

# SMA CENTCOM Reach-back Reports



- 1: Messaging
- 2: The fight against ISIL
- 3: Encouraging Regional Stability
- 4: Regional actor interests and motivations
- 5: Sources of extremism
- 6: ISIL support and recruitment
- 7: USG bureaucratic requirements

## Part 8: Post ISIL Governance


- 9: Coalition Views

*This is Part 8 of a 9 part series of SMA Reach back responses to questions posed by USCENTCOM. Each report contains responses to multiple questions grouped by theme*

10 January 2017

At the request of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), the Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the JS, Services, and U.S. Government (USG) Agencies, has established a SMA virtual reach-back cell. This initiative, based on the SMA global network of scholars and area experts, is providing USCENTCOM with population based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations in the Iraq/Syria region.

The Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff (JS/J-3/DDGO) and executed by ASD(R&E)/EC&P/RRTO.

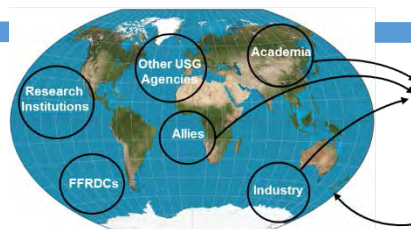
<b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>	
	<b>UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND</b> OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER 7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101
	9 September 2016
MEMORANDUM FOR JOINT STAFF, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL OPERATIONS, DR. HRIAR CABAYAN	
SUBJECT: U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Prioritized List of Study Topics for Analysis by Strategic Multilayer Assessment Reach Back Cell	
<p>1. I greatly appreciate the support you and the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team have provided over the years, and I look forward to institutionalizing our relationship through the establishment of a reach back cell for USCENTCOM. This initiative will provide my staff and components access to your network of scholars and area experts to address questions critical to USCENTCOM in support of ongoing operations in the central region.</p> <p>2. To kick-off the process, USCENTCOM's list of prioritized study topics organized by recommended analytic approach (Quick Look, Virtual Think Tank [ViTTa], Literature Review, and Simulation) is attached in TAB A.</p> <p>3. Ms. Elaine McCusker, SES, Director of Resources &amp; Analysis, has kept me well informed on this initiative. Please continue to work through her for any clarification and/or suggestions for improvement in our reach back process.</p> <p>4. I look forward to reviewing the results of these initial study topics, and again, appreciate the support you provide to our warfighters.</p>	
JOSEPH L. VOTEL General, U.S. Army	
Attachments: TAB A: Prioritized List of Study Topics	
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#### CENTCOM Questions

*Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population? ..... 4*

*Following the clearance of Da'esh from both Mosul and Raqqah, and beyond that any remaining substantive elements in the Euphrates River Valley, what governing structure is most likely to be effective, and acceptable to the predominant tribes? ..... 53*

*How will the population in northwest Syria react to future Salafist political institutions?.....77*



## SMA Reach-back Report

**Question:** Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

**Contributors:** Elie Abouaoun (USIP), Harith Al-Qarawee (Brandeis University), Omar Al-Shahery (Atkis Strategy), Scott Atran (ARTIS), Munqith Dagher (IIACSS), Amb. Robert S. Ford (MEI), Sarhang Hamasaeed (USIP), Buddhika B. Jayamaha (Northwestern University), Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron), Vern Liebl (CAOCL), Renad Mansour (Chatham House), Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University), Clark McCauley (Bryn Mawr College), Spencer Meredith (NDU), Alireza Nader (RAND), Denise Natali (NDU), Lt Col Kevin S. Petit (George Washington University), Will S.K. Reno (Northwestern University), Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins University), Randa Slim (Middle East Institute), Christine Van Den Toorn (American University of Iraq Sulaimani), Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute), Maha Yahya (Carnegie Endowment)

**Editor:** Sarah Canna, NSI

**Compiler:** Sam Rhem, SRC

### Executive Summary

#### Winning the War, but Losing the Peace<sup>1</sup>

*“With every step of the military operation, the gap is widening between Shia and Sunnis.” – Scott Atran, ARTIS*

The general consensus among contributors to this essay is that not only is political reconciliation lagging behind military progress, but that the gap is widening every day (Atran, Dagher & Kaltenthaler,

<sup>1</sup> This subtitle is borrowed from Munqith Dagher and Karl Kaltenthaler: *“The Iraqi government, army, police, and its Shia militia allies are winning the war against Da’esh, but are poised to lose the peace.”*

Hamasaheed, Mansour). The government is not focused on reconciliation, it is focused on the anti-ISIL fight, budgetary issues, and Shia in-fighting (Slim). Furthermore, among the Shia population, there is a general sense that Sunnis lost twice already and that there is little need for reconciliation with them (Slim).

So why are national reconciliation efforts failing? It is not due to lack of initiatives; in fact, there are so many that they are perceived to be more like pronouncements rather than planned, meaningful efforts (Abouaoun, Al-Qarawee, Ford, Wahab). Furthermore, many of these initiatives are being led by international organizations (Liebl). Lack of meaningful national reconciliation efforts have convinced some Sunni Arabs that the Iraqi government intends to revert to the political status-quo ante after ISIS is defeated militarily (Dagher & Kaltenthaler).

### The Myth of the Iraqi State

The successful containment of ISIS will erode the single unifying incentive holding the diverse domestic and regional actors in Iraq together. The idea of a territorial sovereign state in Iraq is an illusion. Iraq is divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. It's economy is fragmented and reliant on personalist patronage networks that emerged from and reinforce clan, tribal, sectarian and ethnic loyalties. It goes without saying that the Iraqi government is fractured, but even within the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish factions, competing forces (and militias) are dividing internal loyalties and interests. Regional countries also have competing interests while USG goals have not been clearly stated. Without a common enemy, it is unlikely that there will again be a confluence of interests to bring these actors together as (reluctant) allies. The risk is that Iraq descends into a failed states, which is particularly concerning as neighbors are more fearful of Iraqi unity than Iraq's dissolution. (Buddhika, Petit, Reno).

The "Historical Settlement" initiative announced at the end of October seemed to hold promise of a post-ISIS reconciliation until parliament passed a law in November legalizing and recognizing Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which Sunnis find an abhorrent form of government-sanctioned sectarian violence (Atran, Hamasaheed). Other unhelpful actions have included the failure to pass the National Guard Law and stripping the amnesty law of important content, according to Hamasaheed. Because of this, other GoI "initiatives" have largely been perceived as lip service to vague promises of reconciliation. These kinds of efforts will not address Sunni Arab or Kurdish grievances (Abouaoun).

One expert pointed out that reconciliation cannot just take place at the national level, it must also occur locally (Hamasaheed). Local efforts will be needed to remediate revenge violence among tribes as well as prepare for the return of over three million displaced people that could undermine military gains (Hamasaheed, Natali, Yahya). "Tribal and other forms of local violence could become a game changer" and should not be ignored, according to Hamasaheed.

However, other experts noted—without discounting the daunting challenges of reconciliation—that there are a few positive signs. First, there is a group of advisors around Prime Minister Abadi who believe that a new compact must be struck with the Sunnis, but this group is not powerful enough to effect change by itself (Slim). Second, two experts noted that in speaking with people on the ground that there is a general sense that reconciliation efforts have proceeded better than expected (Natali, Serwer). Third, in general,

Sunni Arabs continue to largely see themselves as Iraqi nationalists and are committed to Iraq's territorial integrity (Natali). Finally, while Sunnis are completely opposed to the presence of Iranian-backed PMFs in their communities, many expressed a willingness to cooperate with Iraqi Security Forces (Natali).

Experts mentioned five underlying barriers to effective reconciliation.

- PM Abadi **lacks the support of his Shia alliance**, which he has not been able to secure due to intra-Shia rivalries (Abouaoun, Al-Qarawee, Ford, Liebl, Natali, Serwer). It is not clear that Shia hardliners will ever agree to reconcile or share power with the Sunni population (Hamasaheed).
- **Intra-Sunni competition** means that Sunnis are not united behind a single, clear agenda and likely will not be until free elections can be held (Al-Qarawee, Al-Shahery, Liebl, Maye, Natali, Wahab, Serwer).
- **Regional powers** are taking advantage of the power vacuum to promote their own agendas under the guise of protecting the Sunni population (Al-Qarawee).
- **Budget:** Iraq has an 18 billion dollar budget deficit (Yahya). Iraq's huge financial outlay combined with an inadequate inflow of funds means the Iraqi government cannot afford reconciliation initiatives (Liebl).

#### Conditions for Reconciliation

Sunnis do not speak with a single voice and do not have a unitary agenda, but the list below comprises some of the most frequently mentioned grievances. Experts noted that these grievances are not sectarian in nature—like most populations, they desire elements of basic good governance: security, justice, jobs, and equality under the law (Natali, Liebl). Furthermore, the Sunni population has to *feel* that they have a secure, just, and prosperous future in the country (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, McCauley, Natali, Serwer). The failure to deliver these demands may lead to further instability and unrest.

The list below touches on the most frequently noted demands from the Sunni population. For more detail, please refer to the cited contributions.

1. **Security.** Perhaps the most frequently mentioned issue is security (Serwer, Van Den Toorn). This encompasses many elements: freedom from tribal-based revenge and retribution for offenses committed during ISIS's rule (Serwer, Van Den Toorn) and removal and disempowerment of Iranian-backed militias, which Sunnis consider to be a bigger threat than ISIS (Abouaoun, Al-Shahery, Atran, Liebl, Nader, Natali, Yahya).
2. **Justice.** Reconciliation efforts must address forms of structural discrimination against Sunnis (Al-Shahery, Meredith). This broad category emphasizes many complaints: 1) need to moderate retributive justice (Meredith), 2) national policies that discriminate against Sunnis in government and military positions (Al-Shahery), 3) due process for those accused of supporting ISIS (Al-Shahery, Slim, Yahya), equal treatment under the law (Natali, Yahya), and 4) insistence on public accountability for those guilty of government abuses and corruption (Ford).
3. **Self Determination.** Local reconciliation efforts are just as important as national ones (Hamasaheed). Sunnis want more control over their lives (Maye, Wahab). Sunnis desire the authority to control their own territory and resources, determine local power sharing arrangements, provide security through local police force, hire for local government positions, and have meaningful participation in decision-making (Al-Shahery, Hamasaheed, Ford, Maye, McCauley, Natali, Serwer, Van Den Toorn)
4. **Humanitarian Assistance.** Experts agreed that humanitarian assistance must be an immediate priority following the liberation of ISIS-controlled territory (Al-Shahery, McCauley, Natali, Slim).

Assistance will be needed far beyond what has already been promised by the international community.

5. **Reconstruction Aid.** It is clear that areas liberated from ISIS control will need massive and immediate reconstruction aid; however, there is deep skepticism about the political will to provide this assistance (Al-Shahery, Ford, Maye, Serwer, Yahya). There was a plan to rebuild Fallujah, but no progress has been seen on the ground yet (Al-Shahery, Natali).

The failure of the GoI to seriously address the grievances of the Sunni community could lead to a three-fold threat of destabilizing outcomes: a power vacuum where regional powers and their proxies escalate the fight (Mansour); a failed state where warlords, extremist groups, and transnational criminals thrive (Buddhika, Petit, Reno); or the rise of a ISIS 2.0 (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Natali, Yahya). Hamasaheed underscored the severity of the political climate in Iraq by stating that “today Iraq has more ingredients for violence than before Da’esh took over one-third of the country.”

#### What Can Coalition Partners Do?

Contributors outlined a few actions that the US government and its coalition partners could do to facilitate reconciliation.

1. Do not approach reconciliation through an **ethno-sectarian lens**—it not only ignores complex political realities on the ground, but it threatens to reverse important political and societal shifts that have happened in the last two years (Natali).
2. Demonstrate **genuine and firm support for PM Abadi** if he adopts an effective and detailed plan for re-integrating Sunni communities. If he fails to do so, threaten the withdrawal of this support. However, this must be communicated in a way that recognizes the pressure he is facing from Shia hardliners (Al-Qarawee).
3. The USG and its partners can allow Sunni areas the **protected breathing space to reorganization** themselves and hold election of new, local leaders (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Meredith, Serwer). This also includes acting as a neutral intermediary to bring together international, regional, national, and local leaders to facilitate communication and reconciliation (Hamasaheed, Meredith, Van Den Toorn).
4. Reinforce Iraqi state capabilities and **sovereignty** by preventing regional powers from impeding the stable future of Mosul and other Sunni-majority areas (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Natali).

#### Conclusion

Contributors noted that reconciliation efforts need to begin now while there is still military cooperation against a common enemy (Mansour, Yahya). As ISIS is defeated, local and regional actors may devolve into violence if a political vacuum emerges. One danger is that if legitimate Sunni grievances are not acknowledged and addressed, the emotions that gave rise to nationalism may once again become a powerful source of political mobilization in Iraq (McCauley). The intractable nature of the challenges listed in this essay led at least one contributor to conclude that there is little-to-no chance for reconciliation in Iraq at this time (Liebl). We may be in a situation where many of the actors’ interests are better served by continued conflict than resolution (Liebl, Astorino-Courtois).

## SME INPUTs

Elie Abouaoun, USIP

The current initiatives by the Government of Iraq focus on a national accord around vague headlines and, in their current form, will not address much of the grievances of Sunnis and Kurds. Therefore, it is not expected that they will yield significant results. What is really missing is a clear decision by major Shia militarized factions to endorse inclusive policy options that would dismiss concerns by Sunnis and Kurds. The current dialogue initiatives remain in the realm of optics rather than genuine political will to find an acceptable governance model. The Shia parties' entrenchment is aggravated by an Iranian support to maintain a parallel military structure in the form of the Popular Mobilization Forces.

Dr. Harith al-Qarawee, Brandeis University

The initiatives of Iraqi government for reconciliation are not sufficient yet. On the one hand, PM Abadi needs the support of his Shi'a alliance in order to move forward. He has not secured this support because of the intra-Shi'a rivalries and the accusations directed at him by Shi'a hardliners who view such initiatives as a concession and a show of weakness.

On the other hand, the intra-Sunni competitions make it hard to identify a serious and genuine Sunni negotiator. Sunni groups, competing for recognition and patronage, are not united behind a single and clear agenda, and this will be the case as long as a large Sunni territory remains insecure for conducting any type of free election. Regional powers that claim to be backers of Sunnis, such as Turkey, are also taking advantage of power vacuum in Sunni areas to promote their own agenda under the excuse of protecting Sunni population.

There is a need to demonstrate genuine and firm support for the Prime Minister if he adopts an effective and detailed plan for re-integrating Sunni communities. If he fails to do so, he should clearly understand that he might lose this support. But this should be communicated in a way that takes into consideration pressure he is facing from Shia hardliners and his need to not publicly associate himself with anti-Iranian policy. He will need the US support in order to face Shi'a hardliners and deal with Sunni-Sunni rivalries.



Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

To put the answer in proper context we should rewind to the point in time when Da'esh had not yet gained any significant presence in Iraq, and most of the fighting was still confined to Syria; there were a number of public demands stated by the Sunnis that represented the minimum that would keep them from picking up arms against the government. None of these demands were truly addressed by the Iraqi government then, and things only deteriorated further since. The simple answer to this question is no, however, preventing Maliki's third term after he foisted Allawi (elections winner) out of office, was perceived as a step in the right direction.

The problem since Da'esh took hold of Mosul the first time has now been compounded by the integration of the popular mobilization militias into Iraq's national security forces, including the army and the federal police. To begin with, the ranks of the Iraqi army were already unjustifiably favoring Shias after integrating the Shia militias in 2004, and later the assimilation of the predominantly Shia National Guard into its ranks in 2005. Other persistent political grievances include, but not limited to, the reform of the justice system, prosecution procedures, the implementation of the notorious counter terrorism law<sup>2</sup>, the lack of social accountability that actually works, the return of internally and externally displaced people, and last but not least, public employment and participation in decision making. Any initiative that falls short of alleviating these aforementioned complaints will likely continue to stoke violence in the future.

More important than all that is the lack of vision with regards to how areas that are liberated from Da'esh are going to be governed. One potentially effective way is implementing some form of decentralization. That said, Sunnis lack political maturity and leadership despite the fact that they possess, or have the ability to implement, what is potentially the most effective bureaucracy in the country. Moreover, putting any form of decentralization into effect would require a natural resources sharing legislation, something the Iraqi parliament has failed to pass since 2007<sup>3</sup>. One thing worth mentioning is that the Iraqi government is not keen on decentralization and granting any sort of autonomy to Sunni areas, and Sunnis themselves are divided on that matter as well. Sunnis perceive the Iraqi government's efforts at reconciliation as an effort to coerce Sunnis to accept the de-facto Shia political hegemony, one they feel is based on a false claim of majority.

Another initiative that hasn't yet been implemented is addressing the lack of funding or will to rehabilitate and rebuild the highly damaged former Da'esh held areas. The initiative was announced by the Prime Minister, and it was planned to start in Fallujah, yet no significant improvement has yet been seen on the ground.

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<sup>2</sup> In particular section 4 of that law that has been used to persecute Sunnis.

<sup>3</sup> The Iraqi Hydrocarbons Law

1. Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

With every step of the military operation the gap is widening between Shia and Sunnis. The ruling Shia national alliance (Iraqi gov't) announced at the end of October an initiative called "the historical settlement" document. They say they've been working on it for quite a while, and the aim is to reach some sort of final historical settlement for all issues in the post-ISIS era. The UNAMI was involved with drafting the last version of the document, but most of the Sunni Arabs are not happy with it (the UN representative in Iraq met with Sunni Arab leaders):

Here's a link to the document in English:

Caution-<http://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=1307> < Caution-<http://rawabetcenter.com/en/?p=1307> >

The document lost much of its meaning and force after the parliament passed a law at the end of November legalizing and recognizing the majority Shia PMU (al-Hassad al-Shaabi) as an independent military entity, operating outside the effective control of the Iraqi army. That outraged the Sunni.

Reconciliation is not an “initiative” or a set of meetings and speeches.

Little sign that the key authorities in Baghdad – security authorities– are willing to take steps to promote reconciliation, such as transparency in detention decisions, holding security personnel accountable for abuse of prisoners and civilians or providing substantial resources to local community leaders to foster reconstruction. I see the UN and Shia political figures visiting Jordan and Egypt, but Jordan and Egypt don’t much influence the sentiments of people in, say, Fallujah or Hawija or Baquba.

Best example: PMU cut off ISIS escape route from Mosul to compel ISIS to fight and die in Mosul, guaranteeing higher civilian casualties and greater destruction of Mosul housing/infrastructure. Another example: what happened to the 600 mens till missing from Saqlawiyah in Fallujah last summer? Doubt the locals have forgotten about that.

In terms of reading conditions to accommodate needs of Sunni population, these are unchanged: (1) reliable security, including a large element of locally generated security that is not itself factional; (2) resources to local communities, including resources for rebuilding and decisions about government hiring; (3) insistence on public accountability for those guilty of abuses/corruption on all sides. In other words, communities in Sunni Arab areas need a sense of security and justice.

#### Mr. Sarhang Hamasaheed, USIP

1. Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

##### *Political Reconciliation Lags Behind*

Political reconciliation lags significantly behind the military progress against Da’esh, and this lag puts sustaining the military gains at risk. It was hoped that Iraqis uniting against a common enemy, Da’esh, in addition to fatigue from the violence, would translate into political collaboration to address grievances that created the space for Da’esh to advance. While Sunni and Kurdish collaboration with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, and the regrouped Iraqi military, against a common adversary has made significant progress, Iraqi leaders across the political spectrum do point out the lack of an agreed political path forward, and express concern that an opportunity is being missed and lessons from the conflict with Da’esh are not heeded.

There are a number of initiatives for political reconciliation in Iraq, and they fall into two related categories: National and Local. The National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), which reports to Prime Minister Abadi’s Office, is working on reconciliation with international organizations such as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP).

##### *National Reconciliation*

UNAMI and CMI are focused on national reconciliation, including trying to bring in the armed opposition (not Da’esh) into the political process. The road has been very bumpy so far, and the

efforts have not culminated in a workable framework agreed to by the relevant actors. These initiatives include attempts to unify the Sunni voice, but they had limited to no success so far. The NRC's document on reconciliation, which calls for a "historic settlement" among the key communities of Iraq, has attracted public attention in recent weeks. The Iraqi National Alliance (Shia), now headed by Ammar al-Hakim, is more vocal and active to advance reconciliation based on some core principles. However, it is uncertain that the hard core conservative Shia forces – especially the militia leaders – would agree to reconcile with the Sunni population.

The Sunnis remain divided and unable to speak with one voice. UNAMI, CMI, and NRC efforts have not been able bring more Sunni unity, let alone Sunni-Shia reconciliation. Abadi's constraints in responding to Sunni demands, as well as actions by powerful Shia actors have only worsened Sunni division, and distrust in the Shia-led government in Baghdad. Unhelpful action include, but are not limited to: failure to pass the National Guard Law, stripping the Amnesty Law from important content, and passing the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Law.

#### *Local/Community Reconciliation*

Da'esh has complicated political reconciliation in Iraq, and added the need for local reconciliation to address potential for revenge violence among tribes and other actors at the local level, help with removing barriers to the return of over three million displaced persons, and address other sources of local tension, which could undermine military gains. Tribal and other forms of local violence could become a game changer.

USIP and UNDP are working at this level, and have brought in the NRC to ensure that the Government of Iraq is aware, uses its resources – as limited as they may be – and connect initiatives at this level with national level ones. USIP has made progress in Tikrit (after the Speicher Massacre in which 1700 Shia servicemen were killed by Da'esh), Yathrib, and Ramadi. Other efforts in Fallujah, Nineveh Province, and other places are underway.

#### *Common Needs*

It may seem that the Sunnis, and other Iraqi communities, have different needs and issues. It is true that there may be different nuances, but the reality is that the core needs/issues of the Sunnis, the Kurds, the Shia, and the religious minorities are very similar: they distrust the others, they need security and feel it has to be provided directly by themselves (in some cases they seek some sort of international protection e.g. minorities), they seek neutralizing the risks that may come from the others, etc. They feel the other sides are not sticking to agreements, plot against them, and seek a status and share of power/resources that are not commensurate to their size in Iraq. For example, each community has a different view of how to secure itself militarily, economically, and politically.

