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## *Promoting greater stability in post-ISIL Iraq*

*Volume 2: Why do groups form and why does it matter for stability in Iraq? When the social becomes political*

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

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## Introduction

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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?*

To address this question, in volume 1, we examine the drivers of **legitimacy**, security, and **social accord** for key Iraqi stakeholders. In the current **volume 2**, we provide an in-depth and comprehensive discussion of the key social elements and dynamics contributing to **social accord**, and tie the social domain to the political domain in Iraq, with accompanying implications for stability.

## Social Identity and Categorization: Why Do Groups Form and Why Does it Matter for Stability in Iraq?

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Individuals can take on many identities, at multiple levels of categorization. They also can invoke and switch flexibly between multiple individual and/or collective (social) identities (for an example in Iraq, see Natali, 2016). For example, a person can be a son or husband (individual identities), or a tribal member, Moslawi, or Iraqi (social identities). Most relevant to understanding the role of identity on political and social interactions in Iraq are *social identities* (Tajfel, 2010). Social identities serve an important function in that they provide a set of common norms and values and help to reduce people's feelings of uncertainty (Hogg & Terry, 2000). People also derive a sense of social worth through these social identities, which reinforce individuals' memberships in a given group and create a sense of emotional significance or value associated with this group membership (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1981). In part due to this emotional component of social identity, actions toward members of a given social identity group that are seen as denying or violating that identity can be met with strong resistance, or even hostility. Properly acknowledging and validating people's important social identities instead reinforces their social worth, and facilitates understanding of their values and preferences, as well as how they may respond to political situations and policy decisions in the context of the broader social environment.

Which social identity is most important and salient at a given time depends on a number of factors. Often, these flexible social identities can be organized hierarchically and thus do not contradict one another. For example, "higher-level categories (e.g., nations) [are] more inclusive than lower-level ones (e.g., cities or towns)." At other times, these social identities may be in conflict (e.g., Sunnis or Kurds struggling to identify with a Shia-dominated Iraqi government).

Social identities also influence how different groups in society interact. Social categorization into ingroups and outgroups based on these social identities is a fundamental psychological process, and is at the root of several cognitive and behavioral biases, including ingroup favoritism (Brown, 2000; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Once people group themselves in this way, they begin to make comparisons between their ingroup and relevant outgroups (Tajfel, 1979). People tend to have positive



evaluations of ingroup members (i.e., those with whom one shares a social identity) and bestow preferential treatment and outcomes to their ingroup members. For example, ingroup (Brown, 2000; Tajfel et al., 1971) members are more likely to be viewed as sharing similar qualities, habits, and attitudes (e.g., Allen & Wilder, 1979; Quattrone & Jones, 1980; Wilder, 1984) while maintaining an individuated identity, whereas outgroup members are seen as being homogenous (“they are all the same”) and less individuated. Moreover, fellow ingroup members are more likely to receive favorable attributions for their behaviors (e.g., if the cause of a behavior is ambiguous, an ingroup member’s motivations will more likely be seen as benevolent compared with an outgroup member), and to receive preferential treatment or **allocation of resources** (Brewer, 1999; Leyens et al., 2000; Pettigrew, 1979; Stephan, 1977). Thus, this basic categorization into ingroups and outgroups forms the basis for multiple forms of outgroup bias, as well as outgroup derogation, whose worst manifestation results in dehumanization, animosity, and even violence (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

*“When an outgroup is perceived to have dissimilar values to the ingroup, it is perceived to lack shared humanity and its interests can be disregarded.”*

- Haslam, 2006

In addition to the barriers to establishing **social accord** within a society that arise from this ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias, social categorization into ingroups and outgroups is particularly problematic for state stability when it occurs at a mid-level in the hierarchy within a nation, as is the case with the observed ethno-sectarian divisions in Iraq. This is because a focus on the mid-level of categorization emphasizes the subgroup (ethnic or sectarian identity) over the superordinate group (**national identity**), the latter of which is required to achieve several fundamental goals of the state (including **legitimacy** and **security**).

