sign peace agreement," May 3, 2007.

y   The Kerwi are the largest Sunni tribe in Jalula, and Diyala's elected Provincial Council Chairman, Omar al-Kerwi, is from this tribe. *Inside Iraqi Politics 134*.

Citations

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A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with LTG(R) Charles T. Cleveland, former Commanding General, USASOC

By Kristina Hummel

LTG(R) Charles T. Cleveland is the former commanding general of U.S. Army Special Operations Command (2012-2015) and former commander of Special Operations Command-Central (2008-2011). A 1978 graduate of the United States Military Academy, LTG(R) Cleveland is a senior fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and the Madison Policy Forum, a senior mentor to the Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group, and an adjunct at the RAND Corporation.

CTC: Increasingly, our nation is calling on Special Operations Forces (SOF) to engage its enemies. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this shift toward less-conventional warfare? Is this change a temporary response to the nature of our current fight, or is it a more permanent and fundamental shift for the foreseeable future?
Cleveland: The shift is a response to U.S. dominance in conventional warfighting, which remains critical and should not be taken for granted. The means that one country or group may use to impose its will on another are, however, additive. Conventional war remains a viable means if your adversary is vulnerable to that type of persuasion. So I do not see this as a temporary condition, and it is a result of fundamental changes in the security landscape. So long as we remain or are perceived to be preeminently powerful in the conventional use of force, our enemies will choose irregular means to try and impose their will on the U.S., and our friends, partners, and allies.

Having said that, it is important to understand why SOF has risen from footnote and supporting player to main effort, because its use also highlights why the U.S. continues to have difficulty in its most recent campaigns—Afghanistan, Iraq, against ISIS and AQ and its affiliates, Libya, Yemen, etc. and in the undeclared campaigns in the Baltics, Poland, and Ukraine—none of which fits the U.S. model for traditional war.

There are two primary types of SOF missions and corresponding forces. On the one hand, the Army Special Forces component of U.S. Special Operations Forces, organized after World War II to support indigenous resistance groups, and subsequently to assist in the countering of such groups after the French loss of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam, uses its deep knowledge of working with locals to either capitalize on indigenous methods that might be more appropriate for certain conflicts or to employ "indigenous mass" in the place of American forces. The other type, being created in part to emulate Israeli success at Entebbe and to overcome failure at Desert One in Iran,[a] has become an unmatched kill/capture and hostage-rescue capability, with an ability to accomplish its mission with limited collateral damage.

Each type of SOF is organized to reflect the necessarily distinct approaches to uncertainty that these two very different missions entail, and these characteristics have proven critical in today's population-centric conflicts. The surgical-strike capability reduces uncertainty to the degree possible through high-volume ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance] and intel fusion, then the capability is executed, further reducing risk by placing superior, mature operators on the objectives. Alternatively, while Special Forces have as their mission to move into uncertainty, they mitigate risk through their ability to understand local situations and use a mix of martial and personal skills to survive, report, mitigate, and exploit the local situation to the advantage of the U.S. This takes specially selected soldiers who spend considerable time compared to other soldiers in education, training, and mission-preparation. The mission requires not only skills in expert light infantry but also language, tradecraft, area studies, survival medicine, engineering, and weapons. These small teams are organized to be self-sustaining in order to enhance their viability in hostile and denied areas. It is these two qualities—the surgical application of force that greatly reduces collateral damage and death of innocents, and the working by, with, and through locals—that has proven not only effective but also most acceptable in recent conflicts.

CTC: Are we, as a nation, where we need to be militarily to meet the challenges of these new threats?
Cleveland: In my estimation, the U.S. still remains at a disadvantage in its operational/strategic-level thinking about such wars and, as a consequence, in its ability to develop appropriate campaigns and field competent, campaign-quality headquarters. Through most of the Cold War our security sector proved adequate to deter, and when applied against conventional enemies in limited wars performed magnificently. However, these same military constructs proved unable to achieve the desired U.S. political objectives in Vietnam, even after a long, costly attempt. As [retired Special Forces colonel and Georgetown University Associate Professor] Dave Maxwell has noted, it could be said that North Vietnam's strategy of Dau Tranh—integrated political and military struggle—proved superior to the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign.

And since Vietnam, our adversaries have increasingly aimed their strategies at a weakness exposed by Vietnam, namely America's inability to sustain casualties and outspend opponents for extended periods in conflicts that are not existential—in other words, our will. I think it is no coincidence that as the American people were able to witness firsthand the horrors of war in ever increasing fidelity, first through TV and now through social media and the internet, the U.S. policy- and war-makers' ability to use overwhelming force in population-centric wars has been hamstrung to the point that they are clearly insufficient. Therefore, so long as we maintain

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a   In July 1976, Israeli commandos carried out a hostage rescue mission at Entebbe Airport in Uganda. Desert One refers to the failed April 1980 Delta Force mission to rescue American hostages held in Iran.

our conventional dominance, our state and proto-state enemies will continue to further their interests, when diplomacy and other instruments do not suit them or apply, through proxy fights, terror, and permanent, low-grade conflict just under the threshold for what is viewed as traditional war.

CTC: Given this discussion, should conventional U.S. forces be increasingly trained and outfitted in ways traditionally reserved for SOF?

Cleveland: I maintain that in the most recent fights, the U.S. did not fail because of inadequately or improperly trained or led battalion-level formations. For the most part, whether conventional or SOF, these units were magnificent and reflected every bit of what is great about the American Soldier. So I believe they must strive to remain elite within their specialty as a deterrent and to assure friends of our ability to succeed in a conventional war.

It has been my experience that the bona fides of U.S. units and soldiers with any foreign military or militia is their ability to perform their primary war-fighting tasks, not their cultural sensitivity. Time spent becoming culturally sensitive at the expense of time in the field or on the range is, in my experience, a poor tradeoff. Perhaps a more useful SOF example for conventional forces is in SOF's surgical strike half. Adopting appropriate tactics, techniques, and procedures used by our national-level raiding forces in targeting, infiltration, and tactics is more useful to their pursuit of being the best

at their primary mission. The Ranger Regiment's Abrams Charter[b] is a standing directive and reminder of the natural and necessary connection between it and the conventional infantry.

The U.S. military's challenges were largely above the battalion. They were in the senior leadership and supporting staff's understanding of the nature of the conflict and in their inability to overcome institutional and structural bias towards fighting the war as they would want it to be, as opposed to the way it was. Most damaging were several, compounding bad national policy decisions for both Afghanistan and Iraq that shaped U.S. campaigns in those theaters. Deciding that nation-building was essential to success in Afghanistan and electing to not reconstitute the Iraqi Army and to purge all Baathists in 2003 in Iraq committed the U.S. to long, costly campaigns that exposed our strategic weakness. I do not know what military advice was given to policymakers or how well the arguments were framed. I have to wonder, if the U.S. could do it over, would we do it differently? Further, what formations or capabilities would we have wanted to have when the war started?

CTC: Are there steps that could or should be taken to enhance the necessary capabilities?

Cleveland: To fill the capability gap, USSOCOM [United States

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b   In activating the Ranger Regiment in 1973, General Creighton Abrams stipulated that it would be "an elite, light, and most proficient infantry battalion in the world ... that can do things with its hands and weapons better than anyone." Russ Bryant and Susan Bryant, *Weapons of the U.S. Army Rangers* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2005), p. 23.

LTG(R) Charles T. Cleveland, then commanding general of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, is pictured at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 2012. (U.S. Army/Dave Chace, SWCS Public Affairs Office)

Special Operations Command] must be tasked and authorized by Congress to take over the professional military education (PME) of its officers. Further, it should task its Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg to become the DoD center for the study of the phenomenon of resistance, insurgency, rebellion, terror, and civil war, and for joint and interagency concept development for U.S. use of and counter to such forms of conflict. Finally, USSOCOM must develop, in cooperation with the Army and Marine Corps, joint special operations commands staffed with appropriate special and conventional professionals and interagency expertise to develop and execute campaigns that are designed to support other nations in their fight against insurgents or terrorists, empower them without supplanting them, or execute "small footprint" SOF campaigns alongside indigenous forces against an enemy nation, occupying power, or hostile non-state actor.

Remarkably, there is no Service PME focused on understanding what history teaches are these most prevalent forms of conflict. Isolated pockets of scholarship exist, such as the SOCAP [Special Operations Campaign Artistry Program] Course at Fort Leavenworth, Naval Postgraduate School's Defense Analysis special operations curriculum, and in the National Defense University's master's program at SWCS [the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School]. But there is no focused effort to create the needed scholarship to provide the foundation for PME or the development of military concepts for its role in these fights. This blind spot in the U.S. approach to defending the national interest ultimately has resulted in a lack of critical capabilities. The U.S. is hampered by the absence of a SOF equivalent to the Air Land Battle Concept for conventional operations. Such a SOF concept would then drive needed doctrine, organization, training, manpower, leadership, etc. to better achieve U.S. objectives. The U.S. has been highly successful in developing its concepts for conventional war; it needs similar success in its approach to these more prevalent, less conventional enemy strategies.

CTC: If we take a step back, it's clear that today's soldiers, particularly Special Operations, are increasingly being asked to fulfill multiple roles when they are sent to conflict areas—diplomatic, intelligence, etc.—in addition to their operational duties. Is this an acceptable ask of today's soldier?
Cleveland: It depends, and SOF leaders have to judge when to say yes or no or when to push back when the tasking comes from a higher headquarters that may not understand SOF's mission or limitations. So long as the tasking is related to their core missions, which can be interpreted fairly broadly, I think it is acceptable, so long as it is a priority. SOF has filled some administrative taskings in countries that gave the operator exposure to the culture or gave the command first-hand information on an area of interest. Also, some of these taskings are of national importance and the seasoned, proven SOF operator may be the best choice to reliably get it done, especially if it is in an area that is hostile or dangerous. These Soldiers, particularly the Special Forces soldier, are specially selected, may have relevant language skills and experience in the country, and are trained to operate in ambiguous situations. Also, the recent reorganization of the SF Groups created smaller units of action consisting of three-man teams or singletons to apply against such non-standard taskings.

Having said that, non-SOF soldiers have provided absolutely essential support to special operations missions. Conventional units

"The most successful aspects of our work with the Afghans and Iraqis have not been with our conduct of U.S. CT. Instead, it was SOF's development of the Iraqi and Afghan special operations units."

have conducted combat operations as part of a SOF operation and individual soldiers and units are normally woven into the fabric of SO headquarters downrange. It really depends on what soldier skills are called for and what the environment is. I am reminded of a warning passed down from the great ones of the past: Don't confuse enthusiasm for capability. There are some things that should be left to SOF.

CTC: Much of the public discussion of SOF tends to focus on the counterterrorism application of these forces, for obvious reasons given the conflicts we have been involved in over the past 15 years. But can you speak more broadly about prevalence of irregular warfare in today's environment and the role of SOF in dealing with these challenges, beyond CT?
Cleveland: The irony is that the most successful aspects of our work with the Afghans and Iraqis have not been with our conduct of U.S. CT, which certainly earned its notoriety. Instead, it was SOF's development of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS) and its special operations units, and Afghan Commando and Afghan Special Forces units under the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command. Today, both remain at the forefront of their respective fights and are their countries' most capable warfighting units. Also, it has been a while, but you'll recall that it was SOF's unconventional warfare capability with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban.

SOF is at its best when its indigenous and direct-action capabilities work in support of each other. Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq and ongoing CT efforts elsewhere, SOF continues to work with partner nations in counterinsurgency and counterdrug efforts in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Russia's use of its updated variant of unconventional warfare in the annexation of Crimea, in eastern Ukraine, and the threat it poses to Poland and the Baltic States has resulted in a renewed interest in the U.S. unconventional warfare capability and how it can assist in their defense should the Russians use the same tactics against them.

CTC: How did SOF capabilities evolve over the years that you were a leader in that community? What challenges did you experience, during your time in command of these units, in adapting to the fight?
Cleveland: I was lucky enough to serve in SOF from 1979 to 2015. My first unit was the 10th SF Group, which had an interesting, strange, and largely dysfunctional chain of command. The command was dual-based, namely under the operational command of the EUCOM Commander who was based at Patch Barracks [in Stuttgart, Germany]. But since it was based in the U.S. for administrative purposes, the unit was under the administrative control of

the Fort Devens Post Commander. I was very junior, but it seemed the advantages were few. One, though, was that members of the Group would routinely coordinate directly with national level agencies. I can remember doing so several times as a very junior officer. I would have to wait until I was a general officer to get the same access.

Beyond the obvious disadvantages of a split chain of command, SF in those days were often the last to be resourced. This problem continued for a while beyond the stand up of USSOCOM and its subordinate service components. I can remember in 1989 watching the 7th Infantry Division soldiers patrol through our housing areas in Panama where I was assigned to the 3rd Bn, 7th Special Forces Group. Their kit was high tech and new. Ours was low/no tech and old but serviceable. With the creation of USSOCOM and its own funding line (referred to as MFP 11) the chain of command cleared up and resourcing improved dramatically. Lastly, and probably most importantly, over the years SOF's approach to selecting and assessing candidates improved across the force. This increasing quality in manpower drove improvements in all other areas. The teams, companies, and battalions became uniformly elite across the board. The differences between special operations forces became their mission sets, not the quality of their soldiers. It was remarkable to be a part of the change.

CTC: What specific changes or reforms that you implemented while USASOC Commander do you think will have the most enduring impact on enhancing the effectiveness of our SOF?
Cleveland: The writing of the Army's first Special Operations Doctrinal Publication, ADP 3.05, in 2012 was a watershed achievement for the Special Operations profession. It advanced two important principles that can lead to significant advances in U.S. special operations capabilities. The first is that the ADP properly describes the two very different but essential Special Operations capabilities that the country needs. It was [previously] widely understood that there were two types of special operations; these were often referred to as "black and white SOF" or "national and theater SOF." Neither were really accurate or helpful. The ADP set forth that the two types

of SOF were a no fail surgical strike or precision direct action capability and a special warfare capability that centered on working through indigenous assets and units in unconventional warfare. The second important principle was ADP's explicit recognition of a portion of the conflict spectrum where special operations is the primary maneuver force. By doing so, the Army identifies the need for SOF campaigns and SOF operational art. Those are being developed now and given where the future fights are likely to take place, none too soon.

CTC: What specific and/or immediate threats do you anticipate the next president will have to grapple with? Are there ways that SOF are uniquely prepared to meet those challenges?
Cleveland: The next president will need all the military tools at the ready. Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, ISIS, AQ, and the inevitable natural disaster and pandemic will all demand some form of a military response during his or her term. Actually, I think that the world is more dangerous today than it has ever been during my lifetime, which is saying something since I can remember having to duck under our desks in grade school during A-bomb drills. Important though will be the U.S.'s ability to aggregate and disaggregate military, interagency, and even private capacity with agility around given security problems, and to do so where it can to prevent conflict from erupting to begin with.

Some of these will obviously be SOF-centric, SOF-led campaigns, but in most, SOF will have some role. Also, automating all source intelligence sources, particularly open source and social media, has the potential to allow the U.S. to know and act sooner and for less cost, an important option after the last 15 years.

CTC: What have you observed is the most persistent misunderstanding by the public of what Special Operations Forces do?
Cleveland: That's a tough question, but I think most people believe that U.S. SOF operates with an open checkbook, unfettered by the rules, and filled with nonconforming, rugged individualists who have a problem with authority. They are right on one of these.   **CTC**

Lessons from the Fifteen-Year Counterterrorism Campaign

By Andrew Liepman and Philip Mudd

For the past 15 years since 9/11, fighting terrorism has been one of the United States' top priorities. The low number of casualties from terrorism in the United States indicate that intelligence and law enforcement agencies have performed well—preempting attacks, killing terrorists, working with partners overseas, and reducing the threat more comprehensively than any observer would have judged likely after 9/11. But the United States still suffers from a hysteria about terrorism, fueled partly by a distorted national dialogue on issues such as the extent of the threat; steps the country should take in areas as disparate as migration and cyberspace; and how the country should deal with youth who choose a potentially violent path.

The attacks on 9/11 forced the United States intelligence community (IC) to pivot quickly and dramatically. Practitioners from that era had few experiences to draw on and little time to reflect on the decisions of the global counterterror campaign. In the weeks and months after the attacks, resources and people flowed in, expertise grew, and analysts and operators grappled with a shadowy enemy they did not fully understand. The evolution of that enemy—from centralized al-Qa`ida to its affiliates, the growth of its propaganda arm, and finally the appearance of the multi-headed beast that includes the Islamic State—required the IC to adjust, from chasing a terror leader to his hideout in Abbottabad to finding an Islamic State-inspired Twitter follower in California. Along the way, successes ranged from the dismantling of al-Qa`ida's leadership to a largely unheralded but effective defensive screen in the United States that has limited attacks here. No one in the dizzying days after 9/11 would have believed that annual terrorism-related casualties leading into 2017 would number only in the dozens; experts might have predicted hundreds, even thousands. This rapid intelligence escalation also prompted now much-debated steps such as establishing CIA prisons, how the CIA treated al-Qa`ida prisoners, and to the mistakes that led to the near-catastrophic miss of a terrorist on board a plane over Detroit in 2009.