#### *Gaps in the Political Process*

Political reconciliation needed to sustain gains post-Da'esh requires a mediated political process where international and regional actors, alongside the Iraqi leaders, work toward the same goals. The Iraqis cannot lead such process on their own, and the U.S. and other international actors say such process should be Iraqi-led and owned. As a result a gap exists, which poses a risk to the whole effort, because today Iraq has more ingredients for violence than before Da'esh took over one-third of the country.

Additionally, once a political process exists and it produces agreement – or a historic settlement as the NRC seeks – there will remain deep-rooted concerns about the implementation of agreements. All sides are seeking guarantees, which are not on the table. They all say they entered agreements in the past which the other side did not uphold.

Buddhika B. Jayamaha, Northwestern Univ, Lt Col Kevin S. Petit, George Washington Univ and Professor Will S.K. Reno, Northwestern Univ

### **The Day After**

We face a daunting challenge at the moment of our success. Our Iraq First strategy is about to be vindicated, as our allies in the Nineveh plain move to cut off Syria and isolate the Islamic State. At that moment, the common enterprise that thus far bound together our Iraqi and regional allies will disappear. Once the Islamic State has been contained, we will face a new challenge: how to hold Iraq together, when Iraq as we imagine it simply does not exist?

The idea of Iraq as a territorial sovereign state is an illusion in many respects. The idea that Iraq can capitalize on this success against the Islamic State is based on the assumption that there is an Iraqi state that has the capacity and a government with the political will to provide security to its citizens — an assumption that is fundamentally at odds with the intense fragmentation of Iraqi state, society and its politics.

Geographically as well as politically, Iraq is divided along ethnic lines (between Kurds and Arabs) and along sectarian lines (between Sunni and Shia). Ethnic separation is especially stark, notwithstanding the 1.3 million internally displaced Arabs currently taking refuge inside Kurdish regions. The sectarian divisions are not so clearly delineated, and many cities have mixed sectarian populations. But at the local level, the violence associated with twenty years of intermittent war has created sharp sectarian divisions, neighborhood by neighborhood and even within families.

Iraq's economy also exhibits this intense fragmentation. Many people are reliant on handouts from the cash-strapped state. Though these resources are distributed through state institutions, access to them depends on the favor of local political and military leaders with ethnic and sectarian hues. This dependence in turn solidifies the personal authority of these men, establishing neo-traditional personalist networks based on clan, tribal, sectarian, and ethnic loyalties.

All the combatants — Iraq's government, the Kurds, Iran, Turkey, and the U.S. — responded to the Islamic State's unexpected success by allying with various (non-state) armed groups and by creating new ones. These militia-like groups tend to work at cross purposes, harboring their own parochial agendas dictated by these neo-traditional networks. Regional partners are at odds with one another as well. Iraq's government and the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, long-standing antagonists, both fought the Islamic State. The Syrian Kurdish PYD work with the Turkish Kurdish PKK; both have secessionist goals that pose threats to Syria and Turkey respectively. The governments of Iraq and Iran sponsor Shia popular mobilization forces that, though they are now formally part of the Iraqi government, divide their loyalties between their political patrons (in the Iranian and Iraqi governments) and their spiritual leaders (members of

clerical patronage networks in Baghdad and Tehran). For its part, Turkey supports multiple Sunni militias. Other mini-militias are similarly divided along territorial, sectarian and ethnic lines: Sunni, Yazidi, Turkoman, and Shabak, for example. Focused on the security of their home communities, they have managed to mask their mutual distrust with a shared hatred of the Islamic State. Without a common enemy, it is unlikely that there will again be a confluence of interests to bring them together as (reluctant) allies.

The Kurdish, Shia, and Sunni sectors are themselves internally fragmented, with overlapping and interconnected patronage networks defined by political, clerical, ethnic, and external allegiances.

The Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq has a parliament and presidency that are theoretically representative, though firmly under the control of its two main ruling parties. Beneath the veneer of unified government in Iraqi Kurdistan, there is a deep-rooted economic, political, military, and geographic division between the Green Zone, run by the PUK (and allied with Iran and regional Kurdish groups), and the Yellow Zone, run by the KDP (and allied with Turkey). Turkey has made long-term investments in Iraqi Kurdish territory, to include a fifty-year oil agreement. Despite their differences, KDP and PUK elites share Kurdish national aspirations. In private, however, they recognize that peaceful independence will come only when their Iranian and Turkish patrons say so, with the blessing of the Americans and Europeans. For now, they worry that, despite the close military cooperation between Baghdad and Kurds against the Islamic State, the Kurds' territorial gains will eventually be challenged by Baghdad with the use of force. Some Shia militias openly clamor for war against the Kurds the moment the Islamic State is defeated.

Politics in Baghdad, often portrayed as a Shia hegemony, are similarly fragmented. Shia ruling parties with direct access to oil revenue have not missed their opportunity. These funds support a series of shifting political alliances among patronage networks, involving regional political bases, national political party affiliations, deep-rooted Shia clerical networks that double as political parties, and political networks connected to patrons in Iran. The Iranian patrons, whether from the revolutionary guards or the Iranian clerical hierarchy, bring their own agendas, resources, and styles.

Former Prime Minister Maliki's position is instructive in this regard. His sectarian political program not only invited Saudi and Gulf meddling in Sunni politics, but also alienated Iraq's Sunnis, allowing the Islamic state to gain a foothold. Maliki's authoritarian streak indeed alienated his own Shia constituency. He continues to rally his domestic network of loyalists, while playing the part of the useful spoiler for his Iranian patrons by undercutting the programs of Prime Minister Abadi.

But political dysfunction in Baghdad is not purely a function of cynical politics and external meddling. There are built-in incentives in the political system that create perpetual dysfunction.

Iraq's political system gives primacy to *representation* over *stability*. Iraq's proportional and consociational system is as representative as Belgium's and just as dysfunctional. Belgium can afford political dysfunction and survive without a government; it has functioning institutions, and neighbors that want it to survive. In Iraq, however, the political, economic and military patronage systems that constitute a dysfunctional government directly threaten to turn the country into a failed state — and its neighbors are more fearful of Iraqi unity than of Iraq's dissolution.

Politics in Iraq is violent, as the political parties have their own militias. Some militias, such as the Badr organization sponsored by patrons in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, remain as formidable as the armed forces of Iraq. Iraqi lawmakers formalized the popular Shia militias, by government edict. In the

absence of order, groups with capacity for violence become formidable political actors with their beholden constituencies. Men with guns, well organized, can have immense convincing power.

In this milieu, Sunnis have very limited leverage, and they twice got burned, in allying first with Al-Qaeda and later with the Islamic State. The Sunni political center resembles a tattered tapestry, scattered around the Sunni regions of Iraq, with most leaders in exile.

Inhabiting a state with no real political center, the Sunnis cannot be said to be reverting to ancient tribal affiliations. In reality, they represent “neo-tribes” — recent creations of economic, political, and military patronage networks, using labels developed first under Saddam (during the sanctions decade), and then by the U.S., when we used the Sunnis to fight the al-Qaeda through the Awakening Councils. Those two periods drastically altered Sunni society, and the Islamic State has nearly destroyed what remains of it. The ablest Sunnis that were part of the Maliki government were forced into exile, and the rest were given the “option” to stay and ally with the Islamic State. Now the exiled Sunni elites are attempting to reactivate their old networks, which now barely exist. In its place are a new breed and a group of actors: the Kurds and Iraqis empowered by the U.S. to fight the Islamic State. These Sunni militias are hardly national organizations. They are regional and even neighborhood vigilantes, most of them fired with conviction and good hearts. For the moment, most believe, just as they did last time, that the Americans will work to make sure that Baghdad will not turn against them, this time. Not without irony, Sunnis in Iraq rely on their former enemies, the Americans and the Kurds, as the only hope of having any leverage vis-a-vis Shia-dominated Baghdad, and of course Tehran.

We must recognize the reality that Iraq’s domestic political and military travails, and its deep divisions, are inescapably linked to the geopolitical struggles of regional powers — Saudi Arabia, Iran, and now Turkey. It is doubtful that there is a shared Iraqi interest powerful enough to escape the centrifugal pull of the geopolitical contestations, anchored in Riyadh Tehran and Ankara.

Rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional hegemony are about regime survival, and they play out through proxies, including in Iraq. Regime proxies propagate their explicitly politicized, extremist interpretations of Sunni and Shia Islam in the form of a virulent political ideology. The philosophical foundations of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda can be traced to the curricula taught in Saudi and Gulf school textbooks and in their state-funded mosques. Similarly, the philosophical foundations of the many Shia militias in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq are derived from the ruling ideology propagated by Tehran, through proxies and state-funded mosques. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran rely on their politicized extremist interpretations of Islam to create a legitimizing political ideology. A series of kingdoms and sheikhdoms have hijacked religion to serve as a totalizing ideology to legitimize their exclusivist Sunni regimes, as Iran mirror their Sunni brethren in their Shiite totalizing ideology constructed to legitimize an exclusivist regime. Neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran can compromise on their ideology or their foreign policy, crucial for the survival and domestic legitimacy of their respective regimes. Turkey is a latecomer, with the resuscitated Ottoman dreams of Erdogan suggesting a redefinition of the Turkish state along politicized Islamic lines. This regional jockeying allows Erdogan to keep his domestic base in a constant state of mobilization. Iraq is stuck in the middle, and most Iraqi politicians, of all ethnic and sectarian hues, are forced to recognize this reality and navigate it.

So, the moment Nineveh plain is closed to Islamic State traffic flowing out of Syria, our Iraq First military strategy will be vindicated. But that event will also blow up the single incentive uniting the diverse domestic and regional actors. Their parochial and regional agendas in a post-IS Iraq will not be congruent

with American desires. Indeed, we have never explicitly stated our own post-IS goals. With any luck, we will soon be forced to make those goals clear.

- The authors are currently conducting field research in Iraq on the Politics of Security Sector Reform.

**Karl Kaltenthaler** (University of Akron/Case Western Reserve University) and **Munqith Dagher** (IIACSS)

The Iraqi government is not taking the necessary steps to achieve reconciliation among the Sunnis, Shias, and other Iraqi groups that is in step with the military progress against Da'esh. The military campaign against Da'esh has moved along relatively well over the last year, but attempts at creating policies and institutions that breach the divide of distrust between Sunnis and Shias have not been achieved. The Iraqi government, army, police and its Shia militia allies are winning the war against Da'esh, but are poised to possibly lose the peace. In order for Iraq to win the peace, all of its citizens must believe that they have a secure, just, and prosperous future in the country.

Freeing Mosul and the rest of Sunni-majority Iraq and running it in the same way it is run before Da'esh took this territory, will definitely generate a great deal of anger and dissatisfaction among the Sunni population. This will be the right environment for Da'esh and \or other terrorist organizations to re-establish themselves. Unfortunately, reverting to the political status quo ante seems to be the game plan of the Iraqi government at this time.

Empowering Sunnis and others since freed from Da'esh and giving them more authority over their lives will definitely be the right strategy to win the peace. While going back to political business as usual as it was before Da'esh swept through Sunni Iraq is not a viable strategy for peace, a federalism strategy is also fraught with dangers. Federalism is what some local politicians are demanding. These politicians have been promoting federalism as the right solution for all Sunnis' problems in Iraq. Unfortunately this is also what some US officials believe in. Due to the fact that Nineveh (Mosul) and the other Sunni Arab provinces lack significant energy resources and the leverage they provide, Kurdish-style constitutional autonomy is not a viable option. More importantly, as the Islamist movements and their businessmen supporters in Nineveh are the most organized and well-funded powers currently, then they will be the ones who control the suggested semi-autonomous government. This will, for sure, lead not just to friction with much of the populace but also to a lot of tension with the Iraqi federal government and expansion of Turkish influence in the region. A Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish power struggle will potentially take place. Again, this is the right environment for Da'esh and similar organizations to take over again. The new elite who should run Mosul must emerge from and really represent the people of Mosul if, we really want to avoid any reappearance of Da'esh or any other terrorist group.

To achieve this, the Iraqi government needs to give the people in the liberated areas the required space and opportunity to reorganize themselves and push up a local technocratic elite to govern their areas for a period of time. This would give way, over time, to elected officials drawn from local civil society. This



cannot be reached unless the Iraqi government can establish an environment for fair and legitimate local elections. The current politicians, which are part of the old Shia-dominated national power structure, will never provide such conditions. The only feasible alternative is to make all stakeholders agree on an interim local government with no more than a 2 year mandate. All members of this government should publically announce that they will not stand for the next election as candidates or represent any political group's interests. They should really be technocrats. The interim government's main tasks should be:

1. Run the reconstruction process, with the allocated money, in a very transparent and professional way.
2. Provide a secure environment for all people to exercise their freedom to organize political parties and NGO's.
3. Work with the federal government and the international community to develop the local economy and the provision of public services. These services should be provided by the *local* authorities and there should not be any federal police or army in the city itself. These institutions are deeply distrusted.
4. Run real integrated local elections which result in a new local government within two years.
5. Establish a secure environment where citizens can live their lives without fear. This security should be achieved by local government forces.
6. Create judicial institutions that are as apolitical as possible and guided by a mandate of fair administration of justice for all.

Finally, it is very important to prevent Turkey, Iran and the Kurdistan regional government or their agents from getting a freehand in the future of Mosul and other Sunni-majority areas if we really want to avoid further terrorism in the region.

Vern Liebl, Center for Advanced Operational Culture, Marine Corps University

**Response:** The Government of Iraq (GoI) is still deadlocked in Baghdad, with the Sadrist Ahrar Bloc, the Al-Muwatin and the State of Law Coalition all at loggerheads (these are the three main Shi'a political coalitions). The previously powerful Kurdish Alliance has devolved, with the PUK and Goran joining with each other (loosely allying with the Baghdad government in order to obtain financial assistance) in opposition to the KDP (who are seeking an independent Kurdistan). Further complicating the political situation is the lack of a Minister of Interior and an interim Minister of Defence, due to fierce attacks by VP Maliki's Dawa Party. Combined with a huge outlay of funds with an inadequate inflow of funds, the Iraq government can't really afford any reconciliation initiatives.

The great majority of reconciliation initiatives/efforts is being done by international organizations and NGOs. One of the most prominent, as an example, is the International Organization for Migration (IOM, since September 2016 affiliated with the UN), which is working via the Community Revitalization Program (CRP, a multi-sectoral program that aims to contribute to stabilization in Iraq by improving the conditions for sustainable economic and social inclusion of vulnerable individuals in communities with significant

populations of displaced persons and returnees). The United States alone has contributed over \$1 billion in refugee aid/assistance just in 2016.

Despite the primarily internationally funded Iraqi reconciliation efforts, this are in essence doomed to fail as long as the sectarian issues of Iraq remain dominant. The numerous Hashd al-Shaabi PMUs/PMFs engaged in re-establishing Baghdad's authority in the rear of the Iraqi Army forces engaged against Islamic State (Da'esh) elements in and around Mosul to Tal Afar are working primarily in Sunni inhabited regions. In addition, most of these Shia Hashd forces are funded and materially supported by Iran, to the point they are often corseted by Iranian officers and specialists. Iran has been seeking to essentially establish Basij-like forces in Iraq, approved by the Baghdad government, which they now have been, and to be mobilized as support to Shia political organizations such as the Badr Organization (heavily represented among the Federal Police).

So, the Sunnis of Iraq have repeatedly stated that they do not want to be under the domination of Shias, specifically ones they deem are controlled by Iran. Current events are seeing the use of the Shia Hashd not only providing extensive rear area security, they are also the western most "military" arm of the Baghdad government as they have outflanked the Mosul-based Da'esh forces and driven to the Iraq/Syria frontier west and south of Tal Afar. This has brought in the Turks, who have pointedly warned Iran, as Turkey sees the Hashd al-Shaabi as Iranian proxies, that if Tal Afar is taken by these Hashd elements, that Turkey views this as a direct threat to themselves. Iran views capture of Tal Afar necessary in order to protect the approximately 1 million Shia Turkmen in and around the city.

So, with the current military operations and the ongoing IGO/NGO/PVO reconciliation efforts not linked to the Baghdad government deadlock, there is no real chance of sectarian reconciliation. Additionally, with Kurdish aspirations for independence conflicting with other Kurdish realizations that maybe independence isn't appropriate in the current regional political situation, Kurdish and Turkish support to ethnic and religious minorities as they contest for their survival against not only Da'esh but the Baghdad government and Iranian encroachment. The situation is intractable at this point in time, as numerous conflicting entities seek to freeze the conflict(s) in place or to inflame the conflict(s).

Kurdish aspirations, whether in the KRG, in the PYD or with the PKK, ultimately depend heavily on Kurdish homogeneity. Iraqi Shi'a do not want to be governed by Iranian Shi'a nor do they want to ever again be dominated by the Sunnis or Iraq. The Iraqi Sunnis believe they should be dominant, or at least co-equal (unfortunately for them, anything less than a return to dominance leaves them without significant hydrocarbon reserves, which is unpalatable). The various minorities have their own issues. The Turkmen, both Sunni and Shi'a, would like to be autonomous (if not independent of Baghdad, also of Turkey). The Assyrians, with a history of 5,000 years in Mesopotamia, want to re-establish an Assyrian presence, if not a mini-state. The Yezidi and Shabaks would like to just be left alone but have been subject to the depredations of Sunni (and on occasion Shi'a) for over a thousand years. They also do not want to be dominated by the Kurds, who are seeking to assimilate them somewhat forcibly.

So, with all these outstanding religious and ethnic issues, how is there a possibility to accommodate the Sunni population of Iraq? Many of these Sunnis are currently refugees at the mercy of the Baghdad and Irbil governments, or are under the domination of Da'esh (some obviously voluntarily in order to contest Shi'a dominance, others involuntarily).

It is an American belief that all situations have a solution, or solutions. The current situation in Iraq is one that has evolved for well over 3,000 years, although I grant that the last 120 years have really piled on the pressure. So, in reference to the stated question, the Sunni population of Iraq cannot be accommodated sufficiently to preclude future conflict without severely impinging upon the Shi'a, Turkmen, Yezidi, Assyrians, etc. The situation in Iraq, and the larger Middle East, has become zero-sum (actually has been zero-sum for centuries). Looking at this in a big-picture manner, compromise and accommodation are "western" concepts in which we are desperately trying to apply to cultural situations which have long left such concepts behind.

Not the answer you wanted but is based in reality. Am now prepared to be assaulted by those suffering from a positivity bias.

[Mr. Renad Mansour, Chatham House](#)

Unfortunately, the military battle has brought the sides together and facilitated quick consensus, but the political solution is not present. The worry is that if no political solution for reconciliation is established now (while there is military cooperation), it is less likely that such a process would succeed after ISIS is defeated and a power vacuum emerges in Mosul and elsewhere.

[Diane L. Maye, Ph.D., Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University](#)

#### Political Reconciliation

Iraq's central government has a legitimacy problem: the Sunni Arabs of Iraq do not have an abundance of mature political parties. The challenge for the U.S.-led coalition is to develop a viable political alternative to the Islamic State for Iraq's Sunni population. The coalition is working to liberate Mosul, an initiative that is likely to gain great accolades from the Iraqi people if the efforts are successful. The narrative on the Iraqi street is that the liberation of Mosul is likely to end as an urban street fight that can only be fought with Special Operations Forces. Therefore, Iraq's Special Operations Forces are likely to emerge as heroic figures after the liberation. To show Mosul's population that the liberation was in good faith, it will be critical that the Iraqi government and coalition forces immediately begin reconstruction efforts. Equally important will be ensuring self-governance and supporting police and law enforcement personnel that are from the local area.

## What Comes After ISIS? A Peace Proposal

### Abstract

*This proposal develops the following points: (i) Emotions are an important part of mobilizing for violent conflict, especially ethnic conflict. (ii) Sunni versus Shi'a in Iraq and Syria is more an ethnic than a religious conflict. (iii) Sunni in Syria and Iraq join ISIS for a job and for defense against humiliation and domination by Shi'a; religious ideology has little to do with recruitment. (iv) Sykes-Picot is dead; peace in the Middle East depends on development of some degree of self-determination and security, not only for Sunni and Shi'a but for Kurds, Alawites, Christians, and Druze. (v) There is a pressing need for a vision of the Middle East after ISIS; I briefly describe one possibility that Western countries might wish to support. **Keywords:** ISIS; Syria; Iraq; Sykes-Picot; peace; ethnic conflict*

### Introduction

ISIS is more than violence, it is a brand name. We need to fight the brand in a war of ideas that is just as important as the war on the ground in Syria and Iraq. In this text, I suggest a diplomatic initiative to describe the world we want to emerge in Syria and Iraq. I begin with a brief review of emotions in intergroup conflict, then assess the current situation, then describe a view of the future that the U.S. could offer for discussion, and end with some estimates of likely reactions to the initiative.

### Emotions in Intergroup Conflict

Rational choice is not absent in intergroup conflict, especially in tactical choices, but emotions are important, especially for taking risks for a group or cause. Ethnic conflicts are fraught with emotions.

The idea of nationalism is that an ethnic group, a perceived descent group and its culture, should have a state. Nationalism was the most powerful source of political mobilization in the 20th century, despite punditry predicting that economic interest would supplant ethnicity. The weakness of economic interest and the power of ethnic nationalism was already apparent at the beginning of WWII, when the members of 'international' labour unions rallied vociferously for what union leaders denounced as a 'capitalist' war.

For ethnic majorities, domination by a minority is associated with the experience of humiliation. Here I understand humiliation to be a corrosive combination of anger in response to injustice and shame for not fighting injustice. Anger calls for revenge, not taking revenge because of fear is cause for shame, shame leads to additional anger at those who have shamed us—and the cycle continues. Shi'a in Iraq and Sunni in Syria experienced years of humiliation as majorities repressed by minorities.

