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Promoting greater stability in post-ISIL Iraq

Volume 1: *Analysis of the drivers of legitimacy, security, and social accord for key Iraqi stakeholders*

Prepared for
Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment
CENTCOM Virtual Reach Back Cell

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Introduction

United States Central Command (CENTCOM) posed the following question to the Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) virtual reach back cell:

> *What opportunities are there for USCENTCOM to shape a post-ISIL Iraq and regional security environment, promoting greater stability?*

Analyses of the security challenges facing post-ISIL Iraq frequently emphasize two central points. The first of these is that any security solution must address the political concerns and goals of key actors. This report is focused on providing insight into not only security factors, but also those political and social factors that have follow-on effects for the security domain. The second point is that both political interests and security interests are highly localized. We acknowledge the tremendous variation in interest groups within the social and political landscape in Iraq. At the same time, social science methodologies are oriented around making sense of such fragmentation, by looking for commonalities within and across societies. While no generalization will ever cover every possible case or variation, the common themes that are derived will represent likely scenarios. Toward this goal, we focus here on the broad ethno-sectarian divisions that are often currently in use in Iraq: Sunni, Shia, and Kurd. Where possible, we seek to specify relevant subgroups (e.g., Shia-led militia, Peshmerga, Sunni tribal elites). While we recognize that there is variation both within and even entirely outside of these groups, the discussion and insights here capture the interests and grievances of a wide segment of the Iraqi population as a whole.

The provision of security is one of the fundamental functions of all governments, and as such, contributes directly to governing legitimacy. For a country such as Iraq, emerging from a period of conflict with unresolved and highly salient sectarian divisions, the relationship between security and governing legitimacy is even more critical for stability. If key stakeholders do not perceive the national government to be legitimate, they are unlikely to trust that that government will meet their security needs. A post-ISIL Iraq will face a complex security environment with multiple government and militia forces identifying with Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni populations as much as, and in some cases more than, with the Iraqi state. Given the recent history of sectarian competition and conflict surrounding Iraq's security apparatus and national government, political reconciliation between Kurds, Shia, and Sunni, irrespective of the institutional form that takes, will be essential for creating short term stability (ending open conflict). Moreover, the achievement of a more general social accord is a necessary condition for the development of a cohesive national identity. Common national identity (not to be confused with nationalism) increases the legitimacy of national government, and as such, is an important foundation for longer-term political stability.

This report presents insights from the analysis of a set of qualitative loop diagrams[1] of the security dynamics for Kurds, Shia, and Sunni, constructed around social accord and governing legitimacy in Iraq.

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[1] Loop diagrams are a useful means of uncovering unanticipated or non-intuitive interaction effects embedded in this incredibly complex environment. While these types of diagrams are often referred to as "causal loop" diagrams, no presumptions of direct causation are made in

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The relationships and feedback loops for each of the key stakeholders (Shia, Kurd, and Sunni) have been developed through the application of NSI's StaM model.[2] Our analysis for this report focuses specifically on the dynamics that drive the security and stability challenges facing Iraq post-ISIL.

> *Our analysis indicates that, for each group, there is a key interest—both driving and driven by their relations with other groups—that is central to understanding how the security-legitimacy relationship manifests for that group. For the Sunni, it is their perception of equality (or lack thereof) and fear of retribution; for the Shia, their drive to maintain political dominance, and for the Kurds, their desire for greater autonomy.*

A qualitative loop diagram is a visual heuristic for grasping complex recursive relationships among factors, and is a useful means of uncovering unanticipated or non-intuitive interaction effects embedded in complex environments such as that we see in Iraq. It is intended to serve as a "thinking tool" for analysts, practitioners, and decision makers. Once produced, the "map" of the direct and indirect relationships between legitimacy, social accord, and Iraqi perceptions of security, can be used to explore those relationships, test hypotheses about them, and provide a broad picture of second- and third-order effects on critical nodes in the system.

> *For CENTCOM and others involved in building stability in Iraq, a clear understanding of the system that links Iraqi politics and social relations to security is a critical prerequisite for identifying areas in which CENTCOM activities might have the greatest positive impact and those where the risk of unintended consequences is highest.*

The report is organized in two volumes: **Volume 1**, here, presents the detailed insights of the loop diagram analyses, along with a discussion of key areas of opportunity or risk mitigation for CENTCOM, while **Volume 2** provides a more in-depth and comprehensive discussion of the key social factors that significantly impact the political domain, and thus ultimately, stability in Iraq. Traditionally, the social scientific emphasis when examining issues of security has been heavily rooted in international relations and politics. In more recent years, additional layers of insight have been added from anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Here, we take a heavily social psychological approach to examining the social domain, though we continue to incorporate concepts from across the social science disciplinary spectrum. The utility of this work is enhanced by the loop diagram methodology—which emphasizes looking at cross-cutting effects both within and across the major domains of interest—and generates new insights about the reciprocal and balancing effects that exist among these social, political, and security domains. This enables a more transparent assessment of relationships both between and within specific groups.

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these analyses. In addition, although they resemble system dynamics models as used here, they are neither computational models nor intended to be strictly predictive.

[2] The StaM framework consolidates political, economic, and social peer-reviewed quantitative and qualitative scholarship into a single stability model based on three dimensions – governing stability, social stability, and economic stability- and, critically, specifies the relationships among them. As such, the StaM represents a cross-dimension summary, which draws on rich traditions of theory and research on stability and instability from diverse fields, including anthropology, political science and international relations, social psychology, sociology, and economics. The StaM aids users not only in identifying the factors that explain the stability or instability of a nation-state, region, or other area of interest, but also in making the connections between and among the various stability factors apparent—allowing users to derive all implications of a potential engagement strategy.