Fifteen years since the attacks, analysts can bring more perspective to what worked well, what did not, and where improvements are needed. The record is pretty clear. Low casualties certainly indicate that intelligence and law enforcement agencies have performed well. But the nation's leaders across government, including those in the IC, have yet to carve out a government communication strategy; fear and scaremongering creep too quickly into the national conversation, whether about preventive measures, immigration, or the safety of average Americans. The threat is real and enduring, but terrorism too often monopolizes the national security dialogue in emotional debates, leading to arguments that often lack factual context.

The following are reflections on the lessons learned, from the first 15 years of the post-9/11 era, drawn from the experiences of two former, long-time practitioners who witnessed this campaign from the CIA, the FBI, and the National Counterterrorism Center.

Denial of Territory

Terrorist safe havens are critical to terror groups' durability, and controlling territory is essential to grow terrorists. After years of deploying U.S. combat troops, a decade-plus of Special Forces missions and intelligence operations, and drone surveillance and strikes in theaters around the world, there is no substitute for controlling territory. When the United States and its partners deny space to terrorists, with ground troops, Special Forces and intelligence operations, and local partnerships, the threat declines. Killing or capturing senior terror leaders counts as a critical element in these campaigns, but only when local ground forces eliminate the safe havens that allow future leaders to emerge, proselytize, and plan and then direct attacks. The Islamic State is using its safe haven to devastating effect in Syria; the same is true for al-Qa`ida in Yemen and Afghanistan and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Terror groups cannot build external operations cells over time unless they have the advantage of stable operating areas for planning and training. In the future, a United States suffering intervention fatigue will have to balance the limited will to spend resources overseas with the glaring reality that unless the United States helps foreign partners fight the next Islamic State-like generation in distant hotspots, those terrorists will eventually use their safe haven to target Americans.

Removing Leaders

Retaking territory takes time, often years. In the interim, killing terrorists remains key in any long-term counterterrorism (CT) campaign. Successes in this area have saved innocents and degraded the enemy, though we do not yet fully understand the unintended consequences of an aggressive lethal campaign; killing is a tactical

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device to disrupt or prevent attacks rather than a strategic tool to defeat a terrorist group. Removing leaders from the battlefield is critical to preempt and prevent terror plots. But as we have seen too clearly, removing successive generations of leaders, as we have done in the case of al-Qa`ida, is not sufficient to eliminate the threat. Lethal operations cannot be the only, or even the dominant, aspect of a comprehensive CT program.

Alliances

Taking territory back, establishing a permissive environment in which U.S. forces can operate, and maintaining a secure and stable environment to prevent threats from resurging require local partners. After 9/11, one of the most productive exercises was casting a wide net, cajoling allies and partners of convenience to join the fight. This painstaking coalition-building was key to successes, from working with the coalition in Somalia to chipping away with allies in Syria and pressing Pakistan to move in harder near its western border with Afghanistan.

Partnership Trade-Offs

The United States cannot work just with its allies and friends to defeat terrorists. U.S. cooperation with Jordan and Israel, with European allies, and with Commonwealth friends are second nature in this CT campaign. But fighting terrorism is also about forcing tough choices. Does the United States work with regimes that violate American values or act with ulterior motives? Egypt's General Sisi, for example, is an effective CT partner, but his crackdown on those he considers extremists may reinforce underlying causes of militancy. We could not have destroyed the core of al-Qa`ida without the close and troubled partnership with Pakistan. The United States wants the fundamental human right of democracy, but ethnic, religious, and tribal divides in these countries has resulted in electoral processes that are violent and destabilizing. Over time, in countries from Libya to Yemen, the United States may face the choice Washington encountered in Egypt: encourage the end of strongman leadership and hasten the rise of extremists in the resulting chaos, or quietly accept the kind of autocrats who sparked such unrest in the first place.

Messaging

Western leaders, particularly those in the United States, endlessly debate how to combat violent extremism in the virtual space. The Islamic State is failing, but largely because it has lost safe haven and not because the West won the virtual war. We need to ask ourselves three serious questions. First, does it matter? Too often we assume that the Islamic State's dominance in social media makes it stronger, more enduring. Maybe so, but perhaps not as much as we think. Second, how much effort do we spend on a more effective counter-messaging effort? And third, what role does government play? The United States overrates the war of ideas and the centrality of the United States in waging and winning the propaganda war. When terrorists lose territory, their message loses traction because potential followers do not have a geographic location to which they can migrate. As the Islamic State loses on the battlefield, its media and propaganda efforts decline. Even if it did have a role in this decline, the United States does not have much of a competing vision to offer a group of extremists who believe that they have been ordained by God to oppose the West.

Rehabilitation

Using rehabilitation to turn potential terrorists away from extremism has more potential than analysts have allowed, especially because many youth are falling under the sway of extremists without fully understanding the ideology they claim to accept. In Saudi Arabia, Denmark, and elsewhere, long prison sentences are not the only tool used to deal with offenders—not so in the United States. A terrorism-related offense here promises a lengthy jail term and minimal exposure to rehabilitation programs. Programs to work with radicalized youth can actually help. There is a tendency in the United States to too quickly categorize them as fundamentally different than youth who might join a gang or a cult. They are not. While the early members of al-Qa`ida, captured in the first years after 9/11, were ideologically committed to an Islamist revolution, the youth joining the Islamic State today, including many of the thousands who streamed into Syria, have little understanding of, or commitment to, the ideology for which they are signing up. That means that experts in Islam can challenge them in controlled environments, such as rehabilitation programs.

Labels and Tone

After an attack, partisan battles quickly emerge. The expected "Was it terrorism or not?" probe has far less to do with sensible responses and more to do with partisan traps. These labels do not matter much to counterterrorism professionals. Terrorism holds a special place in the American psyche: we cannot always explain why it happens and we may never understand it, but if you call something "terrorism," it leaps onto the front page. Concerns and commentary tends toward overreacting to individual attacks and pointing fingers rather than improving our posture to respond to future attacks. Regardless of whether politicians can or want to draw distinctions between what scares Americans and what threatens Americans, practitioners should. Threats of bans on Muslims, bogus debates about sharia law in America, and relentless focus on violent crime in the name of Islam without reference to the vastly more devastating violent crime resulting from gangs and drugs in America are all indications of a society that cannot get beyond political points and emotional anger to focus on the question of how Islamic extremism truly ranks as a threat to the nation.

Returning Fighters

The numbers of Western youth who have traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State dwarfs previous waves of volunteers for al-Qa`ida or al-Shabaab, but warnings about a long-term ripple effect of attacks in the United States are exaggerated. Yes, we must keep track of this group of potential terrorists, but compared to many other countries, from Jordan and Tunisia to France, Belgium, and the U.K., the United States has a manageable task. Some returnees may plot and execute attacks, but the relatively modest impact of immigrants and returning fighters in the United States today suggests that the level of violence from these groups will result in episodic tragedies, not national security catastrophes.

Mission Definition and Clarity

Confusion between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism obscures the debate about whether and how the United States should intervene. The Islamic State, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram all threaten governments in their respective areas of operation. Only a small sliver of these groups, though, is dedicated to trying to plan

The Pentagon prior to a ceremony to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks (U.S. Navy/Damon J. Moritz)

and stage attacks overseas. When the United States talks about defeating the Islamic State, debates about intervention are fuzzy. Are we targeting elements that threaten American cities? Or helping foreign partners defeat elements that threaten foreign cities? The first is and should be an American-led effort. The second is and should be, after the lessons from major American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, a foreign-led effort, supported by the United States' military, diplomats, and intelligence officers.

Root Causes

Once popular to describe underlying social problems that might spur radicalization, the phrase "root causes" was overused and is now largely dismissed as 'too hard.' But these basic grievances—factors that cause young people to join extremist causes—still beg more attention. Governance, economic opportunity, corruption, and societal dysfunction are all likely causes of terrorism. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq is a case in point. How did a nearly defeated al-Qa`ida in Iraq (a group which started calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006) resurrect itself so quickly to become the Islamic State? Blaming it on the United States' pull-back from Iraq grossly oversimplifies the problem. Rather, it was the Shi`a government in Iraq that ignored the needs of its Sunni minority that incubated the new threat. Whether it was the case of the Islamic State in its self-declared caliphate, AQAP in Yemen, AQIM in Mali, al-Shabaab in Somalia, or Boko Haram in Nigeria, militancy spread in a vacuum of authority where governments failed to provide a satisfactory alternative to the terrorists. It is that vacuum that must be filled, not simply with military operations against the terrorists but also basic services and security.

Resilience

The United States is obsessed with terrorism, to an unhealthy and illogical degree. Gun violence, texting while driving, swimming pools, and synthetic street drugs all dwarf terrorism as causes of death in the United States, but none evoke the kind of visceral fear and overreaction that terrorism does. Part of this fear is a national failing, by government officials, politicians, community leaders, and communities themselves, for rarely attempting to communicate the complex and painful truth that not all attacks can be stopped. Why should the public accept some level of terrorist violence if their government seems unwilling to acknowledge that occasional failures are part of reality? Many nations, including the U.K. and Israel, among others, have suffered terrorism casualties in their homeland, but none have responded with the same intensity, the same level of public alarm or public blaming to which America succumbs. When politicians attempt to calm those fears, to put terrorism into perspective, they are accused of ignoring danger, of coddling the enemy. Terrorists want attention; our hyper-sensitivity to their violence feeds that need.

Perspective

The American people must understand that while vast efforts are being undertaken to prevent terrorism, more attacks are inevitable. Americans may think there is some way out, that some politician will have a new solution that can stem or stop a small group of extremists from staging a strike against a random target. We do not think this way about gang violence; we do not think this way about school shootings or bank robberies; and we should not think this way about terrorism. We must do all we can to reduce the risk of terrorism and to address vulnerabilities, but we must admit soberly

that perfection is not attainable. Until we get this idea across, as U.K. officials have, Americans will have unrealistic expectations of what their politicians can deliver.

Cyberspace

Perspective in the divide between Silicon Valley and Washington on the government's access to data and on how the government interacts with the private sector also would help. Rhetoric from U.S. officials about access to data is overheated. American firms have a responsibility to customers and shareholders, and they have a right to challenge sweeping requests for data. But counterarguments from U.S. firms are equally overwrought. There is, however, one fundamental shift that the U.S. government has yet to acknowledge. It does not control data as much as it did before the social media explosion, and U.S. officials should spend more time figuring out how to support data owners rather than requiring data owners and technology providers to support the government. Social media companies, for example, might benefit from working with government entities that ask a simple question: How can we help you with your efforts to police the slice of cyberspace in which you operate?

Meanwhile, we have not yet found the proper balance between civil liberties and security, partly because trust between government and the private sector and citizenry is at a low ebb. With persistent public questions about the government's handling of private data, more dependence on private sector companies as partners, not just data providers, might help. The government has to learn how to communicate better what it is doing and why, and legal remedies to force private sector compliance are not a good long-term answer.

Conclusion

Fifteen years after 9/11, the fight continues. The energy and commitment our CT professionals have displayed is impressive. Many in the core CT community are the same people whose lives were upended on 9/11, and they have been in the fight ever since. Questions about winning and losing, political squabbles about whether an attack is terrorism, and irresponsible overreactions that paint immigrants, refugees, and indeed an entire religion as potential terrorists do a disservice to the nation's CT efforts, unnecessarily extend the conflict, and distract us from our real target. The target is not Islam; rather it is the narrow extremist mindset that views murdering innocents as an acceptable tactic of war. That tactic is rejected by all of the world's civilized communities, whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, or any other.

Terrorists are not winning, by any measure. We can continue this successful campaign with a clearer focus on what we can achieve, what is relevant, and who can help. Less focus on breathless threats, fact-free allegations about Islam and terrorism, and wasteful claims about which American politician or bureaucrat is to blame are the downsides to this war. With a little more perspective, the next stage in this generational effort can take the United States to the next level: a relentless pursuit of individual terrorists and cells that threaten the homeland and a realistic program of supporting good, bad, and mediocre partners who can help along the way.   **CTC**

Unseating the Caliphate: Contrasting the Challenges of Liberating Fallujah and Mosul

By Zana Gulmohamad

The successful liberation of Fallujah from the Islamic State by a constellation of Iraqi forces in June provides pointers for the more challenging mission of liberating the much larger city of Mosul. Relatively effective coordination of Iraqi forces, coalition airpower, and vital intelligence from Sunni tribes and townspeople led to the Islamic State being driven out more quickly than expected, despite the fact that an unauthorized incursion by Shi`a militias risked compromising the offensive, as well as attempts to secure and rebuild the town. Mosul will be harder to take because Islamic State fighters are less likely to flee in large numbers. It may be possible to make significant progress in the coming weeks because of weakening Islamic State capabilities and morale and the emergence of resistance forces in the city providing key intelligence, as well as successful cooperation so far between Baghdad and Erbil. But the large number of rival Iraqi actors and regional powers— particularly Iran and Turkey—jockeying for position in Mosul means that unless their conflicting agendas can be resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting.

The offensive to liberate Mosul, which began in the early hours of October 17, is far more delicate and challenging than that of any previous Islamic State-held cities because of its size and because Nineveh province—of which Mosul is the capital—consists of the most diverse and ancient ethnic and religious communities in Iraq. Moreover, a dug-in Islamic State looks set to fight to the death there unlike in Fallujah where over 1,000 fighters and members retreated from the town. Making it even more contentious, the geopolitical significance of Mosul has created competition between the federal government, pro-Iranian Shi`a militias, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraqi Arab Sunni factions, and regional powers to carve out future influence in the city.

This article draws on interviews[1] with key Iraqi political and military players, including in Anbar and Nineveh, to outline and assess the operation that recaptured Fallujah in June and to compare and contrast the challenges faced there with those of the just launched Mosul offensive. It analyses the constellation of forces set to march on the northern Iraqi city, the Islamic State's ability to defend the city, and the political and military dynamics that will determine the ultimate success and failure of the war in Iraq against the Islamic State.

Part 1: The Fallujah Operation

Why Fallujah Was First

Fallujah, 37 miles west of Baghdad, is the second-largest city in Anbar governorate and was the second most symbolic territorial prize in Iraq for the Islamic State.[2] The Iraqi government's decision to liberate Fallujah first, despite U.S. pressure[3] to drive northward to Mosul first, was primarily to protect Baghdad from attacks launched from the area. "We used to call Fallujah Iraq's Kandahar as it was Daesh's stronghold,"[4] Ghazi al-Kaoud,[5] the Sunni chairman of the Committee of Tribes in the Iraqi Council of Representatives (ICR), told the author.

There were also political imperatives. Shi`a political factions, led by the Iraqi National Alliance and Shi`a militias' leaders, pressured Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to pursue Fallujah's liberation before Mosul's in order to retaliate against attacks on their fellow Shi`a in Baghdad.[6] Amidst power struggles in Baghdad and criticism of the government, the Fallujah operation also provided al-Abadi with an opportunity to turn the fight against the Islamic State into a unifying issue.[7]

Competing Agendas

Initially, the Iraqi government and the Shi`a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) "al-Hashd al-Sha'abi"[8] leaders sought to take the lead on Fallujah.[9] But after U.S. pressure, a compromise was reached. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) would lead the operation inside the city while the Shi`a-dominated PMF militias would surround and isolate Fallujah and support the ISF from the outskirts. Al-Abadi appointed Lieutenant General Abdul-Wahab al-Sa'adi, a key commander in the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), to lead the effort. Al-Sa'adi was disliked by the PMF militias due to previous tensions in operations in Ramadi and Tikrit, particularly between himself and Hadi al-Amiri (the leader of the Badr Organization, the largest Shi`a militia in Iraq).[10] Moreover, in 2008 the CTS and Jaish al-Mahdi (Sadrist militia) and its offshoots had fought.[11] Therefore, fissures in the military command surfaced. While they did not result in confrontation, various factions, particularly the Shi`a militias, did not completely adhere to the plan, which complicated the task of taking back Fallujah.