Particularly humiliating is sudden reversal of status. In Iraq, the U.S. intervention against Saddam Hussein turned Sunni minority dominance into Sunni minority subjugation by Shi'a. In Syria, civil war turned large parts of the country from the original Alawite-Christian-Druze minority dominance of a Sunni majority to Alawite-Christian-Druze subjugation and ethnic cleansing by Sunni Muslims. In the incipient state of Kurdistan, made possible by U.S. support, Sunni minority dominance has turned to

Sunni subjugation by a Kurdish majority. Roger Petersen's book, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict*, which traces the emotional consequences of status reversals in the Balkans [1] is a guide to the power of emotions that are also at play in the Middle East.

### Viewing the Sunni - Shi'a Divide as Ethnic Conflict

Although often referred to as sectarian conflict, the conflict between Shi'a and Sunni in Iraq and Syria is not about religion. ISIS wraps itself in a particular fundamentalist form of Islam, but it is not the interpretation of the Koran that is at issue. ISIS wants political power, land, oil, money—wants to be the new Sunni caliphate, wants to be a state.

Sunni versus Shi'a in Iraq and Syria is no more a sectarian conflict than Loyalist vs. Republican in Northern Ireland was a sectarian conflict. The issue in Northern Ireland was not Catholic versus Protestant religious practice or doctrine, but two groups defined by perceived descent at war over land and political power.

Similarly the conflict between Jews and Palestinians is not a sectarian conflict, is not about Muslim versus Hebrew religious practice but about two perceived descent groups at war over land and political power.

Are Shi'a and Sunni ethnic groups? Are they defined by descent? Under Saddam Hussein's repression of Shi'a in Iraq, from 1979 to 2003, intermarriage between Shi'a and Sunni was not uncommon. Intermarriage as we know, means the dissolution of groups defined by descent. But after the U.S. deposed Saddam Hussein, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began a campaign of attacking Shi'a in order to incite Shi'a revenge on Sunni, which would turn complacent Sunni into warriors bent on revenge against Shi'a. This campaign succeeded in its aims after Zarqawi blew up the Shi'a mosque in Samarra: Shi's and Sunni began a cycle of violence and counter-violence in which no one was safe. Militias arose on both sides to offer protection, and violence escalated. [2]

It is fair to say that Shi'a and Sunni were declining as ethnic groups in Iraq as perceived descent distinctions were blurred by intermarriage in the last decades of the 20th century. But violence and ethnic cleansing have strengthened group boundaries so that today intermarriage is rare and existing Shi'a-Sunni marriages are strained and breaking. [3] This is not a case of ethnicity causing war, this is a case of war building ethnicity.

### The Roots of Violence in Syria and Iraq

ISIS is successful to the extent that the Sunni of Iraq and Syria see ISIS as their only effective defense against domination and humiliation by Shi'a. [4]. As Charlie Winter pointed out at a conference, ISIS communications in the territory they control emphasize the horrors of Shi'a retribution against Sunni if ISIS loses. For many in Iraq and Syria, ISIS is also the only source of jobs. [5].

But ISIS protection and ISIS jobs are currently welded together with an extremist form of Islam that many Sunni would rather do without. [6] To undermine Sunni support for ISIS, the U.S. must show Sunni in Syria and Iraq a path to security from Shi'a humiliation that does not depend on ISIS. Thus John Bolton, former

U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has argued that the creation of a Sunni state is required to defeat ISIS.

[7]

Similar issues of security and status exist for other ethnic groups in Iraq and Syria. Kurds are seeking security from subjugation and humiliation by both Arabs and Turks. Alawites and Christians seek security from revenge and humiliation by the Sunni majority they previously dominated. Russians seek to continue Mediterranean port and airbase facilities and the survival of their ally Bashar al-Assad. Turks want good relations with the Sunni majority in Syria and no Kurdish state on their border. Iran wants to extend its influence and protect Shi'a Arabs. Sunni tribes in both Syria and Iraq have been both perpetrators and victims of violence; tribal sheiks have both welcomed and fought ISIS.

Denise Natali (National Defense University), who has been studying ISIS and related security issues in Syria and Iraq, recognizes the complexities of local actors in her February 2016 report, *Countering ISIS: One Year Later*. The last section of her report, titled Post-Da'ish stabilization, is worth quoting here.

Even if the U.S. defeats Da'ish tomorrow, there will be a day-after problem in much of Iraq and Syria. U.S. aims to stabilize Iraq and Syria should address the larger problem of weakened states and the emergence of strong, violent non-state and sub-state actors. This effort will demand a stable set of political security arrangements that can avoid the emergence of another Da'ish in the future. It should also assure that liberated areas are successful and stable so that people can return. This effort should include providing massive refugee assistance, immediate resources and humanitarian aid, developing local power sharing and security agreements, building local institutions, and mitigating regional spillover. [8]

What comes after ISIS? What would it mean to develop "local power sharing and security agreements, building local institutions"? The U.S. needs a diplomatic initiative that can promise at least a degree of security and status to all the major actors. This initiative would describe a world the U.S. would like to see emerge from the current violence in Iraq and Syria, and include a statement of willingness to talk with anyone and everyone about how to reach this world or something like it.

### [A Future for Syria and Iraq](#)

The U.S. goal should be recognition of political units providing security and status for the groups identified below. Security and status would be assured to the extent that each unit has its own police and court system and controls a population-proportionate share of oil revenues in Iraq and Syria. The units may initially be thought of as states in a federal government responsible for allocating water and oil resources, but other descriptions of the units are possible: provinces, departments, or cantons. The U.S. would talk with any group or power about how to get to these or similar units. The U.S. should try to enlist EU/NATO allies to support the initiative. There should be no pre-conditions for the discussion, all borders and conditions being up for negotiation.

In particular, the lines drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 are on the table for reconsideration. Giving up the Sykes-Picot division of Syria from Iraq will be necessary because Sunni fears will not countenance a continuing division of Sunni into a Syrian majority and an Iraqi minority.

The initiative would raise for discussion the following as possible federal states with local institutions of governance and security:

- IS territory becomes a state of Sunni who want ISIS governance. U.S. will cease attacks on ISIS and cease opposing foreign volunteers for ISIS, including volunteers from the U.S.
- Tribal state for Sunni who do not want ISIS governance.
- Alawite state on the Mediterranean north of Lebanon (~Latakia, French Mandate 1920-1936).
- Turkman areas near the Turkish border annexed to Turkey.
- Kurdish state around Erbil.
- Shi'a state around Baghdad and south of it.
- Druze state next to Jordan (~French Mandate 1920-1936).
- Damascus Federal District with police but no military.
- Christians who wish to emigrate will be accepted as refugees in Europe and the U.S.

#### Likely Reactions to such a Peace Initiative

- ISIS will oppose the initiative because it threatens ISIS's claims to represent an international caliphate. But if ISIS loses more territory it may become ready to negotiate to save the remaining caliphate. At a minimum such an initiative would generate conflict inside ISIS between power pragmatists (localists) and international Islamist radicals (globalists). [9] Such a conflict would weaken ISIS from the inside.
- Sunni who do and do not want ISIS will be in conflict. The Awakening of 2007 showed the potential power of this conflict; in 2016 it would weaken ISIS from the outside.
- Tehran would likely oppose the initiative because any movement toward a peaceful solution in the area would reduce Iran's influence in Iraq and Syria.
- Hizballah would likely oppose the initiative and follow Iran, its supporter.
- Some Baghdad Shi'a may welcome the initiative as a way to reduce threat from ISIS, even at the cost of more self-determination for Sunni areas of the old Iraq. Others in Baghdad would be against any initiative that does not continue their revenge posture against the Sunni who dominated Iraqi Shi'a for so long. This is a split already evident in reactions to Prime Minister al-Alabadi's efforts to represent Sunni more in Iraqi politics.
- Moscow should welcome saving Bashar and de facto Western recognition for its Mediterranean air and sea bases in the Alawite state. Russia might welcome a division of territorial influence that can limit potential conflict between Russian and NATO armed forces.

- Israel would be satisfied with a devolution movement of Syria and Iraq from strong centralized states into militarily weaker federal states.
- Kurds would welcome recognition of their statelet.
- Turkey would strongly oppose recognition of the present de facto autonomous Kurdish territory but would see some sweetener in transfer of Turkman areas along the Syria/Turkey border to Turkey.
- Druze would be pleased at the prospect of recognition and a degree of self-governance.
- Christians, who are by now too few for effective self-defense, would be glad for an escape hatch to immigrate to Christian-majority countries.
- The United States would get credit in the Muslim world for seeking peace without Western domination and for putting an end to the Sykes-Picot colonial boundaries.
- France and U.K. should not oppose the initiative; these countries lost the benefits of Sykes-Picot decades ago.
- Arab oil countries will likely oppose the initiative because it does not promise to crush ISIS; however, they might be glad to see limiting Iran's power in Syria.
- U.S. sympathizers with ISIS would more likely go to join ISIS than perform attacks on U.S. soil.
- Refugees from Syria are likely to welcome an initiative that might permit some of them to return.

## Conclusion

The proposed initiative should, in public relation terms, be positive for the United States and help to reduce Sunni support for ISIS. It should shake up all sides by shifting the narrative from who is winning at the moment to a realistic vision of a future worth working for. Even opposition from Turkey, Iran, and the oil states might be tempered by a desire to avoid being seen putting self-interest above the welfare of millions who prefer peace. With such an initiative the U.S. government could seize the moral high ground that brings new friends and new opportunities.

What comes after ISIS? The old states of Syria and Iraq have dissolved in violence. The U.S. needs, and the people suffering civil war in these areas need even more, a vision of how peace can emerge from violence. Unfortunately there is currently no appetite in the U.S. for thinking beyond defeating ISIS. Similarly there was little thought for what would come after defeating Saddam Hussein. I have described one possible future in an effort to get the future in our sights. If this or a similar initiative were announced, and diplomatic efforts and material resources were committed to it, there is a chance of failure. However, if we do not think about what comes after ISIS, failure will be certain and new rounds of fighting will be all but certain—with no peace in sight.



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Question 1:

“The Structure of Responsive Governance”

The central task for governance under conditions of conflict is to communicate *progress* and *patience* to the populace. This task is fundamentally unresolvable without two factors: 1) the presence of tangible successes, and 2) the communication of supporting (and reliable) interpretations of those successes. At the heart of those factors are narratives and the means to understand them in a time of change. What does that look like practically?

The Iraqi government maintains a message of national effort, yet struggles with legacies of retributive justice – both in terms of *legal provisions* (and the structures built around them) designed to give a sense of righting the wrongs suffered by the Shia community in the past, and in the *perceptions* of the Sunni as they increasingly came to view themselves as outsiders. At the core has been the challenge of building democracy in a time of war.

As a means of non-violent conflict resolution through political reconciliation, democratization requires its goals and methods to be both *sacrosanct* (inviolable rules of the game to ensure majority values and interests are met, while also preserving minority protections) and *adaptable* (the state maintains a space for public debate with clearly defined borders of what cannot be negotiated, but also recognizing that those boundaries can change). To do so requires a consensus that must include, but also transcend ethnic, religious, communal, and individual goals and approaches often currently at odds with the national compact in Iraq.

Iraq struggles to find the consensus because none now exists at a fundamental level throughout the country. Inherently, internecine violence remains too present, with ample memories of suffering during the democratization period of the past decade. As a result, any government effort to increase “buy-in” will continue to be met with skepticism at best, or at least the potential for that skepticism will remain high for some time, with each perceived infraction of the national compact latching on to anti-government messaging.

To overcome this, patience must be communicated and channeled through the election process. This is the hallmark of democratic government – the idea that losing now does not mean losing again in the future. Yet the concept must also have real world evidence that today’s electoral losers have a realistic chance of winning in the foreseeable future. Seminal events when opposition parties have power resonate in more than the new policies they bring; they establish the core content of a democratic order.

Can Iraq today include a faithful opposition, whether defined by ethnic, religious, or communal identities? Rather than try to make an amalgam of those core identities for the country, it seems more realistic first to build confidence in the democratic system itself, as a compact established on tangible successes (in the

marketplace and farmlands as much as on the battlefield), with narratives that reinforce patience in the process.

One way would be to *increase the frequency of local elections for a given period of time* – this reinforces the norms of non-violent conflict resolution by giving more regular opportunities to air grievances, as well as for elected officials to proclaim successes and be responsive to failures. The provisions for more frequent local elections should also *include more referenda on specific issues of local concern*. This approach does three things: 1) it increases the presence of democratic practice, and 2) by doing so, it also shapes expectations for what needs to be done – defining the successes governance is supposed to produce. Finally, 3) it also gives a direct “shortcut” for popular sentiment, while also having boundaries on the kinds of issues under consideration – these are established by higher levels of government designed to keep the disparate, conflicting goals within the boundaries of a national system.

Above all, this means *prudence* – doing what is feasible, not just desirable. International partners can assist with the inculcation of that concept into the democratic political order by *anchoring aspects of cultural, religious, and local values as aspects of prudence*, as both a concept people adhere to in their daily lives, as well as the foundation of the national compact to build a responsive government in Iraq. Given the progress mentioned in the initial question, absent this multi-layered ideational and governmental approach, Iraq could see its own version of what happened in Bulgaria in the 1990s – the democratic process yielded a confused policy orbit that vacillated wildly between pro-Western marketization and EU membership, and pro-Russian historic leanings resting on socialist economic promises of stability. The result was a deeply disaffected population susceptible to counter-democracy messaging from external actors. Yet even that period of uncertainty was better than the effusion of violence in the Balkans after the collapse of the national compact in the former Yugoslavia. In that regard, the worst case of the above course of action for Iraq would likely be better than the best case of continuing on the current path without it.

Ali Nader, RAND

1. Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

It is not clear that this is happening. The sectarian divide is more historical and structural, and it doesn't seem like the Iraqi government can do much to alleviate divisions between the various sects, especially as the Popular Mobilization forces gain more power in Iraq.

Denise Natali, NDU

Dr. Natali's inputs were based on her 16 November 2016 article "**Stabilizing Iraq With and Without the Islamic State**" published in the War on the Rocks journal and can be accessed at the following website:

<http://warontherocks.com/2016/11/stabilizing-iraq-with-and-without-the-islamic-state>

Additional input was gleaned from her 24 October 2016 trip report "**Beyond Mosul: The Battle for Borders and Authority in Post-ISIL Iraq**" which was FOUO, so contact her at [denise.natali@ndu.edu](mailto:denise.natali@ndu.edu) for further details.

Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins University

The Iraqi Government [has committed itself](#) in principle to political reconciliation and the behavior of its security forces (including the Popular Mobilization Forces) towards the civilian population has been better than many expected. Abuses have not been widespread. Screening of suspected Islamic State fighters has proceeded in a fairly orderly fashion, though with significant variations depending on which forces are doing the screening. Trials are ongoing, but how well they meet reasonable standards of due process is unclear.

Unforced errors like the Council of Representatives October prohibition of alcohol country-wide have offended non-Muslim minorities in the north and made relations with Baghdad more difficult. Sunnis view the law legalizing the majority Shia Popular Mobilization Forces as problematic, even if it arguably regularizes them and attempts to limit their participation in politics.

More than avoiding abuses and mistakes is required, however. The Sunni population feels defeated. It needs to revive socially, politically and economically. Displaced Sunnis are returning to their previous towns and villages, but the conditions they find there are far from ideal. They face the prospect of revenge violence, especially in Ninewa, and difficulties in recovering their property. UNDP has been doing a good job of initial reconstruction work—clearing rubble, emergency repairs—but massive challenges remain to restore homes, businesses, commerce, and social life. The Iraqi government

compensation arrangements available at present are woefully inadequate.

The governors and provincial councils of Anbar, Saladin and Ninewa are playing a stronger role than at times in the past, sometimes in competition with the ministries in Baghdad, but they still lack resources with which to provide adequate services and remain far from achieving consensus on what the future of their provinces should be. Sentiment in Anbar leans towards making the province a region, like Iraqi Kurdistan. Saladin tried to become a region several years ago but Prime Minister Maliki blocked the move. In Ninewa, there are questions about whether some of its territory should be transferred to Iraqi Kurdistan and about whether Sunni-majority territory should form its own province or region.

Ninewa and especially Mosul will be particularly challenging, because they are mixed, unlike the overwhelmingly Sunni towns of Anbar and Saladin. While Baghdad has stated unequivocally its commitment to a united, non-sectarian and democratic Iraq, none of Ninewa's many sects and ethnicities have confidence in Baghdad's ability to deliver even rudimentary physical protection, never mind dignity and prosperity.

If I had to bet on a single factor that will determine the success or failure of political reconciliation in northern Iraq, it would be this: can Baghdad find legitimate representatives of indigenous forces and negotiate with them decent and respectful solutions to how power, including responsibility for repression of ISIS, and resources will be distributed in liberated areas? Ideally, the choice of political representatives should be up to the people living in the northern governorates liberated from Daesh, but it is still unclear whether provincial council elections will be held in 2017 as scheduled or will be postponed to 2018. Nor is it clear that anything like free and fair elections could be held in Ninewa, Saladin, and Anbar as early as 2017.

[Dr. Randa Slim, MEI](#)

1. Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population?

RS: Baghdad is not focused on reconciliation. The government is consumed by its anti-ISIS fight, its budgetary woes, and by Shia elite infighting. A mindset still prevails among the majority of the Shia governing elites that Sunnis are in their majority Baathists or Daesh. They believe the Shia are the victors and the Sunnis have lost twice already, hence there is no need for reconciliation with them. There is still not enough recognition in Baghdad over the depth of Sunni, Kurdish, and minority grievances in Iraq. There are ongoing talks between Baghdad and Erbil over resource sharing, partly driven by anticipation of post-ISIS, intra-Kurdish competition.

There is a group of advisors around Abadi (and Abadi himself is sympathetic to this idea) who believe a new compact/relationship must be struck with the Sunnis, but they say there are no authentic Sunni leaders to deal with - especially ones who have influence over their co-religionists in Mosul and other former ISIS strongholds. This group talks of the need to fill the Sunni leadership vacuum.

Re. conditions that must be in place to accommodate Sunnis' needs: 1) a surge in humanitarian aid – beyond the pledges of the July 2016 conference, including rapid infrastructure/ reconstruction projects in Sunni-majority liberated territories to enable refugees to go home ASAP; 2) due process to be afforded to Sunnis accused of ISIS membership and have been either stuck in jail for a long time without trial or are still in detention after being taken from liberated territories; 3) SME programs to create jobs; 4) passage of the National Guards Law, which will go a long way in reassuring the Sunni communities that they will not be left without protection post-ISIS; 5) try some of the PMU members who have been accused of flagrant human rights violations. Whether Abadi & co. can achieve that in the current climate of intra-Shiite power competition is questionable.

Christine Van Den Toorn, AUIS

There are certain initiatives from the GOI that are having success, but I think they need more resources, attention, bolstering. The main initiative at the local (tribal, district, provincial) level is the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) out of PM Abadi's office. Then there is also the work of USIP and their local affiliates Sanad and Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF). The UNDP through the stabilization fund has not prioritized such reconciliation work (funding, resources wise), and focuses on the return of key services. UNAMI could be doing more on this, they need heavier hitters and to be more active. I think they don't have a strong team right now (off the record...) Also what is missing is the participation of powerful international players like the USG and EU in terms of acting a facilitating neutral actor (where possible) in political reconciliation between local actors and between the center and periphery. It is definitely true that in many areas, lack of political arrangements/ reconciliation and/or social trust between communities is preventing return and stabilization process from taking place.

I would say that the number one condition that needs to be met with regard to the Sunni population on a local, return level is security. There are huge fears of revenge and retribution (intra Sunni and also from Shia tribes) and also fear of militia forces. Local police need to be reinstated, and to be in control. These forces should be vetted, and representative of local populations and the Hashd/ militias must leave towns. This has happened some, but not all places. Mechanisms like security committees (inclusive, representative) that decide who gets to go back and who does not are important. There should also be similar committees (with NRC, NIF, Sanad, ideally US/ EU/ UN representation) to facilitate negotiations before and after return with local populations. Last, there should be inclusive, and representative committees to identify and allocate reconstruction funds. This is a major concern of Sunni and other local populations.

These processes and committees need buy-in at the local and national level. Examples to date shows that without one of the other, deals are not sustainable. For example, if a deal is made by local populations to return, but there is not buy in from leadership in Baghdad, attempts will be made to scuttle or at least no support the deal. And vice versa is true – if a deal is made between national leaders about the return of a group without buy in from the local populations. Timing is also a key factor here – people cannot go back before certain deals have been made because this will most likely be opposed through a violence that will destroy the whole process.

A couple case studies: While there has been progress in non-mixed, homogenous areas like Tikrit, Fallujah and smaller towns like Dour, Dhuluiyah and Adheim, there has not been in mixed areas that

are strategically important to Iraq and to Baghdad's Shia parties such as Sleiman Beg and Yathrib (and Diyala). If there is not resolution, these towns and areas will continue to destabilize Iraq. There has been some progress lately in these difficult areas though – for example, recently, talks between Dr Abdul Latif Al Humayem, the head of the Sunni Endowment, and PM Abadi and the local sub-district director have started to show progress (real, substantive talks about return of the local population after 2 years of really empty promises and talks) toward return of that population to Sleiman Beg. They are now “waiting for Hadi al Ameri to get back from Mosul” to support/ enforce the deal. Sleiman Beg is an area that is an example of a need for serious political/ social reconciliation as well though – it is close to the Shia Turkmen town of Amerli, which remains opposed to the return of the 70,000 Sunnis to Sleiman Beg. This will require serious attention, facilitation to local deal making on tribal, social and political levels to sustain a stable return process.

Similarly, a place like Rabiaa, which is mostly homogenous with the Shammar (Sunni Arab) tribe – which usually aligns with the State (GOI), could have been a beacon of post ISIS stability but now the tribe is divided between some who have joined Peshmerga and are somewhat pro KDP, and the majority who are still pro Baghdad and joining the Hashd. This situation has deteriorated and become more contentious over the past year and half since liberation of the area because there are no political interlocutors. A similar situation exists in Sinjar, and will exist in Sunni and minority areas in Ninewa province around Mosul that are now being liberated. Rabiaa and some of these other areas are also good examples of how a lack of resolution of the DIBs issue will continue to destabilize Iraq – as the DIBs are fault lines, flashpoints and powder kegs – and are areas that have, or had, large Sunni Arab populations who are now displaced.