## Intra-group cohesion: what are the ties that bind?

Categorization into and identification with a given ingroup is by definition necessary for **intra-group cohesion**.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Iraq, where the current emphasis centers on ethno-sectarian groupings, we constrain our discussion of social cohesion to subgroup identities<sup>2</sup> (e.g., Shia, Kurds)—examining the cohesion that occurs within these groups. Specifically, we regard social cohesion as the degree to which: a) members of a given group share similarities on characteristics that are deemed important to the group’s identity (e.g., common sect, common ethnicity, and/or common values or shared history); b) group members exhibit a positive orientation toward one another, and c) group members perceive that they have a common goal toward which they are working. By this definition, we presently observe greater social cohesion among Kurds and Shias than among Sunnis.

<sup>1</sup> Group cohesion, or social cohesion, more broadly construed, has been variously defined across multiple disciplines (e.g., Forrest & Kearns, 2001; French, 1941; Friedkin, 2004; Hogg & Turner, 1985; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Zander, 1979). Though our definition of intra-group cohesion is derived from our analysis of subgroups in Iraq, we draw heavily on the social identity approach (for a discussion of this and other social psychological approaches, see Hogg, 1992), as we feel it is most appropriate for the social environment in Iraq.

<sup>2</sup> Here, “subgroup” is not intended to imply anything about the quality of a given group, but only to denote a hierarchical relationship, with subgroups being defined as more exclusive than superordinate groups, which would be inclusive of all of a portion of subgroups (e.g., each state in America is one kind of subgroup, whereas the United States as a whole is one example of a superordinate group).



In the case of Iraq, leadership is also critical to **intra-group cohesion**—or its absence. For example, the Sunnis experience a state of deep alienation and perceived discrimination from the Shia-led national government (al-Qarawee, 2013), which might under some conditions create a sense of common fate (i.e., experiencing the same or interrelated outcomes) and identification with fellow subgroup members. Yet, the Sunnis do not exhibit strong **internal cohesion**, as they lack a cohesive identity (Mansour, 2016), as well as a leader who can speak on behalf of the whole population. Instead, multiple figures (e.g., sheikhs/tribal leaders, clerics, and businesspeople) all claim to speak on behalf of the Sunnis, while also remaining in conflict with each other (Mansour, 2016). In

*“There is no monolithic Sunni group. On the contrary, this so-called group consists of diverse political actors (with different ideologies), tribal sheikhs, religious clerics, and businesspeople.”*

- Mansour, 2016

*“Not only did the Sunnis lack a clear leadership structure but, more critically, they also lacked the necessary sectarian-based identity for successful political mobilization in post-2003 Iraq.”*

- Mansour, 2016

contrast, due to a sense of common fate, shared history of perceived discrimination, and uniting ideologies (e.g., qawmiyya—a strong sense of ethno-nationalism among Kurds, and muthloomiya—a sense of oppression among Shia), both the Shias and the Kurds respectively have traditionally exhibited a strong degree of **internal cohesion** (see, for example: Anagnostos, 2016; “Iraq Situation Report, Part III,” 2016; Mansour, 2016).

### The effect of intra-group cohesion on the likelihood of inter-group integration

**Intra-group cohesion** is achieved to some extent at the expense of **inter-group integration**, in that an emphasis on intra-group affinity and shared goals and values highlights the perceived differences between ingroups and outgroups. As discussed above, when compared with outgroup members, ingroup members are more likely to be the recipients of many benefits and positive biases—ranging from how they are viewed and how other ingroup members feel about them, to how they are treated. Thus, all else being equal, we would expect that an increase in **intra-group cohesion** can under some conditions result in a decrease in the likelihood of **inter-group integration**. This is especially the case when there is not a strong and inclusive superordinate identity that is equally or more salient to all individuals in society.