Participating Forces

The ground forces deployed to take back Fallujah—more than 30,000—involved three major loosely allied groups:[12] one, the

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Shi`a-dominated Iraqi Army (Defense Ministry),[13] the Shi`a-dominated Interior Ministry's forces,[14] and the much less sectarian CTS;[15] two, the PMF's majority Shi`a militias including some local Sunni volunteers;[16] and three, 6,000 Sunni tribesmen from Anbar belonging to a variety of al-Hashd al-`Asha'iri al-Anbari al-Sunni groupings.[17] All of these forces were officially under the authority of the Joint Operation Command (JOC) and the Fallujah Liberation Operations Command, which was closely observed by al-Abadi.[18] The local Sunni tribes and local police forces were supposed to control Fallujah after its liberation.[19]

Islamic State Defenses

The total number of Islamic State fighters in Fallujah according to al-Sa'adi were around 3,500,[20] with foreign Islamic State fighters (non-Iraqis) given key combatant roles.[21] Al-Sa'adi and the Iraqi researcher Hisham al-Hashimi estimate around 85 percent of the group's fighters in the town were Iraqis and 15 percent foreign fighters.[22]

The group put up defenses by building barricades, trenches, and around four miles of secret tunnel networks; prepared improvised explosive devices; booby trapped vehicles; and used heavy and small arms.[23] Tunnels were also a feature of the group's defenses in Ramadi, Tikrit, Sinjar, and Manjib in Syria, and are expected to play a significant role in the group's attempts to defend Mosul. In Fallujah, the tunnels were designed to help fighters encircle and ambush anti-Islamic State forces; avoid airstrikes; connect three frontlines, and deploy snipers, weaponry and logistic transportation around Fallujah; and to be used as escape passages.[24]

Retaking Fallujah

The military operation consisted of two phases.[25] First, in January and February 2016, Iraqi forces conducted a shaping or isolating campaign to encircle Fallujah in order to cut the Islamic State's supply lines.[26] It was led by the PMF and supported by the ISF and local Sunni tribes.[27] These forces encircled and took control of three major areas around Fallujah: the areas to the north and northwest close to Saqlawiyah, the area to the east around al-Karmah, and the area to the south around Nuaimiya.[28] Despite the encirclement, some small infiltration routes for the Islamic State remained, according to al-Sa'adi, the operation's top commander.[29] Meanwhile, the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi Air Force targeted Islamic State positions in Fallujah.

Despite a number of tribal chiefs pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in Fallujah one year before the liberation, there were tribal members inside Fallujah who secretly assisted the ISF and anti-Islamic State coalition by providing intelligence to target Islamic State positions.[30] The developments in this stage eroded the Islamic State's confidence and eased the next phase of operations to take back Fallujah.

Prime Minister al-Abadi announced the second phase, "Operation Breaking Terrorism," on May 23, 2016. As the U.S.-led coalition provided air power, joint forces led by the CTS and Iraqi army stormed the city center from the southern "Nuaimiya" front because it is closest to the city center and there are no agriculture areas where Islamic State fighters could hide. By this point, the PMF's Shi`a forces had secured the northern and western approaches to Fallujah and remained stationed there.[31] Smaller PMF units were embedded with the ISF in the area to the south of the city.[32] At this time, the pro-Iranian Shi`a factions were still sticking to the plan, as illustrated by the remarks in early June of al-Amiri, the leader of the Badr Organization, when he stated, "After we isolated Fallujah … we [the PMF] scored a great achievement encircling Fallujah … the remaining task will be entering and liberating it, which we [PMF] have completely left for the Iraqi armed forces, counterterrorism forces… We [the PMF] will not participate [enter Fallujah]."[33]

With Iraqi forces pouring into the town, the PMF lobbied to also enter Fallujah and gave locals a deadline to evacuate. On June 13, some PMF forces, mainly from the Badr Organization, ignored the injunctions from the Prime Minister's office, entered the city, and took up position in the southern suburbs, including Shuhada.[34] Al-Marjiya Sistani's, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's and
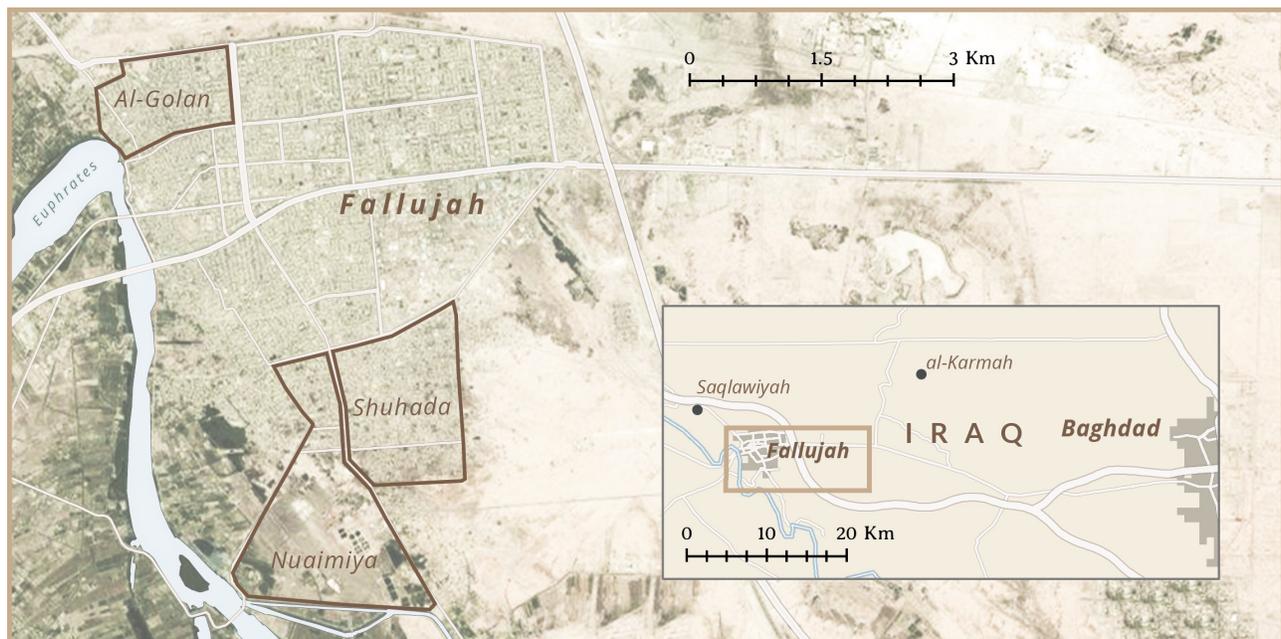
Fallujah, Iraq (Rowan Technology)

Muqtada al-Sadr's militias also entered these areas but in fewer numbers.[35]

The decision by some of the PMF's militias to act on their own initiative rather than execute the previously agreed plan risked jeopardizing the operation. Their entry without permission and the subsequent abductions and arrests of townspeople and Islamic State fighters could have created a major backlash among the town's Sunni population.[36] Ultimately, despite the PMF's actions, the JOC managed to distribute responsibilities among the military components and coordinate between the ground forces and the U.S.-led coalition's airpower effectively enough to drive the Islamic State out.

On June 17, the CTS reached the city center from the southern axis after the collapse of the Islamic State's defenses on the southern flank. That day, al-Abadi prematurely announced victory, but a few hundred Islamic State fighters halted the ISF advance and held Fallujah's northwestern district of al-Golan for a further week.[37] On June 26, after an intensive month of military offensives, the CTS announced the liberation of this last district.

After months of an attritional siege, the Islamic State's morale had collapsed. More than 1,800 of its fighters were killed in the final phase of Fallujah's liberation, around half the force the Islamic State originally had available to defend the city.[38] According to the Iraqi government, over 1,000 active Islamic State members infiltrated the group of refugees fleeing Fallujah.[39] Al-Hashimi said that Islamic State members in Fallujah could be classified in two groups: first, military, and second, logistical, finance, and administrative members. Islamic State members who infiltrated the fleeing masses of overwhelmingly innocent civilians were mainly from the second group.[40] But a significant number of fighters appear to have fled, too. As June progressed, reports streamed in of Islamic State fighters defecting, discarding their weapons, or escaping from Fallujah. One fleeing Islamic State convoy of hundreds of cars was destroyed by the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi Air Force at the end of the month.[41]

The liberation of Fallujah had been less difficult than many had feared. Intelligence from Sunni tribal fighters appears to have helped considerably. Abboud al-Issawi, an MP and a member of the Committee of Tribes in the ICR, told the author, "Besides the ISF and the U.S.-led coalition's air forces' significant role in defeating the Islamic State in Fallujah, Hashd al-`Asha'iri had a positive role in supporting the Iraqi Army, providing them with information which included identifying Islamic State figures, and knowing the land."[42]

A month afterward, al-Kaoud, the Sunni tribal leader, told the author, "Although we condemn some of Hashd al-Sha'abi's actions such as killing a number of innocents, bad treatment of civilians, and the arrests of individuals … we expected that Fallujah's liberation would be with great difficulties, damage to the city, and significant civilian bloodshed. The results were to the contrary."[43]

The Post-Conflict Phase

Liberating Fallujah was the easy part. According to the author's interviewees and al-Sa'adi, a long war of attrition is expected as Iraqi forces continue to press against the remaining Islamic State fighters in the region and the group's fighters' shift to guerilla war and terrorist attacks.[44]

The PMF's arrests and abuse of locals not only risked the mission to clear Fallujah of the Islamic State, but angering the local population has made it more difficult to hold and rebuild the town and its surroundings. As Hamid al-Mutlaq, the deputy chair of the Committee of Defense and Security in the ICR, remarked, "Fallujah's liberation was not a model operation because the fate of around 700 individuals, a number of whom were killed and kidnapped by Hashd al-Sha'abi, is unknown."[45]

The risks of a backlash were mitigated by the fact most locals were evacuated from Fallujah before and during the operation. In recent weeks, residents have begun to return to Fallujah after their backgrounds were checked. To date, al-Hashd al-`Asha'iri al-Anbari, particularly the Dera' al-Fallujah Brigade, has been deployed in some areas of Fallujah, helping to reassure the townspeople, as has the fact that several areas are now controlled by locally recruited police.

However, other areas are still controlled by the Shi`a-dominated Iraqi Army, a regiment of Iraq's Emergency Rapid Response, and Shi`a PMF militias.[46] According to several local reports, not only has the Badr Organization formally opened a branch west of Fallujah in Abu A'lwan in al-Nasaf called the Cultural Office of the Badr Organization, but Shi`a militias have hung Shiite flags with Shi`a slogans such as "Ya Hussein" along the main roads of the town. According to the same reports, this has increased locals' concerns about Fallujah's identity and about the presence of these militias.[47]

Several challenges remain. A significant proportion of Fallujah's homes and infrastructure are destroyed, even if the damage is less severe than in Ramadi and Tikrit. There is no water or electricity, and the reconstruction process is slow. The strict screening processes to check the backgrounds of internally displaced person (IDPs) and to learn whether they have ties to the Islamic State risk further alienating locals. Those suspected of ties with the Islamic State are not permitted to return to the city.

According to the author's interviews,[48] local Sunnis yearn for their tribesmen to control the whole city. There is a danger that sectarian frictions, caused by the still large numbers of non-local and non-Sunni forces present as well as revenge attacks by those who were hurt by the Islamic State in Fallujah, could be exploited by the Islamic State to destabilize the security situation.

Incoherence between forces, inadequate support for local tribesmen that was expressed to the author, lack of a genuine plan to integrate local Sunni tribesmen into formal forces, and allowance of the Shi`a militias' to control districts and violate human rights will continue to hinder the stabilization phase in Fallujah.

Despite these challenges, liberating Fallujah was successful in reducing the security threats to the capital, and it shrunk the Islamic State's revenue streams, destroyed its regional command center, and scaled back its movements in Anbar.[49] Even as anti-Islamic State forces were fighting small resistance pockets in Fallujah, the Iraqi government ordered operations on new fronts south of Mosul in preparation for its liberation.

Part 2: The Mosul Operation

The Biggest Challenge Yet

The Mosul operation is more complicated and arduous than any other in Iraq due to several reasons. It is one of the Islamic State's twin capitals and the largest city under the group's control.[50] Its demographics are significantly different to any other province in Iraq as it contains Arab Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabaks, Kakais, and Sabeans. Mosul has geopolitical importance to Baghdad, Erbil, Turkey, Iran, Syria, and the Arab

Northern Iraq (Rowan Technology)

Gulf States, and their divergent political and military agendas will complicate the retaking and rebuilding of the city.

Mosul fell to the Islamic State in June 2014 after the ISF's rapid meltdown. Other insurgent and terrorist groups that were holding the city alongside the Islamic State were quickly assimilated.[51] With the Islamic State now losing ground, its leaders have recognized it may lose much of its territory, including Mosul, but they have made clear they will not give up fighting.[52] They have had two years to prepare defenses and will fight for Mosul, where the caliphate was declared by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, more fiercely than other cities because their foothold in Iraq and the caliphate's legacy will be lost if Mosul is retaken. The Islamic State will likely resort to various tactics that it has employed previously in other towns. In recent weeks, they have filled trenches with oil to be set ablaze to lower visibility for coalition airplanes, have extended their tunnel network, and have resorted to arming children as young as eight years old and using them as spies.[53]

Despite the challenges, the constellation of ground forces seeking to liberate Mosul should eventually prevail. They all share at least the common goal of removing the Islamic State. But their competing agendas and the lack of shared plans to stabilize Mosul will make securing and rebuilding the city and preventing the emergence of a destabilizing terrorist and guerilla campaign by the Islamic State very difficult.

Weakening Islamic State Numbers and Morale

Iraqi sources and American officials believe a maximum of 4,500 Is-lamic state fighters remain in Mosul, of which more than 1,000 are non-Iraqis.[54] The significant reduction in the group's presence in Mosul is due to the transfer of some of its forces to Syria[55] as well as airstrikes targeting the group and its top commanders.[56] Despite the Islamic State fighters' counter attacks on areas such as those close to ISF positions north of Qayyara,[57] the pressure exerted on the Islamic State has led to growing frustration as evidenced by harsher punishments for those unwilling to obey orders to stay and fight.[58] While there are still a number of key commanders and caliphate ministers operating in Mosul, some important Islamic State figures have sold properties under their control in Mosul and moved their families to Syria.[59] There are also indications that al-Baghdadi has replaced Iraqis occupying key security roles for the group in Mosul with foreign fighters.[60] This policy was also reportedly implemented in Fallujah, and risks aggravating tensions between the Iraqis living in Mosul and foreign fighters who are increasingly calling the shots.