[Dr. Bilal Wahab, Washington Institute](#)

It would be inaccurate to say that the Iraqi government lacks initiatives for societal reconciliation. In fact, there might too many such initiatives that lack coordination. Hence, unlike the military campaign against Da'esh that has brought together opposing factions—Iraqi military, Kurdish Peshmarga and Shia Popular Mobilization Forces—the political track may amount to pronouncements rather than planned initiatives.

The reconstruction would be a case in point. To date, the Iraqi government has not produced a plan or made reconstruction funds available for liberated towns like Falluja, let alone Mosul. Iraq did receive some international humanitarian aid, thanks in part to U.S. fundraising support. The government itself, however, is cash-depleted due to large government expenditures, including the war effort, amid plunging revenues due to low oil prices.

Ultimately, the path to political reconciliation is through economic development and inclusive governance. Given the diversity of the forces against Da'esh, the vision for post-Da'esh Iraq remains unclear. Defeating Da'esh is a cause that has united groups with long standing fault lines.

Moreover, the weakness and internal divisions within Sunni community opens them up for political interference by Kurds and Shia groups as well as by regional powers. While some call for devolution of power into an autonomous Sunni region, others call for administrative decentralization at the provincial level. Iraq's politics is marred with wielding patronage networks, and Shia and Kurdish parties have the financial means to coopt Sunni leaders. Ultimately, the Sunni community needs to feel empowered through governing their own affairs and running their cities, otherwise their continued grievances—sectarian and economic—will continue to be subject to exploitation and radicalization. The prospects for stability through reconciliation in Sunni regions in Iraq have a deadline: upcoming provincial and national elections, expected to run simultaneously in 2018.

Once the Islamic State is defeated, Iraq will have to mend a divided society.

- December 08, 2016

As the campaign to retake Mosul continues, Iraqis are celebrating it as an embodiment of national unity. The offensive has brought together the Iraqi Army, the Kurdish Peshmerga, and paramilitary groups, including the Popular Mobilization Forces (*Al-Hashd al-Shaabi*), or PMF, as well as Sunni tribal fighters. Early on this heightened expectations of a swift military victory.

In recognition of this, both Prime Minister [Haidar al-Abadi](#) and the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, [Masoud Barzani](#), stated after the Mosul offensive began that it was the first time in Iraq's history that the Peshmerga and the Iraqi Army were cooperating militarily. Abadi [declared](#), "All peoples are here to fight with us, Kurd with Arabs, Shia with Sunnis, and all the minorities are here with us—Christians, Yazidis, and Turkmen all fighting shoulder-to-shoulder." His comments were echoed by Jan Kubiš, the United Nations' special representative to Iraq, who stated in a [briefing](#) to the Security Council, "We witness the birth of a new Iraq and its security forces, who are welcomed by civilians as liberators."

Such optimism aside, even if the Islamic State is defeated, which seems likely even though progress is [slow](#), Iraq will face several key challenges. They include a crisis of confidence between the state and citizens, a crisis of trust among Iraqis, a struggle for political leadership within the main ethno-sectarian communities, the financing of reconstruction, and the future of Iraq's disputed territories.

## A GAP BETWEEN THE STATE AND COMMUNITIES

The crisis of confidence between the state and Iraqi citizens is the result of decades of exclusionary practices and violent repression as the central authorities targeted specific ethnic and sectarian communities.

The fierce repression of the Sunni community under former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki was a key trigger in the transition from the 2012–2013 protests in Sunni-majority provinces towards a violent jihadi insurgency. The ease with which large swaths of Iraqi territory fell to the so-called Islamic State in June 2014, like the abandonment by the Iraqi Army of key areas, further widened a preexisting rift between many Iraqis and their state.

Preventing the return of the Islamic State means addressing the principle demands of Sunnis—including political inclusion, reform of the counterterrorism law, and amnesty for the tens of thousands of Sunnis who have been imprisoned under the law, often without appropriate judicial review. Government cooperation with the Sunnis, particularly Sunni tribes, will also be an important factor in reassuring the community.

At stake in a post-Islamic State Iraq are changes in the power structures governing Baghdad's relations with the provinces and sectarian and ethnic communities. Three separate entities now coexist within Iraq's borders: Iraqi state-controlled areas where Shia factions mainly hold sway; the Kurdistan Regional Government; and the territory ruled by the Islamic State. Each of these areas has developed specific forms



of governance, against a backdrop of escalating regional competition for power and external interventions by Iran and the Western-led coalition.

In this context, the relationship between Baghdad and the different regions is at the heart of discussions of what comes next after Mosul. While both the Kurds and the Sunnis would prefer to limit the central government's role in Mosul and other liberated provinces, the Shia-dominated leadership seeks to maintain such authority. A non-inclusive political process in a post-Islamic State environment and a refusal to decentralize power to the governorates as enshrined in the constitution are likely to spur more communal violence.

At best, the presence of the PMF in mainly Sunni areas may fuel support for the Islamic State—whose legacy will linger in Iraqi society—or for other extremists.

## THE CRISIS BETWEEN IRAQIS

A crisis of trust exists not only between Iraqi citizens and their state but also between Iraqi communities themselves. In the last two years, Iraq has witnessed the increasing militarization of ethnic and sectarian communities seeking protection. Following the advances of the Islamic State in 2014, the rapid growth of the Shia-dominated PMF to some 50 groups and around [150,000 fighting men](#) is one aspect of this, as is the establishment of militias composed of minorities, including Christians and Yazidis. The latter are operating under the auspices of the PMF or the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Even though many Sunnis did not support the Islamic State, and the Sunni community has suffered considerably at its hands, members of Iraq's other sectarian groups felt [betrayed](#) by how some of their former Arab Sunni neighbors compromised with the group. A Yazidi mother who escaped with her family [remarked](#), "We don't cry only for ourselves, but for all Yazidis. They tortured us, attacked our honor, our religion. We have lived together with our Muslim Arab neighbors during the Iran-Iraq War [and] during the first Gulf War. We protected each other. Now they became our enemies."

An activist working in the refugee camps of Dohuk told me last February, "Yazidis are refusing to go back to areas liberated from the [Islamic State] until they know how they will be governed. They want to have a say in the running of their own affairs."

Meanwhile, the actions of the Islamic State and the cycle of sectarian blame and distrust have led to [revenge](#) killings of Arab Sunnis by Shia militias. These militias have been [accused](#) of slaughtering Sunnis with impunity, as have Yazidi militias. In other areas, [Kurdish militias](#) have been blamed for massacring and [expelling](#) Arab citizens, under the pretext that they collaborated with the Islamic State. In reality, the Kurds are also driven by an attempt to consolidate their control over disputed territories.

Such actions will drive further wedges into Iraqi society. Without an overhaul of communal relations through the adoption of more inclusionary policies, the potential for peace in a post-Islamic State Iraq will be in doubt.

## THE DANGERS OF INTRA-SECTARIAN CONFLICT

However, communal tensions are not limited to contestation between the Kurds, Shia, and Sunnis. There are also worrying signs of increasing intra-sectarian conflict, particularly in the Shia and Kurdish

communities. Among the Shia, rivalries have increased, accentuating conflicts within the Dawa Party, Iraq's largest, which has effectively ruled the country since 2005 and is split into two feuding camps.

While political strife and internal divisions are not new to Dawa, the removal of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki in 2014 and his replacement by another Dawa official, Haidar al-Abadi, has given these divisions a harder edge. The Mosul offensive allows Abadi to appear as a strong national leader, while Maliki's control over a portion of the PMF has given him additional leverage on the ground to challenge his political rivals in ways that were not possible before. He is using the groups affiliated with him to both undermine Abadi and strengthen himself before provincial council elections in 2017 and parliamentary elections in 2018.

This intra-Shia struggle will also be shaped by the rising power of the PMF. Parliament's recent passing of a [law](#) officially recognizing the coalition of armed groups as a part of Iraq's armed forces had a number of objectives. Not only was it an attempt to acknowledge the PMF's efforts in fighting the Islamic State, it was also designed to place its forces more squarely under the authority of the state and impede the political ambitions of its leaders.

Yet many PMF leaders are connected to political parties, and are unlikely to lay down their arms quietly. They have become powerful warlords, commanding large numbers of troops, exploiting considerable resources, and enjoying political clout. These leaders' growing ambitions mean that it is not inconceivable that rivalries will emerge leading to conflicts among some of the PMF's armed groups themselves.

The Kurdish region is not faring much better. The mandate of Masoud Barzani, Kurdistan's president, which had already been extended for two years by the Kurdish parliament, expired in August 2015. Parliament has been inactive since then and the government is dysfunctional. The historic struggle between the two principle Kurdish political dynasties—the Barzani-led Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which controls the city of Irbil, and the Talabani-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), based in Suleimaniyya—is giving way to feuds within the ruling families of both areas, and between them and other influential Kurdish officials. These low-level partisan tensions could spill over into renewed conflict between the KDP and PUK.

Meanwhile, the salaries of Kurdish civil servants have not been paid for months, triggering [multiple demonstrations](#) across the different cities of the Kurdistan Region by the civil servants and [police](#). These grievances are driving a broader sentiment of support among Kurds for remaining within the Iraqi state, which would at least guarantee payment of their salaries.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AND DISPUTED TERRITORIES**

The realities of the Mosul battle are generating a third challenge for the Iraqi government, namely rebuilding cities and towns liberated from the Islamic State at a time when state coffers are empty.

The 2017 budget, [ratified](#) recently by parliament, highlighted a budget deficit equivalent to \$18 billion. In April, the World Bank forecast [that the deficit would represent](#) around 14.2 percent of GDP. Moreover, around 22 percent of budget spending is financed by borrowing or financial assistance. Around 25 percent of spending has been allocated to military activities, including funding for the PMF. Meanwhile, disagreements have emerged among Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish politicians over what share of this money would go to their respective armed groups.

This deficit raised questions about the government's ability to undertake reconstruction activities, estimated to be anywhere between [\\$14 billion](#) and [\\$25 billion](#). Areas previously liberated from the Islamic States have yet to be rebuilt or their services restored. The slow pace of reconstruction efforts will prolong the suffering of Iraqi displaced by the Islamic State, making it impossible for them to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Popular anger at the lack of services may, with time, provoke new insurgencies.

A fourth challenge will be what happens with regard to territories liberated from the Islamic State and that are disputed by the Iraqi state and the Kurds. Haidar al-Abadi has affirmed that an agreement [exists](#) for the Peshmerga to withdraw from such areas once the Islamic State is defeated. However, Masoud Barzani and other Kurdish officials have [suggested](#) that they would not implement such withdrawals.

The tense situation could pave the way for open conflict between the Kurds and Baghdad, belying the optimism that surrounded the start of the Mosul offensive. This will only further complicate the process of reconstruction and the future of any potential political settlement for a post-Islamic State governance system in Iraq.

## **AN OPENING FOR A HOLISTIC VISION OF IRAQ**

With the Iraqi state facing multiple challenges, civil society actors who have organized protests during the past year and a half across Iraqi cities and provinces, including Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Erbil, and Suleimaniyya, have an opportunity to present a holistic vision for Iraq's future. United by their demands for a reform of governance mechanisms and an end to corruption, among others issues, these actors can look towards the upcoming provincial and parliamentary elections to advance an inclusive platform of change.

In light of Iraq's powerful political and military realities, this may be an uphill battle. However, it is one that is urgently needed to create a framework for national reconciliation between the country's diverse communities.

To help do so, civil society actors, divided until now by ethnic and sectarian belonging, must offer a vision that addresses several requirements. They must recognize that discussions over the redistribution of resources are fundamental for addressing power inequalities among sects and ethnicities, for rebuilding the bonds of trust between Iraqis, and for addressing the traumas inflicted on Iraqis by the Islamic State.

This process of healing would also include mechanisms for working with hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, who, according to the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, have been [brainwashed](#) by the Islamic State. It includes the challenge of reintegrating women who have been violated by the Islamic State's militants, as well as their offspring, into conservative Iraqi society. In addition, improving the prospects for transitional justice mechanisms would permit further healing. If left unaddressed, such a situation could lead to a new incarnation of the Islamic State.

The Islamic State may have unified the Iraqis, but it has not created a consensus over Iraq's future. As the prominent Shia cleric Sayyed Jawad al-Khoei put it, "We do not have one Iraq, we have an Iraq of the Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds, as well as the Iraq of persecuted minorities of Yezidis, Sabians, and Mandaeanes." The opportunity to create a broader vision is now and it is up to civil society groups and others invested in Iraq's future to attempt to do so.

## BIOGRAPHIES



### **Dr. Elie Abouaoun**

Dr. Elie Abouaoun is the director of Middle East Programs with the Center for Middle East and Africa at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Elie served until recently as a senior program officer for the Middle East and North Africa programs and the acting director for North Africa programs. Previously, he held the position of Executive Director at the Arab Human Rights Fund after an assignment as a Senior Program Officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace – Iraq program.

Prior to 2011, Dr. Abouaoun managed the Iraq program of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and worked as the program coordinator for Ockenden International-Iraq. He is a senior trainer and consultant with several local, regional and international organizations on topics such as human rights, program development/management, displacement and relief, capacity development, Euro Mediterranean cooperation; and is a member of the pool of trainers of the Council of Europe since 2000. Dr. Abouaoun regularly contributes to publications related to the above mentioned topics. In 2001, he was appointed a member of the Reference Group established by the Directorate of Education-Council of Europe to supervise the drafting of COMPASS, a manual for human rights education. He further supervised the adaptation and the translation of COMPASS into Arabic and its subsequent diffusion in the Arab region in 2003. He regularly writes articles for the French speaking Lebanese daily newspaper L'Orient du Jour as well other publications in the Arab region. He is a visiting lecturer at Notre Dame University-Lebanon on the subjects of human rights, civil society, advocacy and at Saint Joseph University-Lebanon on the subjects of human rights and citizenship. Dr. Abouaoun serves as a member of the Board of Directors of several organizations in the Arab region.

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Writing a book manuscript on Shi'a religious authority in Iraq and its relationship with Iran. Writing commentaries and briefs on the Middle East, with special focus on post-ISIS Iraq. Briefing US government institutions on political developments in the Middle East.

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Held the position of Chief of Party in North Africa during his tenure in Aktis Strategy. Former Analyst at the RAND Corporation. Prior to joining RAND, he served as the Deputy Director General of the Iraqi Defense Intelligence and Military Security.

Graduated with an MC/MPA from Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Currently a PhD candidate in Engineering and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University.

## Dr. Scott Atran

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Previously, Scott was assistant to Dr. Margaret Mead at the American Museum of Natural History; Coordinator "Animal and Human Communication Program," Royaumont Center for a Science of Man, Paris (Jacques Monod, Dir.); member of the Conseil Scientifique, Laboratoire d'Ethnobiologie-Biogéographie, Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle, Paris; Visiting Lecturer, Dept. Social Anthropology, Cambridge Univ.; Chargé de Conférence, Collège International de Philosophie; member of the Centre de Recherche en Epistémologie Appliquée, Ecole Polytechnique, Paris; Visiting Prof., Truman Institute, Hebrew Univ., Jerusalem; Leverhulme Distinguished Visiting Prof. of Anthropology, Univ. of London-Goldsmiths.; Presidential Scholar, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Scott has experimented extensively on the ways scientists and ordinary people categorize and reason about nature, on the cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion, and on the limits of rational choice in political and cultural conflict. He has repeatedly briefed NATO, HMG and members of the U.S. Congress and the National Security Council staff at the White House on the Devoted Actor versus the Rational Actor in Managing World Conflict, on the Comparative Anatomy and Evolution of Global Network Terrorism, and on Pathways to and from Violent Extremism. He has addressed the United Nations Security Council on problems of youth and violent extremism and currently serves in advisory capacity to the Security Council and Secretary General on combatting terrorism and on ways to implement UN Resolution 2250 to engage and empower youth in the promotion of peace. He has been engaged in conflict negotiations in the Middle East, and in the establishment of indigenously managed forest reserves for Native American peoples.

Scott is a recurrent contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Foreign Policy*, as well as to professional journals such as *Science*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. His publications include *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science* (Cambridge Univ. Press), *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press), *The Native Mind and the Cultural Construction of Nature* (MIT Press, with Doug Medin), and *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human* (Penguin). His work and life have been spotlighted around the world on television and radio and in the popular and scientific press, including feature and cover stories of the [New York Times Magazine](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), [Nature](#) and [Science News](#).



**Dr. Munqith Dagher**

Dr. Munqith Dagher conducted Iraq's first-ever public opinion poll and since that time has been responsible for undertaking 1,500,000+ interviews for a range of agencies and topics. Munqith established IIACSS in 2003 while he was a Professor of Public Administration/ Strategic Management at Baghdad University. He has managed more than 300 public opinion and various market research projects. He has lectured widely and published several articles and books in different countries in the world.

Recently and since ISIL took over Mosul, on June 2014 , Munqith has dedicated most of his time to study the reasons behind the sudden uprising of this terrorist organization and how to defeat it. For this reason he has run three rounds of quantitative and qualitative research in Iraq. Munqith published the some of these results in the Washington post and gave number of talks and presentations in the most well-known think tanks in the world as the Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington and King's College in London.

Munqith holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration from the University of Baghdad, College of Administration and Economics, master degree in Human resources and Master degree in war sciences .He was professor of public administration and strategic management in Baghdad, Basrah and National defence universities. Munqith has also finished course in principle of marketing research in the University of Georgia,US.

On June 16th 2015, Munqith awarded the Ginny Valentine Badge of Courage ,on behalf of the Research Liberation Front , for Bravery in keeping the research alive in multiple conflict zones.



## Robert S Ford

Robert S Ford is currently a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington where he writes about developments in the Levant and North Africa. Mr. Ford in 2014 retired from the U.S. Foreign Service after serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014. In this role Mr. Ford was the State Department lead on Syria, proposing and implementing policy and developing common strategies with European and Middle Eastern allies to try to resolve the Syria conflict. Prior to this, Mr. Ford was the Deputy U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from 2008 to 2010, and also served from 2006 until 2008 as the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, where he boosted bilateral education and rule of law cooperation. Ford served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 until 2004, and Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad from 2004 until 2006 during the tumultuous establishment of the new, permanent Iraqi government. In 2014 he received the Secretary's Service Award, the U.S. State Department's highest honor. He also received in April 2012 from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston the annual Profile in Courage Award for his stout defense of human rights in Syria. He has appeared on CNN, PBS, Fox, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC and Arabic news networks as well as in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*.

### Education

B.A. in international studies, Johns Hopkins University; M.A. in Middle East studies and economics, Johns Hopkins SAIS; Advanced Arabic studies, American University of Cairo

### Regions

Syria, Iraq, North Africa

of

Expertise

### Issues

US foreign policy, economic and political development, Islamist movements

of

Expertise

### Languages

Arabic, French





**Mr. Sarhang Hamasaeed**

Sarhang Hamasaeed is a senior program officer for the Middle-East and North Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). He joined USIP in February 2011 and works on program management, organizational development, and monitoring and evaluation. His areas of focus include political and policy analysis, conflict analysis, dialogue processes, reconciliation and post-conflict stabilization, and ethnic and religious minorities. He writes, gives media interviews to international media, and is featured on events and briefings on Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East. He provided analysis to NPR, Voice of America, Al-Jazeera America, Fox News Al-Hurra TV, Radio Sawa, Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat TV, Rudaw, Al-Iraqiya TV, NRT TV, Skynews Arabia, the Washington Times, PBS, and CCTV. He is a member on the Task Force on the Future of Iraq, and was member of the Rebuilding Societies Working Group under the Middle East Strategy Taskforce, both initiatives by the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He regularly gives a lecture at the Foreign Service Institute on ISIL and Challenges to Governance in Iraq.

Hamasaeed has more than 15 years of strategy, management, and monitoring and evaluation experience in governmental, nongovernmental, private sector, and media organizations.

As a deputy director general at the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (2008-2009), Hamasaeed managed strategic government modernization initiatives through information technology with the goal of helping improve governance and service delivery. As a program manager for the Research Triangle Institute International (2003-2004), he managed civic engagement and local democratic governance programs in Iraq. Hamasaeed has worked as a planning and relations manager at Kurdistan Save the Children (1997-2002). Hamasaeed has also worked for the Los Angeles Times and other international media organizations.

He holds a Master's degree in International Development Policy from Duke University (2007) and is a Fulbright alumnus.

### **Buddhika B. Jayamaha**

Buddhika B. Jayamaha is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Northwestern. He is a veteran of the 82nd Airborne Division with deployment to Iraq.

## **Karl Kaltenthaler**

Karl Kaltenthaler is Professor of Political Science at the University of Akron and Case Western Reserve University. His research and teaching focuses on security policy, political violence, political psychology, public opinion and political behavior, violent Islamist extremism, terrorism, and counterterrorism. He has worked on multiple research studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, and the United States. He is currently researching the radicalization and recruitment process into Islamist violent extremism in different environments as well as ways to counter this process (Countering Violent Extremism). His work has resulted in academic publications and presentations as well as analytic reports and briefings for the U.S. government. He has consulted for the FBI, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Intelligence Community and the U.S. military. His research has been published in three books, multiple book chapters, as well as articles in *International Studies Quarterly*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, as well as other several other journals.

## **VERNIE LIEBL, Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning**

Vernie Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Mr Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia.

Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2.

Mr Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with “Highest Distinction” and focused on Islamic Economics).



### **Renad Mansour**

Since 2008, Renad has held research and teaching positions focusing on issues of comparative politics and international relations in the Middle East. His research at Chatham House explores the situation of Iraq in transition and the dilemmas posed by state-building. Prior to joining Chatham House, Renad was an El-Erian fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Centre, where he examined Iraq, Iran and Kurdish affairs. Renad is also a research fellow at the Cambridge Security Initiative based at Cambridge University and from 2013, he held positions as lecturer of International Studies and supervisor at the faculty of politics, also at Cambridge University. Renad has been a senior research fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut since 2011 and was adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Civil Society Ministry between 2008 and 2010. He received his PhD from Pembroke College, Cambridge.



