SINAN ADNAN WITH AARON REESE

BEYOND THE ISLAMIC STATE: IRAQ'S SUNNI INSURGENCY

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Cover: Masked Sunni gunmen chant slogans during a protest against Iraq's Shiite–led government, demanding that the Iraqi army not try to enter the city, in Falluja, 50 km (31 miles) west of Baghdad January 7, 2014. REUTERS/Stringer. Reproduced with permission.

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MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 24

BEYOND THE ISLAMIC STATE: IRAQ'S SUNNI INSURGENCY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) is not the only violent group opposed to the government of Iraq. Groups ranging from Salafist-jihadist to Sunni nationalist have also been mobilized against Baghdad since at least 2013. They remain a threat to the government even if ISIS is removed, especially if the core concerns of Iraqi Sunnis remain unaddressed by the Iraqi government. The primary grievances of most Iraqi Sunnis include the integration of Shi'a militias into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), attacks by the ISF in Sunni civilian areas, and political exclusion in Baghdad.

This anti-government mobilization developed months before the fall of Mosul to ISIS in June 2014. Most of the current anti-government groups had been active during the Sunni insurgency following the fall of Saddam Hussein. The militancy of these groups and their prominence declined as Sunni political participation increased in 2009 and 2010. After the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, Maliki's political marginalization of Sunni leaders and sectarian command of the Iraqi Security Forces spurred an anti-government protest movement, primarily in Sunni areas such as Anbar and Salah ad-Din. The protest movements spawned an organized, overt militant opposition to the Iraqi government after the Iraqi Security Forces killed civilians while attempting to clear a protest camp in Hawija in April 2013. The armed Sunni rebellion fostered the conditions in Fallujah and Mosul that ISIS exploited to capture the cities in January and June 2014, respectively.

Some of these groups, particularly the General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR), have cooperated with ISIS in its campaign to expel the ISF from parts of Iraq. Nevertheless, most of them do not share ISIS's long-term objectives for Iraq. Each group has come into direct confrontation with ISIS in 2014. Some of these groups may turn and fight ISIS, but the Iraqi government will not find them an acceptable partner because they oppose the Shi'a government in Baghdad. In fact, where ISIS is degraded by military action, these groups may seek to fill the vacuum and continue to challenge the ISF for control of Iraq's Sunni heartland.

These groups vary in capability. Not every group is capable of mounting effective attacks, and not every group maintains widespread influence. Among the most capable are the General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries, which is Ba'athist aligned, and Ansar al-Islam. Both groups represent long-term threats to the Iraqi state. Even the smaller groups, though, disrupt ISF operations and make them vulnerable to better-equipped groups like the GMCIR, Ansar al-Islam, and ISIS. Should the Iraqi Security Forces launch ground assaults into Sunni areas that are currently under ISIS's control, they will likely meet with armed resistance by these groups, which will likely prioritize the fight against the Iraqi state over the fight against ISIS.

The success of a ground war against ISIS in Iraq depends upon the Sunni population. This population, mostly behind the ISIS control line, is more proximate to the influence of ISIS and Sunni insurgent groups than to the Iraqi state or the U.S.-led counter-ISIS coalition. A strategy to destroy ISIS requires that these competing influences be outmatched to such a degree that the Sunni population once more decides to side with the Iraqi government to fight ISIS on behalf of the state. This will likely be the most difficult requirement for the counter-ISIS campaign.

Lack of national-level Sunni leadership feeds support for local insurgent groups. Many Sunni political leaders on the national stage lost credibility with the population during the protest movement, during which a number sought political accommodations with the Maliki government. Many of these national figures no longer effectively represent the Sunni population, as the 2014 parliamentary elections demonstrated. Inclusion of these national figures will not likely bring the wider Sunni population behind the government in Baghdad. Rather, a political accommodation in Baghdad that appeals to Iraq's Sunni population is essential in order to mend this critical vulnerability of the Iraqi state permanently. Without this, the Sunni population will more likely oppose than welcome an Iraqi-led military campaign to retake Iraq's cities from ISIS. Presently, the Sunni population living under ISIS control is disconnected from Sunni national politics, and this separation must also be overcome in order for Iraq to survive. A military campaign to destroy ISIS that does not treat this condition will accelerate Iraq's descent into a sectarian civil war.

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MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 24
BEYOND THE ISLAMIC STATE: IRAQ'S SUNNI INSURGENCY

By Sinan Adnan with Aaron Reese

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is not the only armed group fighting the government of Iraq today. A number of other armed anti-government groups are active amidst the complicated and unsettled political and security situation in Iraq. These armed groups represent an independent threat to the government of Iraq. They are also an enduring demonstration that the Sunni population in Iraq may not return to political life if ISIS is removed from the equation. The formation of Iraq's new government under PM Haidar al-Abadi will not necessarily mitigate this concern, especially while Shi'a Militias deploy forward with the Iraqi Security Forces, and while Sunni majority cities under the control of ISIS come under direct and indirect fire by the state.