An Emerging Resistance Movement

A fledgling resistance movement has emerged in Mosul, increasingly challenging the Islamic State. Members use the letter M to symbolize resistance "*Muqawama*," and their number includes organizations known as Kataib Mosul, Kataib al-Hrar, Free Officers Movements "Harakat Thubat al-Ahrar."[61] These secret networks target Islamic State forces and spread liberation propaganda. They have exposed the Islamic State's harsh policies and actions and produce anti-Islamic State videos. They have connections with and provide intelligence to anti-Islamic State coalition forces.[62]

Hashd al-`Asha'iri leader Ahmad al-Jarba (in keffiyeh*) inspects the Lions of Nineveh force in Rabia west of Mosul on October 10, 2016. (Photo provided to author by Ahmad al-Jarba)*

The contribution of these groups will be relatively limited compared to the extensive fighters and firepower that are rallying around Mosul. However, small, organized local groups were instrumental during the offensive to liberate Qayyara, for example targeting Islamic State fighters on the streets, and also played an important role in Fallujah.[63] Several of the Iraqi sources interviewed for this article told the author that before, during, and after the operation to take back Mosul, these networks are expected to assist in identifying and targeting critical Islamic State locations and elements.[64] This could play a critical role in displacing the group from the city by making offensive operations more effective and weakening the Islamic State morale and its ability to hold ground. Just days before the Iraqi offensive of Mosul started, the Islamic State appears to have brutally suppressed an attempt by some of its fighters to switch sides.[65]

Progress So Far

The preparatory phase of Operation "Fatah" (Conquest) was launched in March 2016 from Makhmour, 47 miles southeast of Mosul.[66] It involved the ISF, including the Iraqi Army's 15th division, backed by Peshmerga forces, Hashd al-`Asha'iri, and Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition's air forces. It has succeeded in cutting off Mosul from Kirkuk and Salah al-Din provinces. A significant number of villages and areas west of Makhmour and south of Qayyara were recaptured.[67]

In mid-June, while fighting was still raging in Fallujah, the sec-

ond phase of Operation Fatah—designed to isolate Mosul—was launched from the south of Mosul by Defense and Interior ministries' forces, CTS, and Hashd al-`Asha'iri, which consists of local Arab Sunni tribes.[68] Iraqi forces successfully crossed the Tigris between Makhmour in the east and Qayyara in the west to retake the latter.[69] Advancing north, they have retaken a number of towns and villages south of Mosul from the axis stretching from Baiji along the Mosul-Baghdad road to Qayyara, then on to Hammam al-Alil and toward Mosul.[70]

In military terms, the operation's sequence can be called a lily-pad strategy. The capture of Qayyara was particularly significant as it was the center of the Islamic State's Wilayat Dijlah, a defensive line in its own right guarding the approach to Mosul, a major petroleum revenue source, and a logistical hub connecting the south of Mosul with Hawijah and al-Shirqat.[71] Qayyara and its airbase, approximately 39 miles south of Mosul, has become a major strategic and military base of operations for the Mosul offensive with a significant number of U.S. forces now stationed there in a supporting role.[72]

Despite their assertions, the Shi`a militias did not play a role in the shaping operation in Nineveh nor in the liberation of Qayyara.[73] Their lack of presence in the staging areas around Qayyara for the Mosul offensive will likely limit their influence on the initial phases of the Mosul operation. Over time, this is likely to change as the PMF have a presence in al-Shirqat, intend to retake Hawijah, and are likely to move toward the west of Mosul and possibly to the

Nineveh plains or even to Mosul city as they did in Fallujah.[74]

The initiation of the offensive to take back Mosul followed the completion of shaping operations and operations to isolate the city.[75] According to Hamid al-Sabawi, a Hashd al-`Asha'iri commander, and open sources, the final offensive on the city itself is expected to launch from multiple directions.[76]

The ISF will enter Mosul from the south and southwest. According to al-Sabawi as well as Kurdish officials, the Peshmerga, who control most other axes (north, northwest, east northeast, southeast), will have a closely supportive role and will pave the way for the ISF but will not enter the city.[77] Iraqi sources believe pro-Islamic State fighters in the east of Mosul will put up a less furious fight than the west and southwest of Mosul and will likely fall more easily.[78] Some sources say an escape route for the Islamic State will be left for its fighters on the western side of the city, an attempt to shorten the duration of fighting and the harm inflicted on civilians. Once outside the city, the source say these fighters would be easier to target from the air.[79]

According to senior Iraqi figures interviewed by the author and some media reports, the offensive will consist of two phases. The first phase, launched in the early hours (local time) on October 17 with coalition air support, is completing the encirclement of Mosul, taking control of most of the city's outskirts and preparing to access the city. The second phase will involve entering the city from multiple directions after heavy airstrikes from the U.S.-led coalition.[80]

In the opening phase of the offensive ISF and Peshmerga forces liberated a number of villages to the east of Mosul, while the ISF engaged in clashes with the Islamic State from the southern and southeastern axes backed by U.S. artillery and French artillery in Qayyara and Makhmour.[81] Kurdish officials were pleased with the initial pace of progress[82] and expected it would take more than a week for the constellation of Iraqi forces to reach Mosul's suburbs.[83]

Participating Forces

According to Iraqi sources, the constellation of Iraqi forces involved in the liberation of Mosul, including those carrying out the offensive, in supportive roles, and holding ground post-liberation will be between 80,000 and 100,000[84] and can be classified into six major groups.[85] Currently around 45,000 of these—mainly the Iraqi Army, CTS, and Peshmerga—are moving toward the city limits of Mosul.[86]

First is the federal government's forces including the Defense and Interior ministries' armed forces,[87] CTS, military intelligence, and the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS).[88] Government forces have liberated swathes of Nineveh's southern territories and are spearheading the operation to liberate Mosul from the southern and southwestern axes.[89] A fragile understanding and compromise between the KRG and Baghdad was established in late September after President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani visited Baghdad. The agreement has paved the way for Iraqi forces to use the Kurdish-controlled areas around Mosul to conduct a multi-directional offensive.[90] The ISF were expected to attack from the south and southwestern areas that they control and were also expected to attack from areas controlled by the Peshmerga from Nineveh Plain northeast, including Bashiqa and Hamdniya, as well as Khazr east of Mosul, Gwer southeast, and Zumar northwest of Mosul.[91] The early phase of operation to liberate Mosul followed this plan. On October 17 the ISF liberated a number of villages south east of Mosul and launched an offensive with the Peshmerga along the Khazr axis.[92]

The second group is the Hashd al-`Asha'iri, a Sunni militia force under the nominal control of Falah al-Fayad, head of the National Security Agency.[93] Hashd al-`Asha'iri in Nineveh governorate can count on 15,000 fighters from Mosul tribes trained by the United States, including the Shammar, al-Sabawi, al-Lihab, and al-Jubour tribes, to hold ground after the liberation.[94] Around 6,000 tribesmen are ready to engage in the Mosul operation.[95]

Third is the "Hashd al-Watani," (now renamed Haras Nineveh),[96] which consists of a number of local Arab Sunni tribes who are led by Atheel al-Nujaifi and backed and funded by Turkey.[97] They are allied with the KDP's Peshmerga and based in Bashiqa 12 miles northeast of Mosul. There has been much diplomatic wrangling between Baghdad and Ankara on their role, with Baghdad nervous about a militia they view as defending Turkey's interests participating in the operation.[98] Nevertheless, as the Mosul offensive looms closer, the Iraqi government has grudgingly accepted Hashd al-Watani as part of the liberating forces.[99] There is close coordination between the KRG's Peshmerga and Hashd al-Watani, and the former will likely pave the way for the latter to enter the city, though the role of the Hashd al-Watani remains unclear and is expected to be limited by the federal government because of its close ties to Turkey.[100] In an agreement brokered just before the start of the Mosul offensive, a fraction of their forces (around 1500 fighters) have been allowed by the federal government to participate in the operation.[101]

Fourth is the PMF, a largely Shi`a constellation of militias that are also nominally under the control of the National Security Agency. It is not yet clear what role the PMF will play, though, as noted, its absence in Qayyara means these militias are unlikely to play a significant role in the initial parts of the operation. Some of the militias have announced they intend to enter the city, and while al-Abadi has accepted that they should play some role in the liberation of Mosul, this has yet to be clarified.[102] The PMF is set to take up position south of Mosul, and it is expected a number will head toward Tal Afar west of Mosul as there are considerable numbers of Shi`a Turkmen inhabitants there.[103]

According to leaked plans disclosed by the BBC, Shi`a militias are set to be deployed in the areas and roads south of Qayyara and west of Mosul, but they will not enter the city.[104] However, their adherence to this plan is very doubtful. Many Sunni political factions and the KRG are unhappy with the idea of the largely Shi`a PMF entering Mosul or even Nineveh governorate,[105] especially because Baghdad was not able to constrain PMF forces from carrying out abuses in Fallujah. Al-Issawi and Zebari told the author there is a danger of revenge killings during the liberation of Mosul.[106] Armed "microminority groups" affiliated with Shi`a militias[107] are also expected to head east toward "Sahal Nineveh" (Nineveh plains).

Fifth is the estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Kurdish Peshmerga forces[108] that surround Mosul in a crescent formation. They are in control of areas north, east, and northwest of Mosul,[109] including the main roads leading into the city from these areas.[110] During the past few months at some locations, they were just five miles north of Mosul's outskirts, and they are now driving toward the city from the east and northeast.[111] In August, Kurdish forces advanced from the southeast and recaptured more than 10 villages as well as Gwer Bridge, 29 miles from Mosul.[112]

The cooperation thus far between Kurdish and Iraqi forces has surprised pessimists. At a press conference on October 17, President Barzani praised the unprecedented coordination and cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil's forces. "This is the first time the Pesh-

merga and Iraqi forces have coordinated to fight an enemy in one place."[113] As the Peshmerga are playing a supportive role, it is expected that in the final offensive, a fraction of the aforementioned number will take up position close to the outskirts of Mosul. It is possible that at the local, tactical level, they will be asked to assist if the ISF runs into difficulties in the city, even though there is no political agreement on this.

The sixth category consists of "microminority" armed groups including Christians,[114] Yazidis,[115] Shabaks,[116] Kakais,[117] and Turkmen[118] that are affiliated with and supported by the federal government, the PMF, and the KRG and its Kurdish parties. Turkey is backing some Turkmen.[119] All the microminority groups intend to engage in Nineveh plains. For example, the PMF's and KRG's Christian militias as well as their Shabak armed units intend to go to the Nineveh Plains because that is where they lived before the Islamic State takeover of the region. Meanwhile, the KRG, Baghdad, the PMF and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and People's Protection Units (YPG) have focused on arming and setting up Yazidi militias affiliated with them in Sinjar.[120] Some of the KRG's microminority armed units (Christian and Kakai) and Peshmerga will close in on Mosul from the northeast (Nineveh Plains) and have already started to bombard it by artillery.[121]

Divisions

The large number of rival Iraqi actors jockeying for position in Mosul means that unless their conflicting agendas can be resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting. The proliferation of armed groups is symptomatic of fragmentation of communities and the divisions between Iraqi and Kurdish political factions.

Various key players told the author the plan, as agreed, is that the Hashd al-Sha'abi and Peshmerga forces will not enter Mosul itself. However, many of those interviewed by the author remain skeptical this agreement will hold fully. The eastern and northeastern districts of Hai al-Tahreer, Hai al-Qahira, and Hai al-Arabi in Mosul are inhabited by Kurds and the Peshmerga want to reclaim and protect them.[122] And Hashd al-Sha'abi officials have said that if Peshmerga enter then they will enter too.[123]

While there appears to be an initial understanding between Baghdad and Erbil that both will play complementary roles in the liberation of Mosul, there is little sign the parties have agreed on how this will work in the long term,[124] which may lead to significant problems in the future because of their very divergent aims. Inevitably, there will be tensions when various anti-Islamic State forces with competing ambitions control the same areas, such as Nineveh Plains, Sinjar, and Tal Afar.[125] Further challenges are created by the conflicting agendas of regional powers, especially[126] (through its proxies) and Turkey, given the possibility that Turkish troops may engage without Baghdad's consent.[127]

There is a "race to Berlin" aspect when it comes to the drive to recapture Mosul and the Islamic State-controlled areas around it because the involved actors all recognize that whomever controls Mosul will have a great say in the future of Nineveh and Iraq. But despite various proposals,[128] no consensus has emerged on how this province will be administered in the future, suggesting fractures will emerge as soon as Mosul is liberated. In September, President Barzani said that there is not yet agreement on the future of Mosul.[129] Currently, the Iraqi government is not keen to divide Mosul into more than one province. There are differences between and reservations among some political blocs on the question of dividing

Mosul, and if no consensus is reached, it could be an insurmountable challenge to stabilizing the province.

Conclusion

The operation to liberate and secure Mosul will be significantly more challenging than Fallujah. A significant number of Islamic State members and fighters fled the fighting there, but that is unlikely to be repeated in Mosul. While there is evidence some leaders and fighters have relocated to Syria, the Islamic State is likely to put up fierce and sustained resistance so as not to lose a city that is key to its caliphate pretensions.

Despite this, the constellation of ground forces seeking to liberate Mosul should eventually prevail. They all share at least the common goal of removing the Islamic State and may feel incentivized to participate because of a "to the winner go the spoils" dynamic.

But the battlefield is much more crowded and complex around Mosul than the other towns so far liberated. While pro-Iranian Shi`a militias were not interested in controlling Fallujah in the long term, as it is majority Arab Sunni in Nineveh, they are interested in Tal Afar, which was majority Shi`a Turkmen before it was taken over by the Islamic State two years ago, and the micro-minority areas east of Mosul. While there was no competition between the federal government and the KRG over control of Fallujah, the two groups have divergent interests when it comes to the future of Nineveh. Moreover, Turkey and other regional powers have a much greater stake in the future of Mosul, which could complicate the task of securing the city.

The Hashd al-`Asha'iri commanders al-Jarba and al-Sabawi told the author that there is the potential for clashes between the liberating armed factions, for example between Kurdish Peshmerga and the Hashd al-Sha'abi when their forces come into proximity to each other. The operation in the city of Mosul, including liberating Tal Afar, will be more challenging than reaching and liberating the areas around it.[130] Only political compromise between their leaders and agreement to operate in separate areas can reduce the chance of confrontation. Although there was unprecedented military coordination between Baghdad and Erbil in the early phases of liberation of Mosul, there is still no clear plan for Mosul's future.

Although Fallujah is far less complicated politically and is an Arab Sunni city, lessons can be learned from its liberation. The entry of Hashd al-Sha'abi into the town without permission jeopardized the entire operation and complicated efforts to stabilize the town. Baghdad should therefore prevent Hashd al-Sha'abi or other de facto groups from exploiting the battle in Mosul for political rhetoric and gains. It will be easier to minimize sectarian tensions and thus secure the city if Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabak, and others who take control of areas in Mosul and the area around it are placed under the control of the federal government and the KRG instead of Hashd al-Sha'abi or the Interior Ministry's almost entirely Shi`a emergency response forces. The Shi`a-dominated ISF will also need to show sensitivity to the majority Sunni local population. To a large degree, the security of Mosul will depend on a comprehensive political agreement between Baghdad and Erbil.

Another lesson from Fallujah is that Iraqi forces should do everything they can to build bridges with local Sunnis to gain vital intelligence and to encourage an uprising from within. The operations in Anbar including Ramadi and Fallujah demonstrated that empowering local communities is key to providing long-term stabil-

ity. Every care should be taken not to repeat the ISF's sectarian and abusive behavior during the decade after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, which created significant resentment among locals.[131] It is critical to build trust between the ISF and the locals in order to have a constructive outcome for the stabilization phase. Given the ISF is over 75 percent Shi`a and the proportion of Sunnis in Mosul has risen to 85-90 percent because many non-Sunni Moslawis fled Islamic State oppression, this will be ever more challenging.[132] After liberation, safeguarding the return of minority IDPs to their original lands will be essential to restore the natural mosaic of Mosul, but this is a difficult task as distrust between the communities runs deep.

Mosul's humanitarian prospects are the worst in Iraq's history. The Iraqi government and international organizations are not yet prepared for the possibility of a million fleeing refugees.[133] And there is concern that displaced young men could be recruited by the Islamic State as it pivots back to guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks in the hopes of making a comeback.[134] Ultimately, security can only be restored in Mosul and in other parts of Iraq via an end to the politics of sectarianism, a devolution of powers to locals, and the establishment of domestic and regional compromises between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey with the latter two agreeing to end their interference once the Islamic State has been defeated. This will require supervision from the United Nations and the U.S.-led coalition during the stabilization phase. Without this, it is likely the country will be further destabilized and again descend into chaos, recreating the conditions that set the stage for the rise of the Islamic State in first place.   CTC

Substantive Notes and Citations

1   During the summer and fall of 2016, the author interviewed Dr. Khasraw Gul Mohammed, the head of Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Abdul Bari Zebari, chairman of Iraq's Foreign Relations Committee; Ghazi al-Kaoud, chairman of the Tribes Committee; Hamid al-Mutlaq, the deputy chairman of the Committee of Defence and Security in Iraq's Council of Representatives; Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, an MP and member of the Tribes Committee and a former advisor to Nouri al-Maliki; two senior Hashd al-`Asha'iri commanders who have participated in liberating Islamic State-held areas and who are set to take part in the Mosul operation, namely Hamid al-Sabawi and Ahmad al-Jarba, who is also a member in the Tribes Committee and an MP; and Ahmad, a Kurdish Peshmerga colonel, whose last name was withheld at his request.

2   Fallujah was partly seized by al-Qa`ida in Iraq from 2004 to 2006. The Islamic State held it from January 2014 to July 2016. Some local tribes in Fallujah pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, while others are discontented with the federal government. Fallujah has been a persistently rebellious town for the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) since 2003. There have been at least three major military operations against jihadis by the ISF and the United States. Micheal J. Totten, "The third battle of Fallujah," *World Affairs*, June 1, 2016.

3   In May, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesperson Colonel Steve Warren said, "Fallujah doesn't really have any tactical influence on Mosul … there is no military reason to liberate Fallujah now." U.S. Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," May 13, 2016; Andrew Tilghman, "No U.S. combat advisors for Fallujah invasion," *Military Times*, May 23, 2016.

4   Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016.

5   Al-Kaoud is also the leader of the Abu Nimr tribe and a leader of Anbar's Hashd al-`Asha'iri Sunni militia force.

6   Patrick Martin, "Fallujah control of terrain map: prior to May 23, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, May 27, 2016.

7   Threats emerged from Muqtada al-Sadr's factions against the government, political (quota) system, and the Iraqi pro-Iranian Shi`a militias.

8   This is an umbrella group for armed majority Shi`a militias affiliated with political parties and Iran. See Zana Gulmohamad, "A Short Profile or Iraq's Shi'a Militias," *Terrorism Monitor* 13:8 (2015).

9   Mustafa Habib, "Behind the Scenes: How the US, Iraqi army and militias came to unite - then split - in Fallujah," Niqash, May 13, 2016.

10 Mustafa Habib, "Taming the Beast: Can Iraq Ever Control its Controversial Volunteer Militias?" Niqash, August 4, 2016.