**Dr. Diane L. Maye**

Dr. Diane Maye is an Assistant Professor of Homeland Security and Global Conflict Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida and an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict Resolution. She also served as a Visiting Professor of Political Science at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Diane earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Mason University; her dissertation focuses on Iraqi political alignments and alliances after the fall of the Ba'ath party. Diane has taught undergraduate level courses in International Relations, Comparative Politics, Homeland Security, American Foreign Policy, Terrorism and Counterterrorism Analysis, Beginner Arabic, and Political Islam. Her major research interests include: security issues in the Middle East and U.S. defense policy. Diane has published several scholarly works and has appeared in online and scholarly mediums including: *The Digest of Middle East Studies*, *The Journal of Terrorism Research*, *The National Interest*, *Radio Algeria*, *The Bridge*, *Business Insider*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Military One*, *In Homeland Security*, and the *New York Daily News*.

Prior to her work in academia, Diane served as an officer in the United States Air Force and worked in the defense industry. Upon leaving the Air Force, Diane worked for an Italian-U.S. defense company managing projects in foreign military sales, proposal development, and the execution of large international communications and physical security projects for military customers. During the Iraq war, she worked for Multi-National Force-Iraq in Baghdad, managing over 400 bilingual, bicultural advisors to the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Department of Defense. She has done freelance business consulting for European, South American, and Middle Eastern clients interested in security and defense procurement, and is currently the official representative of MD Helicopters in Iraq. Diane is a member of the Military Writers Guild, an associate editor for *The Bridge*, and a member of the Terrorism Research Analysis Consortium. She is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School.

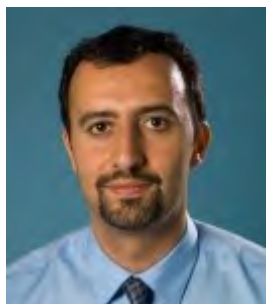
**Dr. Clark McCauley**

Clark McCauley (B.S. Biology, Providence College, 1965; Ph.D. Social Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, 1970) is a Professor of Psychology and co-director of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at Bryn Mawr College. His research interests include the psychology of group identification, group dynamics and intergroup conflict, and the psychological foundations of ethnic conflict and genocide. He is founding editor of the journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*.

**Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD**

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Joint Special Operations Master of Arts program for the College of International Security Affairs at the National Defense University. After completing his doctorate in Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia in 2003, he served as a Fulbright Scholar in the Caucasus in 2007 working on conflict resolution, and has focused on related issues in Eastern Ukraine for several years. He has also served as a subject matter expert for several DOS public diplomacy programs in South and East Asia dealing with the role of religion and democracy in US foreign policy.

His areas of expertise include democratization and conflict resolution in Russian, Eastern European and Middle Eastern politics. Most recently, he has been working with USASOC on several projects related to comprehensive deterrence, narratives and resistance typologies, and non-violent UW in the Gray Zone. His publications include research on democratic development and international nuclear safety agreements (*Nuclear Energy and International Cooperation: Closing the World's Most Dangerous Reactors*), as well as articles in scholarly journals ranging from *Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, to *Central European Political Science Review*. He has also published in professional journals related to UW, SOF more broadly, and the future operating environment, with articles in *InterAgency Journal*, *Special Warfare*, *Foreign Policy Journal*, and the peer-reviewed *Special Operations Journal*. He is currently participating in SOCOM SMAs on Intellectual Motivators of Insurgency and a Russian ICONS simulation.



**Alireza Nader**

Alireza Nader is a senior international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and author of *The Days After a Deal With Iran: Continuity and Change in Iranian Foreign Policy*. His research has focused on Iran's political dynamics, elite decision making, and Iranian foreign policy. His commentaries and articles have appeared in a variety of publications and he is widely cited by the U.S. and international media.

Nader's other RAND publications include *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*; *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*; *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*; *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*.

Prior to joining RAND, Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses. He is a native speaker of Farsi. Nader received his M.A. in international affairs from The George Washington University.



#### **Dr. Denise Natali**

Dr. Denise Natali is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) where she specializes on the Middle East, trans-border Kurdish issue, regional energy security, and post-conflict state-building. Dr. Natali joined INSS in January 2011 as the Minerva Chair, following more than two decades of researching and working in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

Dr. Natali is the author of numerous publications on Kurdish politics, economy and energy, including *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse University Press, 2010) and *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), which was the recipient of the Choice Award for Outstanding Academic Title (2006) (trans. to Turkish *Kurtler ve Devlet: Iraq, Turkiye ve Iran'da Ulusal Kimligin Gelismesi* (Istanbul: Avesta Press, 2009). Dr. Natali is currently writing a second edition of *The Kurds and the State* to include Syria.

Dr. Natali also specializes in post-conflict relief and reconstruction, having worked on the Gulf Relief Crisis Project for the American Red Cross International Division in Washington D.C., as director of cross-border operations for a non-governmental organization (INGO) in Peshawar Pakistan, and information officer for the U.S Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in northern Iraq in support of Operation Provide Comfort II. Dr. Natali returned to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 2005-2010, where she engaged in research, teaching and university start-ups, including positions as the Head of the International Politics Department at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler (UKH) and Associate Professor, Dean of Students, and Director of International Exchanges at the American University of Iraq-Sulaimaniya (AUI-S).

Dr. Natali received a Ph.D in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, a Master of International Affairs (MIA) at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and a B.A. in government at Franklin&Marshall College. She also has studied at the L'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, the University of Tehran (Deh Khoda Language Program) and Tel Aviv University. Dr. Natali speaks French, Kurdish and conversational Farsi.

Dr. Natali provides frequent commentary on national and international media sources. She is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies, columnist for *al-Monitor*, member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

### **Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Petit**

Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Petit is a PhD candidate in Political Science at George Washington University, and has multiple tours in Iraq with the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade and the 101 Airborne Division.

### **Will Reno**

Will Reno is a Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University.



### **Daniel Serwer**

Professor Daniel Serwer (Ph.D., Princeton) directs the Conflict Management Program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is also a Senior Fellow at its Center for Transatlantic Relations and affiliated as a Scholar with the Middle East Institute. His current interests focus on the civilian instruments needed to protect U.S. national security as well as transition and state-building in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans. His *Righting the Balance: How You Can Help Protect America* was published in November 2013 by Potomac Books.

Formerly vice president for centers of peacebuilding innovation at the United States Institute of Peace, he led teams there working on rule of law, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, where he led its peacebuilding work in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and the Balkans and served as Executive Director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group. Serwer has worked on preventing interethnic and sectarian conflict in Iraq and has facilitated dialogue between Serbs and Albanians in the Balkans.

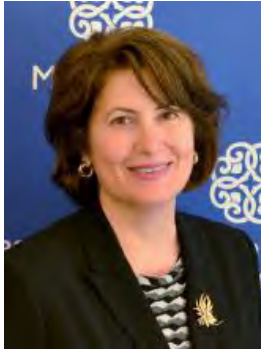
As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at the Dayton peace talks. From 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S.



Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War.

Serwer holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from Princeton University, an M.S. from the University of Chicago, and a B.A. from Haverford College. He speaks Italian, French and Portuguese, as well as beginning Arabic.

Serwer blogs at [www.peacefare.net](http://www.peacefare.net) and tweets @DanielSerwer



### **Randa Slim**

Randa Slim is Director of the Track II Dialogues initiative at The Middle East Institute and a non-resident fellow at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced & International Studies (SAIS) Foreign Policy Institute. A former vice president of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, Slim has been a senior program advisor at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a guest scholar at the United States Institute of Peace, a program director at Resolve, Inc, and a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. A long-term practitioner of Track II dialogue and peace-building processes in the Middle East and Central Asia, she is the author of several studies, research reports, book chapters, and articles on conflict management, post-conflict peacebuilding, and Middle East politics.

#### **Education**

B.S. at the American University of Beirut; M.A. at the American University of Beirut; Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina Languages Arabic, French Countries of Expertise Syria, Iraq, Lebanon Issues of Expertise Peacebuilding, Peacemaking, Negotiation, Track II Dialogue, Democratization, Post-Conflict Reconciliation

### **Christine van den Toorn**

Christine van den Toorn is the Director of IRIS. She has over 10 years of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, 6 of which have been spent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). She has conducted fieldwork all over the KRI, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash as well as delivered talks on her research. Ms. van den Toorn has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the KRI and disputed territories, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. Ms. van den Toorn speaks Arabic, which she studied at Middlebury College, Georgetown University, the University of Damascus in Syria and the French Institute for Near East Studies in Damascus.

**Dr. Bilal Wahab**

Bilal Wahab is a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on governance in the Iraqi Kurdish region and in Iraq as a whole. He has taught at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani, where he established the Center for Development and Natural Resources, a research program on oil and development. He earned his Ph.D. from George Mason University; his M.A. from American University, where he was among the first Iraqis awarded a Fulbright scholarship; and his B.A. from Salahaddin University in Erbil. Along with numerous scholarly articles, he has written extensively in the Arabic and Kurdish media.



## **Maha Yahya**

Director  
Middle East Center

Yahya is director of the Carnegie Middle East Center, where her research focuses on citizenship, pluralism, and social justice in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

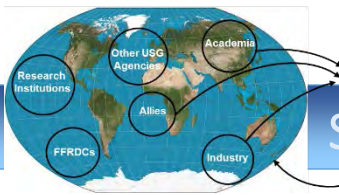
PhD, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, PhD, Architectural Association School of Architecture

Maha Yahya is director of the Carnegie Middle East Center, where her research focuses on citizenship, pluralism, and social justice in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

Prior to joining Carnegie, Yahya led work on Participatory Development and Social Justice at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). She was previously regional adviser on social and urban policies at UN-ESCWA and spearheaded strategic and inter-sectoral initiatives and policies in the Office of the Executive Secretary which addressed the challenges of democratic transitions in the Arab world. Yahya has also worked with the United Nations Development Program in Lebanon, where she was the director and principal author of *The National Human Development Report 2008–2009: Toward a Citizen's State*. She was also the founder and editor of the *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Yahya has worked with international organizations and in the private sector as a consultant on projects related to socioeconomic policy analysis, development policies, cultural heritage, poverty reduction, housing and community development, and postconflict reconstruction in various countries including Lebanon, Pakistan, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. She has served on a number of advisory boards including the MIT Enterprise Forum of the Pan Arab Region and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Yahya is the author of numerous publications, including most recently *Great Expectations in Tunisia* (March 2016); *Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disorder* (November 2015); *Towards Integrated Social Development Policies: A Conceptual Analysis* (UN-ESCWA, 2004), co-editor of *Secular Publicities: Visual practices and the Transformation of National Publics in the Middle East and South Asia* (University of Michigan Press, 2010) and co-author of *Promises of Spring: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in Democratic Transitions* (UN-ESCWA, 2013).



**Question:** *Following the clearance of Da'esh from both Mosul and Raqqa, and beyond that any remaining substantive elements in the Euphrates River Valley, what governing structure is most likely to be effective, and acceptable to the predominant tribes?*

**Contributors:** Dr. Kathleen Reedy (RAND); Siree D. Allers (Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, Department of State); Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University); Lina Khatib (Chatham House, UK); Amjed Rasheed (Durham University, UK); Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool; independent consultant); Dr. Gwyneth Sutherland (Geographic Services, Inc.); Bilal Wahab (The Washington Institute); Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma).

## Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

## Acceptable Governance

A governing system or structure is essentially a fixed distribution of power. At its core, governance is about the span of authority and who distributes public goods, and stable governance is not so much a function of which groups benefit from a system as of the tolerance of those who believe they do not.

Vern Liebl of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) has made the argument elsewhere<sup>4</sup> that there really is no such thing as an “ungoverned space.” The implication is that whether or not it is contested, power is distributed in some way and there is some authority in charge if only over a small area within a larger region. Everyone, in other words is subject to at least one – sometimes more than one -- governing authority. The point is that some form of governing is happening across Syria

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<sup>4</sup> See SMA Reach-back report R3 QL 7: *How does Da'esh's transition to insurgency manifest itself in Syria; which other jihadist groups might offer the potential for merger and which areas of ungoverned space are most likely to offer conditions conducive for Da'esh to maintain some form of organizational structure and military effectiveness?*

whether this is the formal governance of the Assad regime, fighter group control, kinship-based groups or local committees and councils working to distribute relief aid and provide security.

Any “acceptable” form of governance has a cultural element reflecting what constituents perceive as the appropriate relationship between the individual or group and authority, and a more pragmatic element which has to do with the value to the group or individual of the “goods” a governing authority provides. The relationship between the cultural and pragmatic factors is not static; in some instances or for some periods value on one can compensate for deficits on the other (e.g., a culturally relevant structure such as a *shura* can be acceptable even if it is not able to produce significant security or employment; a newer system like a federation may be seen as acceptable if it can deliver meaningful security and employment benefits.)

### The Question

The question posed for this Reach-back report appears to be premature considering the rapidly evolving conflict environment in Syria. To answer it satisfactorily we need to know who are the important leaders in the area currently, and whether there are others who would lay claim to the area once the ISIL threat has been controlled. We need to recognize the current power brokers – what is there now – what is incentivizing their actions now and what they hope to gain or regain in the future. Consider that what might be a widely acceptable (and thus more likely durable) governing structure to replace what is currently present could decrease the power currently held by some leaders. Very few leaders respond well to arrangements that curtail their power or authority. Even fair division of assets like territory, political power, oil revenue, etc. among groups represents a loss for those who currently control them. Finally, situations in which political actors willingly give up power to a higher authority demand a significant amount of trust that others will not use this to their disadvantage but will abide by similar rules. At present this level of trust appears to exist only within relatively small groups in Syria and Iraq.

Nevertheless, the expert contributors to this report do suggest dynamics that may serve as guideposts in future analyses of the most likely paths to stable and legitimate governance in Syria and Iraq.

#### 1) The tribe may not be the most important political influence group

While there are many areas of agreement among the contributors, a list of “prominent tribes” is not one of them. The authors list different tribes and clans as power brokers in Eastern Syria and Iraq and it is not necessarily the case that tribes whose names have historical prestige have political power today. Tribes are neither monolithic nor homogenous. It has not been uncommon for clans within tribes to take opposing sides in the various civil and counter-ISIL fights going on in Syria. When it comes to what might

be acceptable governing structures, a number of the experts suggest that the tribe is not the most appropriate level of control in all locations, and thus not the most appropriate target of efforts to identify the requisites for post-ISIL governance. Siree Allers of the State Department Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations explains that the tribe is “an unreliable unit for understanding allegiances” both in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah where “clan and sub-clan loyalties are more likely to shape local conflict dynamics.” Similarly Lund (2015)<sup>5</sup> argues that tribal groups are not “functioning social units” and that affiliations are more local along “family, sub-clan and village lines” than tribal. In short kinship ties remain important links in influence networks it is just that the most crucial may be at the tribe, clan or relatively small family units.

## **2) Relationships between and within groups are fluid; impacted by material concerns**

As has historically been the case in the tribal areas of Syria and Iraq, intra and inter-family, clan and tribal conflict is endemic. Josh Landis among others notes that many of the relationships among kinship groups and civil society and opposition groups are fluid, citing as a recent example local leaders who have retreated from overt opposition to the regime or re-sworn allegiance in order to hedge their bets on the likelihood that the Assad regime will return to their areas with the defeat of ISIL. In addition to the pragmatic desire to align with what is perceived as the stronger side, Lund (2015)<sup>6</sup> observes two reasons for “side-switching”: a desire for better defense, and a desire for better pay. In fact, these have been consistent issues throughout the conflict in Syria and give us a clue as to what may inform public perceptions of future governors. Namely, at least in the short run, to be seen as effective (and retain public support), a governing body must provide at least two types of goods to constituents: security and employment.

## **3) To date there is no common vision of post-Assad Syria**

Factionalism among Sunni populations in the tribal areas precludes a near-term “fix” to governance – regardless of what structure or process is chosen – because there is no clear vision among kinship and/or other groups of Syria following the defeat of Assad. Moreover, groups with stable leader-constituent relationships (i.e., groups that see a leader as a legitimate protector of their interests and thus will adhere to his authority) are likely smaller in size and number than would be needed to govern apolitical unit like a city. The implication for political transformation and stabilization: start small and with narrow expectations. Here Syria expert Lina Khatib of Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs)

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<sup>5</sup> Lund, Aron. What’s Behind the Kurdish-Arab Clashes in East Syria? Carnegie Middle East Center, 23 January 2015; <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/58814>.

<sup>6</sup> Lund, Aron. What’s Behind the Kurdish-Arab Clashes in East Syria? Carnegie Middle East Center, 23 January 2015; <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/58814>.

offers sage advice: barring full regional independence, “we shouldn't forget that decentralization is still based on the existence of a credible center.”

#### 4) “Acceptability” changes with location

Related to the points above, many of the expert contributors were careful to note that the relative influence of a tribe, clan, family or civil society leader differs according to the experiences in different locations *and at different times*. For example, while leaders of the *Al Waldah* clan played a significant role in expelling the regime and administered Raqqa after 2013, many fled to Turkey when ISIL moved in. Others (e.g., *Al Afadlah*) stayed in the area if not in the fight. Once ISIL is removed, it is not clear that former governors who sat out in Turkey will return with the same political authority and legitimacy that they had when they left. Similarly, Sirree Allers (DoS) posits that kinship ties are more important to political outcomes in Raqqa than in (more cosmopolitan) Mosul and surrounding areas in Ninewah which she believes are “likely to accept the local council structure that existed before.”<sup>7</sup> Like Kathleen Reedy (Rand), Lina Khatib (Chatham House) argues further that the basic roles of tribes in Syria and Iraq are where the latter are, “political entities that play a role beyond their own regions, but tribes in Syria have never played a political role and it seems that this role is being parachuted on them in the fight against Da’esh.”

#### 5) Include (nearly) all local voices

Finally, a couple of the expert contributors intimate that the formal and informal governing processes that have emerged in Syria and Iraq (whether traditional or civil) may be the best bet for effectiveness and what will be seen as “acceptable.”<sup>8</sup> If for no other reason than that many of these local committees and councils emerged more or less organically from necessity or tradition and the time and financial costs of replacing them whole cloth will be significant. As a result, Allers cautions that clans who remained – especially those newly empowered or enriched by affiliation with ISIL should not be excluded from future governance. There are two reasons for this. First, as Kathleen Reedy of Rand and previous SMA Reach-

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<sup>7</sup> Allers argument is that the reason Mosul governance failed in the past was not because of the structure – which was designed to be inclusive of Sunni voices, but because both the Malaki and Abadi governments were unwilling to devolve authority beyond Baghdad. In SMA Reach-back reports V7 Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI) found that given its span of domestic and regional political, economic and security interests, the Abadi government lacks necessary incentive to concede power to local leaders unless and until all-out civil war breaks out in Iraq.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Allers (DoS) notes that ISIL’s habit of installing foreign fighters atop governing bureaucracies in the Euphrates Valley and elsewhere may have provided an unexpected service to those attempting to stabilize local governance in the wake of ISIL defeat in the villages and main cities of the Euphrates River Valley (e.g., Dayr az Zawr, Al Mayadin, Abu Kamal). She suggests that replacing these “foreign” governors with local leaders while retaining the lower-level bureaucrats that have been running service provision and administrative offices is a way to simultaneously encourage local buy-in to the new government and maintain the expertise and continuity required to continue to provide (and expand) services in the immediate post-ISIL period.



back reports like V7 note, the willingness of locals to work with ISIL in many cases has been the result of pragmatic choice rather than sympathetic beliefs or ideology. Second, newly empowered groups could play the role of spoilers if they are excluded from new-found gains and/or authority. We should not be too quick to eliminate current power-brokers or workers who administered social service or government departments for ISIL.

## SME Input

### Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Dr. Kathleen Reedy  
Rand

The rural Sunni areas of Iraq and Syria are different scenarios, and I suspect that what passes for acceptable governing and governance in the two areas will be different based on long-term and more recent history. What the two regions share is the initial grievance that created the space for violent extremists to rise in the first place: disenfranchisement. In both instances, people in these areas remember times and have certain expectations about when a strong, centralized government worked for them rather than leaving them behind. “Social injustice” is a very powerful rallying cry, and both of these populations felt that they have lost that. In Iraq, that loss has been since 2003 with the loss of Saddam Hussein and his generally pro-Sunni policies. In Syria, the loss has been somewhat slower in the making and was almost more the loss of an ideal rather than a reality. In both cases, then, acceptable government will involve the return of inclusivity in some fashion or another. But there are nuances that will change the flavor of that.

In general, Sunni tribal sentiment is a stronger organizing factor in Iraq than in Syria, largely due to Saddam

“much of the governing that has happened [in Syria] since 2011 has not been a local solution, but an imposed one. This means that, unlike Iraq, eastern Syria has not really developed standing institutions based around local governments in the

Hussein’s attempts to co-opt the tribes at various points in order to secure his own power. As a result, tribal areas in Iraq are more used to some degree of independence and local decision-making, with greater levels of governance being (if informally) devolved to more local leaders in this region (a pattern perpetuated by the coalition efforts there). What this often meant was not just ability to govern, but to provide resources, meaning it was not ideological so much as very practical to support a shaykh. The proliferation of “old” shakys and “new” shaykhs is a pretty good indicator of that, with the more traditional leaders having ideological support while the nouveau riche earned loyalty through purchasing power. This style of local-centric leadership has become even more prominent since 2003 and the subsequent years of unrest when self-reliance became more common and active persecution of Sunnis made them less interested in being part of a central regime. This recent history makes it likely that

there is a greater popular expectation for power to be less centralized in Baghdad, especially with the Shi’a coalition that continues to govern nationally. Within the region, power is likely to wind up consolidated in the hands of a few powerful people, because that is largely the political model people are familiar with, both at the tribal and broader political levels, but greater autonomy will likely remain the preferred outcome. The complication with that is the economic and bureaucratic systems of the country

are in no way set up to devolve power, meaning that transition would be a complicated one, even without the political turmoil it would cause. However, long-term stability will mean having to find ways to ensure that these populations genuinely feel they have more buy in than they do now. The current political system clearly has not engendered that confidence and is unlikely to do so going forward.