As the U.S., Iraq, and other allied governments pursue military action against ISIS, it is important to note that the problem of anti-government militancy in Iraq will not be solved by destroying or degrading ISIS. Military action to counteract the threat posed by ISIS and protect civilian populations is important to prevent the complete collapse of the Iraqi state; but military action alone is insufficient to address the broader challenge facing Iraq. A variety of other anti-government groups may step in to fill the vacuum and give rise to a second Sunni insurgency in Iraq. These groups are likely to continue to resist the return of Iraqi Security Forces in areas currently under ISIS control, and they will retain a modicum of popular support in the absence of political solutions that rise to address the grievances of these local populations. The absence of national Sunni political leadership in Baghdad with popular support allows insurgent, tribal, and religious leaders to influence Iraq's Sunni communities more directly.

These anti-government groups include Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN), the General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries, the Fallujah Military Council, the Council of the Revolutionaries Tribes of Anbar, the 1920 Brigades, the Islamic Army of Iraq, Jaysh al-Mujahidin, and Ansar al-Islam. Some of these groups are moderately capable, and they are playing an active role in shaping the military situation on the ground against the Iraqi government. All of these groups became less active after the U.S. withdrawal of forces in 2011, but actions taken by the Maliki government spurred a resurgence of these groups in 2013.1 In the beginning of 2014, widespread Sunni unrest became outright rebellion, and the Iraqi government lost control over large portions of Anbar province. In June of 2014, ISIS seized Mosul and began an urban offensive that led to even more Iraqi territory falling out of the hands of the ISF. Some of this territory is now controlled by other armed anti-government groups. The Iraqi government is therefore confronted by a broad challenge among its Iraqi Sunni population, where attacks against ISIS in Sunni areas may give rise to other groups.

These groups hold different ideologies. Some are more extreme than others, and they express a range of political views. Although all of these groups operate against the Iraqi Government, they generally do not target Iraqi civilians. The only current exception to this is ISIS. Nevertheless, groups that confine themselves to military targets are not necessarily reconcilable within the current political process. Groups like Jaysh al-Mujahidin and Ansar al-Islam will almost certainly refuse to participate in any sort of democratic process. Meanwhile, groups such as the 1920 Brigades and the Ba'athist group JRTN articulate their goals in terms of a political solution, but in practice their political goals include the complete dismantling of Iraq's current system of government.

These groups are not equally capable of projecting military force against Iraqi government forces. While some are effective, others are limited in their numbers, experience, and military capabilities, rendering them less effective on the battlefield. Nevertheless, their attacks can play a role in fixing or degrading the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), thus exposing vulnerabilities in the Iraqi government's defenses against wider and more complex military attacks from groups like ISIS. These smaller groups, although active, do not operate in an effective and coordinated national campaign; instead, they operate locally and do not project force far from their support zones.

Some of these groups are rhetorically prolific, attempting to present an image of effectiveness to their constituencies in order to achieve political gains. They seek to maintain the momentum of the current anti-government offensive by raising popular support. Regardless of their rhetoric, ISIS remains the dominant military force in Iraq that is executing a national military campaign to bring about a cohesive political vision involving the destruction of the Iraqi state. Other groups have in some cases jumped on the ISIS bandwagon, taking advantage of anti-government momentum and claiming credit for successes that rolled back the Iraqi Security Forces.

Although these groups share an anti-government orientation, they have a troublesome relationship with ISIS. Some Iraqi Sunni armed anti-government groups, such as JRTN, have worked with ISIS to accomplish short-and medium-term goals of expelling the Iraqi Security Forces and controlling terrain. Others have coordinated with ISIS in areas of mutual presence. However, over the long-term their visions for Iraq are incompatible. Some of these groups, including Jaysh al-Mujahidin and Ansar al-Islam, are openly anti-ISIS. All of these groups have on at least one occasion clashed with ISIS, particularly after ISIS declared an Islamic "Caliphate" and demanded all other groups pledge allegiance to its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

These groups are all opposed to the return of the ISF to Sunni heartland areas. Consequently, they do not represent viable anti-ISIS ground forces to partner with the ISF and the international anti-ISIS coalition. Instead, they demonstrate how difficult it will be for Iraq to identify Sunni populations that will combat ISIS on behalf of the state. These anti-government groups likely garner more tribal support than ISIS, but they may actually impede the positive long-term effects of tribal mobilization and local security forces that would be essential to Iraq's immediate security strategy. The Iraqi government must overcome these groups and reconnect with Iraq's disenfranchised Sunni population if an effective anti-ISIS program is to take hold within Sunni areas.