A n a l y s i s   o f   t h e   d r i v e r s   o f   l e g i t i m a c y , s e c u r i t y ,   a n d   s o c i a l   a c c o r d   f o r   k e y   I r a q i   s t a k e h o l d e r s

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Before turning to the loop diagrams, however, a brief discussion of the concepts of social accord and legitimacy in the context of Iraq is warranted. This is followed by a discussion of important features and nodes excerpted from the complete loop diagrams for Kurds, Shia, and Sunni.[3] The final section presents general findings across the various subgroups, and identifies risks and opportunities associated with CENTCOM and other US efforts to shape the security environment and promote stability in post-ISIL Iraq.

Legitimacy[4]

Governing legitimacy is rooted in the perception of actors within a state. Specifically, legitimacy encompasses the perception of the citizenry of a state that those institutions have the right to govern, generally follow the rules adopted by that authority, and use governing institutions to allocate public goods and services, while allowing for voice of political grievances or needs and protection of civil rights and liberties.[5] People who view their government as legitimate are more likely to accept the rules determined by that authority, self-identify with that authority, seek public goods (e.g., security, justice) from its institutions, and voice their political grievances or needs within the systems established by that government

The legitimacy of a governing authority is a concept that is often related to, but distinct from, its sovereign authority and control. While legitimacy resides in the perceptions of those governed, sovereignty is most commonly associated with a state's control of a specific territory. Sovereignty requires, among other things, that the state effectively has a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, and that the writ of the state to enact this and related authorities expands across its entire territory (Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1933; UN Charter, 1945).[6] Herein lies the central connection between the two constructs—that a state's lack of sovereign authority fundamentally undermines the capabilities of the central government, thus effectively limiting its perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry. As such, one of the hallmarks of a stable state is close alignment of governing legitimacy and sovereign control. In contrast, an important indicator of state

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[3] See Appendix A for complete loop diagrams.

[4] The discussion of legitimacy draws upon work in Astorino-Courtois, Bragg, & Key (2015). *The Dynamics of Israeli and Palestinian Security Requirements in the West Bank Cross-border activities, sovereignty and governing legitimacy,* Strategic Multi-layer Assessment, and Bragg, Pagano, Brickman, Popp, & Desjardins (2015). *Stability Model (StaM) users' guide: incorporating StaM analysis of Nigeria for illustration*, USAFRICOM.

[5] For additional discussion of political legitimacy, see Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Russell Bova, "Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Transition: A Comparative Perspective," *World Politics* 44, no. 01 (October 1991): 113–38; George Bugliarello, "Megacities: Four Major Questions," *Journal of Urban Technology* 16, no. 1 (2009): 151–60; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Kraas, "Megacities and Global Change: Key Priorities"; Scott Mainwaring, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 4: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[6] For additional discussion of sovereignty see: Baty, Thomas, 1930, The Canons of International Law 9-10; Kelsen, Hans, 1941-42, *The Pure Theory of Law and Analytical Jurisprudence,* Harvard Law Review 44, 64-65 (1941-42); O'Connell, 1970, International Law, 2nd Edition-86 (2d ed. 1970) ; Biersteker, T. J., & Weber, C. (1996). State sovereignty as social construct (Vol. 46). Cambridge University Press; Williams, P. R., & Pecci, F. J. Earned Sovereignty: Bridging the Gap between Sovereignty and Self-Determination'(2004). Stanford Journal of International Law, 40, 347; Berg, E., & Kuusk, E. (2010). What makes sovereignty a relative concept? Empirical approaches to international society. Political Geography, 29(1), 40-49.

instability is the emergence of opponents who work outside established institutional means (e.g., elections; the justice system) to challenge a government. All insurgencies and revolutions begin with challenges to the legitimacy of a government's right to govern. When opposition groups take up arms against the regime, they are challenging its sovereignty. There is also an important distinction to be drawn between a government's legitimacy and its popularity; citizens can view a governing authority as legitimate while also generally disliking its policies.

A high degree of governing legitimacy in Iraq would indicate public trust in and support of the established governing institutions. This trust would facilitate the government's ability to successfully enact policies that impose short-term costs, but create the types of structural adjustments required for economic and social development over the long-term. A low degree of legitimacy would result from the Shia-led government system being seen as biased and/or corrupt by large groups in society (Sunnis and Kurds), as well as being unable to perform its basic functions.

Without this perception of legitimacy in Iraq, which also negatively impacts non-Shia perceptions of the security situation, there will more likely be ongoing calls for a devolution of power and calls for (greater) autonomy by both the Sunnis and Kurds. Thus, for Abadi's government, increasing its legitimacy—which is in question—is critical for stability. Rising sectarian conflict and the failure of the ISF to combat ISIL's advance have already undermined the position of the government. At present, Iraq fails to meet the qualifications for a sovereign and central authority. Its security apparatus is fragmented, and ultimately undermined, by the presence of multiple militias and other sectarian-based forces, some of which also are under the heavy influence of external actors, such as Iran. Furthermore, the state does not have autonomous control over all of its territory, as evidenced both by the presence of ISIL and by the operation of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Demands by other actors for the creation of additional autonomous regions have the potential to further exacerbate this situation. Worsening economic conditions and significant threats to oil revenue, which limit the capacity of the government to perform its other functions (e.g., administration of public services and the rule of law and justice) challenge the government's already tenuous position in terms of its perceived legitimacy.

The legitimacy – security link

We focus on legitimacy in Iraq because of its centrality for Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds in the maintenance of state stability through the connections to legitimacy discussed above. Legitimacy, and its relationship to sovereignty in Iraq, in turn has crucial ties to perceptions of security. The lack of autonomous control following from the fragmentation of Iraq's security apparatus—while enabling combat of ISIL in the current landscape—weakens the government's ability to mount a centralized response to security threats over the long-term. Lacking this ability to provide a core function of the state in turn reduces its legitimacy, reciprocally weakening its ability to shore up its security capacity (without the use of regional sectarian forces), and thus ultimately the credibility required to effectively administrate security.

Social Accord

Social accord—the degree to which harmony among individuals and groups is achieved—is an overarching construct that comprises multiple factors. Social accord is more likely to be attained within a population when relevant sub-groups are well integrated with one another and on equal footing, there is a lack of intra-group strife, and there is a high degree of social certainty among the population as a whole.