As defined here, social cohesion within the subgroup is a function of similarity, positive orientation toward fellow ingroup members, and the perception of a common goal. As such, **subgroup cohesion**, though making integration more challenging to achieve, should not in and of itself preclude **inter-group integration**. If the subgroups can negotiate an effective balance of subgroup and superordinate group identity, the individual groups that take on this common identity will be more likely to work toward—and achieve—**social accord** within a given society (discussed in further detail below). Embracing a common ingroup identity also does not necessarily preclude the continuation of an important subgroup identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Huo & Molina, 2006). A common ingroup identity does not require that people completely reject their original, subgroup identity, but instead allows for the simultaneous existence of dual identities (e.g., Huo & Molina, 2006). For example, greater **inter-group integration** within Iraq does not require Sunnis, Shia,



and Kurds to renounce their existing ethnic/sectarian identities; rather, that they create a concept of Iraqi identity that is flexible enough to accommodate all of these ethnic identities.

However, in the context of Iraq, where subgroup identities (e.g., Sunni or Kurd) are likely to be perceived to compete with other subgroup identities (e.g., Shia), the relationship between **intra-group cohesion** and **inter-group integration** instead may work in opposition to one another. That is, **intra-group cohesion** may be so strong, that it creates a barrier to inter-group integration and **social accord**. For example, in Iraq, though a strong sense of Kurdish identity and unity historically has provided the Kurds with a sense of positive self-worth and the mechanisms to form organizations aimed at protecting their interests, this **cohesion** has also contributed to a desire for increased **autonomy** or even secession from the state—operating in opposition to **national identity** and **cohesion** at the state level.

## Inter-group Integration: what can change “us and them” into “we”?

As discussed above, individuals' categorization of themselves into group memberships is flexible—they can see themselves as members of multiple groups, or only one group—or as members of a more exclusive *subgroup* or more inclusive *superordinate group*. This categorization is also mutable—individuals' categorization of themselves can change over short or long periods of time, depending on the various motivations they may have, including responses to the social and political context, to think of themselves as members of one group versus another (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In some cases, individuals who primarily think of themselves as members of a subgroup may choose to recategorize themselves as members of a broader superordinate group, which they now share with others who were formerly outgroup members. This recategorization is known as a *common ingroup identity*.

The formation of a common ingroup identity represents **inter-group integration**. In contrast to **intra-group cohesion**, **inter-group integration** instead emphasizes the degree to which two or more originally *distinct* groups come to share a common sense of identity and purpose (i.e., form a common ingroup). In other words, groups that originally defined themselves in contrast to one another—by invoking ingroups and

*“The salience of sectarianism ebbs and flows in Iraq, and it is not the dominant narrative now as it was in 2006.”*

- Tollast, 2016

outgroups (“us” versus “them”)—will come to think of themselves as part of a superordinate identity that becomes the basis for a new, more inclusive ingroup (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994). Along with this recategorization comes the

*“...tribalism is stimulated not only by the internal context, but also, in a direct way, by a complex relationship with the world’s most global force – the U.S. army.”*

- Dawod, 2015

benefits previously accrued to the original ingroup (i.e., subgroup in a hierarchical structure), in terms of cognition (e.g., more positive explanations generated for others' behavior), affect (e.g., more positive feelings about and greater empathy for the other), and behavior (e.g., greater likelihood of helping the other, increased trust) (Dovidio et al., 1997; Gaertner et al., 1994).

## The role of shared goals in inter-group integration

One motivation for **inter-group integration** may be inter-group interdependence – for example, when the groups rely on one another to achieve important social, political, or economic outcomes. We can



refer to these outcomes as superordinate goals – which cannot be achieved without the cooperation of all groups involved (Tajfel, 1982). The practicality of the Iraqi people may eventually form the basis for **inter-group integration** (e.g., a coalition between Sunnis and Kurds in the face of an external threat from the Shia-dominated government). A sense of common fate (colloquially, “we’re in the same boat”) also may, similar to the relationship to **intra-group cohesion**, bind originally disparate groups together.