A unified military effort is extremely important to prevent the collapse of the Iraqi state and to regain Iraqi government control over its territory. It is important to note that the current crisis in Iraq was largely the result of popular grievances inspired by the policies of former PM Nouri al-Maliki and the heavy-handed tactics employed by the ISF. Anti-government groups captured the momentum generated by Iraq's longstanding protest movements, which ISIS also exploited as a critical vulnerability of the Iraqi state. Therefore, even if ISIS is militarily degraded, Iraq's Sunni population may not return willingly to rejoin Iraq. This will undermine Iraq's efforts to build a ground force that can defeat and destroy ISIS long term. The following study will examine these other play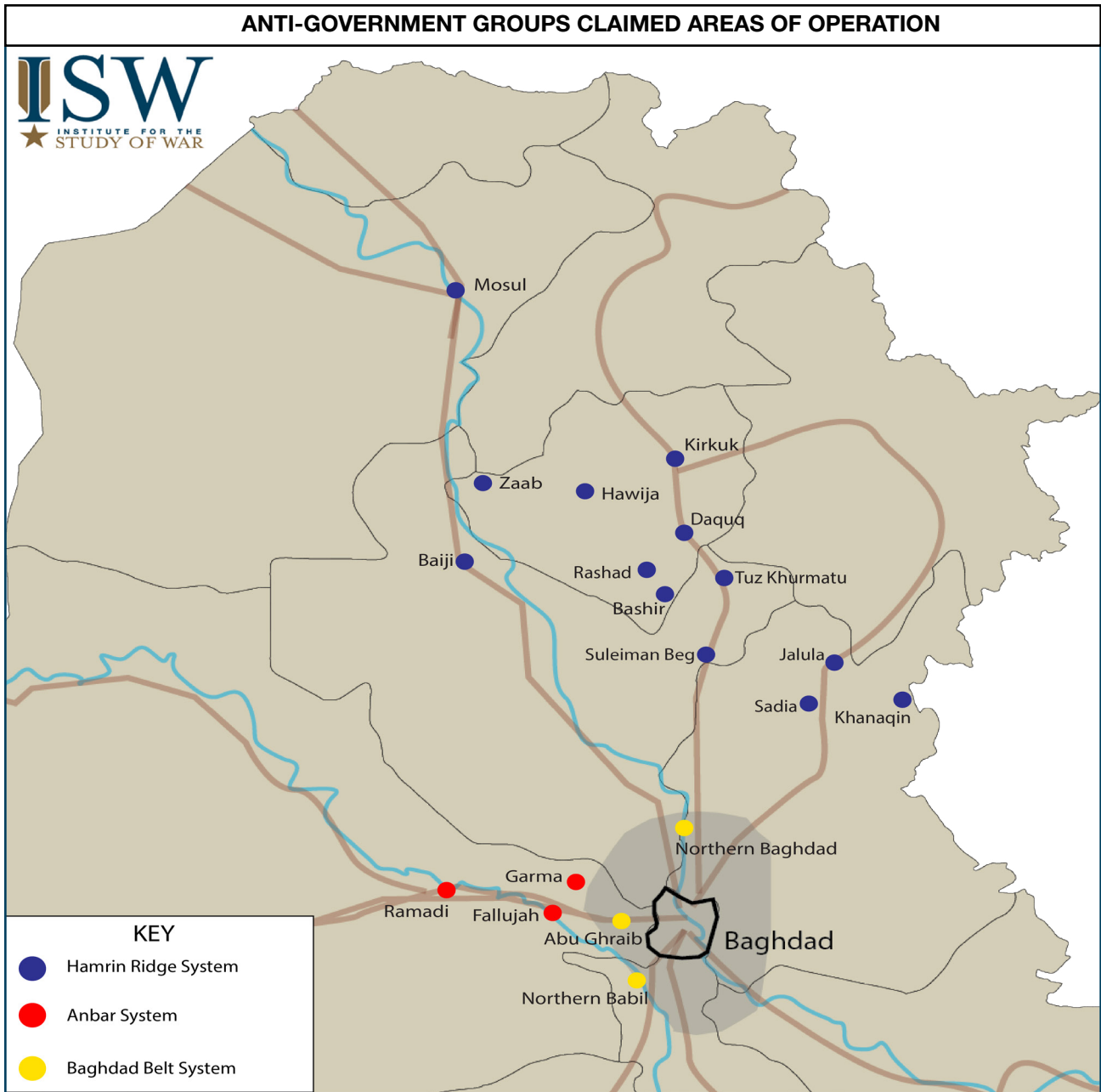ers, seeking to characterize their ideological orientation, rhetoric, operational presence, and their desired political end-state. Although this report may not be comprehensive in describing every armed Sunni anti-government actor in Iraq, the groups described below can be considered representative of the trends within the anti-government movement.