Of the social dimensions contributing to state stability in Iraq, social accord is the most relevant, with significant effects not only in the social domain, but with strong implications for the political and security domains as well. Social accord has direct implications for the perceived legitimacy of the Abadi government among both Sunnis and Kurds, and follow-on effects that are pervasive throughout each individual loop diagram. As such, the focus of our analysis within the social domain will be on social accord.

In order to facilitate understanding of the complex and multidimensional construct of social accord and its implications, it is helpful to examine first the nature of social identity and categorization—which can serve to promote or hinder the degree of social accord achieved. Toward this end, Volume 2 of this report (Why Do Groups Form and Why Does it Matter for Stability in Iraq?: How the Social Becomes Political) provides an extensive discussion of the social elements and dynamics contributing to social accord, and ties the social domain to the political domain in Iraq, with accompanying implications for stability.

The legitimacy – social accord link

Social accord is tied to legitimacy through their joint relationship with national identity. National identity emerges as a specific manifestation of people's recategorization of themselves into a broader, more inclusive superordinate identity (versus or in addition to their less inclusive ethno-sectarian subgroups). As discussed in more detail in Volume 2, national identity influences perceptions of legitimacy, as individuals who adopt a national identity are more likely to feel that their interests or those of their broader group are in alignment with the activities of the government. Additionally, a governing body can better claim that it represents the interests of its governed population when citizens are united instead of hyper-fragmented. Moreover, inherent in social accord itself is a greater disposition toward cooperation, along with a relative state of harmony among and within subgroups. This creates a positive reinforcing loop with an ongoing sense of national identity, and in turn, with governing legitimacy. Establishing a sense of Iraqi national identity, driven by social accord, also enables extra-state bonds based instead in ethnic or sectarian ties to loosen or even be dismantled.

Qualitative loop diagrams[7]

The process of building and exploring loop diagrams is particularly useful for illuminating the drivers of complex relationships among explanatory factors. They are also a useful way to uncover unanticipated or non-intuitive interaction effects. Loops diagrams consist of "nodes," and "edges." Nodes are the factors or components of a system; in many cases, its variables. "Edges" are the lines that indicate the relationships between nodes. As used in this study, edges represent unweighted, correlative rather than strictly causal relationships. Positive relationships between connected nodes, meaning that as the antecedent or "parent" node increases or decreases the successor does the same, are indicated in blue. Orange edge lines indicate an inverse relationship between an antecedent node and its successor. That is, as the parent increases or decreases, the successor does the opposite.

The feedback loops that represent recursive relationships among nodes can take two forms: they can be negatively or positively "reinforcing" (indicated by an "R" in the diagrams) where change in one node propagates through a single or series of other nodes to return and magnify the effect on the initial node; or, they can be "balancing" (indicated by a "B") in which the initial positive or negative effect associated with a node is dampened or "balanced" as it propagates through the system.[8] The following sections discuss some of the key insights that emerge from examining the qualitative loop diagrams constructed to describe Iraqi security dynamics for Kurds, Shia, and Sunni. To clarify presentation, the diagrams shown in the body of the report are excerpted from the full diagrams, which can be found in Appendix A. Nodes shown in blue indicate political factors or perceptions, those in green indicate economic factors, and dark red captures social concepts and factors.

Sunni fear of retribution and perception of equality

The policies of Maliki's government that marginalized, and in some cases, targeted Sunni Iraqis are widely held to have driven much of the sectarian conflict within Iraq in recent years (Connable, 2014; Dodge, 2014; J. T. Mathews, Hiltermann, & Parker, 2014), and contributed to the speed with which ISIL was able to advance in Sunni areas (Connable, 2014; Muir, 2015). Following the shift in power after the fall of the Baathist regime, the Sunni have experienced a perceived loss in influence, resources, and political position, combined with a sense of humiliation (al-Qarawee, 2013; Dawod, 2015). Sunni Iraqis thus have long felt disenfranchised from their government, though their opposition to Malaki's government was driven more by fear and distrust of Shia ties to Iran, than by a desire to form an independent state. Connable argues that Sunni acceptance, or lack of resistance to, ISIL is driven more by their interest in fighting the Abadi Government, than a shared ideology or desire to join the caliphate.

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[7] The description of the qualitative loop diagrams is taken from Astorino-Courtois, Bragg & Key (2015) The Dynamics of Israeli and Palestinian Security Requirements in the West Bank Cross-border activities, sovereignty and governing legitimacy, Strategic Multi-layer Assessment.

[8] The implications of reinforcing versus balancing feedback loops in these qualitative loop diagrams are slightly different than those typical of many mechanical or electrical systems in which reinforcing loops are associated with ever-increasing or exponential growth and are often considered destabilizing while balancing feedback is associated with system stability. Rather than potentially ever-increasing factors (analogous to continuous variables in empirical studies), the majority of nodes in these system diagrams are naturally limited. For example, constructs such as legitimacy have no natural numerical value and are best measured in terms of popular perception; satisfaction, for example, which cannot exceed 100%.

Some experts have argued that Iraqi Sunni tribes may have aligned with ISIL—or be threatening to align with ISIL—as a bargaining chip in their push for greater decentralization, or autonomy from the central government (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014). The threat allows tribes to ask for concessions, such as greater political representation and removal of Shia militias from their areas, in response to requests that it fight ISIL. "The reason so many tribes joined Daesh in the first place is because they saw them as revolutionaries fighting against the government that abandoned them," said Sheikh Amin Ali Hussein of the al-Khazraji, a government-allied tribe in Samarra (Salama, 2015). Any effort by tribes to put up strong resistance to ISIL and participate with the government of Iraq and the Shia militia moreover has resulted in that tribe being targeted by ISIL (Salama, 2015)—providing further incentive not to resist.