11 David Witty, "The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service," Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 16, 2015.

12 Saudad Al-Salhy, "Fallujah escape: families pay $100-a-head to IS militant – to flee his group," Middle East Eye, June 20, 2016.

13 There is no formal percentage of the Shi`a in the Iraqi Army. However, according to various reports, they are estimated to make up more than 75 percent. Florence Gaub, "an Unhappy marriage: Civil-Military relations in post-Saddam," Carnegie Europe, January 13, 2016; Ummar Ali, "Iraqi

Army: the journey from the military of Umma to sectarian Army," Al-Taqreer, 2015.

14 The federal police, Anbar police, and Iraq's Emergency Rapid Response "Qwuat al-Rad al Sari" are part of the Shi`a-dominated Interior Ministry. More than 70 percent of Interior Ministry forces are Shi`a, and most have strong links to Shi`a militias including Badr. Ned Parker, "Political struggle: Power failure in Iraq as militias outgun state," Reuters, October 21, 2015. Currently, the Deputy Minister of Interior is running the ministry and is aligned with the Badr Organization. It was previously run by Muhammad al-Ghabban from the Badr Organization. The ministry's forces adhere to the Prime Minister's and JOC's orders.

15 The CTS's elite force is known as Iraq's Golden Division that today number around 10,000. Highly trained by U.S. advisors, they are under the Iraqi government's and PM's authority. The CTS is the most cross-ethnic sectarian force in Iraq as it contains Arab Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and minorities. The Iraqi Special Forces "Golden Brigade," which is part of the CTS, is headed by Fadhil al-Berwari, a Kurd with a long history in the Peshmerga ranks. It is the only professional and sophisticated armed forces in Iraq that was created, equipped, and intensively and closely trained by the United States. David Witty, "The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service," Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 16, 2015; Iraqi Special Operation Forces-iq, "Counter Terrorism Agency: Special Operations-Golden Division," October 10, 2016. (Isof-iq.com is its formal website.)

16 There are three Shi`a militia blocs in the PMF that participated in Fallujah's liberation—pro-Iranian; pro-Sistani, closer to al-Abadi; and pro-Muqtada and other parties such as Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. See Zana K. Gulmohamad, "Iraq's Shia militias: Helping or hindering the fight against Islamic State?" *Terrorism Monitor* 14:9 (2016).

17 Three groups of Sunni volunteers have been fighting in Anbar: first, a group locally funded and organized without the federal government's or PMF's involvement; second, a group equipped by the U.S.-led coalition and Baghdad and connected to the Iraqi Army; and third, small armed units affiliated with the PMF. Author interview, Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, Baghdad, August 2016. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk said there were about 20,000 local tribal fighters in Anbar province working with ISF and being paid by the government of Iraq. C-SPAN coverage of Future of Iraq event at the United States Institute of Peace, July 19, 2016. The chairman of the Tribes Committee told the author that "although there are other Sunni Arab tribes that might have received support from Baghdad, my tribe in Anbar has been self-sufficient in fighting the IS. We call our actions and rally as Faza'a [a sudden awakening]." Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, July 2016. "Warren: Iraqi forces will enter Fallujah soon with participation of 4000 Sunni fighters," Iraqi News, May 26, 2016; Munaf al-Obeidi and Heba El-Koudsy, "International Coalition halt advance of PMF towards Fallujah," Asharq al-Awsat, May 27, 2016.

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supervise Fallujah operation liberation," Iraqi Prime Minister's Office, May 23, 2016.

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22 "The debate on the Arab land: Operation liberation Fallujah," CCTV Arabic, July 24, 2016.

23 Terri Moon Cronk, "Fights to retake Fallujah, Manbij city from ISIL begin," Department of Defense News, Defense Media Activity, June 3, 2016; Habib, "Suicide bombers + secret Tunnels: Extremists tactics on Fallujah's frontlines."

24 Mustafa Habib, "Battle for Fallujah: ISIS snipers use four mile-long tunnels to stall Iraq offensive," Niqash, July 7, 2016.

25 PMF factions led by the Badr Organization have been operating in the environs of Fallujah since April 2015 before the first phase. At this time, they failed to control the terrain around Fallujah. Patrick Martin, "The campaign for Fallujah: May 26, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, May 27, 2016.

26 George Allison, "Iraqi forces recapture the city of Fallujah from Islamic State," UK Defence Journal, June 27, 2016; "Video: Iraqi army troops begin massive operation against ISIS in Fallujah," Al Alam, February 25, 2016.

27 Al-Sumaria.

28 "The third battle of Fallujah," Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, June 10, 2016.

29 Al-Sumaria.

30 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016; "Fallujah Tribes protest against Daesh in several neighbourhoods," Sky News Arabia, February 19, 2016. These networks were smaller than those that have now grown up in Mosul, less organized, and more spontaneous. In February 2016, months before the town's liberation, Fallujah tribesmen attacked Islamic State positions and killed dozens of Islamic State members, including key figures such as the Wali of Fallujah, Wahib Abu Aber. The tribesmen were subsequently crushed by the Islamic State. The resistance fighters had contacts with Anbar Provincial Council members and Hashd al-Anbari. Although cell phones were banned by the Islamic State in Fallujah, these networks used them covertly to contact outsiders. Al-Hurra, "Tribes in Fallujah revolt against IS," February 20, 2016.

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44 Ibid.

45 Author interview, Hamid al-Mutlaq, Baghdad, September 2016.

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48 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016; author interview,

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52 On May 21, 2016, the Islamic State's Furqan Media published an audio recording by Islamic State spokesperson Abu Muhamad al-Adnani conceding it was possible the group would lose significant amounts of territory, but vowing to fight on. "Daesh, according to its spokesperson, mourns itself," Al-Alam, May 26, 2016; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Islamic State's Iraq 'Caliphate on the Brink of defeat," *Terrorism Monitor* 14:15 (2016).

53 Bethan McKernan, "ISIS 'ready and waiting' for Mosul offensive with booby traps, suicide bomber squadrons and network of spies," *Independent*, October 17, 2016.

54 These include Europeans, Chechens, and Arabs. Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016. Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016. In late September U.S. military officials said they believed 3,000 to 4,500 fighters remained. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," September 29, 2016.

55 Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; Ben Kesling and Gordon Lubold, "U.S. gets ready to assist offensive to retake key Iraqi city from Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2016.

56 In September, U.S. airstrikes killed 13 Islamic State leaders who were part of the group's military intelligence communication networks in Mosul. "The people who replace these leadership figures have not established their bona fides with al-Baghdadi, his inner circle, and they are often not as seasoned as those they replace. This is especially true around Mosul," stated Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Colonel John Dorrian. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq."

57 "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," September 29, 2016.

58 Fighters and commanders who desert or order withdrawal have been executed. For instance, the Islamic State beheaded commanders who withdrew their forces from Nineveh, such as Abu Qutada al-Uzbaki, the commander of the Battalion of Uzbek. On August 20, Abu Mzmachr al-Mhairi, an Islamic State military commander, was burned alive for withdrawing his forces from around Qayyara. "Daesh execute the commander of Uzbek battalion," Al-Masdar News, August 17, 2016; "Daesh execute Abu Mzmchar al-Mhairi," PUK Media, August 20, 2016.

59 "Shelling then selling: In Mosul, extremists lament damage, then sell scrap to highest bidder," Niqash, August 18, 2016; "Baghdad asserts that IS leaders escaping the Islamic State from Mosul," Middle East Online, August 1, 2016.

60 Hamid al-Sabawi told the author that al-Baghdadi replaced Islamic State's key security figures because they had wrongly claimed that Qayyara would be difficult for the ISF to retake. Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; "Al-Baghdadi removes security leaders," Al-An TV, September 3, 2016. According to the author's research, replacing Iraqis with foreign fighters in the senior echelons of the Islamic State's security apparatus has become a pattern in Islamic State strategy. Foreign fighters are judged more willing to fight to the death and are more ideologically indoctrinated than locals who mainly joined for benefits or out of fear or discontent with the Shi`a-led government. Finally, the foreign fighters are judged by the group less likely to flee, and it is more difficult for them to blend in with IDPs.

61 Their members are locals, including former Iraqi army elements and university students. They rely on their personal capabilities and target Islamic State forces using snipers, assassins, and small IEDs. "Mosul hit Daesh from inside," Sky News Arabia, June 1, 2016. The Free Officers Movement includes current military and security officers and those from Saddam's era. "Thubat al-Ahrar killed Daesh Mufti in Mosul," Rudaw,

November 3, 2014.

62   Some of the Katib Mosul sub-groups such as Katib al-Suqur and
Kataib al-Nabi Yunis have ties with the anti-Islamic State coalition and
Hashd al-`Asha'iri's leaders and provide them with information. Author
interview, Hamid al-Sabawi September 2016. Most published YouTube
videos show anti-Islamic State resistance network activities such as
targeting checkpoints, committing arson, marking letters on the wall, and
distributing anti-Islamic State flyers. On August 26, 2015, Katib Mosul
"Mosul Battalions," which consists of smaller groups such as Katibat al-
Raa'd, Katibat al-Nabi Sheet, and Kataib al-Zilzal, posted a video showing
a speech by these groups; the post-Saddam Iraqi flag; anti-Islamic
State songs and poems; and a list of their anti-Islamic State activities.
"Return... publishing first visional for Katib Mosul," Katib Mosul, August
26, 2016.

63   "Details about the operation to retake Qayyara by the ISF," Al Arabiya,
August 25, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.

64   In addition, Atheel al-Nujaifi has stated on multiple occasions that based
on internal anti-Islamic State activity, revolution is expected. "Ex-Mosul
governor: many prefer ISIS to Shiite militia for fear of revenge and abuse,"
Rudaw, July 8, 2016; "Interview with Atheel al-Nujifi," al-Jarida, February
29, 2016.

65   "Exclusive: Islamic State crushes rebellion plot in Mosul as army closes
in," Reuters, October 14, 2016.

66   The long-awaited liberation of Sinjar, west of Mosul, was completed by
the Peshmerga at the end of 2015 and provided a new front for Mosul's
liberation.

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such as Kudila, Kharbadan, Karmadi, Mahana, and Kabruk, were slowly
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Mosul enters the phase of battlefield details," Al-Arab, February 9, 2016;
"Iraq declares the first phase to retake Mosul," BBC Arabic, March 24,
2016; "Operation of Mosul," Al-Kulasa, March 24, 2016.

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of the operation in mid-June. "The start of the second phase of the
operation for the liberation of Mosul... Iraqi Minister will participate in
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Voice, June 12, 2016; Hamza Mustafa, "Operations to Liberate Mosul
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69   Mohammed A. Salih, "Iraqi forces in Nineveh eye the ultimate prize:
Mosul," Al-Monitor, July 19, 2016.

70   Muhannad Al-Ghazi, "Mapping the road to the liberation of Mosul," Al-
Monitor, July 17, 2016.

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town, which is home to around 80,000 people, was liberated. The Islamic
State used Qayyara town as a rich revenue source due to its 63 oil wells,
sulfur, and old refinery, which has the capacity to produce around 16,000
barrels a day. "Iraqi forces press towards key air base south of Mosul,"
Reuters, June 29, 2016; "Iraqi army announces recapture of ISIS-held
Qayyara airbase east of Mosul," Al-Alam, July 9, 2016; "Qayyara in the
hand of the Iraqi forces," Al-Hurra, August 25, 2016. The oil in Qayyara is
reported to generate more than $2 million a month for the Islamic State.
During the fighting, the group lost special armed units such as Katibat
Tareq Bin Zaid, Jaish al-Khilafa, and the foreign fighter unit Jaish Dabiq.
"Interview with Hisham al-Hashimi," Al-Hurra Iraq, August 27, 2016;
"Qayyara the last Dijla stronghold," Rawabet Center, July 16, 2016.

72   The liberation of Qayyara was led by the CTS and forces from the Defense
and Interior Ministries and Hashd al-`Asha'iri. They attacked from three
directions: close from the oil wells in the west, from the Tigris River in
the east, and entered the governmental compound from the south. "Iraqi
Forces continue to advance to retake Qayyara," Elaph, August 24, 2016;
author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016. Hundreds of U.S.
troops are currently stationed at the Qayyara air base. See Ryan Brown
and Barbara Starr, "US, Iraqi troops close in on last ISIS-held city," CNN,
September 17, 2016. U.S. assets in Qayyara airbase include U.S. Apache
attack helicopters, and it was announced High Mobility Rocket Systems
(HIMARS) were also to be deployed. Thomas Gibbons-Nef and Missy
Ryan, "US approves additional troops, artillery systems and helicopter
gunships for Iraq fight," Washington Post, April 18, 2016; Richard Sisk,
"DoD to Send HIMARS Rocket Artillery to Turkey, Northern Iraq," Military.
com, April 26, 2016.

73   Shi`a factions are stationed around al-Shirqat, a northern district in Salah
al-Dalah. Al-Shirqat was liberated on September 22 by the Iraqi Army and

Hashd al-Sha'abi. "Baghdad declares the liberation of al-Shirqat from
Islamic State," BBC Arabic, September 22, 2016.

74   "Hashd al-Sha'abi found communication centre of Daesh in al-Shirqat,"
Annabaa, September 29, 2016; "Hashd al-Watani: the participation
of Hashd al-Sha'abi in liberating al-Shirqat is concerning for the Arab
Sunnis," Sotaliraq, September 20, 2016; author third interview, Hamid
al-Sabawi, October 2016.

75   "Security forces finish 2nd phase of operations to liberate southern
Mosul," Iraqi News, June 21, 2016; "Abadi emphasises the completion of
the first and second phases of Mosul's liberation," Mehr News, August 10,
2016.

76   Author third interview with Hamid al-Sabawi, October 5, 2016.

77   Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September - October
2016. As of early October, Kurdish officials—including Jabar Yawar, the
spokesperson of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs—were still stating
their role would be as supporting forces for the ISF and that Peshmerga
fighters would be stationed in the outskirts of the city and would not
enter Mosul. "Peshmerga Official: we will not enter Mosul, only Kurdish
land," Rudaw 24, September 24, 2016; "Sunni militia to come under
Peshmerga command for Mosul operation," Rudaw, October 5, 2016.

78   Mosul is divided east to west by the Tigris River. It is expected that Islamic
State fighters will withdraw some of its forces to the west bank as it has
narrow streets where tanks, artillery, and heavy armor will find it difficult
to gain access and operate effectively. Many of the residents on the east
side have fled while on the west side, residents are poorer and unable to
flee. It is anticipated that the Islamic State will, therefore, use them as
human shields. Helen Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Michael Gordon, "U.S.
set to open a climactic battle against ISIS in Mosul, Iraq," New York Times.
October 7, 2016; "The Battle for Mosul," Economist, October 8, 2016;
author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

79   Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

80   Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

81   "The French artillery are participating in retaking Mosul," Wakala Noon
al-Khabaria, September 12, 2016; "Operation to liberate Mosul from
ISIS: Prospects and problems," South Front, October 16, 2016; Sky News
Arabia coverage, October 17, 2016.

82   "President Barzani hails historic coordination between Kurdish and Iraqi
forces," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.

83   Author interview, senior Kurdish security official, October 2016. Khasraw
Gul Mohammed the head of Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan
Region of Iraq told the author, "Mosul's liberation will be within a
reasonable time due to the great cooperation between the Peshmerga
and the ISF. However, we cannot give an exact estimate of how long it will
take to reach the outskirts or liberate Mosul as there are many forces
engaged and there are political and military complications within the
plan." Author interview with Dr Khasraw Gul Mohammed the head of
Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, October 17,
2016.

84   Ibid.

85   The plan on paper is for the various Iraqi forces and militias involved in
the Mosul operation to be coordinated and assigned tasks by JOC in
Baghdad, headed by Lieutenant General Taleb al-Kinani; JOC in Erbil
headed by Major General Ali al-Faraji; and Nineveh Operation Command
led by General Najm al-Jubouri. The U.S.-led coalition, particularly the
Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR),
is closely involved in and a part of these command centers, which are
ultimately overseen by Prime Minister al-Abadi. Author third interview,
Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016; "Iraqis, Kurds, coalition forces
coordination center," United States Central Command, September 3,
2015; "Denying Daesh safe haven," Global Coalition, January 10, 2016.

86   "Battle for Mosul: How the Military Operation will work," Sky News,
October 17, 2016; "SitRep: Mosul Burns as Iraqi Forces Push Closer; Putin
and the Nuke Game," Foreign Policy, October 17, 2016.