BACKGROUND: FROM PROTEST TO INSURGENCY

The origins of the current Sunni insurgency in Iraq can be traced to the end of the previous one. The previous Sunni insurgency ended when former insurgents dropped their arms and reconciled with the Iraqi government. With the government, they then took up arms against ISIS's predecessor organization, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in what became known as the Sahwa or "Awakening" movement. The Sahwa uprising of Iraqi Sunni tribes against AQI marked the major turning point in the battle against AQI that ended the last Iraq War. In conjunction with the U.S. military 'surge' of 2007-2008, the Awakening movement managed to rapidly break AQI's territorial control over Sunni areas and drive the group into remission.[2] Despite this victory, Iraqi Shi'a politicians were deeply suspicious of the Awakening and its fighters, many of whom had previously fought against the central government as members of the insurgency.

After American ground forces left Iraq in 2011, former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki failed to integrate Awakening members into the national military and instead consolidated his control over a centralized political and security apparatus regarded by most Sunnis as authoritarian and sectarian.[3] Sunni popular resentment finally boiled over on December 20, 2012, after Prime Minister Maliki arrested the bodyguards of Sunni Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi in a targeted move meant to sideline Maliki's political rivals.[4] Within weeks, large-scale protests had spread across the Sunni-dominated provinces of Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Diyala, as well as Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad.[5]

Despite the fears of many government officials, the Sunni protest movement remained relatively peaceful, although Iraq's first provincial elections post-U.S. withdrawal were postponed due to security in Anbar, Ninewa, and Kirkuk provinces in March 2013.[6] However, on April 23, 2013, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) stormed a protest camp in Hawija, southwest of Kirkuk, and opened fire, killing 20 Sunni protestors and wounding over 100 others.[7] Violent resistance erupted almost immediately across Iraq's Sunni-majority provinces, with more than 200 people killed in armed clashes over the following five days.[8] Over the following months, the crisis developed distinct sectarian overtones as Iraqi Sunnis increasingly vocalized support for an armed resistance which included tribal militias and insurgent groups (such as the Ba'athist Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandia – JRTN) while

ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS CLAIMED AREAS OF OPERATION

KEY

- Hamrin Ridge System
- Anbar System
- Baghdad Belt System

The map above depicts the systems where known anti-government groups may be active. The three systems include: The Hamrin system, the Anbar system, and the Baghdad Belts.

Hamrin: *The GMCIR, Ansar al-Islam, Jaysh al-Mujahideen, the 1920s Brigades, and the Islamic Army are assessed to operate in this region.*

Anbar: *The GMCIR, Jaysh al-Mujahideen, the Islamic Army, and the Fallujah Military Council are assessed to operate in this region.*

Baghdad Belts: *The GMCIR, Ansar al-Islam, Jaysh al-Mujahideen, and the 1920s Brigades are assessed to operate in this region.*

IRAQI SUNNI INSURGENCY GROUP DESCRIPTIONS				
Organization Name	Logo	Leader	Orientation	Claimed Areas of Operation
The General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries, JRTN, and the Iraqi Baath Party		Izzat al-Duri (and possibly others)	Nationalist and secular	• Hamrin system • Anbar • Baghdad Belts
1920 Brigades		Harith al- Dhari is a major figure	Islamist, jihadist	• Hamrin system • Baghdad Belts
The Islamic Army in Iraq		Ahmed al-Dabash (and possibly others)	Islamist, Nationalist	• Hamrin system • Anbar
Jaysh al-Mujahidin		Haqi Ismael al-Shortani (and possibly others)	Salafist, Jihadist	• Hamrin system • Anbar • Baghdad Belts
Ansar al-Islam		Warya Holori, also known as Abu Abdullah al-Shafei (Although recent artifacts mentioned the pseudonym Sheikh Abu Hashim al-Ibrahim)	Salafist, Jihadist	• Hamrin system • Baghdad belts
Fallujah Military Council	None	Unknown	Combined	Fallujah

The groups described above are those assessed to be active in some form in Iraq. We do not assess that the Council of Revolutionaries of the Tribes of Anbar is active beyond the statements of its leader, Ali Hatem.

Shi'a militias remobilized in Baghdad, Diyala, and other mixed areas.[9]

Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which reflagged as the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) in April 2013, seized upon this moment of political and social upheaval to expand its own anti-government terror operations, in the hopes of channeling Sunni militarization to its own ends.[10] On December 30, 2013, one week after ISIS killed 24 senior officers of the 7th IA Division in a single blast in the remote Horan valley, Prime Minister Maliki ordered the ISF to clear a major protest camp in Ramadi, sparking violent clashes with Sunni tribal militias.[11] In an attempt to reduce tensions, Maliki promised to withdraw Iraqi Army units from Ramadi and Fallujah. ISIS swept into the resulting power vacuum and captured Fallujah on January 1, 2014, declaring an "Islamic state" to "defend

Sunnis from the government."[12] In the subsequent months, ISIS – and other Sunni insurgent groups expanded their operations across the country, setting the stage for the current security crisis.