*“At the same time, disputes over land and a legacy of mutual suspicions will make any potential alliance [of the Sunni] with the Kurds a tactical one (as was the case with the Shia-Kurdish alliance which was undermined despite the absence of any legacy of hostility).”*

- Dawod, 2015

*“To officials in the Kurdistan region, friendly ties with the Sunni Arab community are of strategic importance. A Kurdish–Sunni Arab alliance, for now, can serve as the cornerstone of a political coalition to check an untrusted Shia-dominated government in Baghdad.”*

- Mansour, 2016

**Intra-group cohesion** among subgroups within a state also can be dissuaded—and **inter-group integration** across subgroups can be motivated—through the more general reduction of uncertainty (physical and psychological), as well as shifting the target outgroup target to one external to the state, and emphasizing the positive attributes and benefits of the broader superordinate ingroup (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

At the same time, there are also factors that can operate in opposition to recategorization. For example, political leaders can also invoke, or even create, the perception of group differences, in order to serve political interests, and generate levers for power by playing one group off of another. Similarly, leaders may also utilize unequal distribution of resources or treatment of groups to accomplish the same goal. As suggested by the al-Qarawee quote, there is evidence that manipulation of identity politics is in fact used to garner power and other goals.

*“In Iraq, identity politics is an instrument used by political actors as they engage in the more fundamental conflicts over power, status and resources.”*

- al-Qarawee, 2013

### Why is recategorization and inter-group integration important?

Given that group members consistently demonstrate an ingroup bias (i.e., one in which they favor the ingroup) that may devolve into outgroup derogation, the recategorization into a superordinate common ingroup is important as it can have significant effects on the way in which people interact. Along with this recategorization come the benefits previously accrued to the original ingroup members (i.e., subgroup in a hierarchical structure), in terms of more positive evaluations and sentiment, greater willingness to provide help, and greater propensity toward cooperation (e.g., Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). Additionally, recategorization into a common ingroup identity and achievement of **inter-group integration** also can promote increased **trust** and forgiveness among the originally distinct groups (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010).

In a country such as Iraq, where there is a history of ebbing and flowing ethno-sectarian conflict, and in which each subgroup has its own grievances, the necessity of **inter-group integration** for **social accord** is especially necessary. Rapid social change, as observed in Iraq, can deepen existing divisions among social groups, and result in a backlash against the perceived sources of this change. If not counteracted, this can result in increasing grievances and strife between groups, contributing to social instability. The



resulting social instability in turn can impact state stability. The formation of a common ingroup—or **inter-group integration**—can serve to counteract this movement toward instability.

For example, forming a common ingroup identity enables Sunnis to effectively reintegrate into society and reduce their sense of **alienation from** and suspicion of the state government and its goals. Similarly, **integration** may reduce the Shia's need to maintain their own power at the expense of **representation** for the Sunnis and Kurds, as they will be less likely to emphasize the loss to their Shia subgroup, and more likely to focus on the gain for national unity and the achievement of the goals for a unified Iraqi state, particularly in contrast to extra-state actors such as Saudi Arabia. Finally, while the Kurds might need to compromise some measure of desired **autonomy** or the goal of secession, the reward for **integration** would be a stronger state that is in theory capable of better meeting the needs of its constituents through the provision of effective security and governance (e.g., in comparison to the Kurdistan Regional Government's struggle to make payroll, its heavy debt, and lack of support from neighboring countries and some others in the international arena) (Salih, 2016).

*"...as long as the mind-set of Shia-centric state building is in place and is politically empowered, Sunni resentment and rejection will persist; and as long as there is a sense that Sunnis reject the post-2003 order, the mind-set of Shia-centric state building will deepen and gain broader popular acceptance. In both cases, feelings of mistrust, fear, encirclement, and insecurity drive further sectarian entrenchment and stand in the way of compromise and reform."*

- Haddad, 2016

## How and When Does Justice Matter? Perceived Inequality in Treatment and Outcomes and the Role of Identity

A caveat remains in that increased **inter-group integration** alone may not be sufficient to eliminate inter-group bias (whether manifested as ingroup favoritism or outgroup derogation) (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). Structural relations factors (Mummendey & Otten, 2001), such as **perceived equality** of status, which emerges as a key factor in inter-group relations in Iraq, are also important. This perception is often more powerful than any objective reality (where they may differ), and can strongly influence people's attitudes and behaviors toward others or organizations, when they feel there is an injustice (Griffin & Ross, 1991). This injustice or inequality can manifest in multiple ways. A violation of *procedural justice* would involve bias or injustice either in the **procedures used to make decisions** that affect members of different groups, or in the way that members of different groups are treated, thereby derogating one group versus another or violating their dignity (i.e., the capacity to live by their standards and principles; Killmister, 2010). In contrast, a violation of *distributive justice* focuses instead on injustice in the **allocation of outcomes** (Tyler, 1994).<sup>3</sup>