87   The Iraqi police and local tribes are set to be deployed behind or following
the Iraqi Army and the CTS in order to secure and stabilize the liberated
areas and impose order. Terri Moon Cronk, "Mosul liberation from ISIL
'Inevitable', Canadian General says," U.S. Department of Defense, October
5, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

88   Some of the Iraqi Army's and Air Force's more than 30,000 strong forces,
such as the 9th, 15th, and 16th divisions, will be stationed in Makhmour
and Qayyara. The CTS, headed by Lieutenant General Abdul Ghani al-
Asaadi, will lead the operation alongside the Iraqi Army as it approaches
and enters the city. The Interior Ministry includes the federal and local

police and the Command of Nineveh Police "Qiyadat Shurtat Nineveh," which consists of battalions to liberate Nineveh "Afwach Tahrir Ninewa," and the Emergency Rapid Response Nineveh. Shallaw Mohammed, "Leaders of Nineveh Liberation Operations," Yalla Iraq, April 4, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.

89   Stephen Kalin, "Iraq Readies for Offensive to Rid Mosul of ISIS," *Time*, September 9, 2016.

90   Dilshad Abdullah, "Erbil: Kurdish delegation in Baghdad," Asharq al-Awsat, October 6, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

91   Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.

92   "Live Updates: The battle for Mosul," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.

93   Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; "Abadi emphases the participation of Shi`a militias in the liberation of Mosul," Fallujah TV Channel, September 7, 2016. Al-Fayad is the national security advisor to Prime Minister al-Abadi and head of the National Security Agency. He officially heads the PMF. He is a key figure in coordinating between various Iraqi armed factions and the U.S.-led coalition.

94   Ahmad Jarba, a Hashd al-Asha'ri leader and an MP, told the author "My forces are part of the directorate of Hashd al-`Asha'iri, which is related to the PMF. The Lions of Nineveh will be stationed around Sinjar and will head west to liberate a number of towns and villages and 25 kilometers from the Iraqi-Syrian border to cut Mosul off from Syria." Author interview, Ahmad Jarba, Baghdad, July 2016. Tim Lister and Hamdi Alkhshali, "Stakes for Iraq's future couldn't be higher as Mosul offensive looms," CNN, October 4, 2016; "The leader of Hashd al-`Asha'iri says we are related to Hashd al-Sha'abi and Hashd al-Watani is not legal," Al-Masalah, June 29, 2016; "Baghdad prepares 15000 fighters and gives Hashd al-Watani conditions," Shafaaq News, June 27, 2016.

95   Michael Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold," BBC, October 4, 2016.

96   On October 12, al-Nujaifi renamed his forces Haras Nineveh. "Al-Nujaifi changed the name of Hashd al-Watani to Haras Nineveh," Rudaw, October 12, 2016.

97   Hashd al-Watani was founded in 2014 by Atheel al-Nujaifi, the then-governor of Nineveh, who leads the militia today. It has an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 fighters also based in Zilkan in Sheykhan, where Turkish military forces are training them. Many of them receive their salary from Turkey. Al-Nujaifi opposes the PMF's participation in the Mosul operation. The role of his militia is unclear as the federal government, the PMF, and some of the Hashd al-`Asha'iri do not view Turkey-sponsored Hashd al-Watani as a legitimate force unless it submits to Iraq's National Security Agency's authority. "Report: Iraq's al-Hashd al-Watani forces; troublemaker for Mosul liberation?" Alwaght, June 21, 2016, Tensions between Turkey and Baghdad had escalated after President Erdogan's and Prime Minister al-Abadi's clashing statements about Turkey's troops in Bashiqa. On October 6, the Iraqi government and Defense Ministry approved Hashd al-Watani's bases in the Bashiqa area. Mewan Dolmari, "Iraqi government approved Turkish-Bashik military base: KRG," Kurdistan 24, October 6, 2016; author fourth interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016. The role of this Sunni militia is still unclear, despite the fact that Hashd al-Watani announced that they will be under the authority of the Peshmerga forces. "Sunni militia to come under Peshmerga command for Mosul operation," Rudaw, October 5, 2016. "Under ISIS fire, Sunni military base readies for Mosul offensive," Rudaw, March 29, 2016.

98   For example, Abdul Rahman al-Luwayzi, a Nineveh MP and Nineveh's deputy governor, said, "There are conditions for Hashd al-Watani's participation in Mosul: The withdrawal of Turkish troops or moving from their base [to areas controlled by Baghdad]." "Preparation to liberate Mosul," Al-Rashid Satellite Channel, September 7, 2016.

99   Delegations of ISF have visited the Hashd al-Watani, and Hashd al-Watani now have representatives in the JOC in Erbil. "Hashd al-Watani: we will participate in Mosul liberation and we reject to be part of Hashd al-Sha'abi," Al-Quds al-Arabi, October 10, 2016.

100   Barham Arif Yassin the General Peshmerga Commander stationed in Bashiqa Mountain said, "We will open a way for Hashd al-Watani to go inside Mosul." Wilson Fache, "What is Turkish army really doing in Iraq?" Al-Monitor, September 6, 2016. Barham Arif Yassin the General Peshmerga Commander stationed in Bashiqa Mountain said, "We will open a way for Hashd al-Watani to go inside Mosul." Wilson Fache, "What is Turkish army really doing in Iraq?" Al-Monitor, September 6, 2016.

101   "Interview with Atheel al-Nujaifi, the commander of Haras Nineveh," Qanat al-Fallujah, October 15, 2016.

102   A number of the PMF's militias, including Hadi al-Amiri and the rival Asaib

Ahl al-Haq, have announced their participation. "Asaib Ahl al-Haq: We will participate in the battle of Mosul," April 2016. Rai al-Youm, "Hadi al-Amiri: Hashd al-Sha'abi will participate in the battle of Mosul," NRT, August 31, 2016. Karim Nuri the PMF's spokesperson said on September 10, "We are going to take part in the battle for Mosul. We do not need the Kurds or Peshmerga to assist us." "Shiite militia leader advises Peshmerga to 'protect own borders', stay out of Mosul," Rudaw, September 10, 2016. Maher Chmaytelli, "Iraqi Shi'ite paramilitaries say will join offensive to retake Mosul," Reuters, April 7, 2016; "Sectarian rhetoric crisis in preparation for Mosul," Rudaw, July 30, 2016; Bill Roggio, "Sadr's 'Peace Brigades' prepares for Mosul offensive," The Long War Journal, May 17, 2016.

103   The majority of Tal Afar's population at the time of the Islamic State takeover in 2014 was Shi`a Turkmen. There is concern the Sunni Turkmen who have helped the Islamic State will be targeted. Conflicts may emerge between the Shi`a Turkmen and the Sunni Turkmen communities, but it is likely that one of the areas that will be liberated from the Islamic State will be Shi`a-controlled as they were in the majority. One of Turkey's justifications for its presence around Mosul has been its protection of the Sunni Turkmen there.

104   Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold."

105   "Al-Nujaifi emphasizes the rejection of the PMF's participation in Mosul's liberation," Iraqi News Network, July 12, 2016; "Nineveh Governorate Council reject participation of Hashd [Shi`a militias] in battle of Mosul," Sky News Arabia, March 1, 2016. Hamid al-Mutlaq and key tribal leaders asserted to the author their concerns over the Shi`a militias' human rights violations and potential clashes with Peshmerga forces.

106   Author interview, Abdul Bari Zebari, September 2016; author interview, Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, August 2016.

107   The expression "microminorities" refers to non-Arab, non-Sunni, and non-Kurd communities from the region, such as Christian, Yazidi, Shabak, and Turkmen. These communities are themselves divided. Some of their men are fighting with Shi`a-dominated PMF factions; some are fighting with the federal government, while others are fighting with the KRG or PKK or YPG.

108   The Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs have two unified brigades equipped by the U.S., and some of them plan to be part of the Mosul operation in a supporting role for the ISF. The majority are divided between the KDP and the PUK, known as the KDP's 80 unit, which are mainly distributed around Mosul, and the PUK's 70 unit, which has a lesser presence around Mosul. Author interview, Ahmad (last name withheld), a colonel in the unified armed brigades, October 2016. "Jabar Yawar the spokesperson of the Peshmerga forces reveals information about participating forces," Rudaw, October 16, 2016. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq." The number of the Kurds in the Iraqi army was historically around 20 percent and declined significantly after the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 as most of them joined the Peshmerga. Florence Gaub, "An Unhappy marriage: Civil-Military relations in post-Saddam," Carnegie Europe, January 13, 2016; Ummar Ali, "Iraqi Army: the journey from the military of Umma to sectarian Army," Al-Taqreer, 2015; Nawzad Mahmoud, "Lawmaker: Kurds make up only 1 percent of Iraqi Army," Rudaw, January 17, 2016.

109   Aziz Ahmad, "No Kurd will die to restore Iraqi unity," *Atlantic*, May 28, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.

110   The Peshmerga do not control the south and southwest main and minor roads. The roads the Peshmerga control are Badoush and al-Kasak northwest of Mosul; Nawaran north of Mosul; Khazer northeast of Mosul; and Gwer west of Mosul. The last main route is the Baghdad Mosul road, which is controlled by the federal government. "Mosul indicates increasing differences between Baghdad and Erbil," Al Arabiya, August 25, 2016. Therefore, the KRG has at least five corridors, and Baghdad has far fewer.

111   "Update: Day two offensive against ISIS liberates more villages; 35 militants killed," Rudaw, August 15, 2016; "In two-day battle Peshmerga capture important Gwer bridge, onwards to Mosul," Rudaw, August 16, 2016. Hisham Arafat, "Kurdistan remains graveyard for terrorists," Kurdistan 24, May 3, 2016.

112   Gwer Bridge crosses the Grand Zab River that flows into the Tigris. It is a critical point that permitted the Peshmerga to open a new front toward Mosul. Said Hameed, "Kurdish forces launch fresh thrust to retake Mosul from Islamic State," Reuters, August 15, 2016. "Update: Day two offensive against ISIS liberates more villages; 35 militants killed," Rudaw, August

15, 2016; "In two-day battle Peshmerga capture important Gwer bridge, onwards to Mosul," Rudaw, August 16, 2016.

113 "President Barzani hails historic coordination between Kurdish and Iraqi forces," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.

114 There are three Christian groups: one, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac Christians affiliated with the Assyrian Democratic Movement backed by Baghdad and the Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU) founded in 2014; two, supported by the KRG—the Nineveh Plain Force (NPF), an Assyrian Christian militia affiliated to Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, and the Dwekh Nawasha founded in 2014 by the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) l; and three, created by the Shi`a militias in 2014; the Brigade of the Spirit of God Jesus Son of Mary is part of the Imam Ali Battalion, a pro-Iranian Iraqi Shi`a militia. The Babylon Battalion is part of the PMF. Zana Gulmohamad, "A short profile Iraq's Shi'a militias," Terrorism Monitor 13:8 (2015). Christian factions envisage an autonomous region for Christians. Adam Lucente, "Iraqi Christian militia draws foreign fighters," Al-Monitor, July 24, 2015. "Assyrians in Kurdistan arm themselves," Nationalia, January 9, 2015. The first and the second groups are expected to have a major role in the Mosul operation.

115 Yazidis are divided into three armed groups: one, 2,000 of the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBD) backed by the PKK and trained by the YPG and YBD's all-female unit, the YBJ; two, the relatively autonomous Yazidi Protection Force funded by the Iraqi government with connections to the PUK and the first group, as well as other Yazidi units within the PMF such as Hashd al-Sha'abi al-Yazidi and Kataib the Fury of Malek Taus; and three, KRG-supported units under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs such as 13 units and a few thousand fighters of Qasim Shesho's Peshmerga (Yazidi Battalion). There were tensions between PKK, YPG, and its Yazidi militias on the one side and the KRG's Peshmerga forces in Sinjar on the other. The Yazidi's role in Mosul's liberation is not clear, but at the very least they will control and defend their bases' areas and possibly close in on the Islamic State on Mosul's western flank. Saad Salloum, "Yazidi infighting, disputes over Sinjar stall battle against Islamic State," Al-Monitor, August 18, 2015.

116 Shabaks mainly inhabit the Nineveh Plain and have two military units totaling less than 2,000. One is affiliated with the KRG's Peshmerga and another to the PMF. Their role will focus on the Nineveh Plain. Saad Salloum, "Division among Iraq's Shabak minority reveals Kurdish-Arab land rivalry," Al-Monitor, August 16, 2015.

117 The Kakai's armed regiments of a few hundred fighters are mainly supported by the KRG. Saad Salloum, "Iraq's Kakai minority joins fight against Islamic State," Al-Monitor, September 22, 2015.

118 Their units of a few thousand are backed by the federal government and the PMF. Other units are trained and supported by Turkey. "Nearly 4,000 Iraqi Turkmen fighters to take part in Mosul liberation operations," Fars News Agency, May 10, 2015.

119 Bassem Dabbagh, "Turkish forces training Turkmen force in Iraq," The New Arab, April 7, 2016.

120 "Hashd al-Sha'abi al-Yazidi participate in the battle to liberate Sinjar," Baghdad Times, November 12, 2015. "Kataib Yazidis alongside Hashd al-Sha'abi," Al-Masalah, March 10, 2016; Mohammed A. Salih, "With the Islamic State gone from Sinjar, Kurdish groups battle for control," Al-Monitor, December 10, 2015.

121 Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold;" "The Army defeated Daesh attack on the frontlines," Al-Hayat, October 4, 2016.

122 Author fourth interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016; author interview, a Kurdish security source, October 2016.

123 Ibid.

124 On September 9, Barzani said, "Until now the forces that will participate in Mosul's liberation are the Iraqi Army [ISF] and Peshmerga." "Interview with Masoud Barzani," France 24, September 9, 2016. "We do expect the Peshmerga to be involved, although the details of their involvement are still being worked out," Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Colonel John Dorrian stated in late September. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq."

125 This is acknowledged by some of the players. Ahmad Jarba, an MP, a member of the Committee of Tribes in the ICR, and a leader of one of Hashd al-`Asha'iri's armed groups called The Lions of Nineveh whose forces will be stationed in west Nineveh and around south Sinjar toward the Iraqi Syrian border told the author, "Although our forces will not cross with the Peshmerga and the YPG forces in Sinjar, there will be complications when the forces get closer to each other, for example in the Sinjar Mountains. Therefore, I think it requires international intervention

126 Iran is using its Shi`a militia proxies to try to secure logistic and supply pathways from Iran to Assad regime-controlled areas in Syria through parts of Iraq, including the area west of Mosul and south east of Sinjar. See Martin Chulov, "Amid Syrian chaos, Iran's game plan emerges: a path to the Mediterranean," Guardian, October 8, 2016 and "Information about Iran's plan to connect Mosul to Syria," Al Arabiya. October 9, 2016.

127 Turkey has asserted that it will maintain its forces in Bashiqa and will participate in the Mosul operation if the PKK or the pro-Iranian Shi`a militia participate. PMF and Iraqi security officials such as Muhammad al-Askari, advisor to Iraq's Defense Ministry, have emphasized if the Turkish forces approach Mosul, they will treat them as enemies. "Muhammad al-Askari rejects al-Nujaifi's statements about Mosul," Al-Hurra Iraq, October 9, 2016. The author agrees with analysis by Michael Knights and Aaron Stein that Turkey is unlikely to play a direct role. At the most, Turkey will play a supportive role to the Hashd al-Watani. Paul Iddon, "What role does Turkey seek to play in Mosul operation?" Rudaw, October 10, 2016.

128 For example, Prime Minister Abadi stated in a meeting with Nineveh's governor, MPs, and Provincial Council members that the government's policy is the decentralization of power and giving irreversible local authority to the province. Prime Minister Dr. Haider al-Abadi's Media Office, "The PM Haider al-Abadi's meeting with governor of Nineveh, Nineveh's MPs, Nineveh's Provincial Council members," July 25, 2016. Abadi's proposals have not been detailed or clarified. The Sunnis are divided. Mutahiddoon (a Sunni political coalition) led by Usama al-Nujaifi, Atheel al-Nujaifi, and a number of tribal leaders propose dividing Nineveh into four to eight provinces based on religious and ethnic backgrounds, creating an Arab Sunni federal region. "The Battle for Mosul pushed the idea of regionalisation of Iraq," Al-Arab, August 25, 2016; "Atheel al-Nujaifi tries to divide Nineveh into four provinces and establish a Sunni region," Al-Etejah TV, August 24, 2016. The KRG's leaders have relatively similar views. However, Hamid al-Mutlaq told the author, "I would favor Mosul staying the same … the division would result in fracturing the country and causing conflict … the locals can decide." The KRG, particularly the KDP, proposes to divide Nineveh into three provinces: Arabs in Mosul, Kurds in Sinjar, and minorities in Nineveh Plain. The KRG proposes a referendum for locals to choose to be part of the KRG or not. Dalshad Abdullah, "Barzani to divide Mosul post-ISIS into three provinces," Asharq al-Awsat, September 7, 2016; "Barzani encourages the Christians to establish a province in Nineveh," Al-Hayat, July 18, 2016. Abdul Bari Zebari, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the ICR, told the author, "The Kurds' first proposal was to divide Mosul into three provinces, west Nineveh, east or Nineveh Plain, and the city of Mosul and its south. Now the idea has developed to create more [than three provinces]… it became accepted that dividing Nineveh into more than one province would be better for providing services and locals' participation in administration." Author interview, Abdul Bari Zebari, September 2016.