THE GENERAL MILITARY COUNCIL OF IRAQI REVOLUTIONARIES, JRTN, AND THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY

The General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR) is the strongest among the anti-government groups in Iraq. The Council surfaced at the end of December 2013 in the wake of the violent dispersal of anti-government protests in Anbar that began the previous year.[13] These protests, the ensuing clashes, and the ground assault of Fallujah and

Ramadi by ISIS resulted in large amounts of territory in areas of Anbar falling out of government control in early 2014.

The GMCIR announced itself in a statement via Twitter on January 15, 2014.[14] In the weeks leading up to this announcement, local military councils had been announced in Anbar, Fallujah, Mosul, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk (referred to as "Tamim"), Baghdad, Diyala, Abu Ghraib, Dhuluiya, and Sharqat.[15] The GMCIR's statement united these local councils into one organization. It is most likely that the Ba'ath party, including Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN), played a major role in forming both the local councils and the broader General Council. The January GMCIR statement featured Ba'athist nationalist rhetoric, calling for all Iraqis to cooperate in order to repel the "aggression" of the government and the "militias," in reference to the Iraqi Shi'a militias, which are now integrated into Iraq's security apparatus, and to rid Iraq of "the symbols of evil and corruption."[16] The statement described the gunmen operating under the organization as "sons of the tribes and revolutionaries."

On February 21, 2014 the council described its military operations as part of a "revolution."[17] The same statement described the council as an umbrella organization under which multiple groups operated, alongside an unspecified "tribal component." Based on the video announcement of the formation of the Anbar Military Council, a subcomponent of the GMCIR, ISW assessed on January 9, 2014 that the prominent neo-Ba'athist group Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN) is closely affiliated with the council.[18]

Association with JRTN

Activities of JRTN can be traced back to the early stages of the Sunni insurgency against the U.S. forces in Iraq. JRTN is an Iraqi armed group that was officially announced in a statement on November 30, 2006.[19] The statement claimed that the members who formed JRTN had independently carried out attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq. The announcement

Members of the GMCIR allegedly heading to attack security forces in Baiji.

further claimed that JRTN formed as a response to the execution of deposed president Saddam Hussein. It further sought to demonstrate that operations carried out against U.S. Forces were the work of Iraqis "from the furthest North to the furthest South" rather than foreigner fighters. The group includes many members of the military and regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and it is now led by former Hussein Vice President Izzat al-Duri.[20]

The leadership of Duri and former Ba'athists, along with the concentration of former military members, is reflected in JRTN's rhetoric. JRTN statements are typically read by men in the professional military attire of the former Iraqi Army.[21] The group's logo also reflects a Ba'athist heritage. A major component of the logo is a map that encompasses the land extending from Iraq to Morocco without displaying the borders between the individuals countries.[22] The absence of the borders speaks to the desire of the Ba'ath Party to unite all Arab countries under what is described by the Party as an "Arab Nation."[23]

The name Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia is derived from the Naqshabandi order of Sufi Islam.[24] Although the name of the group suggests that followers of the Naqshbandi order are the major component of the group, in reality Islamic religious rhetoric does not play a role in the group's communications or activities.[25] The reasons for the association of what is primarily a Ba'athist military group with a Sufi order remain unclear, but group supporters do regularly use Naqshabandi songs alongside videos of attacks purportedly carried out by the group.[26] This seemingly indicates that there is a legitimate Naqshabandi association with the group.

The rhetoric of the GMCIR is very similar to that of JRTN, and its spokesperson is described by the council as a former officer of the Iraqi Army (IA) named General Muzhir al-Qaisi.[27] Furthermore, men in professional military attire delivered the video statements of the council's announcements, a characteristic more suggestive of JRTN than tribal elements.[28] These indicators signal that JRTN is a dominant component of the GMCIR. There is at least one more group that is likely part of the council, the so-called "1920 Brigades" that will be discussed later in this study. There is no available information that indicates the role of other groups in the GMCIR, although the Council did criticize ISIS for harassing Jaysh al-Mujahidin, which would suggest that they are at least supportive of other armed anti-government groups.

The Iraqi Ba'ath Party

It is important to clarify the distinction between the GMCIR, JRTN, and the Ba'ath Party. The Ba'ath Party, the party of deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, continued to exist after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled his government. Although officially banned, it continued to operate as a

government-in-waiting, producing regular statements about ongoing events. It is interesting to note that many statements by the group reflect anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric very similar to that of the former Hussein regime. The party is comprised of three factions as a result of internal disputes. The most prominent faction is the command of Izzat al-Duri, who served as vice president under Saddam Hussein and also serves as the head of JRTN. Given his leadership role in JRTN, the largest component of the Council, it is likely that that Duri plays a major role in the GMCIR as well.