For Sunnis, in particular, the perception of both **unequal** (and thus unjust) treatment/**process** and unequal **distribution** of resources by the Shia-led government has been a major source of tension and conflict. Sunnis do not feel that the Shia-led government represents them or their interests. These

<sup>3</sup> In many cases, injustice in distribution may involve unequal distribution of resources, etc. (i.e., everyone does not get the same allocation). In other cases, injustice instead may involve inequitable distribution of resources (i.e., individuals or groups receive outcomes that are not proportional to their inputs). Because it is not entirely possible to tease apart these two types of concerns in Iraq, and because a reference to unequal versus inequitable outcomes should be more intuitive to our reader, we focus our terminology around inequality.



activities represent a violation of **trust** and the reality (or at least potential) for unjust (**unequal treatment or outcomes**). Moreover, significant grievances surface due to the perceived injustice arising from the **human rights' violations** perpetrated against the Sunni population by the Shia-led security apparatus. Such grievances (i.e., reactions to perceived inequality in outcome and treatment) give rise to anger. Feelings of anger (from annoyance to rage) are generally associated with “actions against” (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). For example, research indicates that moral outrage in response to perceived injustice may result both in a desire to punish the perceived perpetrator and a desire to change the system seemingly responsible for the perceived injustice (Gurr, 1990, 2015; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Kuznar, 2007, 2007; Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005; Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009; Pagano & Huo, 2007). Typically, the government or other authority is perceived by the population to hold this role and power. For Sunnis (as well as Kurds), the Shia-led government and some of its security apparatuses (e.g., **Shia militia, Popular Mobilization Forces**) occupy this role. Correspondingly, Kurdish and especially Sunni **trust in the Shia-led security forces**, and more generally, **trust in one another** as groups, is low.

### The implications of perceived injustice for identity

Perceived inequality in **treatment or outcomes** is given additional weight by the implications that inequality has for identity. Relational models of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Blader, 2003; Tyler & Lind, 1992) suggest that the fundamental reason people care about the fairness of procedures is because it affects their feelings of *self-worth*. To be treated in a way that is procedurally fair indicates the extent to which people are viewed by decision makers with **trust, standing, respect, and value** (Heuer, Blumenthal, Douglas, & Weinblatt, 1999; Huo, 2002; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998). One manifestation of procedural justice is to allow people to have “**voice**”—the opportunity to express their side or values during a **decision-making process** or as part of the political process more generally (Jost & Kay, 2010; Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990; Tyler, 1987). A violation of procedural justice may send a message to individuals or group members that they are in some way unworthy, thereby jeopardizing people’s fundamental human need to belong and the benefits that individuals obtain from being valued members of groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Jost & Kay, 2010). In Iraq, Sunnis’ perception that they do not have fair **representation and opportunity for voice** in government also creates another powerful source of grievance, which if left unchecked and paired with an ongoing **sense of inequality** may lead to ongoing support for devolution of power, or even violence.

### The implications of identity for perceived injustice

At the same time, identity (manifested here in the classification of others into ingroups or outgroups) is not only shaped by, but also shapes, the perception of justice. All else being equal, people tend to focus

*“Further disagreements on revenue sharing arise from the lack of definition on what constitutes “fair” redistribution or “damaged regions.” Lack of clarity has led to competing claims from different groups for a larger share of the petroleum revenue.”*

- Aresti, 2016

more on procedural justice (**fair process** and treatment) when interacting with fellow ingroup members, whereas distributive justice (**fair outcomes**) becomes relatively more important when dealing with outgroup members (Tyler, 1994). One implication of this general finding is that an unequal **distribution of resources** (or the perception thereof) by a governing body can be particularly





problematic if individuals' salient social identities are at a level of categorization subordinate to the **national identity** (e.g., ethnic or sectarian subgroups such as Sunnis or Kurds), as these group members can be more sensitive to **distributional discrepancies**—and thus once again more likely to have related *grievances*. The **allocation of** oil revenues in Iraq, a long-contested issue, illustrates the case of grievances arising from **perceived inequality in distribution of resources**. For example, the Kurds have lobbied the government to **allocate more resources** to them (Aresti, 2016; Chmaytelli & Coles, 2016).