129 "France 24 Arabic Interview with Masoud Barzani," France 24, September 9, 2016.

130 Some factions in the PMF have already announced they will attack Peshmerga if they remain in areas they have liberated from the Islamic State outside of Kurdistan. Author interview, Fared al-Ibrahimi, an Arab Shi`a MP from southern Iraq and member of the Tribes Committee in the ICR, August 4, 2016 [in which al-Ibrahimi said, "If the Peshmerga will not withdraw from the liberated areas including Kirkuk we will force them out."]; 'Peshmerga commander warns Shiite militias a threat to Kurds," Rudaw, August 9, 2016; "Kurdish commander dismisses Shiite militias threats on Peshmerga advances," Rudaw, September 11, 2016. One possible flashpoint is the Sinjar region to the west of Mosul, where there is concern about Yazidi infighting between those loyal to the KRG (KDP) and to the PKK.

131 Michael Knights, "How to secure Mosul: lessons from 2008-2014," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 38, October 2016.

132 Ibid.

133 Only half of the United Nations' $284 million appeal for Mosul has been funded. Erika Solomon, "Iraqi forces in confident mood as they prepare for Mosul battle," Financial Times, September 13, 2016. The United States estimates between 500,000 to 800,000 to be displaced from the Mosul area. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq;" Andrew Tilghman, "No U.S. combat advisors for Fallujah invasion," Military Times, May 23, 2016.

134 Derek Flood, "The Hard March to Mosul: A Frontline Report," CTC Sentinel 9:8 (2016).

Revising the History of al-Qa`ida's Original Meeting with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

By Brian Fishman

In 2005, al-Qa`ida's one-time security chief Saif al-`Adl chronicled a key period in the Islamic State's origin story—the initial engagement between Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Usama bin Ladin in 1999. His history, which describes al-Qa`ida agreeing to help al-Zarqawi establish a training camp near Herat without demanding al-Zarqawi swear allegiance to bin Ladin, is a seminal text in our understanding of the Islamic State's history. But how reliable is the story? Even though most analysts believe the account was genuinely written by al-`Adl, bin Ladin was so unhappy with its contents he called it a fraud. And newly available jihadist documents suggest al-Qa`ida's rationale for supporting al-Zarqawi was more complex and more Machiavellian than al-`Adl, or bin Ladin, ever admitted.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the godfather of the Islamic State, arrived in Afghanistan from his home country of Jordan in late 1999. He quickly struck a deal with al-Qa`ida to build an independent, Levant-focused jihadist camp near the western Afghan city of Herat. Al-Zarqawi did not swear allegiance to Usama bin Ladin for another five years, and the two men had very different visions of jihad. But al-Qa`ida nonetheless provided critical financial, logistical, and political support for the new project. The question is why. Why did al-Qa`ida provide such extensive assistance with so few strings attached?

The accepted history of this period largely comes from an account attributed to al-Qa`ida's security chief Saif al-`Adl. In a letter to the Jordanian journalist Fuad Husayn, al-`Adl explained that al-Zarqawi and bin Ladin clashed initially, but that he (al-`Adl)

negotiated an agreement between the two factions.[a] According to this version, al-Zarqawi came to appreciate (but not accept) al-Qa`ida's more nuanced ideological outlook, while bin Ladin and his eventual successor Ayman al-Zawahiri overlooked al-Zarqawi's extremism because they wanted the Jordanian's help in rebuilding jihadist networks in the Levant.

Al-`Adl's version of this history was originally published in Husayn's seminal 2005 book *Zarqawi: The Second Generation of al-Qaeda*,[b] and this very Jordan-centric storyline has informed most histories of al-Zarqawi's initial engagement with al-Qa`ida. Much of the story holds up. But it is also deeply incomplete. Al-`Adl's history forms the basis of public understanding of al-Zarqawi's initial engagement with al-Qa`ida, but it omits key issues, exaggerates other details, and gets key facts wrong.

Perhaps most importantly, the veracity of al-`Adl's story was explicitly rejected by none other than bin Ladin himself.

This article contextualizes al-Qa`ida's first engagement with al-Zarqawi and thereby reframes the Islamic State's origin story. First, it explains and analyzes bin Ladin's objections to al-`Adl's version of history. Second, using internal al-Qa`ida correspondence described and cited here for the first time, it contextualizes al-Qa`ida's initial wariness and ultimate embrace of al-Zarqawi by describing the counterintelligence challenges the group faced at the time.[c] Those investigations reveal the depth of al-Qa`ida's rivalry with the independent Syrian jihadist strategist Abu Musab al-Suri in 1998 and 1999 and suggest that this intra-jihadist squabble was a primary motivation driving al-Qa`ida's initial support for al-Zarqawi. Finally, the article argues that this fuller story offers new perspective on the more contemporary development of both the Islamic State and its enemies in Syria and Iraq.

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a   Husayn showed pages of the original letter to two journalists in the wake of publishing al-`Adl's letter. Yassin Musharbash, "The Future of Terrorism: What al-Qaida Really Wants," *Der Spiegel*, August 12, 2005; Urs Gehriger, "Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi: From Green Man to Guru," *Die Weltwoche*, October 6, 2005. In 2015, the author found the first page of al-`Adl's letter in a jihadist archive and confirmed its authenticity with Husayn. It matches a document released with Gehriger's story in 2005 but no longer available with the story online. However, the document originally released with Gehriger's story is available via archive.org's Way Back Machine and is likely the source of the document found by the author in the jihadist archive.

b   Husayn's book was serialized in Al-Quds Al-Arabi in 2005. For a translation of this series of articles including al-`Adl's account of his interactions with al-Zarqawi, see http://atc2005.blogspot.com/2006/06/al-zarqawi-second-generation-of-al.html.

c   The documents obtained by the author and cited here for the first time were mostly declassified within the past two years as a result of court proceedings, and will be marked 'NEW' in the notes. They are available at www.isismasterplan.com/sentinel-article.

The Trouble with al-`Adl's History

Bin Ladin thought the document that has informed virtually every history of al-Qa`ida's initial engagement with al-Zarqawi was fraudulent. "After reviewing [the history]," bin Ladin wrote, "it became clear to me it was falsely attributed to our Brother Sayf Al-'Adl as it included an offense to our Brother Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi."[1]

Al-`Adl's history was initially published in 2005, but bin Ladin seems to have ignored it—or not learned of it—until much later. (It began to recirculate on jihadist web forums in 2009.)[2] The document annoyed bin Ladin so much that on September 26, 2010, he fired off a letter to Libyan al-Qa`ida operative Atiyah abd al-Rahman, a key aide, with instructions for repudiating al-`Adl's history.

Bin Ladin pointed to an inconsistency in al-`Adl's story to prove it was fraudulent. Al-`Adl claimed that al-Zarqawi met with bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri in 1999 to broker a deal with al-Qa`ida. Bin Ladin rejected that claim because "unity was not achieved between [al-Qa`ida] and [Zawahiri's] Jihad Group" at the time he negotiated with al-Zarqawi.[3] Essentially, bin Ladin argued that if al-`Adl's history got such a basic fact wrong, it could not have been written by him.

The basic facts of bin Ladin's critique are accurate. Al-Zawahiri was not a member of al-Qa`ida when al-Zarqawi arrived in 1999; Egyptian Islamic Jihad did not unify with al-Qa`ida until June 7, 2001, when bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri formally signed a merger agreement.[4] Bin Ladin argued that Abu Hafs al-Masri, al-Qa`ida's military commander in 1999, not al-Zawahiri, would have joined him in any negotiation with al-Zarqawi. Indeed, as explained below, Abu Hafs al-Masri did manage al-Qa`ida's difficult engagements with other jihadist groups in Afghanistan. But by the time al-`Adl's history was written and published, Abu Hafs al-Masri was dead and al-Zawahiri had become bin Ladin's deputy.

Bin Ladin's case against al-`Adl's history is not open and shut, however. Researchers have long noted that al-Zawahiri played a major role in al-Qa`ida long before joining the organization, to the chagrin of some members of the group. But it is odd that bin Ladin would turn to al-Zawahiri rather than Abu Hafs al-Masri, who was widely respected and central to al-Qai`da's relations with other jihadis in Afghanistan. Indeed, al-Zawahiri was not fully trusted until he joined al-Qa`ida—bin Ladin did not inform him about the plans for 9/11 until the two groups merged.[5] Moreover, if al-Zawahiri was part of the negotiation with al-Zarqawi, it is strange that bin Ladin would remain committed to covering it up a decade later in private correspondence with a trusted aide—and after al-Zawahiri had actually become al-Qa`ida's second-in-command. Either bin Ladin's calculation was quite complex—perhaps he did not trust al-Rahman or was committed to undermining al-`Adl's influence in 2010—or al-`Adl's history gets a fundamental fact wrong.

Bin Ladin also had a theory about how al-`Adl's history might have been manipulated. "Deny its attribution to Sayf and remind them he is in jail," bin Ladin explained to al-Rahman. "There are individuals, as well as services belonging to countries in the area whose mission is to defame the Mujahidin and disfigure their [image]." Indeed, al-`Adl was living in an apartment confined on an Iranian military base both when his history was originally published and in 2010 when he remained in Iran.[6]

But bin Ladin did not accuse Iran specifically of fabricating the story. He may have wanted to avoid a confrontation with Iran, which still held many al-Qa`ida members in 2010, but he also may have suspected other intelligence services. If so, Jordan was almost
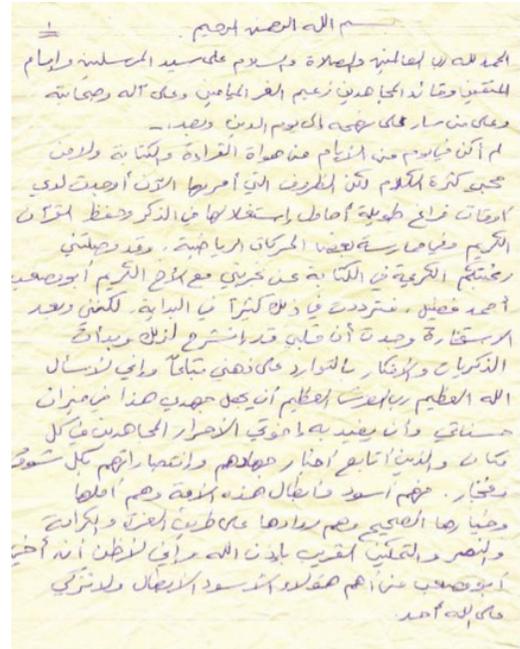
First page of letter from Saif al-`Adl to journalist Fuad Husayn, obtained by author

certainly at the top of the list. Al-Qa`ida had long parried with Jordanian intelligence services, and the Jordanian journalist Fuad Husayn first published al-`Adl's story.[d]

There is no dispute about the arrangement that al-Zarqawi eventually reached with al-Qa`ida, but the details as we know them were generally provided by al-`Adl. Al-Zarqawi and his allies would undergo specialized training with al-Qa`ida; in return, al-Qa`ida would provide financing, training, and support for al-Zarqawi's training camp near Herat.

The lopsided deal favored al-Zarqawi; he received critical assistance but maintained his independence, all while embracing radical jihadis that complicated al-Qa`ida's political position in Afghanistan. Al-`Adl suggests that he convinced bin Ladin to accept al-Zarqawi's extremism in order to foster jihad in the Levant. The broader historical record does not refute that logic, but it suggests there was more to it than that.

For starters, the domestic context in Afghanistan likely influenced the decision to place al-Zarqawi's camp in Herat. According to al-`Adl, Herat was chosen because of its proximity to the Iranian border, which was useful for moving people and materiel in and out of Afghanistan. True enough, but it was also politically convenient. The Taliban leadership was divided over the value of Arab jihadis in Afghanistan—especially extremists like al-Zarqawi—but the Taliban governor in Herat, Mullah Jihadwal, was a strong supporter of the Arab movements. One of the very few Taliban leaders to have left Afghanistan for jihad, he was more aligned with radical foreign jihadis than most of the Taliban leadership.[7] Herat was not just close to Iran; it was governed by the perfect Talib to host someone like al-Zarqawi.

Indeed, if not for Mullah Jihadwal's quick decision-making after

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d   That dynamic was first hinted at in a 2006 article by Mary Ann Weaver. See Mary Ann Weaver, "The Short Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," *Atlantic*, July/August 2006.

9/11, al-Zarqawi might have been killed in Herat. After 9/11, Shi`a tribesmen besieged some of al-Zarqawi's followers. Al-`Adl credited al-Zarqawi with leading a courageous counterattack and escape, but other jihadis, and the official Taliban biography of Mullah Jihadwal, say it was Mullah Jihadwal's quick decision to send his nephew, Gul Mohamed, into battle that facilitated the escape.[8] Bin Ladin critiqued al-`Adl for being disrespectful of al-Zarqawi, but in this case he favored the young Jordanian.

After al-Zarqawi's escape from Herat, al-`Adl's basic storyline is confirmed by other jihadist sources, including the story of a U.S. attack on a jihadist meeting in Kandahar where al-Zarqawi was almost killed.[9] Al-Zarqawi eventually fled Afghanistan where he reconnected with al-`Adl in Iran before moving on to Iraq. Al-`Adl's account of this period is vague and obscures discussion both of al-Zarqawi's route to Iran and of the jihadis' interaction with Iranian security services. That is a major omission—and one that is consistent with bin Ladin's suggestion that al-`Adl's story was influenced by intelligence sources.

But both al-`Adl and bin Ladin neglected to mention the counterintelligence challenge that probably most influenced al-Qa`ida's initial engagement with al-Zarqawi.

Counterintelligence and Intra-Jihadist Conflict

Al-`Adl was al-Qa`ida's security chief, which means he investigated reports of subterfuge by foreign governments and other militants trying to undermine al-Qa`ida. In 1998 and 1999, al-`Adl investigated potential espionage cases involving Jordan, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq.[10] The veracity and viability of these threats varied, but they reinforced al-Qa`ida's sense of siege, which al-`Adl embodied. As one Jordanian jihadi investigated by al-Qa`ida for being a spy lamented, "Sayf, may Allah avenge against him, he is capable of doing many things. He knows Kabul's director of intelligence, knows Kandahar's director of intelligence, and he is very close to the Sheikh [bin Ladin] because he is loyal to him … [Sayf's] word is it as far as the Sheikh is concerned."[11] Al-`Adl also used alliances to mitigate the threats he perceived to bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida.

In 1998, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, the director of al-Qa`ida's guesthouse in Kabul and coordinator of Arabs fighting with the Taliban, grew suspicious about new Iraqis in town, so he reached out to al-`Adl. Abd al-Hadi explained that the men were affiliated with the Iraqi opposition leader Ahmed Chalabi, who later emerged as a leading voice encouraging the United States to invade Iraq.[12] But in November 1998, Abd al-Hadi was worried that the Chalabi men were impious (they would not give up smoking) and, like many Iraqi opposition figures, had spent extensive time in Iran. The Chalabi men seemed motivated by Arab nationalism rather than jihadist ideology and would not acknowledge any difference between Sunni and Shi`a Muslims. "They believe that there is no difference between the two sects," lamented Abd al-Hadi "and the important thing is that they are all Arabs."[13] Al-Qa`ida kept a close watch on the men and endeavored to keep them separate from other fighters.[14]

But the Iraqis were only the tip of the iceberg. Al-`Adl was also investigating broader allegations that Jordan's intelligence service was working with the United Arab Emirates and the United States to infiltrate al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan.[15] The details, all unproven, were lascivious: a Syrian recruit, presumably under physical threat, declared to al-Qa`ida that he had been recruited via group sex in Dubai, and described alcohol, drugs, and homosexual trysts among jihadis in Afghanistan. He named a series of jihadis, including Abu Musab al-Suri, as threats to al-Qa`ida.[16] Al-`Adl's investigation was not exactly professional; some of the claims read like a jihadist conspiracy nightmare more than a real-world threat. In the end, the accuser formally retracted his accusations, including against Abu Musab al-Suri.[17] Regardless, the investigation seems to have concluded that gay jihadis from Dubai were not a major threat, but Abu Musab al-Suri was.