Al-Duri also heads a group called the Jihad, Liberation, and National Salvation Front, a 2009 reincarnation of an another organization called the Higher Command of Jihad and Liberation that dates back to October 2, 2007.[29] These groups seemingly served as umbrella organizations to unite anti-government groups across ethnic and sectarian lines.[30] JRTN was listed as a leading component of the Front at the time of its formation.[31] A leader in the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, Abdul-Sammad al-Ghrairi, highlighted the role of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party in the Front as recently as July 2014, although it seems that the other components of the group are now defunct.

The second faction is that of Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmed, who held several senior positions within the Ba'ath Party and served as the governor of Ninewa under Saddam Hussein.[32] Ahmed had a contentious relationship with Izzat al-Duri. Their disagreement came to a head when Ahmed, along with other party members, held a conference in Syria in 2007 announcing that they were expelling Izzat al-Duri from the party. Ahmed's group claimed to assume leadership of the party in what they called a reform move.[33] Ahmed and the other attending members were consequently expelled from the Ba'ath Party by Duri, but continue to claim to be the legitimate representation of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq.

The third faction is that of Abdul-Baqi al-Sadun, a former member of the Saddam regime who generally speaks on behalf of the southern, mostly Shi'a component of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party. On January 27, 2014 Sadun accused Duri of plotting to target him and of cooperating with the Maliki government.[34] In the same statement, Sadun stated that he was elected by nine provinces to be the leader of the Ba'ath Party replacing Izzat al-Duri. The following day, the Iraqi Ba'ath Party released a statement describing Sadun as a traitor.[35] Sadun's faction claims to be active in the fighting in the wake of the 2014 Anbar clashes. On April 5, 2014 Sadun released a statement in support of the anti-government clashes.[36] Sadun claimed that members of his faction had established armed formations to participate in the anti-ISF clashes. To demonstrate their participation in combat, he claimed that 15 members of this group were killed and others injured in clashes.

The splintering of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the participation of the Party, along with its component JRTN, within these various umbrella organizations demonstrate the complexity of the environment for armed anti-government groups. There may be many numerous small groups and factions that join together in various coalitions and joint statements, but there is no evidence to point to them having any significant role in fighting. JRTN clearly remains the most prominent group involved in the fighting. The GMCIR has not announced any of its leaders officially, aside from its spokesperson. Because of the major role played by JRTN within the GMCIR, this report will generally treat the GMCIR and JRTN as being interchangeable and as the most significant Ba'athist actor in Iraq.

Participation in attacks

The GMCIR has been publishing daily situation reports since February 1, 2014 via its social media outlets. These reports describe attacks claimed both by unspecified "revolutionaries" and "revolutionaries of the military council."[37] It does not appear, however, that these attacks are part of a comprehensive national campaign. Instead, local councils appear to conduct isolated activities that are launched as separate efforts. Also, the attacks were for the most part described as simple indirect fire and IED attacks rather than complex attacks or attacks that involve large numbers of ground troops. The latter attack threshold distinguishes professionalizing armed groups that might be capable of bigger engagements to seize territory like ISIS.

GMCIR has also posted videos seeking to demonstrate its effectiveness and planning. On April 2, 2014, a video surfaced on YouTube with the GMCIR logo on the top left corner of the screen showing a man wearing a military uniform similar to that of officers in the pre-2003 Iraqi Army. The man delivered a military planning briefing, describing a battle plan in the vicinity of Yusufiyah, south of Baghdad and referring to a large military map in the background.[38] Although there was no evidence that the attack was actually conducted, the release of the video demonstrates that the GMCIR is attempting to display itself as a highly organized military force that is capable of conducting complex attacks._

In a statement published on the GMCIR's Facebook page, the organization claimed that it played a major role in the ISIS offensive on June 10, 2014 stating that "revolutionaries" seized the western side of Mosul.[39] Its statements portray GMCIR as the leading force on the ground.[40] It is not yet clear to what extent the GMCIR and other groups facilitated the fall of Mosul, but given the fact that ISIS destroyed many shrines that are considered sacred even to Sunnis, implemented religious law, and expelled Christians from Mosul, it is clear that ISIS is able to exert its own agenda on the ground over other armed groups. It is nevertheless significant to observe that the GMCIR may independently control territory within Mosul, likely at the neighborhood level. JRTN's historical

Members of JRTN posing with Iraq and JRTN flag.

presence in the city suggests this possibility, though ISIS has also assassinated former Iraqi Army officers in the city as of September 8, 2014.[41]