Sunni fear of retribution

Iraqi Sunnis have voiced fears that, once areas of Iraq controlled by ISIL have been liberated, Kurdish and Shia Iraqis will seek to exact retribution against Sunni populations in these areas for the actions carried out by ISIL (Amnesty International, 2016; Fahim, 2016; Hauslohner & Cunningham, 2014; Rozen, 2016). "There are many barriers [to Sunni IDP's return], including the fear of revenge for atrocities that have been committed, black lists of people accused—rightly or wrongly—of complicity and lack of coordination among local authorities and security forces" (United States Institute of Peace Staff, 2016).

The section of the loop diagram shown in Figure 1 highlights two important effects of this fear on Sunni tribal elders' perception of their security situation and on the perceived legitimacy of the Abadi government. The orange "R" indicates a negative reinforcing relationship between Sunni fear of retribution and their perception of the security situation (which is influenced by
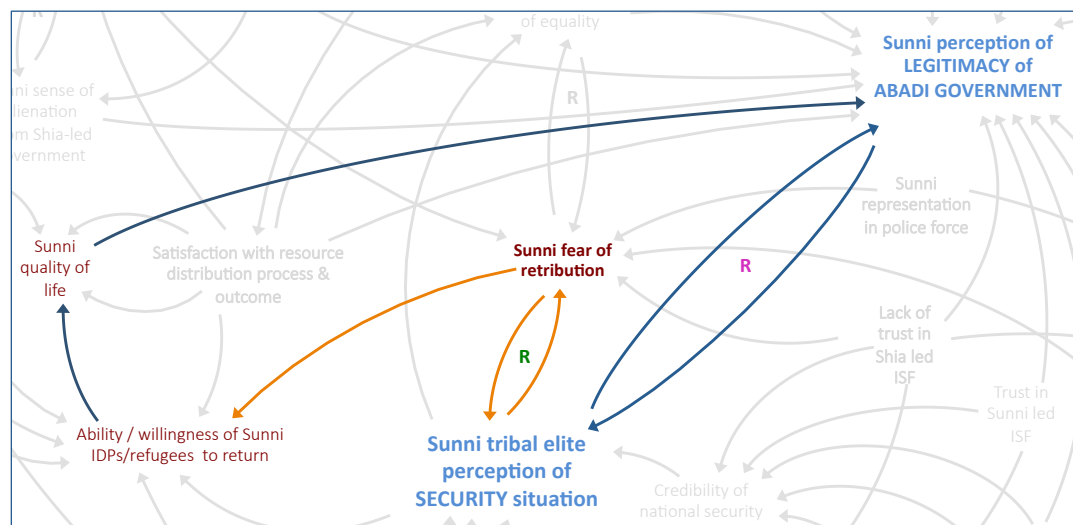

Figure 1: Sunni Fear of retribution

multiple factors, including the perceived capability and credibility of the national security apparatus, along with the perceived legitimacy of the Abadi government as a whole). USIP Staff, in a report capturing discussions among Sunni IDPs, society organizations, and officials in Baghdad, Karbala, and Kirkuk, indicate that weak security in recaptured areas is a key barrier to IDP's return (United States Institute of Peace Staff, 2016). As Sunni perception of the security situation improves, their fear of retribution decreases. Unfortunately, the converse is also true; when security is perceived to be weak, fear of retribution increases. This reciprocal relationship also highlights the close linkages in Iraq

between security and governing legitimacy. The following example illustrates this connection. Fear of retribution is one of the factors preventing Sunni IDP's and refugees from returning to their homes . This in turn has a depressing effect on Sunni quality of life, and through this, Sunni perception of the legitimacy of the Abadi Government.

The reciprocal relationship between security and legitimacy (pink "R") combines with Sunni fear of retribution to create a larger reinforcing relationship. Fear of retribution decreases Sunni's perception of their own security, and thus their perception that the Abadi government is legitimate. This loss of legitimacy in turn decreases perceptions of security, further increasing fears of retribution. However, the negative feedback loop illustrated here also suggests that if the security situation for the Sunnis can be improved, the legitimacy of the Abadi government will be enhanced, instead triggering a positive feedback loop between security and legitimacy.

Security, legitimacy and social accord: Sunni perception of equality

Sunni fear of retribution is also linked to Sunnis' more general concern over their position—social and political—within Iraq (Figure 2 below). Shia political dominance over the national government since the fall of Saddam Hussein has marginalized Sunni political representation and voice, contributing to their current sense of inequality.
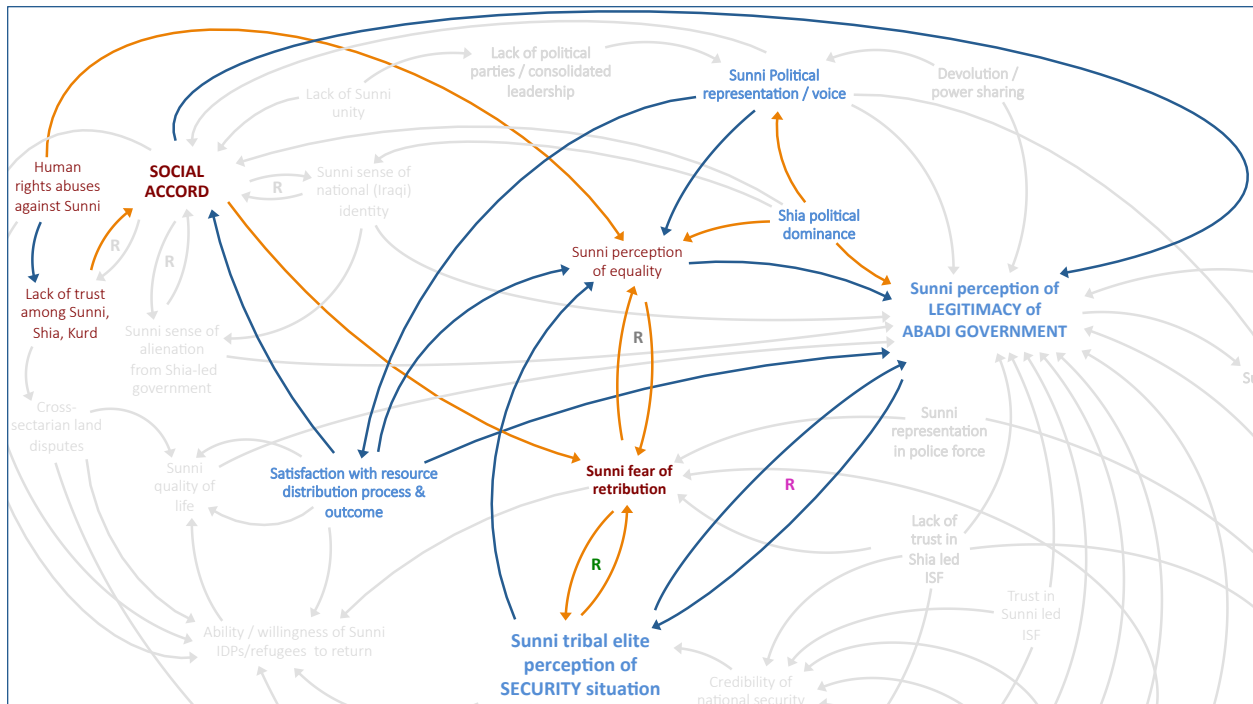
Figure 2: Security, Legitimacy and Social Accord: Sunni Perception of Equality