Syria's tribal Sunni populations are somewhat less "tribal" in nature than their Iraqi counterparts, and were historically generally better incorporated into the bureaucratic fold of the regime, if not necessarily enfranchised in the democratic sense. A lot of this was due to the Ba'ath Party's effort in Syria where it, and eventually Hafez al-Asad, won power and support precisely because they were champions of the little guy. Early Ba'ath policy in Syria broke up a lot of major landholdings and redistributed land to precisely these rural Sunni farmers in eastern Syria. Rather than concentrating power in the hands of tribal leaders, this policy made every man more equal financially and cast the regime as the provider of resources, rather than a tribal elder. The slow loss of political support for these sorts of genuinely socialist policies eroded rural Syrians' confidence in their regime's interest in their well-being. Drought was possibly the spark that set fire to the country in 2011, but the tinder was already stacked high as rural people realized how removed they were from their government and how much it no longer provided for them in comparison to other's and what they were used to.<sup>9</sup> The domination of the region by Islamic State, which was Iraqi to begin with and relies more heavily on foreign fighters than any of the other rebel or insurgent groups in Syria, suggests that much of the governing that has happened there since 2011 has not been a local solution, but an imposed one. This means that, unlike Iraq, eastern Syria has not really developed standing institutions based around local governments in the same way. Given that and cultural preferences in Syria for centralized leadership, I suspect that rebuilding already-existing governing organizations and bureaucratic systems (which ultimately is the face of government for most Syrians) would be the preference rather than the more autonomous solution for Iraq. What it would have to include would be a national political solution that ensures more enfranchisement for rural populations. In this way, rural Syrian concerns are much more similar to other Syrians' concerns than is true of tribal Iraqis and the rest of Iraq and will hopefully be addressed in any political resolution to the war. Should Asad remain in power for any length of time, I imagine discontent among this population will remain high, as elsewhere, making any sort of government building challenging.

So, in short, rural tribes in Iraq are more likely to want greater autonomy and local control over resources to meet their grievances, while those in Syria are more likely to be supportive of the rebuilding of a centralized system, just one that is more responsive to them.

### **Governing Structures in Mosul, Raqqa and Euphrates River Valley**

Siree D. Allers

Conflict and Stabilization Action Officer, IEA Corp.

Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, U.S. Department of State

#### **Mosul, Iraq**

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<sup>9</sup> In Syria, as in some other Middle Eastern nations, rural/urban divides are historically much more salient than any ethnic or religious ones. A similar decline in popular support for the government based on perceived "social injustice" took place in Egypt as power moved from Nasser, who was widely seen as a "man of the people," ultimately to Mubarek, who was seen as a man out for himself and his cronies.

Unlike Raqqa (population ~400,000), Mosul (population ~1.2 million) is not a predominantly tribal city. Its role as a cosmopolitan city throughout most of its history has drawn social contours along overlapping tribal, class, religious and ethnic lines. (Addendum 1) Throughout stabilization, it will be important to reach out to civil society leaders, diverse community leaders and business people. The urban populations of Mosul and surrounding tribes in Ninewa are likely to accept the local council structure that existed before; however, the transition will face greater obstacles with regard to representation and implementation.

### *Local v. Central Governance*

The local governance that existed in northern Iraq before Daesh seized control in June 2014 failed because of the process and players, rather than structure. The governing structures in Mosul district and Ninewa province were intentionally developed after the US invasion to devolve power from the central state and ensure inclusivity through representative provincial and local assemblies. However, these structures are only as effective as the central state's willingness to concede authority and prioritize reconciliation. Since the establishment of the 2008 "provincial powers law," Baghdad has impeded provincial and local leaders from freely exercising the authorities they were legally granted. In the current political climate, Prime Minister Abadi's promises to decentralize power and integrate Sunni populations into a national guard are undermined by the recent legislation that makes Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) an official security force. Political measures such as these accommodate the Shia establishment and reaffirm minority grievances.

### *Other Obstacles*

There are three other important factors that will determine whether a Moslawi government is successful:

1. First, proactive reconciliation efforts in the interim period will be key to creating sustainable governing systems. It is clear that some populations worked within Daesh's system of governance and others are fighting alongside Iraqi security forces to liberate Mosul. Proactive reconciliation and mediation mechanisms will be key to bridging these divides if they are to be sustainably integrated into governance systems. Moreover, tribes are not monolithic; it will be just as important to help tribes reconcile internal disputes as it will be to mediate between them.
2. Second, stabilization efforts in Mosul will be complicated by increasing Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) maneuvering in Ninewa. Though Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga fight jointly against ISIS, the Government of Iraq and KRG have not discussed future security or territorial

"... tribes are not monolithic; it will be just as important to help tribes reconcile internal disputes as it will be to mediate between them."

agreements. Kurdish territorial gains in historically disputed territories bordering Mosul, on top of their pre-existing social and military influence in Ninewa, will likely become a point of contention in political negotiations and on the ground. Before 2014, pro-Kurdish groups created systems of patronage among some minority communities in Mosul, funding militias to protect them; the KRG and Iraqi government financed competing civil society organizations. These tensions are likely to manifest in different ways in Mosul in the post-conflict period.

3. Third, one of the first major challenges that a local government will face is managing the immediate and long-term needs of diverse IDPs and returnees. Reconciliation efforts that integrate property dispute mechanisms are more likely to be successful in preventing violence. Minority populations of Turkmen, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Yazidis, Shabak and others have historically been co-opted and/or expelled by both Kurdish and Arab governments to reinforce their claims to territory in northern Iraq. The return of many of these populations in the immediate post-conflict power vacuum is likely to raise issues that interim local leaders must carefully manage. The question of how they deal with the return of minorities and mixed communities will shape prospects for long-term stabilization.

## Raqqa, Syria

Unlike Mosul, Raqqa has changed hands several times from the Syrian regime to myriad opposition groups to ISIS. In interviews, Raqqawis have expressed frustration with Daesh's system of governance and a desire for a civilian local council with a professional security apparatus to impose law and order. The Raqqa City Council that existed in 2013 was supported by some residents for their efforts to work with the population to provide services. Other residents, however, perceived the council as ineffective, weak and disconnected. In order for a future civilian council to play a role in Raqqa's future, it will have to succeed where the previous city council did not.

### *Raqqa's Tribes and Clans*

Raqqa's clans can play a key role in the city's reconstruction. Unlike Mosul, which has long been an economic hub, Raqqa runs on agriculture and clan relationships. The influence of the tribal stratum has recently because of their inability to maintain their coherence and guarantee the security of their members midst of conflict, economic instability and social displacement. Clan identity, however, appears to persist important social unit and identifier. Several respondents recent USAID interviews said that they expect clan

"...clans can be spoilers in the rebuilding process. In general, clan leaders cannot guarantee that all clan members or factions will follow their leader as sub-clans and families frequently take different

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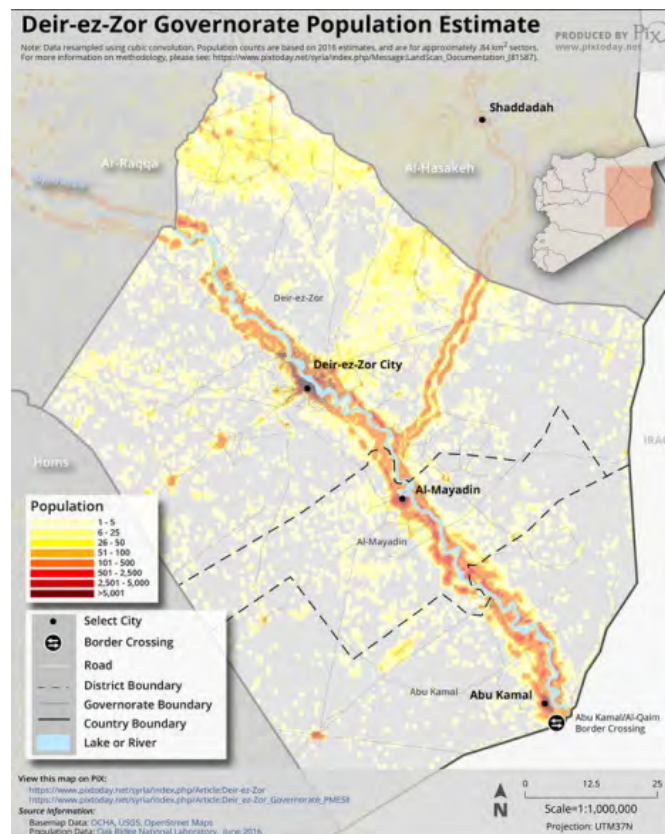
leaders to create a structure to administer Raqqa after Daesh's clearance. Clan leaders, especially from the influential *al Afadlah* and *al Waldah* clans from the *al Busha'aban* tribe, are likely to be an important source of familiarity and stability in the post-liberation period. Clan elders with deep understanding of

the terrain and agriculture can serve as important advisors to a Raqqa civilian council, help protect strategic resources, such as wheat stores, and curb lawlessness. The *al Amira clan* of the *al Anizah* tribe serves as an interlocutor between Daesh and the regime in negotiating caravan passage through territory; their connections within the local economy and in the regime could serve as a resource to the local council in future arrangements with the regime.

At the same time, clans can be spoilers in the rebuilding process. In general, clan leaders cannot guarantee that all clan members or factions will follow their leader as sub-clans and families frequently take different positions. Moreover, traditionally small, marginalized clans, such as the *al Bariyaj*, *al Sabkah* and *al Buhamid*, which have seen their influence swell under Daesh may be averse to any change in governance. It is important that many clan leaders who remained in Raqqa and pledged allegiance to Daesh not be excluded from power though; for many, it was a practical and economic, rather than ideological decision. Clan leaders who remained in the city but maintained a neutral reputation, such as the *al Afadlah*, are more likely to find their legitimacy intact.

The *al Waldah* clan is known to have played a large part in expelling the regime and administering Raqqa after 2013; however, a number of their leaders have fled to Turkey. Liwa Thuwar ar-Raqqa, the Arab force allied with the Syrian Democratic Forces, is led by the well-known commander Abu Issa from the *Ali* subclan of the *al Waldah* clan. Though the *al Waldah* were a large and influential clan before the conflict, it is possible that their time overseas could raise questions of legitimacy among the population. If a negotiated diplomatic settlement resolves the Syrian conflict, tribes which opposed the regime may face challenges in the process of vertical integration. these also

Increasing the chances of a successful conflict transition of governance will require creativity, flexibility and a deep understanding of tribal geographic and economic areas of influence. It will be important to have an inclusive system can reconcile inter- and intra-tribal differences and, importantly, offers leaders the prospect of preserving members' security and their own influence within the social system. post- that clan their



### *From Repression to Representation*

The governing structure in Raqqa does not have to be entirely rebuilt to be effective. Daesh's system of government can be recalibrated and powered by technocrats to facilitate a transition. The administration encompasses two broad categories: administration and Muslim services. The administrative office covers Islamic outreach, Shari'a institutes, elementary education, law enforcement, courts, recruitment and tribal relations. The provision of services, including humanitarian aid, bakeries, water and electricity falls under Daesh's Department of Muslim Services. While some offices will need to be disbanded and/or retrained, others can continue to provide essential services.

There is also opportunity to build community buy-in in the process. Daesh tends to put foreign members in high level positions in their administration. In the post-liberation period, it will be important to replace these foreign Daesh members, which include Tunisians, Jordanians, Saudis, and Iraqis, with interim leaders from the local community while preserving the stability and expertise of mid-level technocrats. Moreover, Daesh's governance model is inherently a top-down system which derives power from God and leaders' extremist religious interpretations. After liberation, a clear break in the narrative to one that espouses a bottom-up system will offer institutional resiliency and community buy-in. However, recalibrating the governing structure and finding representative leaders who believe in and can implement this system will be a challenge.

Like Mosul, vertical integration (with central authorities) and horizontal integration (with other power structures on the ground) will shape the fate of these local councils. There is a limit to how effective local leadership can be without the institutional support of a national government and negotiations are ongoing for the future of Syria.

### **Euphrates River Valley**

East of Raqqa, Daesh tries to apply the same governing model to cities along the Middle Euphrates River Valley region. In areas like Dayr Az Zawr City where they are currently still engaged in a military campaign, however, their influence is limited. As in Raqqa, it will be important to identify technocrats in Daesh's administration to maintain essential services and facilitate stabilization in key cities, including Dayr Az Zawr, Al Mayadin and Abu Kamal. Moreover, removing foreign Daesh members from their positions and creating a secure system informed by local leaders will generate buy-in and build momentum in stabilization.

Also like Raqqa, the tribal level is an unreliable unit for understanding allegiances and behavior in Dayr az Zawr governorate. Clan and sub-clan loyalties are more likely to shape local conflict dynamics. Many clans within the same tribe take opposite sides in their stance on Daesh, opposition and the regime.

Understanding clan conflicts within and between the major tribes in Dayr Az Zawr, the *Al Baqqara*, the *Al Sha'itat*, and the *Al Oqaidat*, is important to understanding the human terrain.

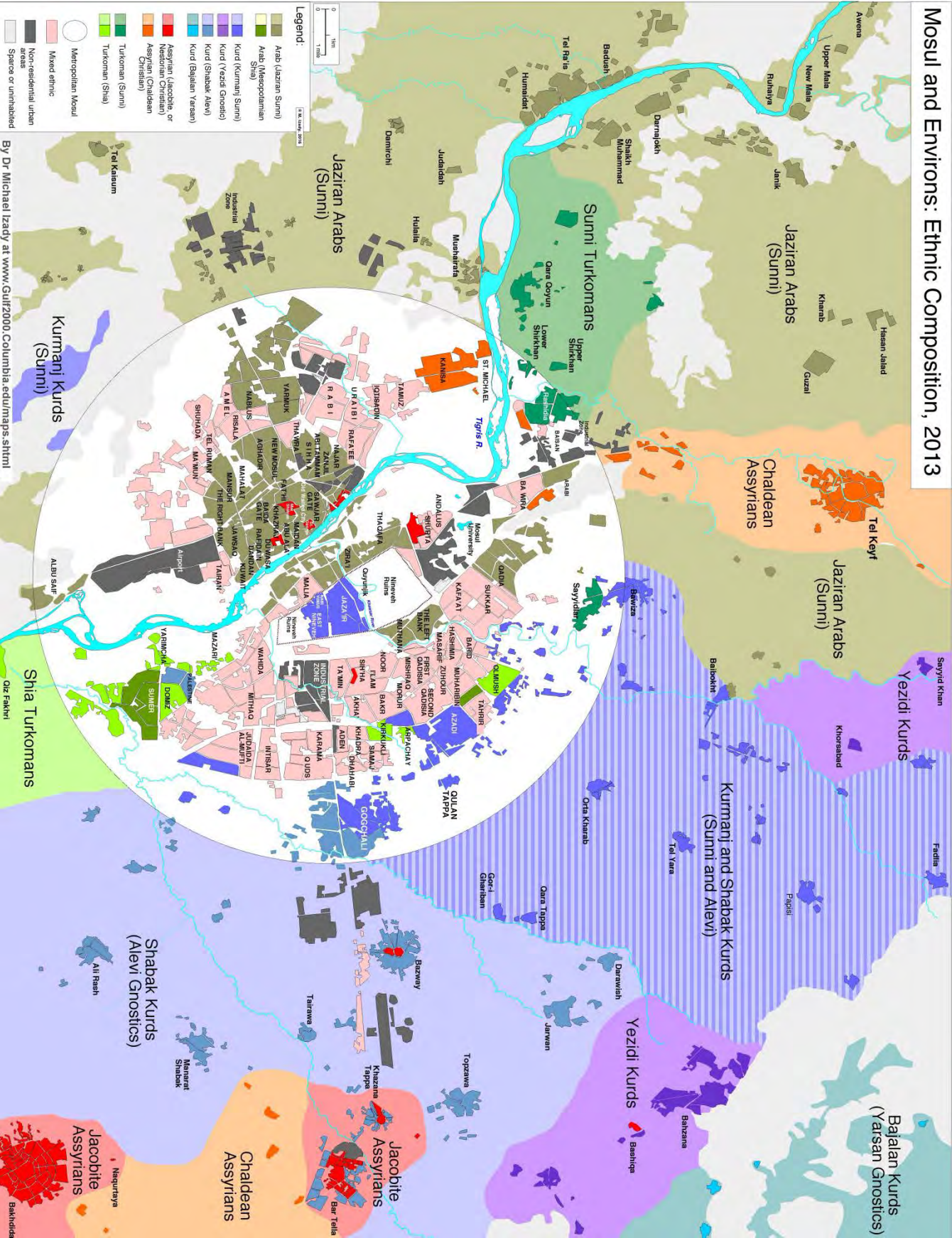
Despite a shared history of Daesh rule, this region differs from Raqqa in two important ways:

1) The Syrian regime has a presence in Dayr Az Zawr City and control of the airport. In the absence of Daesh, the regime will likely maneuver to fill this vacuum. Their extant relationships and experience with tribal leaders in the city gives them an advantage, unless the coalition can provide an alternative that offers both hope and a better salary. Three tribes predominate Dayr Az Zawr City: the *Baqqara*, *Uqaydat*, and *Shaitat*.

2) Dayr Az Zawr Governorate sits atop vast oil fields, which tribes will vie for commercial influence. Before the civil war, this region provided Syria with 70 percent of its oil revenue. After liberation, it will be especially difficult to gain buy-in from tribes that have been benefactors of Daesh's illicit oil smuggling operations and to place these fields under legitimate provincial or local authority.



Addendum 1: Mosul Ethnic Map





## Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Lina Khatib

Chatham House, UK

... To be honest these questions require much further study. I will start by saying that the premise of putting tribes in Syria and Iraq on equal footing is completely off the mark. Tribes in Iraq are political entities that play a role beyond their own regions, but tribes in Syria have never played a political role and it seems that this role is being parachuted on them in the fight against Daesh. In all cases, in Syria and Iraq a decentralized governance structure needs to be debated, but we shouldn't forget that decentralization is still based on the existence of a credible center.

There is some debate about the future of what some call "Salafist political institutions" when talking about the evolution of jihadist groups in Idlib and their establishment of political institutions. But the situation there is very complex. There is some popular support for some of these groups, but at the same a fair degree of civil society resistance and this is pushing these groups to moderate their behavior in order to appeal to the population. So instead of seeing the future as being dominated by "Salafist political institutions" as fait accompli, it would be more useful to think of ways of working with the grassroots to further push jihadist groups towards moderation, which may well lead to the break-up of such groups as their leaders will inevitably disagree on how far they should pursue a pragmatic political route (this is already happening within Ahrar al-Sham for example).

As for Daesh, the group is likely to remain in Raqqa and the north east for a while because it continues to be a useful tool for Russia and the Assad regime. What other groups might join it depends on how much the Free Syrian Army is supported. The less support given to the FSA by the West, the more likely that individual fighters will seek to join other rebel groups, but Daesh is the least favourable option for these fighters.

## Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Amjed Rasheed

Durham University, UK

"A decentralised form of governance seems the best form of governance to be adopted in which allow provinces to rule their cities on their own without an intervention from the centre. This question, however, puts the cart before the horse. As known, ISIL managed to create tribal feud among the clans. For example, al-Sabkha and al-'Aāfādila tribes drove out al-Sh'īyeyṭāṭ and Chīs from the city. The latter would possibly seek vengeance in the post-ISIL period. Those Shaykhes need to be provided with legal protection and guarantees in post-ISIL's period.

## Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Mubin Shaikh

The governing structure that is most likely to be effective and acceptable to the predominant tribes in the Euphrates River Valley is primarily the default tribal structure and system. While this ancient form of representation yields itself to some form of popular support for governance in general, pressures to manifest and maintain Islamic law as part of its cultural application is to be expected. In no way does this mean it is inherently hostile to Western interests (at the moment), however, attempts to delegitimize the governing authority among the tribes can very easily take on an appeal to religious purity or the perceived lack thereof.

The ideal method of governance in this regard will be the traditional chieftain and tribe as well as councils of chieftains and councils of tribes. Analogies to Afghan counterparts is natural but not necessarily a template to follow.

## Human Geography of Syrian Tribes

Gwyneth Sutherlin, PhD

Director of Human Geography and Analytics Research

Geographic Services, Inc.

Focusing on Syria, we leveraged existing Geographic Services, Inc. (GSI) Human Geography (HG) data on tribes, hierarchy relationships/group members, locations, and Prominent Individuals. GSI's complete HG data is available as a cloud hosted graph database from a web service.<sup>10</sup> All data is research-based and has been developed over 10+years of continuous monitoring and update. Research is performed by a team of native linguists, socio-cultural SMEs including a network of in-country experts, and GIS analysts. Each piece of data is multi-sourced and verified.

We unpacked the question of Syrian tribes in (4) parts:

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<sup>10</sup> Please contact Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin at [gsutherlin@geographicsservices.com](mailto:gsutherlin@geographicsservices.com) for more information on GSI's data holdings.