JRTN/GMCIR and ISIS

In his first speech after the fall of Mosul, published on July 12, 2014, Izzat al-Duri spoke positively of ISIS and described them as "heroes and knights."[42] Duri also called for unity among anti-government armed groups in order to achieve victory. He also called for jihadi groups to transcend sectarian divides. The positive mention of ISIS and jihadists was most likely a rhetorical addition aimed at minimizing the conflicts between these groups during a critical period. Other leaders have also attempted to minimize differences with ISIS. In a statement by party leader Abdul-Sammad al-Ghrairi at a conference in Jordan on July 17, 2014, he refused to refer to the group as "Daesh," a pejorative Arabic term used to refer to ISIS, saying "now we call it the Islamic State." He also acknowledged that ISIS "accomplished goals and helped the revolutionaries achieve their goals and we are semi-[parallel] with them in facing the Iranian Safavid [a pejorative term referring to Iran] project in Iraq."[43]

Despite this statement, ISIS and the GMCIR do not share an ideological orientation. Actions taken by ISIS against non-Sunni religious and ethnic communities in areas considered to be "liberated" by the GMCIR ran counter to the GMCIR's nationalist rhetoric that emphasized Iraqi unity. The expulsion of Iraqi Christians from Mosul, the fleeing of Iraqi Yazidis to Mount Sinjar, and the destruction of shrines in the city were the most major example of where ISIS actions contradicted the GMCIR's stated goals. However, because of ISIS's strength on the ground, the GMCIR and JRTN were forced to tread carefully in addressing these problems. On July 21, JRTN issued a statement in response to the

expulsion of Iraqi Christians from the city of Mosul.[44] The statement strongly criticized the act but specifically avoided referring to ISIS by name. The statement also reiterated the nationalist nature of JRTN describing itself as the extension of the former IA and inclusive of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Yazidis, and Sabians.

Two days later, the Ba'ath Party in Iraq released a statement through its official representative, Khudhaier al-Murshidi. The statement was in defense of Iraqi Christians and reiterated Ba'ath rhetorical desire to defend all Iraqis, including Christians.[45] The statement did not mention ISIS and emphasized the "malicious" role of "government of spies in Baghdad and its American, Zionist, and Persian masters" over-amplifying reported threats against Christians adding that these threats were either issued by "some of the gunmen" or that the statements had been falsely attributed as part of a campaign to delegitimize their groups. The "gunmen" here is a delicate way of referencing the forces controlling the city without naming their affiliations. In a separate statement, Murshidi criticized those who attacked the shrines and expelled "citizens" without referring to ISIS.[46] He described the perpetrators as part of a conspiracy aimed to negatively impact the "revolution."

These reactions were echoed by a member of the media department of the GMCIR allegedly based in Mosul. He stated in a phone interview with the Al-Mosul satellite TV channel that was later uploaded to the GMCIR YouTube channel that Iraqi Shi'a from Tal Afar distributed leaflets marked with the ISIS logo and accompanied with a bullet to Iraqi Christians in Mosul.[47] He described the act as a conspiracy planned by the "Maliki government."

The disagreement between ISIS and the GMCIR came to a head when ISIS launched offensives in northern Iraq forcing thousands of Iraqi Yazidis to flee to Mount Sinjar. This prompted the council to issue a statement on August 6, 2014 criticizing ISIS for taking the "revolution to a different path" rather than attacking Baghdad in order to topple the seat of government.[48] On August 23, 2014, the council criticized ISIS by name after the Islamic State demanded that another anti-government group in Garma, Jaysh al-Mujahidin, pledge allegiance to ISIS or depart the area.[49] As of September 2014, the GMCIR's standing position remains to express inclusivity of other religious groups and supportive of military efforts by other anti-government forces. They have pushed back against ISIS where this position is challenged, but not to the extent of direct, open confrontation.

ISIS is putting the GMCIR in a tough position, especially in Mosul. The former is adamant on implementing Shari'a law as a major pillar along with the establishment of full control in the areas where it is present.[50] This forces the GMCIR to explain to its constituency why acts that it does not support are occurring in areas where "revolutionaries"

claim to have control. Yet the GMCIR has to communicate this message without coming out directly against ISIS, which overmatches it militarily. The GMCIR has therefore been cautious: on June 16, 2014 GMCIR called for the tribes and the "revolutionaries" not to surrender their weapons in areas that fell to anti-government groups. Although the statement did not name the group demanding the surrender of the weapons, it almost certainly referred to ISIS.[51] Nevertheless, the Ba'ath party quickly denied reports that emerged on July 27, 2014 indicating that JRTN had started to target ISIS as a result of ISIS recent behaviors.[52]

This careful rhetorical balancing act has served to prevent an all-out fight between ISIS and the GMCIR, but it does not mean that elements of the GMCIR including JRTN are not currently clashing with ISIS. Such clashes have already taken place – in one instance, fighting erupted on June 22, 2014 after ISIS demanded that armed groups in Kirkuk surrender their weapons, resulting in the death of 17 members of ISIS and JRTN.[53] These confrontations are mostly concentrated in and around the area of the Hamrin ridge and Jalula, in addition to areas of Hawija, Zab, and Rashad in southwestern Kirkuk. These areas are historical hubs for both ISIS and JRTN, elevating the friction between the two groups.