## Social Accord

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**Social accord** can be understood as the extent to which the various individuals and groups in a given society coexist in a manner that is harmonious and cooperative.<sup>4</sup> We craft the concept of **social accord** to capture a singular construct that, to our knowledge, does not fall under a unified concept or literature in the social science disciplines, but which, by its definition, is of critical importance in stability and inter-group relations. The social sciences have, however, approached this concept by examining its absence—in other words, by examining social discord or inter-group strife. We draw broadly and at a high-level from multiple literatures that examine these constructs, including those that are referenced elsewhere in this volume, to inform our conceptualization of **social accord**.<sup>5</sup>

As we define it here, **social accord** captures the degree to which there is a neutral to positive attitude toward, and a lack of animosity and resulting violence among, individuals and groups in society. **Social accord** is important as it helps to support people's and groups' dignity (i.e., their capacity to live by their standards and principles) and plays a key role in enabling voluntary cooperation between various societal groups to achieve collective goals. Central also to the idea of **social accord** is the role it plays in generating voluntary cooperation between members of a community to reach a collective goal.

In this way, **social accord** is both a product of **inter-group integration** (which enables cooperation and removes barriers to interaction) and supports continued **inter-group integration**, as repeated positive interactions with prior outgroup members while on an equal footing can help to decrease stereotypes about, increase the perception of similarity with, and enable maintenance of a positive orientation toward prior outgroup members, as well as create support for the new, superordinate group (Gaertner et al., 1994). Moreover, **social accord** may include cooperation toward the common goals that may have motivated **inter-group integration**. **Social accord** also requires that groups in society are on an equal footing—i.e., that there is an absence of obvious **inequalities** in treatment/**process** or **outcomes**, and that the perception of groups is that they are being treated and being **allocated resources** fairly. This relationship is a reciprocal one, in that **social accord** can also work to reinforce people's **perception that all groups are equal**.

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<sup>4</sup> **Social accord** also suggests that there is a reasonable reconciliation between people's subgroup identities and superordinate group identity, achieved by a high degree of **inter-group integration**.

<sup>5</sup> These literatures include those on justice, inter-group relations, inter-group bias, aggression, and grievances (see, for example: Bushman & Huesmann, 2010; Dovidio et al., 1997; Gurr, 1990, 2015; Jost & Kay, 2010; Yzerbet & Demoulin, 2010).



## Social accord and trust

**Social accord** is an important construct in that the greater harmony and cooperation by which it is characterized can create a positive feedback loop for trust among newly integrated subgroups. Thus, groups living and working in relative harmony with one another have more motivation and opportunities to cooperate, which gives rise to increased **trust** in one another. This **trust** in one another in turn gives rise to an increased desire to interact and engage in cooperative endeavors aimed at achieving a common goal. As Larson discusses, “In entrenched conflicts, mistrust is not easily overcome. Words are not enough; deeds are usually required” (Larson, 1997). Similarly, cooperating with former outgroup members helps to demonstrate that the perceived commonalities on which they have based their **integration** with these outgroups are real, and that these new common ingroup members can in fact be depended on in contexts that require partnership or collaboration. Similar to the development of **trust** among states, the development of **trust** among members of previously disparate groups must be built incrementally, beginning with smaller cooperative encounters, and building to larger ones (Larson, 1997). **Trust** may also be made more likely by **social accord** based on Hoffman’s conceptualization that **trust** relies on the basic belief that others will “do the right thing” (Hoffman, 2002). Harmonious engagement of society members with one another underscores this belief.