Sunni's lack of satisfaction with resource distribution process and outcome, which is also influenced by problems of representation and voice, further contributes to their perception that they are not considered as equal partners, particularly by the Shia. The integration, in a meaningful way, of the Sunni into the established political process is considered necessary to longer-term stability, including the prevention of future extremist movements (al-Nidawi, n.d.). Furthering this deficit, human rights abuses

against Sunnis contribute to Sunnis' perception that they lack equality directly, as well as indirectly by contributing to the lack of trust among Sunni, Shia, and Kurds that limits social accord, in turn perpetuating Sunni fear of retribution and decreasing perception of equality.
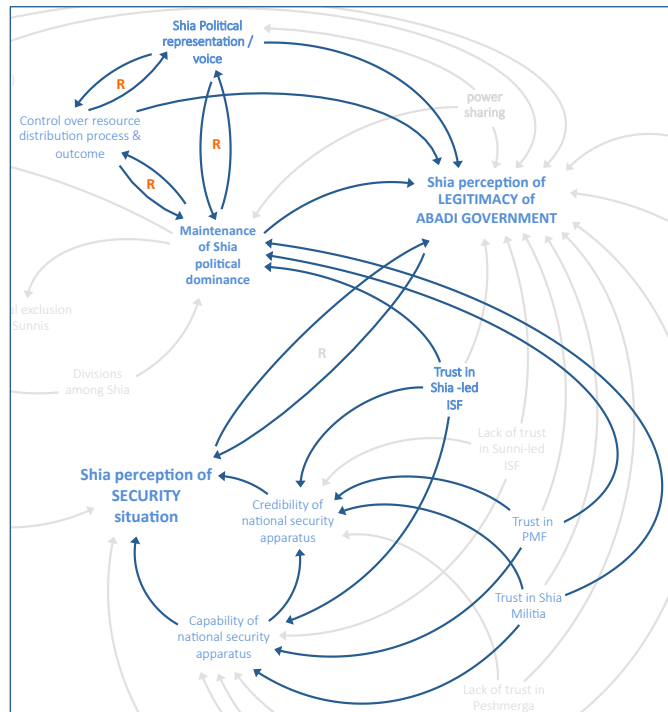
> *"After one year of Abadi's rule, the share of Sunnis who think that his government is more inclusive than Maliki's rule dropped from 50 percent in December 2014 to 36 percent in August-September 2015. Moreover, 58 percent of Sunnis believe that they are unfairly represented in Abadi's government."*
>
> - *al-Qarawee 2013*

Reconciliation with the Sunnis is another critical element required to prevent communities from falling back into violence (United States Institute of Peace Staff, 2016). Yet, reconciliation, and alleviation of Sunni concerns regarding equality and political representation is made even more challenging by the Abadi government's dependence on Shia militias to fight ISIL, particularly in predominantly Sunni provinces. These militias are in some cases the same groups responsible for the wide-scale violence and killings that Maliki failed to classify as terrorism, or do anything to prevent (Dodge, 2014; Hauslohner & Cunningham, 2014; J. Mathews, 2014; Rozen, 2016). There is concern that Abadi will be unable to stand up to these militias, which have retaken, and now control, significant towns and territory in Sunni areas. If so, there is the possibility that the ISIL threat may be replaced by an open Sunni-Shia conflict that would make the task of reconciliation virtually impossible.

Shia desire to maintain political dominance

In an interview soon after Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi took office, Iraqi foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari stated that, "Political reconciliation is the key issue really, for Iraq and the stability of Iraq and I think that all of the key leaders believe that this is the way forward. A political majority is not enough in Iraq. You can win but you cannot govern with it" (Zebari, 2014). Though this position is consistent with the effects on Sunni perceptions of the legitimacy of the Abadi government discussed in the previous section, it is not consistent with the preference of many Shia for maintaining political dominance over the Iraqi national government.

As Figure 3 illustrates, maintenance of Shia political dominance is dependent on control over resource distribution process and outcome, as well as Shia political representation and voice, which combine to create a series of reinforcing loops (red "Rs") that independently and collectively contribute to Shia perception of the legitimacy of the Abadi government.

Shia political dominance is bolstered by the Abadi government's reliance on Shia militia.

Figure 3: Maintenance of Shia dominance

Despite their initial policy of relying on official government forces and ruling out a role for Iranian-backed Shia militia, the loss of Ramadi in May 2015 (BBC, 2015) left the government of Iraq (Abadi Government) with little choice but to officially employ the Shia militias of the Popular Mobilization (al-Hashd al-Shaabi)[9] to push back ISIL in the Sunni Anbar province and Tikrit (Muir, 2015). Addressing concerns about the use of militia among both Iraq's Sunni population and the international community, Iraqi President Fuad Masum suggested that the Abadi Government had few options: "…when your area is attacked, then you use anybody who is able to carry weapons. In Iraq, we don't have a reserve army to ask them to join. We don't have that. That's why we asked—they asked people. We need today to gather everybody who's able to carry weapons and to be against ISIL" (Masum, 2014).