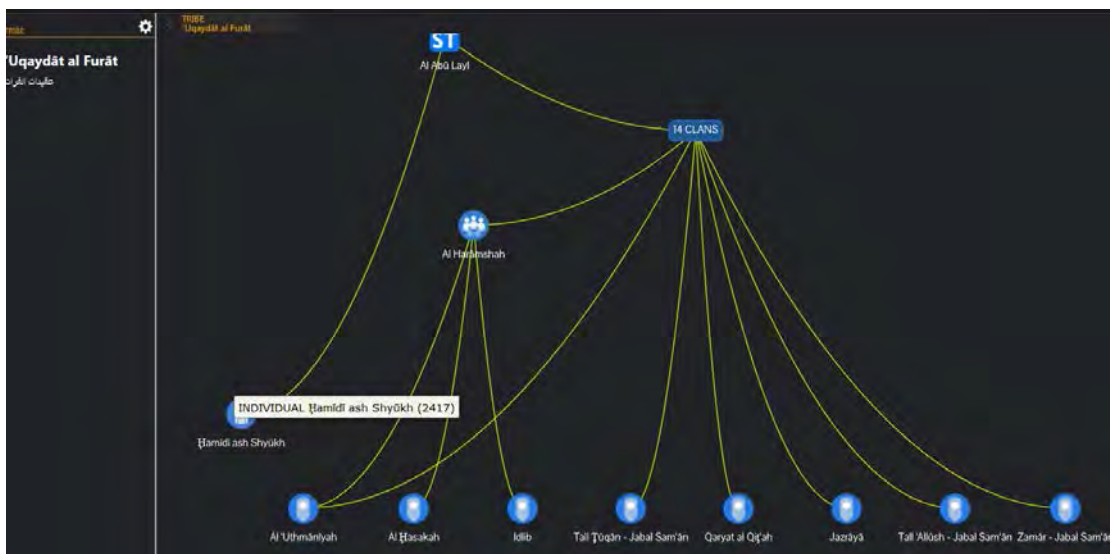
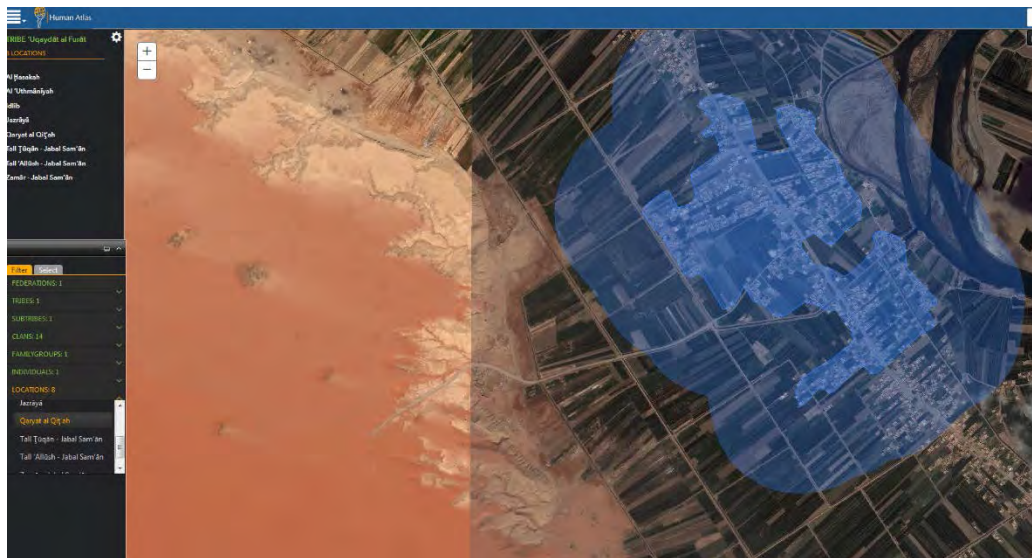
QUESTION	RESPONSE
1. What are the prominent tribes in Syria?	GSI HG DATA
2. Who are their leaders?	GSI HG DATA
3. Where are the members or groups that make up key tribes tribe located?	GSI HG DATA
4. Where are the members or groups that make up key tribes tribe located?	Opensource Research Refined by GSI HG DATA

Below is a sample of results. Giving a regional comparison across Syria, we provided data on four tribes (‘Uqaydāt al Furāt, Al ‘Ujayl, Al Kilbīyah and Al Jbūr) that are considered to have **Very High** levels of influence by GSI’s *Level of Influence* measure (Very High, High, Medium, Low). We provide screen shots of the web application’s interface showing locations (polygons), tribal hierarchies, member groups (in native and Romanized scripts), and associated Prominent Individuals. Prominent Individuals have a culturally specific prominence meaning the significance of their role is culturally determined (think movie star in US vs. Saudi Arabia). They carry a Level of Influence measure that can feed into quantitative or dynamic network modeling. For this question, we looked only at the top tier of Prominent Individuals, i.e. tribal sheikhs, who have influence in matters of governance. Additional open source research refined by our HG data provides insight on the question of governance.<sup>11</sup>

1. **‘Uqaydāt al Furāt tribe** is considered **Very High** influence level. Tribal leaders have met with ISIL indicating potential allegiance to the group. The locations near the northern and southern Syria/Iraq border as well as in the west near Idlib make the group of interest for continued monitoring. Research Source: Syriaahr.com March 3, 2016

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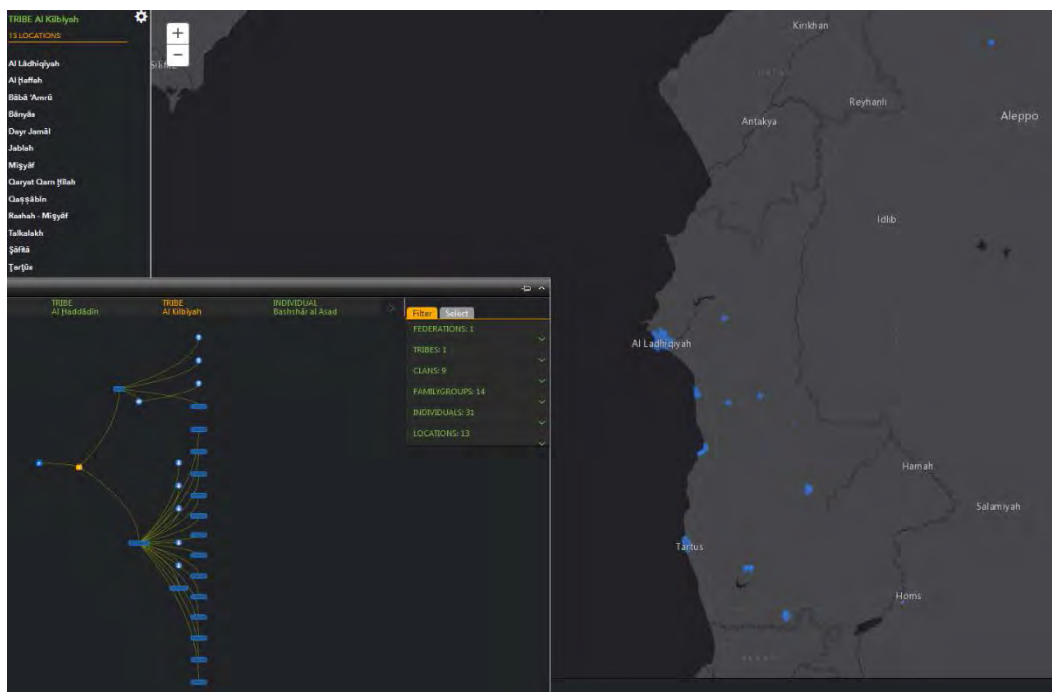
<sup>11</sup> Another approach would have been to integrate CENTCOM mission specific dataset and analyze in relation to verified HG data or select specific location, such as oil fields and explore HG data for control of resource and supply pathways.)



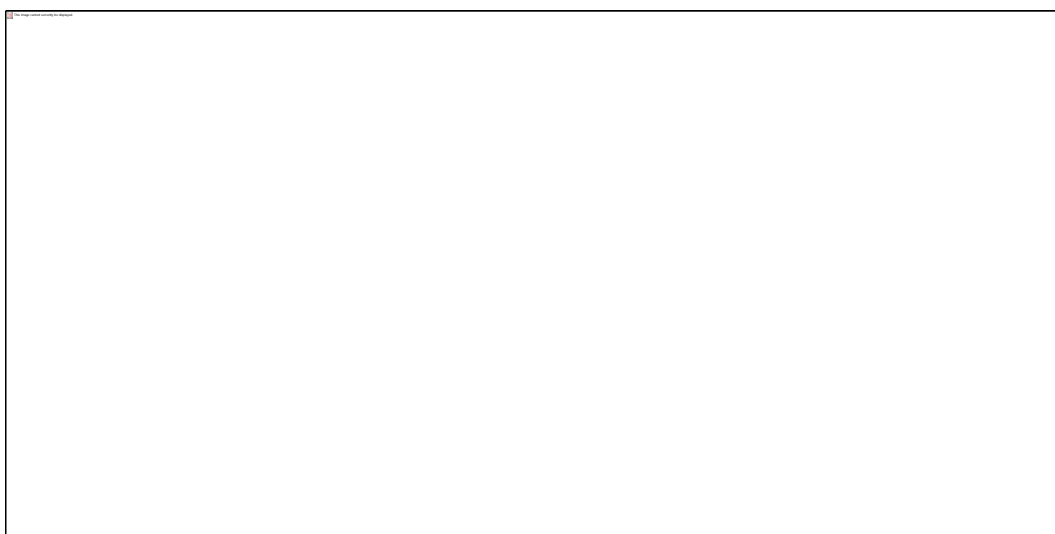
2. Al  
'Ujayl  
tribe,  
with  
many

members spread north and west of Aleppo, is described as 'the largest tribe' in A'zāz district, according to open source research. It is considered to have pro-Syrian Government allegiance. The primary leader is Fāris Junaydān, member of the Peoples Council representing Ḥalab Governorate, and Sheikh of Al 'Ujayl Tribe in Ḥalab. Research source: Smartnews-agency.com May 2016





4. **Al Jbūr tribe** is a large tribe that spans Iraq and Syria and has a **Very High** influence level. It is a pro-Government tribe whose leadership in Syria, Ash Shaykh Ḥammād al ‘Alī al As’ad al Fāḍil Āl al Milḥim al Jubūrī from the Ash Shaddādī village of Al Ḥasakah, has expressed a preference for a federalist style of government. Research Source: Hawarnews May 17, 2016



### Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Bilal Wahab

It is clear that a central government structure would be unfeasible and impractical. Some form of decentralized governance structure, that is inclusive, economically and politically, of minorities—religious and ethnic.

### Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Murhaf Jouejati

... it is my view that when Daesh is cleared from Raqqa and other Syrian territory, the people of the area would return to the self-governance system they had put in place following the Syrian uprising in 2011. This is also the case in those areas under the control of moderate rebels. More specifically, local councils would be formed and charged with governance matters. ... In general, the Syrian people adopt a moderate form of Islam - the antithesis of Daesh and Nusra dogma. Although many have become radicalized by the brutality of the Assad regime, still, the vast majority rejects Salafism, a movement more characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula than of Syria, a Levantine culture.

### Comments on Governing Structures Acceptable to Tribes in Syria

Dr. Joshua Landis

Director, Center for Middle East Studies

University of Oklahoma

The tribes would probably like to rule themselves - but this will not be effective because they have no way of defending themselves against the Assad regime or Iraqi regime. Many may have liked the notion of the large Sunni state established by ISIS that connected the tribes for the first time since the Ottomans were defeated. Most may not have approved of Baghdadi or the chaos and constant war of his regime, but they would have liked not to be ruled by distant and "foreign-Shiite" governments.

1. Iraqi militias have said that they will help the Syrian government return to power in the East of Syria.

2. Assad has said that he will return Syrian sovereignty to East Syria. Already some important tribal leaders who were with the revolution have re-sworn loyalty to Assad and the Syrian State, such as this leader of

the Baggara tribe. <http://www.syrianews.cc/top-opposition-figure-nawaf-al-bashir-repents-returns-syria/>

3. Many tribal leaders in Syria have retreated from overt opposition politics for the past year, because many do not like ISIS and many believe that Assad might come back. They are hedging their bets.

Nusra was a dominant military in much of this area before ISIS took over. There were many other smaller militias in the area as well. Undoubtedly they conformed to local village and tribal structures and factions. It is hard to make many generalizations other than to suggest that the extreme fragmentation that prevailed in this area before ISIS forced conformity on the tribes and villages is likely to return. This is an area of clans and tribes. It has always resisted central government. Syria always ruled with a combination of force, placating tribal leaders, and patronage. ISIS has done the same.

I suspect that the regime will eventually be taken back by the Syria government once ISIS is sufficiently weakened by the coalition and once Assad can retake the West of the country.”



## Author Biographies

### **Siree Allers**

Siree Allers is a Conflict and Stabilization Action Officer (contractor) for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) through IEA Corporation. Prior to joining CSO, Siree worked for the U.S. Institute of Peace, International Organization for Migration (Baghdad), and Stratfor.

The Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations helps embassies and diplomats to visualize, understand, and stabilize conflict. Drawing from multiple disciplines and using conflict prevention tools and field-driven, evidence-based analysis, CSO develops and supports strategies to help the Department and U.S. embassies protect civilians and stabilize communities in conflict.



### **Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois**

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.



**Dr. Murhaf Jouejati**

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati is a Professor at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies. He is also an adjunct Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University and the Former Director of the Middle East Studies Program at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Dr. Jouejati has previously served as a political advisor to the European Commission delegation in Syria. Additionally, he has worked as a consultant to Bureau of Arab States in New York with the UNDP and served as National Program Officer in Syria. He is also the Former Information Officer at the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati received a B.S. at Lemanian College; M.A. at Georgetown University; and Ph.D. at University of Utah. His countries of expertise are Lebanon and Syria. His issues of expertise are: Political Economy, Peace Process, Middle East Affairs, Economics, Development, Democratization, Culture and Society, Commerce and Investment, Arab-Israeli Relations, Regional Security.

#### **Lina Khatib**

Lina Khatib is head of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Programme at Chatham House. Formerly she was the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut and the co-founding head of the Program on Arab Reform and Democracy at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law. Her research focuses on the international relations of the Middle East, Islamist groups and security, political transitions, and foreign policy, with special attention to the Syrian conflict. She is a research associate at SOAS, was a senior research associate at the Arab Reform Initiative and lectured at Royal Holloway, University of London. She has published seven books and also written widely on public diplomacy, political communication, and political participation in the Middle East. She is a frequent commentator on politics and security in the Middle East and North Africa at events around the world and in the media.

#### **Dr. Joshua Landis**

Joshua Landis is Director of the Center for Middle East Studies and Professor at the College of International Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He writes "SyriaComment.com," a daily newsletter on Syrian politics that attracts over 100,000 readers a month. Dr. Landis is a frequent analyst on TV, radio, and in print. He has appeared recently on the PBS News Hour, the Charlie Rose Show, and Front Line. He is a regular on NPR and the BBC. He frequently publishes in leading Foreign Policy journals. He has served as the Syrian Studies Association, won the best teacher prize at his university, and received three Fulbright grants, an SSRC and other prestigious awards to support his research. He has lived for 4 years in Syria and 14 in the Middle East. He is married and has two boys. He was educated at Swarthmore (BA), Harvard (MA), and Princeton (PhD).

### **Amjed Rasheed**

Amjed Rasheed is an academic tutor and a PhD candidate in Middle Eastern Studies at the Institute of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Durham University. The title of his thesis (submitted) is SYRO-IRAQI RELATIONS: THE PUZZLE OF THE PERPETUAL RIVALRY. His research interest focuses on Muslim and Arab World politics, Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan in particular.

### **Kathleen Reedy, Ph.D.**

Kathleen Reedy is an anthropologist and mixed methods researcher at the RAND Corporation. Her background is in Middle Eastern culture and politics. In particular, her research has focused on nationalism, political identities, governance, rule of law, and the gaps between policy and practice in war zones. Prior to joining RAND, she served as a CENTCOM SME for the USAF and as a social scientist for the Army's Human Terrain System, embedding with BCTs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her graduate fieldwork included 13 months of ethnographic research in Syria, and she has also worked in and on Egypt, the Gulf, China, and Japan.

Since joining RAND in 2014, Dr. Reedy has led or participated in studies on strategic posture and presence; Islamic extremism; right-wing nationalism; the human domain in remote sensing operations; policy options for Syria, Yemen, and Iran; military education and training; and military gender integration.

Dr. Reedy received her Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh, and her undergraduate degree from Penn State.



### **Mubin Shaikh**

Born and raised in Canada, **Mubin Shaikh** grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 19, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban prior to their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Mubin became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others and establishing his network in the extremist milieu. He was affected by the 9/11 attacks which forced to him reconsider his views. He then spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Rejecting terrorism from Islam, he would go through a period of full deradicalization.

Returning to Canada in 2004, he became an undercover operator with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet and on the ground. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after Mubin testified over 4 years and 5 legal hearings in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

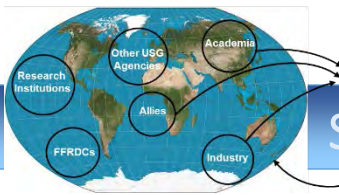
He now has a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is a PhD candidate in Psychological Sciences studying radicalization, deradicalization and violent extremism at the University of Liverpool, Tactical Decision Making Research Group. Mr. Shaikh is considered a SME (Subject Matter Expert) in radicalization, violent extremism and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to: United Nations Center for Counter Terrorism, Interpol, Europol, Hedayah Center, U.S. Department of State - Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, National Counterterrorism Center, U.S. DOD Strategic Multilayer Assessment Team, U.S. Central Command - Special Operations Command (as an expert on ISIS), International Special Training Center, NATO (Defence Against Terrorism) and many others. He has appeared on multiple U.S., British and Canadian media outlets as a commentator and is extensively involved with the ISIS Social Media and Foreign Fighter file. He is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.

### **Gwyneth Sutherlin**

Dr. Sutherlin is the Director of Human Geography and Analytics Research at Geographic Services, Inc. She provides analytic expertise in socio-cultural dynamics, geospatial technology, cognitive linguistics, and emerging conflict. She is uniquely qualified to provide analysis on complex risk environments drawing from 10+ years of project and field experience. Her publications including 'digital battlefield' and 'lines in the cybersand' have emerged on the cutting edge for multilingual data modelling for security contexts. Always with an eye toward innovation, she applies Human Geography research to improving collection/analysis granularity, security (targeting), cyber security (software development), and geospatial communications intelligence (GEOINT and COMINT). Before completing a Ph.D. with fieldwork in East Africa, her expertise facilitating intercultural dialogue garnered UN recognition, in particular, in the MENA and Sub-Saharan regions of Africa.

### **Dr. Bilal Wahab**

Bilal Wahab is a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on governance in the Iraqi Kurdish region and in Iraq as a whole. He has taught at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani, where he established the Center for Development and Natural Resources, a research program on oil and development. He earned his Ph.D. from George Mason University; his M.A. from American University, where he was among the first Iraqis awarded a Fulbright scholarship; and his B.A. from Salahaddin



**Question** *How will the population in northwest Syria react to future Salafist political institutions?*

**Contributors:** *Dr. Kathleen Reedy (RAND); Dr. Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University); Dr. Amjed Rasheed (Durham University, UK); Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool; independent consultant); Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma); Charles Lister (Middle East Institute).*

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## Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Similar to points made by other contributors to this SMA Reach-back report, Dr. Kathleen Reedy of Rand includes a caveat in her response to the CENTCOM question. Given international pressure to avoid Salafi expansion in Syria, it is doubtful she argues, that Salafist policies or leaders would be allowed to become dominant over sizeable areas of northwest Syria. Nonetheless, contributors' input on the likely response to future Salafist political institutions in northwest Syria tends to align with one of two viewpoints: 1) Syrians will reject Salafi efforts to establish political institutions (i.e., to govern); or 2) Salafi governance will be accepted under certain circumstances.

In addition, the experts offer a range of key factors to support either the “reject” or “accept with conditions” conclusions. These factors suggest four areas of inquiry: 1) the cultural salience of Salafism in Syria; 2) the degree to which people differentiate among political groups; 3) popular views of, and experience with political groups; and 4) the relative importance of ideology versus provision of public services.<sup>12</sup>

### Questions #1 and #2: The Cultural Acceptability of Salafism & Ideological Differentiation

Professor Murhaf Jouejati of the National Defense University contends that Syrian culture is a more apt foundation for moderate than for extremist Islamic practices. Salafism, which represents the culture of the Arabian Peninsula, is foreign to Levantine culture and as a result Syrians are most likely to reject Salafist institutions or reforms. Jouejati recalls that in the past Syrians living in areas controlled by radical extremists engaged in civil disobedience and demonstrations and sees little reason that these types of activities would not occur in areas taken or retaken by ISIL, Al Qaeda or Jabat Fatah al Sham (JFS).<sup>13</sup> Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, adds that even within the opposition there is a preference for the Syrian national movement “initiated by peaceful protesters advocating for moderate ideals, rather than the transnational jihadis like Al-Qaeda.”<sup>14</sup> He warns though that “that dynamic is not necessarily immovable.”

Mubin Shaik of the University of Liverpool provides a variation on this argument. He maintains that in fact Syrians differentiate between Salafists and “Saudi style Wahhabists” so would not necessarily reject all Salafist governors or political institutions.<sup>15</sup> It is the particular Wahhabism of the Islamic State that is countercultural in this area. Finally, Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma) warns that the issue of the cultural salience of Salafism in Syria may be becoming moot. While he concedes that many Syrians are “fed up with fundamentalism” because of the harsh treatment they received at the hands of JFS and then ISIL, he argues that over the past six years of conflict the Syrian population has been radicalized as, consciously or not, Salafi ideas and practices have been accepted into their psyches and aspects of their daily lives where they were not necessarily present before.

### Question #3: Popular Experience with Salafi Groups

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<sup>12</sup> Note that while some of the contributors explicitly considered political institutions (i.e., Salafi governors) others tended to focus on the relevance and/or legitimacy of Salafi groups or members of Salafi groups in Syria.

<sup>13</sup> In this paper we will refer to Jabat al Nusrah as Jabat Fatah al Sham for the purpose of simplicity although we recognize that some references to the group are applicable to the period before its re-branding.

<sup>14</sup> Lister does cite variations in past popular acceptance of Salafi governance in Idlib governorate. Al Nusrah/JFS have faced less resistance in Jisr al-Shughour, Darkush, Salqin, Sarmadeh, Al-Dana and Darat Izzeh then in areas such as Idlib city, Al-Atareb, Saraqeb, Khan Sheikhoun, Marat al-Numan and Kafranabel) in which Salafi attempts to impose control have faced stiffer resistance.

<sup>15</sup> Shaik provides a useful definition of Salafism as “a conservative form of Islamic interpretation, manifested in the deliberate display of religious identity and practice (in all areas of human endeavor), and an appeal to strict, corporal punishments in law.”