In the context of Iraq, a lack of **trust** among Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds instead creates a negative feedback loop, wherein decreased **trust** of one another prohibits the successful achievement of **social accord**, which in turn prohibits the development of **trust**. Among Sunnis, human rights abuses by the Shia militias decrease **trust**, and this decreased **trust** serves to further cement the ongoing **cross-sectarian land disputes**. Similarly, a lack of **trust** among both Sunnis and Kurds for the **Shia-led security forces** (viz., **Popular Mobilization Forces** and **Shia militias**) is associated with a reduction in the **perceived credibility** of the security apparatus as a whole, as well as a reduced **perception of legitimacy** of the Abadi government. Ultimately, this lack of **trust** forms a critical barrier in the context of potential change toward greater stability in Iraq.

## When the Social Becomes Political

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The relationships between and among social constructs address important sources of stability or instability as groups interact in any society, including Iraq. These sources of social instability perhaps have their greatest impact when they in turn influence stability within other domains, such as governance or security. In this way, the social becomes political.

## National identity

**National identity**, for example, arises as a specifically political manifestation of recategorization into a superordinate identity. Recategorization of multiple subgroups into a common ingroup is effectively agnostic, in that any one of multiple potential superordinate identities in theory could be chosen as the basis for **inter-group integration**. In the context of Iraq, however, the logical superordinate category for identification is one based on nation—emerging naturally from considerations of subgroup identity, inter-group relations, and the resulting legitimacy and effective functioning of the government, its security apparatus, and the state as a whole. **National identity** represents a movement away from



purely social phenomena, which can operate at any level of analysis, to a state level of social identification, which is specifically political in nature. Similar to the relationship between social accord and **inter-group integration**, **national identity**, as a specific manifestation of **inter-group integration**, supports **social accord** by enabling cooperation and removing barriers to interaction. Thus, **social accord** is both enhanced by and gives rise to **national identity**. A strong sense of **national identity** across all subgroups in a given state, such as Iraq, also requires the presence of **social accord** (harmony and cooperation in society), which itself depends upon **inter-group integration** (recategorization).

**National identity** has an important link to **governing legitimacy** in two primary ways. The first of these is that a governing body cannot claim to represent a population whose interests it cannot identify due to hyper-fragmentation. Second, individuals' own sense of **national identity** will make it more likely that they will perceive a governing body as representing their interests, or those of their common ingroup as a whole (e.g., Iraqi nationals). The converse also holds true. For example, a lack of strong **Kurdish identification as Iraqi nationals**, combined with strong subgroup **cohesion**, is associated with a drive for **autonomy**, which in turn reduces perception of the **Abadi government's legitimacy**.

#### Intra-group cohesion and political representation and voice

The linkages between **intra-group cohesion** and political **representation** and **governing legitimacy** provide another pathway from the social to the political. As discussed earlier, **intra-group cohesion** is based in multiple factors (similarity, positive orientation, common goals), none of which in and of themselves preclude taking on a second, superordinate identity (e.g., identifying as both Sunni and Iraqi). **Intra-group cohesion** should enable political representation and voice, in that a unified group can better identify and represent its core values and needs, as well as participate as effective representatives within political bodies (assuming they are not precluded from doing so by those in power). Effective representation increases a given groups' perception of legitimacy for the governing body. In Iraq, while high levels of **cohesion** among some groups (e.g., Kurds) may enable political **representation**, cohesion may be so strong as to create an inverse relationship with likelihood of **inter-group integration**—cascading follow-on effects for **social accord**, **national identity**, and **perceptions of governing legitimacy**.

#### Perceived equality and legitimacy

**Perceived equality** also emerges as a critical variable in the context of Iraq, particularly for Sunnis, and once again forms the basis for a translation of social concerns into deeply political ones. The relationship between the **perception of equality** and **perceived legitimacy** is a particularly significant one given the role that **legitimacy** has in overall state stability in Iraq. As discussed in detail above, **perceived inequality** in both **process/treatment** and **outcomes** creates a significant sense of grievance among Sunnis. These **inequalities** manifest in multiple ways, from **unequal distribution of resources** such as oil revenue (for Kurds, Sunnis), to mistreatment as part of **human rights abuses** against **internally displaced persons (IDPs)** and other Sunnis. This **perceived inequality** is experienced as an injustice and reveals the bias that Sunnis and Kurds feel is inherent in the Abadi government, fundamentally undermining the **legitimacy** of that governing body.



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