At the same time, Shia attempts to maintain political dominance through the use of Shia-led militia also undermine social accord, which contributes to perceptions of the legitimacy of the Abadi government not only for Shia, but for Sunnis and Kurds as well.
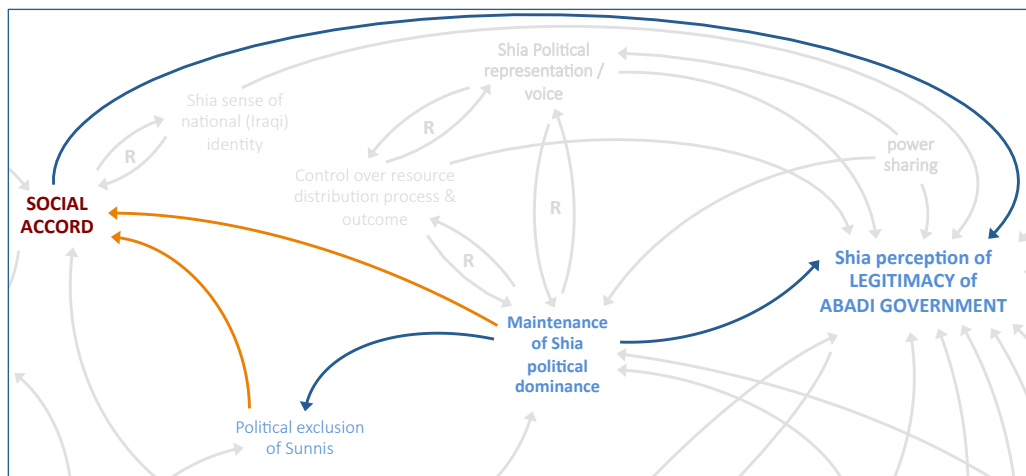

Figure 4: Maintenance of Shia political dominance and social accord

As shown in Figure 4, there is a direct negative relationship between maintenance of Shia political dominance and social accord, as this emphasis on dominance crucially disrupts the ability for groups to maintain harmony and engage in cooperative endeavors toward a superordinate goal serving unified national interests. Based on the same rationale, social accord is also eroded further by the political exclusion of Sunnis that is required in order for the Shia to maintain dominance.

Kurdish desire for autonomy

The political demands and concerns of Iraq's Kurds are similar to those of its Sunni population. According to the KRG Department of Foreign Relations, "The Kurdistan Region …will continue to participate in the national affairs of Iraq so long as our rights and freedoms are protected by the constitutional order " (Department of Foreign Relations, 2015). While Kurds across the region have long

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[9] They were helped in this by a call to arms by Iraq's senior Shia cleric and representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, "Citizens who are able to bear arms and fight terrorists, defending their country and their people and their holy places, should volunteer and join the security forces to achieve this holy purpose." (Sheik Abdulmehdi al-Karbalai, quoted in: BBC, 2014a).

had a strong sense of unity, centered around their longstanding desire for an independent Kurdish state, they are not a monolithic political or social entity (Natali, 2016).

As Figure 5 shows, political, social and economic factors all positively influence pressures for Kurdish autonomy. The Kurds seek an inclusive national government that is responsive to their needs and demands (political representation and voice), and avoids the Shia political dominance that undermined the legitimacy and performance of Maliki's government (Cooper & Gordon, 2014).

Kurdish unity has been enhanced historically by their geographic colocation. Following the successes of the peshmerga against ISIL forces in northern Iraq (trust in Pershmerga), and

Figure 5: Kurdish autonomy

the virtual isolation of the Kurdish autonomous region, Barzani has stated that it would be "almost impossible" to return to the situation that existed before the capture of Mosul, and that the various Iraqi groups needed to "sit down and find a way to live together"(Barzani, 2014).

"No resolution can be imposed and any new resolution now has to be made through referendum," which is a gesture of democracy. "Each nation has its own natural borders, and those borders that have been drawn through the use of force should not be maintained anymore."
- *President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Masoud Barzani (2016)*

Autonomy, however, is also dependent on the financial capacity of the KRG government. For the Kurds, oil revenue offers the best hope of generating the necessary funds. Although a final decision on control of oil revenue from the oil-rich Kirkuk region (KRG or GoI) has yet to be made (Cooper & Gordon, 2014; Gutman, 2014), the KRG began independent oil exports to Turkey through their own pipeline at the end of 2013, against the wishes of the GoI (Stansfield 2014b, p. 1333; see also: Stansfield, 2014a; Zangeneh, 2013). Oil exports provide badly needed revenue to the KRG, enabling them to exercise greater autonomy from the national government. Trade agreements could also help

the KRG create relationships with regional states, particularly to Iran and Turkey (economic ties to Turkey), independent of the GoI (Sheppard, 2014; Zebari, 2014). At the same time, the Kurdistan Regional Government faces ongoing challenges given its struggle to make payroll, heavy debt, and lack of support from neighboring countries and some others in the international arena (Salih, 2016). Absent the ability to make a move toward greater or full autonomy, the Kurds are likely to further the at-times uneasy alliance with the Sunni, which came about due to their common enemies in ISIL and the Shia paramilitary groups (Mansour, 2016). The present forms of cooperation with the Sunni, however, maintain a Kurd-centered strategic purpose, for example, "to put in place allies in the city [Mosul] who can support KRG policies negotiated with the central government. These policies have generally revolved around furthering regional and provincial autonomy and securing a greater share of national revenues" (Mansour, 2016). Until broader social accord and national identity are achieved, however, which will enhance governing legitimacy and security for all groups in Iraqi society, the Kurds' primary emphasis is likely to remain on the achievement of this autonomy from the Iraqi state.