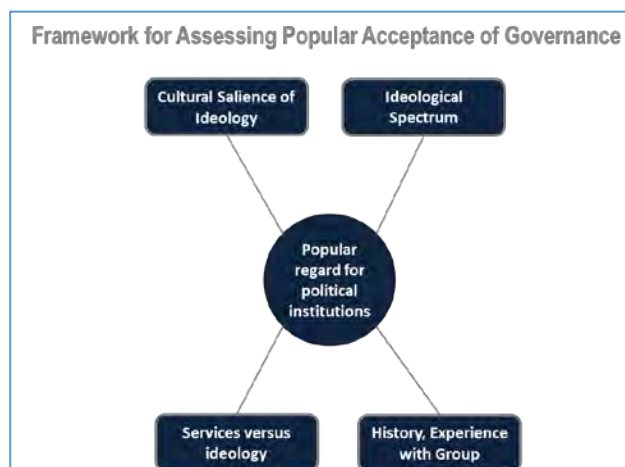
Charles Lister (MEI) argues that the fall of Aleppo, the moderate opposition's key safe haven in Syria, had the effect of diminishing popular confidence in moderate civil society. However, because in his view JFS failed to demonstrate its military value to the Syrian revolution it is now seen as "impotent" by local populations and enjoys "only minimal respect" in civil affairs. Mubin Shaik (University of Liverpool) on the other hand, believes that Salafist groups like Al Qaeda and Jabat Fatah al Sham have succeeded in building the foundation for public support of their leadership by encouraging locals to see them as defenders of the interests of the Syria people as opposed to other groups who they peg as the flunkies of the regime or of the West. As a result, Shaik expects that Salafist groups will be accepted by local populations as long as they continue their gradualist approach to instituting socially conservative (Salafist) practices.

#### Question #4: The Relative Importance of Goods versus Ideology

Finally, in line with the conclusions of other SMA Reach-back write-ups (e.g., see R3 QL5, V7), Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma) argues that local support for one governing structure over another will not be a function of ideology or religious preference as others intimate, but a function of which government can provide goods and services to its constituents. Landis notes that people in northwest Syria are, and will remain, in dire need of employment, security and education and the government that best provides these goods will receive their allegiance. In a specific instance of this argument Lister (MEI) forecasts that continued civil conflict in Syria will eventually bring the people of the Idlib and Hama governates into the regime's sights and in urgent need of defense. Lister warns that if the Coalition were to discontinue support for moderate forces, local populations may again see no option but to align with Salafi groups for their defense.

#### The Result

As is clear from the review of their arguments, there is no clear consensus on prospects for Syrian acquiescence to Salafi authority and/or attempts to govern in the northwest of the country. It is also unclear which factors would be the most important determinants of popular support or rejection of Salafi control. Producing a more definitive answer to the CENTCOM question requires further study data collection on the ground. In short, in cases – expectations and critical variables – the jury is still out.



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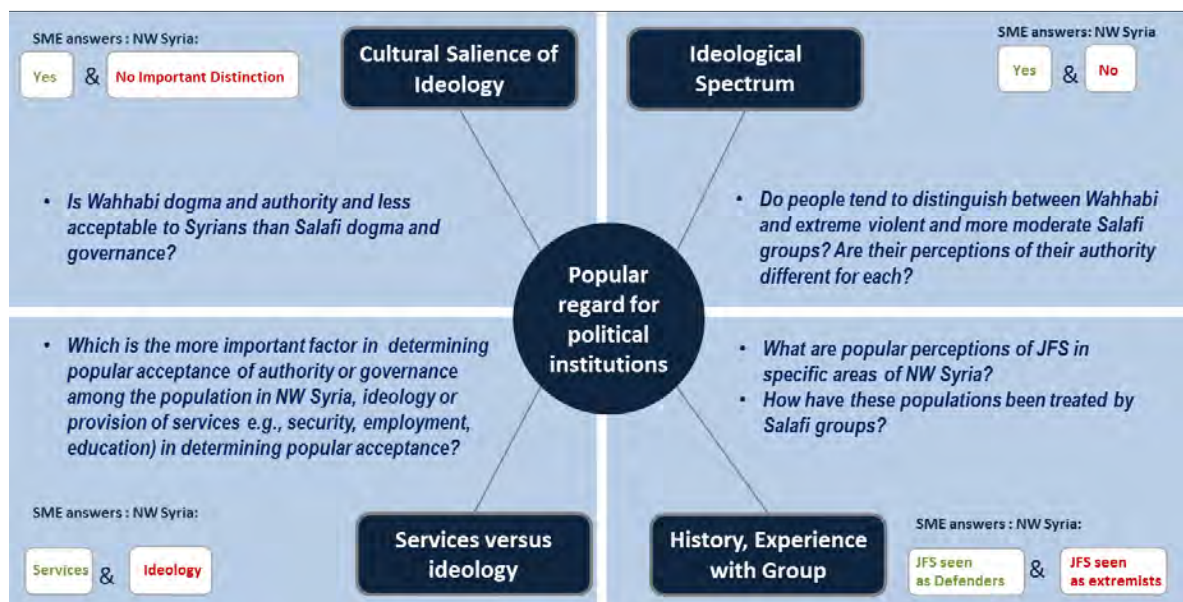
and both



What the experts' input does suggest however, is arguably more useful than a single, consensus answer to (any) question of popular desire or preference in such a volatile environment. Taken together the experts' contributions to this report imply a series of important questions that provide a template for assessing or engaging with local preferences for governing structures (e.g., Salafi, Assad regime, or moderate Islamist, etc.) in both Syria and Iraq. Specifically, analysts and planners should tailor and seek to answer the following questions relative to their areas of interest:

1. *Is the prospective government or governing system salient to, and consistent with local culture?*
2. *Do opponents/supporters of the prospective government or system differentiate among proposed leaders, or are all elements or factions of the proposed governing authority seen as unacceptable/acceptable?*
3. *What history or past experiences do local constituents have with the prospective government?*
4. *What is the relative importance of religious and/or ideological beliefs and government provision of goods and services (e.g., security, employment, etc.) in determining popular acceptance of a governing authority?*

### ACCEPT or REJECT? No clear consensus on Salafi Authority in NW Syria





The Accept-Reject figure above shows these generic questions tailored for the question of popular support for Salafi political institutions in NW Syria, and provides a useful roadmap for further study and on-the-ground data collection.

## **SME Input**

### **Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions**

Murhaf Jouejati

National Defense University

... there were several disturbances that took place in territories controlled by radical Islamists. These disturbances took a variety of forms, including civil resistance, demonstrations, and the formation of small groups who documented Da'esh atrocities through film, pictures, etc., and smuggled them to the outside world. In general, the Syrian people adopt a moderate form of Islam - the antithesis of Da'esh and Nusra dogma. Although many have become radicalized by the brutality of the Assad regime, still, the vast majority rejects Salafism, a movement more characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula than of Syria, a Levantine culture.

### **Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions**

Joshua Landis

University of Oklahoma

The communities of Northwest Syria have been through the meat grinder. They are destabilized and poor. If a government provides jobs, stability and education, many will be loyal to it. Salafi ideas have been inculcated in many over the last 6 years, no doubt. It will take a great deal of education to provide an alternative world view and set of moral precepts. All the same, many are fed up with fundamentalism because of the rigors and deprivations of living under first Nusra and then ISIS.

## Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions

Charles Lister

Middle East Institute

Firstly, it should be stated that the future ideological direction of northwest Syria has not necessarily been pre-determined. Since the fall of Aleppo and the displacement of as many as 100,000 people from that city towards Idlib governorate, the levels of confidence felt within moderate civil society and moderate armed opposition groups inside Idlib has risen markedly. Aleppo city had for approximately two years been a powerful safe-haven for northern Syria's moderate opposition groups. Exemplifying this in early-2016, Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (ANF) dispatched a sizeable convoy of hundreds of fighters and armored vehicles into Aleppo city as a show of force, but popular protest by local community groups precipitated a withdrawal of a vast majority of ANF's newly arrived manpower. Many other similar examples exist from the past, demonstrating Aleppo city's aversion to extremism, which had begun to develop in force in early-2014.

The recent transfer of this large group of moderate population into Idlib should therefore be assessed to present a potential immediate-term challenge to ANF successor Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS) and its project to socialize local populations into welcoming and defending its presence and control in the months and years to come.

This new dynamic notwithstanding, it should be acknowledged from the outset that the population of northwest Syria is already and has long been diverse in its political, religious and otherwise ideological perspectives. In certain areas of the governorate (such as in Jisr al-Shughour, Darkush, Salqin, Sarmadeh, Al-Dana and Darat Izzeh areas) ANF and JFS have faced minimal resistance from local populations, when attempting to impose more conservative and strictly-enforced norms. In other areas of the governorate (such as in Idlib city, Al-Atareb, Saraqeb, Khan Sheikhoun, Marat al-Numan and Kafranabel), ANF and JFS have faced substantial push-back from local communities when their rights and social expectations have been infringed. This latter dynamic has emerged particularly powerfully amid ceasefires and cessations of hostilities, which have revealed ANF and JFS's intrinsic reliance upon intense levels of conflict to sustain their social-level relevance and legitimacy. Without being able to demonstrate their military value as a component of the broader Syrian revolution, ANF and JFS have more often than not emerged as impotent and as enjoying only minimal respect on a civil level. Conversely, the same conditions have emboldened both civil society and the most moderate armed opposition movements.

Should conflict continue in Syria and should the moderate, or mainstream [civil and military] opposition continue to suffer from a detached West unwilling or politically incapable of providing a determined level

of support and protection, these societal-level obstacles to a further strengthening of JFS's control will erode. As civilians and moderate armed opposition groups feel increasingly abandoned by the international community and victimized by a severely oppressive regime backed by Iran, Russia and dozens of sectarian militias, their options for protection decrease and their willingness to entertain, if not protect, extremists will increase. This is perhaps *the* key future challenge that the United States should be looking to prevent. After all, ANF and JFS have attempted to operate and to present themselves to Syrians as much more than merely a militant movement. That strategy has been more successful than unsuccessful, which means a strategy to counter JFS must be holistic in nature, rather than focused solely on traditional, kinetic counter-terrorism measures.

The straightforward answer to this CENTCOM-provided question therefore depends entirely on the broader state of the conflict in Syria, and upon perceptions of its most likely future trajectory at the time. At its core, Syria's opposition movement remains more favorable to the "green" than the "black" – meaning to the indigenous revolution initiated by peaceful protesters advocating for moderate ideals, rather than the transnational jihadis like Al-Qaeda. That dynamic is not necessarily immovable, however. As such, we are faced with two scenarios:

1. Should the international community succeed in tapering off the levels of violence and civilian killing across Syria, while forcing forward a political process aimed genuinely at securing a transition in Damascus, then one should expect populations in northwestern Syria to feel sufficiently emboldened to resist overt attempts by Al-Qaeda/JFS to impose its will or rule on their communities. As has been the case in the past, this would likely begin in the form of popular protest, which if challenged by JFS, would bring in the involvement of locally-rooted Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other mainstream opposition groups – in protest and in protection of the protest. If this dynamic is again challenged by JFS, localized conflict would become a likely scenario, which would then present more conservative but nonetheless nationally-focused Islamic opposition groups with the dilemma: to support their fellow Syrian revolutionaries or to adopt a 'neutral' stance and seek a peaceful solution to the local hostilities. In early-2016 during Syria's first cessation of hostilities, longtime ANF military enabler Ahrar al-Sham dispatched much of its Shura Council leadership to pro-FSA protests in a not so subtle message to ANF to cease its attacks on protesters in Marat al-Numan. Similar conditions could be replicated by the international diplomatic efforts that aimed to sustain ceasefires beyond a period of several weeks.
2. Should diplomatic attempts to freeze Syria's conflict and to push forward a political settlement ultimately fail and were hostilities to resume, Idlib governorate and northern portions of Hama governorate will eventually acquire the determined attention of the Assad regime and its military backers. There are no 'clean' outcomes from such a scenario. Large parts of Idlib governorate had existed largely or partially out of central government control for many years prior to Syria's uprising that began in 2011. Resistance to a pro-regime assault on the region would be fierce and under such conditions, JFS and other likeminded Al-Qaeda-linked groups would be well-placed to present themselves as existentially necessary allies in defense. If this necessitated adopting or accepting religiously conservative laws and social norms, local communities who have otherwise

been resistant to such change would in all likelihood become more amenable, given the dire situation faced.

Most importantly in reference to the CENTCOM-set question: the current trajectory of Syria's conflict makes scenario 2 above the one already on some people's minds. The arrival of Aleppo's displaced is a fresh development, so the moderating consequences witnessed in recent weeks could erode over time. If that proves to be the case, JFS prospects for imposing more conservative norms upon Idlibi societies will improve markedly.

One additional dynamic worth considering in this question is the fate and decisions of Ahrar al-Sham. Despite this group's close military relationship with JFS, recently failed unity negotiations between the groups (and others) and diametrically opposed responses to Turkey's intervention in northern Aleppo have exposed major political differences between the ordinarily close military allies. With a newly elected leadership that retains close ties to the Turkish government, Ahrar al-Sham has proven resistant to JFS's attempts to assume a preeminent influence over the armed opposition movement – whether politically, militarily, or structurally. Should this continue, then JFS will struggle to dramatically expand its unilateral governance efforts. Should Ahrar al-Sham splinter or bend to JFS's will – through military necessity or political weakness – then JFS will have gained a substantial advantage that it has lacked throughout the Syrian crisis thus far.

All of this notwithstanding, JFS will under any conditions face some level of communal resistance to the imposition of increasingly conservative regulations in specific areas of northwestern Syria. For example, areas like Kafranabel and Marat al-Numan are likely to remain extremely challenging environments for JFS and other Al-Qaeda-linked movements. It is hard to imagine any scenario in which they bend to JFS extremist rule without a fight.

### **Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions**

Mubin Shaikh

University of Liverpool, UK

“Salafist” political institutions can be understood to mean: a conservative form of Islamic interpretation, manifested in the deliberate display of religious identity and practice (in all areas of human endeavour), and an appeal to strict, corporal punishments in law.

If we work per this definition of the term, this will mean that populations in northwest Syria may bristle at the notion of living under Saudi style Wahhabists. However, Salafist-rooted organizations like Al Qaeda or its affiliate originally from Iraq under the name Jabhat Al Nusra (now rebranded Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) have long since been working on preparing local populations to view these groups as acting inherently in the interest of the Syrian people. They have exploited the narrative that the West will not assist the Syrian people, make half-hearted attempts to remove Al Assad of Syria, and target those groups which are fighting the regime as well as fighting DAESH.

This narrative by Salafist political groups ensures that some form of political institution will indeed be responded to positively, especially if these groups continue to maintain their gradual approach to corporal punishments and Islamic law, as they have been doing so for the past several years in Syria. Secondly, through their fighting on the ground and the various tactical alliances cemented in the meantime, these groups enjoy the respect of other like-minded Islamists who are not necessarily Salafist but where alliances can be made. This actually allows for the former group to spread themselves within a larger network of the latter, in which it is more difficult to identify which individuals are indeed a threat and which are not.

#### Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions

Dr. Amjed Rasheed

Durham University, UK

Similarly to Afghanistan, the Syrian reaction to the Salafi movement will not be as negative as expected. The Salafi groups fought al-Asad's regime. They enjoy popular support. Therefore, the local salafists will be perceived as heroes immediately post- political transition. Some of those local Salafists may turn to "purists" (Roy and Boubekeur, 2012), or those who focus on non-violent *da'wah*. Some might turn to "activists" (Meijer, 2009), those who would actively engage in the political life and seek to establish Shari'a order. Some most likely will turn to criminals. The foreign Salafi fighters will seek another terrain, presumably Libya or Afghanistan.

## Comments on North Syria Population reaction to Salafist Institutions

Kathleen Reedy

Rand

Realistically, there aren't likely to be any future Salafist institutions in Syria, at least not on anything but a local scale and even then, not long-lasting. There is too much local and international pressure to let Salafist policy become dominant.

If for some reason, though, the Asad or post-Asad transitional government fails and Salafists did manage to take some sort of centralized control or even more widespread localized control, I expect the situation would be highly dynamic. Unlike eastern Syrian, northwest Syria's widely diverse populations and greater proportion of minorities would be less inclined to tolerate Salafist rule and more likely to resist. The Alawi-centric portions of the coast would receive a great deal of support from both Hezbollah and Iran, and other small, minority groups would like flock to the relative safety that secular group has largely espoused. The Kurdish populations that have already proved themselves capable fighters further north would be inclined to push back against Salafist institutions. The less clear answer is what the people making up the current resistance groups that espouse Salafist or at least Islamist doctrine would do. The two are distinct and that difference is worth noting. Many of the rebel groups outside of Nusra and ISIL have been much more moderate in their claims than their Salafist counterparts. While Salafism is an extreme version of Islamism, I do not think there would be wide popular support even among these groups for that sort of extremism. There may be some that would buy into it, hoping to modify it over the long run, but there would probably be as many who actively opposed Salafist interpretations, especially as a mechanism for ruling over a unified Syrian population, since many of these groups still were vocal advocates of a Syrian nationalist identity and the continued presence and protection of minorities.

The other group that is often under-considered is the general population who never really committed to the fight in an active way on any side. Though less vocal, they still account for the majority of the population. After six years of violence, they may be willing to tolerate any institution that establishes some peace, but Syrians by and large have historically been too cosmopolitan to actively support extremist ideologies, so people putting such institutions in place would probably not be tolerated in the long term. Active and passive resistance would likely become pretty widespread from all quarters.

## Author Biographies



### **Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois**

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

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### **Dr. Murhaf Jouejati**

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati is a Professor at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies. He is also an adjunct Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University and the Former Director of the Middle East Studies Program at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Dr. Jouejati has previously served as a political advisor to the European Commission delegation in

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Dr. Murhaf Jouejati received a B.S. at Lemanian College; M.A. at Georgetown University; and Ph.D. at University of Utah. His countries of expertise are Lebanon and Syria. His issues of expertise are: Political Economy, Peace Process, Middle East Affairs, Economics, Development, Democratization, Culture and Society, Commerce and Investment, Arab-Israeli Relations, Regional Security.

#### **Dr. Joshua Landis**

Joshua Landis is Director of the Center for Middle East Studies and Professor at the College of International Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He writes “SyriaComment.com,” a daily newsletter on Syrian politics that attracts over 100,000 readers a month. Dr. Landis is a frequent analyst on TV, radio, and in print. He has appeared recently on the PBS News Hour, the Charlie Rose Show, and Front Line. He is a regular on NPR and the BBC. He frequently publishes in leading Foreign Policy journals. He has served as the Syrian Studies Association, won the best teacher prize at his university, and received three Fulbright grants, an SSRC and other prestigious awards to support his research. He has lived for 4 years in Syria and 14 in the Middle East. He is married and has two boys. He was educated at Swarthmore (BA), Harvard (MA), and Princeton (PhD).



#### **Charles Lister**

Charles Lister is a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, where his work focuses primarily on the conflict in Syria and on issues of terrorism and insurgency across the Levant. Since September 2016, Lister has managed the Middle East Institute’s Countering Terrorism project. Prior to this, Lister also managed nearly three years of intensive face-to-face engagement with the leaderships of over 100 Syrian armed opposition groups, on behalf of the multinationally-backed Syria Track II Dialogue Initiative.

Lister is a frequent source of briefings on the Syrian insurgency to political, military and intelligence leaderships in the United States and across Europe and the Middle East. He appears regularly on television media, including CNN, the BBC and Al-Jazeera, and his articles have been widely published in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the BBC, CNN, Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy, among others.



Lister has previously held positions as a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Doha Center in Qatar and as head of MENA at IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center in London, UK. Lister's critically-acclaimed book, "The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency," was published in February 2016 by Oxford University Press. He has also published "The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction" (Brookings Press, 2015) and he is now working on a third book on Syria, commissioned by Oxford University Press. Lister received 1st Class MA Honours in International Relations from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

#### **Dr. Amjed Rasheed**

Amjed Rasheed is a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies at the Institute of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Durham University. His research focuses on Muslim and Arab World politics, Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan in particular. The title of his recent work is *Syro-Iraqi Relations: The Puzzle of the Perpetual Rivalry*.

#### **Dr. Kathleen Reedy**

Kathleen Reedy is an anthropologist and mixed methods researcher at the RAND Corporation. Her background is in Middle Eastern culture and politics. In particular, her research has focused on nationalism, political identities, governance, rule of law, and the gaps between policy and practice in war zones. Prior to joining RAND, she served as a CENTCOM SME for the USAF and as a social scientist for the Army's Human Terrain System, embedding with BCTs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her graduate fieldwork included 13 months of ethnographic research in Syria, and she has also worked in and on Egypt, the Gulf, China, and Japan.

Since joining RAND in 2014, Dr. Reedy has led or participated in studies on strategic posture and presence; Islamic extremism; right-wing nationalism; the human domain in remote sensing operations; policy options for Syria, Yemen, and Iran; military education and training; and military gender integration. Dr. Reedy received her Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh, and her undergraduate degree from Penn State.



### **Mubin Shaikh**

Born and raised in Canada, Mubin Shaikh grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 19, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban prior to their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Mubin became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others and establishing his network in the extremist milieu. He was affected by the 9/11 attacks which forced to him reconsider his views. He then spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Rejecting terrorism from Islam, he would go through a period of full deradicalization.

Returning to Canada in 2004, he became an undercover operator with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet and on the ground. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after Mubin testified over 4 years and 5 legal hearings in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

He now has a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is a PhD candidate in Psychological Sciences studying radicalization, deradicalization and violent extremism at the University of Liverpool, Tactical Decision Making Research Group. Mr. Shaikh is considered a SME (Subject Matter Expert) in radicalization, violent extremism and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to: United Nations Center for Counter Terrorism, Interpol, Europol, Hedayah Center, U.S. Department of State - Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, National Counterterrorism Center, U.S. DOD Strategic Multilayer Assessment Team, U.S. Central Command - Special Operations Command (as an expert on ISIS), International Special Training Center, NATO (Defence Against Terrorism) and many others. He has appeared on multiple U.S., British and Canadian media outlets as a commentator and is extensively involved with the ISIS Social Media and Foreign Fighter file. He is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.