Abu Musab al-Suri is one of the most fascinating jihadis of the past 40 years. A Syrian veteran of the Muslim Brotherhood uprising against Hafez al-Assad in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Abu Musab al-Suri strongly supported the Taliban and collaborated off and on with various Arab jihadist groups, including al-Qa`ida.[18] In 1997, he arranged bin Ladin's interview with CNN, but the two men's relationship soured after al-Qa`ida's attack on two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998.[19] Abu Musab al-Suri worried that by striking the United States, al-Qa`ida might provoke a counterattack that would threaten the Taliban regime. In 1999, he and a long-time friend and collaborator, Abu Khaled al-Suri, complained to bin Ladin that he "had caught the disease of screens, flashes, fans and applause."[20]

Around the same time, Abu Musab al-Suri started to reposition himself as a potential alternative to al-Qa`ida.[21] He wanted to lead the "Ansar Battalion"—the jihadist contingent fighting with the Taliban north of Kabul, and he wanted recognition as the leader of new jihadist arrivals from the Levant. Neither was acceptable to al-Qa`ida, but Abu Musab al-Suri had strong ties to certain elements in the Taliban. So the threat was not easily dismissed.

The case of one Syrian jihadist volunteer exemplified the growing rivalry between Abu Musab al-Suri and al-Qa`ida. Basim Umar al-Suri was raised in Latakia by an Alawite family, but became a salafi in high school. Inspired by radio broadcasts from jihadis in northern Lebanon, the 23-year-old Syrian left for Afghanistan in early 1999.[e] In Kabul, he moved into an al-Qa`ida guesthouse while attending classes at the al-Faruq training camp.[f] The young Syrian took the *kunya* "Marwan Hadid," presumably to honor a man of the same name who led a militant Muslim Brotherhood uprising against Hafez al-Assad 25 years earlier.

Abu Musab al-Suri had fought with the real Hadid, but the young Syrian testified he had never heard of the jihadist theorist until he stumbled on some of Abu Musab al-Suri's writings at al-Qa`ida's guesthouse in Kabul. He eventually met the elder jihadi during a training session at al-Faruq, which focused on military training and supported numerous Arab jihadis, not just those in al-Qa`ida. "Abu Mus`ab-al-Suri, who was in charge of organizing the security at the camp, was sitting next to me," explained Hadid.

And then Abu Musab al-Suri seems to have tried to recruit the young Syrian for a more specialized camp. "I asked him about urban

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e   It is possible these broadcasts were made by Bassam al-Kanj, an acquaintance of al-Zarqawi from his first trip to Afghanistan in 1989. NEW. Harmony Document AFGP-2002-800078-001-0071-AFGP-2002-800078-001-0079, "Testimony of Marwan Hadid (Basim Umar al-Sury)," undated.

f   One of his roomates at the guesthouse was named "Abu Zubaydah," who was described as a Saudi. This is potentially *the* Abu Zubaydah currently imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay that has been central to U.S. debates around the use of torture.

fighting and explosive making," Hadid went on, "and he informed me that his camp focuses on urban fighting. He informed me that some people believe that he is a Takfiri, however, he is not like that but he is somewhat extremist and does not respect the scholars."[22]

Al-Qa`ida's leaders thought Abu Musab al-Suri was poaching recruits. Years later, al-`Adl's father-in-law, the legendary jihadist journalist Mustafa Hamid (better known as Abu Walid al-Masri) would recall that:

"Abu Musab al-Suri and al-Qaeda were ... in heavy competition. Abu Musab was trying to recruit people to his brigade on the Kabul front, which al-Qaeda did not like. To reduce his influence al-Qaeda put up flyers for its brigade in all of its guesthouses, and also banned Abu Musab al-Suri from entering them. Abu Musab had earlier gone into al-Qaeda's guesthouses and recruited some youth who were working on its front under Abdul Hadi al-Iraq. Abu Musab al-Suri convinced them to join him instead. This made al-Qaeda crazy."[23]

Indeed, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi was irate at the apparent effort to recruit under his nose, and he pushed his chain of command to respond. Abu Hafs al-Masri, al-Qa`ida's military commander, managed al-Qa`ida's relationship with Abu Musab al-Suri and aimed first to deescalate the situation in Kabul. A public confrontation might compel direct Taliban intervention, which was dangerous because Abu Musab al-Suri had strong relations with some Taliban factions. So, Abu Hafs al-Masri first ordered Abd al-Hadi to "take things in stride, do not get too upset," and instructed him to "completely avoid [Abu Musab al-Suri]." Worried that Abd al-Hadi might attempt to debate the intellectual Syrian, Abu Hafs al-Masri ordered him to "avoid back and forth dialogue."[24]

Behind the scenes, however, Abu Hafs al-Masri was actively working to undermine Abu Musab al-Suri with the Syrian's most trusted ally: Abu Khaled al-Suri. In the months prior to March 1999, Abu Khaled asked al-Qa`ida for help leaving Afghanistan so that he could tend to his wife, who had grown sick. "We helped him," Abu Hafs al-Masri explained to Abd al-Hadi in March 1999, and "as far as I know brother Abu-Khalid (sic) has abandoned [Abu Musab al-Suri]."[25] It was a startling statement: the two Syrians had been brothers-in-arms for 25 years.

Abu Musab al-Suri did not want a direct confrontation with al-Qa`ida either, but he deemed himself a peer of bin Ladin's and demanded a meeting with al-Qa`ida's emir directly to smooth things over. Abu Hafs al-Masri took the meeting instead—and reported hopefully to Abd al-Hadi afterward that "the brother requests coordination and cooperation, what is important is that he is in agreement with us."[26]

Abu Hafs al-Masri probably overestimated both Abu Musab al-Suri's alignment with al-Qa`ida and his own success undermining Abu Khaled's allegiance to Abu Musab al-Suri. In July 1999, the two Syrians co-signed a letter to bin Ladin urging him to respect Mullah Omar's leadership in Afghanistan.[27] Instead of routing the note through Abu Hafs al-Masri and the al-Qa`ida chain of command, however, they sent it via Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was not yet a member of al-Qa`ida. Was this the moment, six months before al-Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan, when al-Zawahiri supplanted Abu Hafs al-Masri as bin Ladin's chief advisor toward other jihadis? The answer remains unclear.

Regardless, al-Qa`ida's support for Abu Khaled did pay off eventually. Fifteen years later, when Abu Hafs al-Masri was long dead and al-Zawahiri had both joined al-Qa`ida and become its emir,

he named Abu Khaled his personal representative in the Syrian civil war.[28]

The appeal to Abu Khaled was not al-Qa`ida's only effort to undermine Abu Musab al-Suri, who was a powerful persona but did not command a strong organization of his own. Al-`Adl wanted to make sure things stayed that way—and that is where Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the young jihadi from Jordan, came in.

Al-Qa`ida had never been particularly successful recruiting in the Levant, which created a potential opening for a Syrian like Abu Musab al-Suri. In late 1999 and early 2000, just as al-Zarqawi arrived in Kandahar, there was an influx of Levantine fighters to Afghanistan. Bassam al-Kanj, an old acquaintance of al-Zarqawi's, had led a short-lived uprising in Syrian-occupied Lebanon. The movement was quickly crushed and many young Syrian and Lebanese fighters fled to Afghanistan.

Per his history, al-`Adl thought a productive relationship with al-Zarqawi would allow al-Qa`ida to strengthen the jihadist networks in the Levant. But if that was the only goal, Abu Musab al-Suri would have been the most natural and experienced ally. According to Mustafa Hamid, however, al-`Adl was "very much against Abu Mus'ab al-Suri."[29] Al-Zarqawi's arrival offered al-`Adl a mechanism for empowering the Levantine jihadist diaspora while simultaneously sidelining Abu Musab al-Suri. The Levantine jihadis might not join al-Qa`ida when they joined al-Zarqawi, but at least they would not join Abu Musab al-Suri.

As Hamid put it, Abu Musab al-Suri had effectively challenged al-Qa`ida, saying, "You are not alone in Afghanistan, you are not the only option here. I am here." In return, Hamid explained, al-Qa`ida, "went to [the Levant] with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and said to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, 'We are here [with a Levantine support base in Afghanistan], it is not only you.'"[30]

This explanation helps explain why al-Qa`ida would agree to sponsor al-Zarqawi so extensively without requiring that he swear allegiance. It suggests that an otherwise lopsided agreement with al-Zarqawi actually met al-Qa`ida's proximate political needs. The primary sources from inside al-Qa`ida at the time do not explicitly confirm this rationale, but they emphasize the depth of the conflict between al-Qa`ida and Abu Musab al-Suri that lends it significant credibility.

Regardless, al-Qa`ida's victory was limited. Al-Zarqawi remained his own man. Al-`Adl implied that al-Qa`ida had leverage over al-Zarqawi because it intervened with the Taliban to ensure al-Zarqawi would not "face obstacles." But al-Zarqawi was independently named as one of six Arab interlocutors to the Taliban's "Arab Liaison Committee" (Abd al-Hadi and Abu Musab al-Suri were as well), which indicates he was not bound to work through al-Qa`ida.[31] Al-Qa`ida might have helped set al-Zarqawi up, but he established his own political network in Afghanistan.

But even al-Zarqawi's radicalism and independent streak held a silver lining for al-Qa`ida. The young Jordanian would not swear allegiance to bin Ladin, but he also would not align with Abu Musab al-Suri. At the time, that was good enough.

Eventually, however, al-Qa`ida was forced to confront the demon it helped create in Afghanistan.

The Legacy of an Ill-Fated Alliance

The dispute between al-`Adl and bin Ladin over al-Qa`ida's initial engagement with al-Zarqawi—and the full history of that engagement—suggests several lessons. First, al-`Adl's history and bin La-
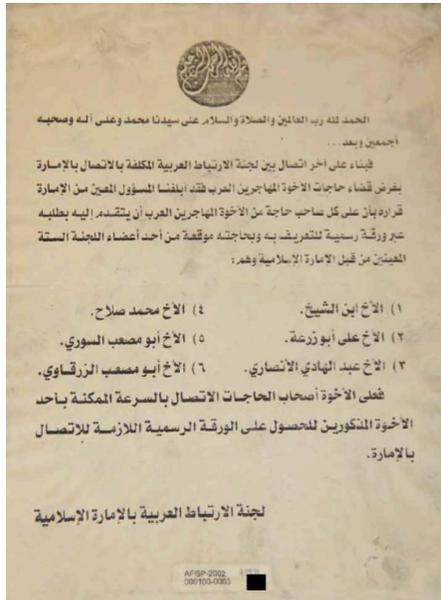
Taliban "Arab Liaison Committee" release designating Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, and Abu Musab al-Suri interlocutors between Arab fighters and the Taliban

din's critique of it are both self-serving. Writing in 2004 or 2005, al-`Adl emphasized his own diplomatic skills; writing in 2010, bin Ladin downplayed reports of conflict with al-Zarqawi after the Jordanian had emerged as a legendary figure in his own right.

Second, the Islamic State has often benefited from alliances with militants—or states—that calculated a temporary alliance with the group or its predecessors would be useful against some more proximate threat. Neither al-`Adl nor bin Ladin mentioned the conflict with Abu Musab al-Suri or al-Qa`ida's more general counterintelligence worries in the late 1990s. Jihadis are generally loath to air dirty laundry. But jihadist dirty laundry has been fundamental to the Islamic State's development. At its core, the Zarqawiist movement that became the Islamic State is a populist rebellion against what it considers the false promises and unfulfilled commitments of more compromising jihadist movements and more compromised jihadist leaders. At the same time, it has benefitted over the years from intra-jihadist competition in which one side or the other has endeavored to instrumentalize the Zarqawiists' radicalism. Exhibit A is al-Qa`ida's original engagement with al-Zarqawi.

Third, ideological and strategic agreement is insufficient to understand jihadist political alignments. Abu Musab al-Suri and bin Ladin had different ideas about provoking the United States and how jihadis should organize, but they had far more in common with each other ideologically than either did with al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi considered both ideologically lax and embraced jihadist preachers the Taliban evicted from other training camps.[32] Abu Musab al-Suri and bin Ladin competed for influence with the Taliban; al-Zarqawi opposed Arabs fighting directly with the rulers of Afghanistan.[33] The politics of this jihadist triangle cannot be understood solely as a function of ideology, strategy, or nationality. Both Abu Musab al-Suri and al-`Adl opposed the 9/11 attack,[34] for example, but one was in al-Qa`ida and the other was not. Despite agreement on the most important strategic question facing jihadis in Afghanistan, they were not allies. It illustrates that even among jihadis, personality—and personal ambition—matters.

Fourth, ideological extremism does not preclude compromise. Despite al-Zarqawi's opposition to Arabs fighting with the Taliban, he accepted a relationship with al-Qa`ida (albeit on favorable terms) and was officially appointed to the Taliban's Arab Liaison Committee even as he supported ideologues the Taliban disavowed. Al-Zarqawi's extremism has since been institutionalized in the Islamic State, but that institution is also capable of pragmatism when necessary. For Zarqawiists, necessity is the mother of ideological compromise; likewise, ideological extremism is a justification to stab one-time allies in the back.

Fifth, the pre-9/11 jihadist political arrangements were not permanent. Al-Zarqawi eventually swore allegiance to bin Ladin in 2004 but continued to define his own strategic path, much to the frustration of his would-be superiors in al-Qa`ida.[35] Meanwhile, the rivalry between Abu Musab al-Suri and al-Qa`ida softened. After the Taliban were overthrown, jihadist rivals rallied together and al-Qa`ida even embraced elements of Abu Musab al-Suri's vision for a decentralized jihadist movement. In 2002, al-`Adl directed 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Muhammad to "leave the managerial matters to brother Abu-Mus'ab" so that they could be further transferred to the al-Qa`ida cadre in Iran. If that "Abu Mus'ab" was Abu Musab al-Suri (and it seems likely), then the rapprochement appears to have been extensive.[36] In 2005, Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Khaled were arrested in Pakistan and eventually transferred to Syrian custody.[37] According to one account, the Syrian regime agreed to release one of the men in 2011 and Abu Musab al-Suri insisted it be Abu Khaled. If Abu Hafs al-Masri was correct that Abu Khaled "abandoned" his old friend in 1999, such magnanimity is awfully ironic.[38]

Abu Khaled and most likely al-Zarqawi had been part of al-Qa`ida's strategy to undermine Abu Musab al-Suri in 1999, but there was no love lost between their movements. In 2013 al-Zawahiri named Abu Khaled his representative in Syria, charged with mediating a dispute between the Zarqawiists in the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qa`ida-affiliated fighters in Jabhat al-Nusrah. A year later, ISIL assassinated him.

Sixth, al-`Adl is not superman. In 2015, al-`Adl was reportedly released from confinement in Iran, raising questions about whether he could reconcile al-Zarqawi's descendants in the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida, just as he had between bin Ladin and al-Zarqawi.[39] But that original agreement, and the accommodation it represented between distinct ideological positions, is best understood as the product of a particular strategic moment. Al-`Adl is unlikely to recreate that magic.

Of course, al-`Adl is a talented, dangerous man. He is old-guard al-Qa`ida, and in 2004, he conceptualized a startlingly prescient—if not determinative—master plan, which called for the reestablishment of the caliphate in Syria between 2013 and 2016.[40] [g]

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g   Al-`Adl's seven-stage master plan served as a strategic vision for the al-Qa`ida organization just as it incorporated al-Zarqawi's organization in Iraq as a formal affiliate. The plan was not followed exactly, but it correctly foresaw numerous developments, including al-Qa`ida in Iraq's networks outside Iraq, the time and place of the caliphate being re-declared, and that the British would reject integration into a more cohesive Europe. Despite this accuracy, the master plan failed to account for the power, destructiveness, and exclusivity of Zarqawiism, particularly as represented in the Islamic State. As such, its prediction of a jihadist "final victory" by 2020 will not come to pass.

Indeed, al-`Adl's most important credential for today's strategic environment is not that he is a statesman, which is what he emphasized in his history of al-Qa`ida's original engagement with al-Zarqawi. Rather, it is that al-`Adl understands how to fight dirty against other jihadis, which is what a fuller account of those events highlights. That is important for thinking about al-`Adl's potential contemporary influence. If he is again driving al-Qa`ida strategy, he is battling an enemy in the Islamic State far more powerful than Abu Musab al-Suri ever was—and one that he empowered, for reasons more Machiavellian than he acknowledged, long ago.   CTC

Citations

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2   See, for example, Saif al-`Adl "A Jihadist Biography of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi."

3   Ibid.

4   "Merger Agreement Between Qaidat Ansar Allah and al-Jihad Group," June 7, 2001.

5   Peter Bergen, "Post-Osama, Now What?" *New York Magazine*, August 27, 2011.

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7   "Mullah Jihadwal Martyr Biography," Taliban Sources Project. This document was archived by Anand Gopal, Felix Kuehn, and Alex Stricht van Linschoten as part of the Taliban Sources Project. Gopal was kind enough to provide a translation of this document to the author.

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