Implications for CENTCOM engagement activities

Examining the individual loop diagrams helps inform our understanding of the dynamics shaping the goals and driving the actions of Iraq's key stakeholders. However, in order to gain insight into the extent to which these goals combine to drive either stability or instability, we need to compare across the three.

Representation and political inclusion

> *BLUF: Bolstering Sunni and Kurdish fighers to aid in the elimination of ISIL and limitation of Iranian influence in Iraq, may have cascading negative consequences for longer term security and stability by reinforcing social cleavages, and diminishing governing legitimacy.*

There is a fundamental tension at play in Iraq between the desire of the Kurds and Sunnis for greater autonomy and substantive representation in the national government, and the Shia's desire to maintain political dominance. To achieve reconciliation, the Abadi Government needs to break from its recent history of Shia dominance and create an inclusive, non-sectarian democracy (Zebari, 2014). If Iraq is to become a unified and stable state, with a legitimate and sovereign government, it will require political reconciliation between Shia and Sunni, and accommodation of Kurdish and Sunni desire for greater power sharing and autonomy. Similarly, the politicization of the ISF, staffed by Maliki "with cronies and rewiring its organizational charts to serve his own purposes (Eisenstadt, 2014) means that, unless Sunnis are given effective leadership positions within the ISF and true representation within the police forces, it is unlikely that Sunni perceptions of their security situation will improve significantly, thereby limiting the potential for improving perceptions of governing legitimacy among Sunni.

"Before, there were many sensitivities between various Iraqi groups. In Iraq, we are still dealing as groups. This idea of citizenship, unfortunately, has not been established yet, and this is normal."

- Iraqi President Fuad Masum

Consolidation of military power by the government

BLUF: CENTCOM and others need to pay careful attention to which groups they choose to support and in what ways. Directly funding and training non-government forces (militia and pershmerga) may have short-term benefits for security; however, doing so has significant negative implications for longer-term stability and may contribute to increased sectarian violence in post-ISIL Iraq.

Currently, the national security apparatus in Iraq is composed both of forces directly responsible to the state, and others that are controlled by regional sectarian groups. While all of these various forces contribute to the capability of the national security apparatus, their implications for security credibility and the perceived legitimacy of the Abadi government vary across groups.

While there is consensus among groups that all of the forces currently fighting against ISIL in Iraq contribute to the capability of the national security apparatus, there is considerable variance in the extent to which they are perceived to enhance the credibility of state security and the legitimacy of the Abadi government. As Dr. Ligon has done for global terror organizations, our schema assesses the likelihood of security cooperation among Iraqi stakeholders. All of the key stakeholders (Sunni, Shia, Kurds) have militia or paramilitary groups. Yet, as Table 1 below shows, levels of trust between these groups is low. That is, in most cases the presence of sectarian forces is seen by other groups to undermine the credibility of the national security appraratus, and through this their perception of the their security situation. As discussed earlier, much of this distruct is rooted in the contentious and sometimes violent nature of political and social relations between these groups. Furthermore, there is also significant political factionalization within each of these key stakeholder groups, and specific militia may have stronger ties to one Shia (or Sunni or Kurdish) political faction that another. Furthermore, Shia politicization of the military (Eisenstadt, 2014), has left Sunnis in particular skeptical about the impartiality of ISF forces themselves.

Table 1: Key Stakeholder perceptions of major miltiary and militia groups

Key stakeholder perceptions of major military and militia groups		Sunni	Shia	Kurd
Credibility of national security apparatus	Trust in Shia-led Iraqi Security Forces	Weak negative	Strong positive	Weak positive
	Trust in Sunni-led Iraqi Security Forces	Strong positive	Weak positive	Weak positive
	Trust in PMF	Strong negative	Strong positive	Weak negative
	Trust in Iranian-backed Shia militia	Strong negative	Strong positive	Strong negative
	Trust in Peshmerga	Weak positive	Strong negative	Strong positive
Perception of legitimacy of Abadi government	Trust in Shia-led Iraqi Security Forces	Weak negative	Strong positive	Weak positive
	Trust in Sunni-led Iraqi Security Forces	Strong positive	Weak positive	Weak positive
	Trust in PMF	Strong negative	Strong positive	Weak negative
	Trust in Iranian-backed Shia militia	Strong negative	Strong positive	Strong negative
	Trust in Peshmerga	Weak positive	Strong negative	Strong positive

Legend: ■ Strong positive (green) ■ Weak negative (orange) ■ Weak positive (yellow) ■ Strong negative (red)

Legitimacy and sovereignty also require that some solution be found to the fractured nature of the security and militia forces currently active in Iraq. Sovereignty requires that the government have the sole legitimate right to the use of force, a condition that cannot be met when autonomous militia are active within a state. Furthermore, the continued presence of such forces increases sectarian tensions and the likelihood of a resurgence of violence, particularly between Sunni and Shia, which will contribute to negative social conditions (e.g., reduced intergroup integration, reduced social accord, decreased sense of national identity) that undermine the legitimacy of the national government.

Without consolidation of military power, the government's ability to pursue political reconciliation will also be hampered. Unfortunately, there are multiple pressures in Iraq providing this type of barrier. Abadi is restricted by fears that armed Sunni militia will turn those arms against the central government, and the need to combat Shia hardliners (led by Maliki) who do not want to empower Sunnis or meaningfully incorporate them into the government of Iraq (Arango, 2015). Moreover, the GoI fears that any effort to arm or empower the Sunnis will lead towards further fragmentation of Iraq, conflict with the Shia-led government, or the defection of armed and trained Sunni groups to radical groups (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014).

Issues of justice and lack of trust

BLUF: Lack of social accord, exacerbated by perceptions of inequality and lack of political voice and representation perpetuate the salience of sectarian conflicts and hamper the development of greater governing legitimacy.

In addition to the group-specific dynamics discussed in the previous sections, we also see across all three loop diagrams a similar pattern emerging around social accord. A lack of trust between and among groups prohibits the attainment of social accord, which influences perceptions of political power (representation and voice) and multiple forms of justice (distributive and procedural). Absent this social harmony and cooperation, and at times reinforcing it, group dynamics emerge that undermine the perceived legitimacy of the government. The Shia work toward maintenance of their dominance, undermining Sunni representation and voice, engaging in unequal distribution of resources for Sunnis and Kurds, and engaging in human rights abuses against the Sunni. These dynamics represent violations of both distributive justice (fairness in outcomes) and procedural justice (fairness in decision making procedures and/or general treatment).

These social factors, both individually and collectively—and directly (first-order effects) and indirectly (second- and third-order effects)—contribute to the perception that the Abadi government is not legitimate. This in turn feeds into the Sunni' and Kurds' desire for greater autonomy and movement away from a unified and stable Iraqi state. As discussed in further detail in volume 2, these social factors also provide insight into the core dynamics giving rise to sectarian conflict. Understanding these dynamics can be critical to determining *how* to intervene and create effective strategies for engagement that can build the cooperation among groups that will be necessary for effective security in Iraq post-ISIL. In particularly, this examination yields insight into the potential pitfalls to avoid when making decisions in a security environment that is heavily influenced by the social and political domains.

Decreasing Sunni fear of retribution

BLUF: Increasing Sunni perception of their security, by providing Sunnis with meaningful leadership roles in the ISF and police can create a virtuous loop; decreasing Sunni fear of retribution (and follow-on effects) and enhancing their perception of the legitimacy of the Abadi government.

In Iraq, there are a multitude of military and paramilitary groups and organizations, with various levels of allegiance to and control by the central government. At present, they are at least loosely unified by their common goal of removing ISIL from Iraq. Once ISIL is removed, however, these groups will remain. Monopoly over the legitimate use of force is one of the defining characteristics of a sovereign state. The continued presence of these groups, therefore, is in and of itself a challenge to the legitimacy of any Iraqi national government. Considering the recent history of sectarian conflict within Iraq, the presence of strongly identified sectarian militia is likely to significantly reduce perceptions of security and increase the likelihood of sectarian violence reemerging.

Specifically as this section of the loop diagram in Figure 6 below illustrates, the nature of the various military and paramilitary forces present in Iraq contributes significantly to Sunni fear of reprisals.

The presence and strength of Shia and Kurdish forces, particularly in Sunni majority regions of Iraq also undermines Sunni perception of their security situation. Increased Sunni representation in police and ISF forces can alleviate these fears that the process of removing ISIL forces will be used as cover for reprisals against Sunni populations, based more in the sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni, and as a means of bolstering Shia political and military dominance. Failure to incorporate Sunni in leadership roles within the police and security forces increases the probability that Sunni tribal elders will look to provide their own security in the future. Doing so will increase both the number and capacity of sectarian militia in the country, further moving the government away from monopoly

Figure 6: Decreasing Sunni fears of retribution

over the use of force and, by decreasing groups' reliance on the state security apparatus, further undermining the legitimacy of the national government.

However, as Figure 2 above shows, there is a also "virtuous" loop, or positive reinforcing feedback (indicated by the grey "R") running from Sunni perception of equality, to Sunni perception of legitimacy to Sunni perception of security, back to perception of equality. This loop highlights the centrality of political and social factors to the potential for stability and security in Iraq moving forward. Sunni perception of equality is hampered by Shia political dominance and Sunni's lack of satisfaction with resource distribution process and outcome.

Conclusion

That defeat of ISIL is essential for the stability of Iraq and the well-being of its people is perhaps one of the few issues on which there is almost complete accord among Iraq's many ethno-sectarian groups. However, it would be dangerous to interpret this specific shared goal as indicative of a more general social accord among Iraq's key stakeholders. There are ongoing and profound social cleavages among Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups, which are reproduced in, and magnified by, the political organization of the state. Furthermore, each of these groups is (to various extents) dominant in specific geographic areas of the country, and has its own sectarian militia or fighting forces.

As discussed in volume 2 of this report, a critical buffer to such cleavages can be the formation of a common superordinate group identity (e.g., Iraqi national identity). A shared goal can be a critical factor in the development of such a superordinate identity, and the fight against ISIL provided Iraq's key stakeholders with just such a shared goal. The question is, what will happen once that shared goal is removed?

It is possible that fighting against ISIL served to erode some of the barriers of mistrust and competition among these groups, and demonstrated the utility of working cooperatively. In this case, Iraq and CENTCOM have a possibly unique opportunity to build on this development, and work toward greater political and social reconciliation. Increasing political representation and voice, satisfaction with the process and outcome of revenue and resource distribution, and perceptions of equality among these groups should mutually and individually improve perceptions of the legitimacy of the Abadi government, creating the condition for short-term stability. In the longer term, these same factors should move through the social system to increase social accord, which can in turn provide a more resilient bulwark for governing legitimacy.

Unfortunately, it is also possible that this shared goal will not be sufficient to trigger the development of a superordinate national identity and common national goals. Rather, it may be the case that the advent of ISIL has created conditions, especially perceived Sunni support for the group and greater Kurdish autonomy, that could form the basis for intensified sectarian conflict once ISIL is eliminated. If this is the case, that conflict will take place among groups that are now considerably better armed, trained, and experienced than they were before ISIL, and will unfold amidst a population that has already endured years of conflict and dislocation, with a government that lacks both resources and legitimacy.

It is clear that at present Iraq stands at a critical juncture between the opportunity for change and stability, and the risk of disintegration. The challenge for U.S. planning is to provide contingency plans

for both of these distinct possible futures. Our analysis suggests that attempting to isolate security engagement efforts from the broader political and social forces at play in Iraq is futile. Security is intrinsically linked to perceptions of governing legitimacy and the dynamics of ethno-sectarian relations. Thus, whatever diplomatic, informational, military and economic levers the U.S. employs in Iraq, attention must be paid to the influence they might have on both of these factors. That is, will these actions contribute to the development of a superordinate Iraqi national identity and to mitigating sectarian conflict should it erupt after the fall of ISIL, or will they reinforce existing perceptions of inequality and mistrust?

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