Although the GMCIR is reported to control very localized neighborhoods in Mosul, ISIS is clearly the organization exercising governance in the city. When unspecified "other armed groups," likely including the GMCIR, attempted to appoint former IA General Azhar al-Ubaidi as governor of the city, Ubaidi promptly apologized and resigned from the position, likely under duress from ISIS.[54] This pattern has been seen in Tikrit, as well. Although the governor of Salah ad-Din under Saddam Hussein, Ahmed Abdul-Rashid, was appointed as governor of Tikrit by other armed groups, he has not been reported to have a leadership role in the city.[55] Indeed, there have been no reports that either person, or any other non-ISIS affiliated person, has governed in Mosul or Tikrit. Instead, the destruction of shrines in the city and the expulsion of Iraqi Christians indicate that ISIS is able to enforce its program of governance despite the wishes of other groups.[56]

ISIS has also sought to directly undermine the GMCIR in Mosul. During the first week of July 2014, between 25 and 60 former senior officers and leaders of the Ba'ath Party were taken from their homes by ISIS and likely executed or held incommunicado.[57] This was almost certainly an effort by ISIS to prevent the formation of an anti-ISIS movement within the city by targeting potential figures who might lead such a movement.

There have also been many reports of assassinations and clashes between ISIS against JRTN and other groups such as the Islamic Army, another armed anti-government group that will be discussed separately, in Sadia in northern Diyala. On July 14, ISIS captured 10 leaders from the Islamic Army and JRTN in Sadia and executed them, seemingly in response to efforts by this group to take greater control.[58] On July 20, an IED was detonated in a house where a meeting was taking place between several JRTN leaders. The attack resulted in the death of three and injured four others.[59] On July 27, 2014, ISIS reportedly deployed 300 gunmen to Sadia in order to harden its presence there.[60]

Sadia is one clear example of an area where tensions between ISIS and other groups could boil over into direct fighting. This infighting has not, however, enabled government forces to retake the sub-district, although there was an ongoing effort to do so. On August 22 the Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) reported that a joint AAH and IA operation was launched to retake Sadia.[61] The operation coincided with a Peshmerga operation to clear ISIS from Jalula, northeast of Sadia.[62] Despite initial reports of gains achieved around both sub-districts, at the time of writing both areas remain out of government control.[63]

The ability to withstand efforts to retake Sadia, indicate that these groups work with each other when confronted by an external threat despite their disagreements. It also illustrates that other anti-government armed groups will refuse the return of the ISF or the Peshmerga to their areas. This resistance is likely fueled by community support, especially with the forward deployment of Iraqi Shi'a militias to Iraqi Sunni areas. The deployment of Iraqi Shi'a militias especially around Sadia and near Jalula may be due to the proximity of these areas to nearby Khaniqin, on the Iran-Iraq border.

It is difficult to see how the GMCIR's operational goals align with those of ISIS in the long term, beyond expelling the Iraqi Security Forces from the areas they seek to control. JRTN has backed Iraqi Sunni tribes as they challenge ISIS rule, including on September 2, 2014 when JRTN supported tribes as they fought ISIS in the Iraqi Arab neighborhoods of Wihda and Tajnid of southern Jalula in northeastern Diyala.[64] The clashes reportedly started after the tribes rejected ISIS implementation of Sharia law in their area. The GMCIR opposes the return of Iraqi Security Forces to areas from which they were expelled in the recent unrest. That said, their continued clashes with ISIS indicate that the GMCIR is not likely to continue their cooperation over the long term.

THE FALLUJAH MILITARY COUNCIL

Although similar in name to the GMCIR and its regional councils, the Fallujah Military Council (FMC) is not a sub-council of the GMCIR but rather a separate entity. Although it is likely that the FMC and the GMCIR have some members in common, the FMC operates entirely in a local context.

Whereas other regional military councils publicize their activities through the media channels of the GMCIR, the FMC serves primarily to coordinate between local armed groups rather than as a united front for action and communication. Other than releasing a statement regarding its foundation, the group has assiduously avoided publicity for itself.

Reports have indicated that the council contained members from groups discussed in this report including the 1920 Brigades, the Islamic Army of Iraq, Jaysh al-Mujahidin, JRTN, and Ba'athists likely from the GMCIR.[65] Another report indicated that the council also contains smaller, localized groups like Hamas of Iraq, the Asadullah Brigades, the Omar Brigades, Army of Al-Murabiteen, and the Asadullah al-Ghalib Brigades. As of February 13, 2014, the Fallujah Military Council allegedly included 15 representatives of the various armed groups, as well as tribal and community leaders.[66]

One Fallujah Military Council member is the Salafist native of Fallujah Abu Abdullah al-Janabi. Janabi had major influence in the city in 2004 when he was an instrumental member in the Mujahidin Shura Council of Fallujah that had al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as a component.[67] Although he left the city after a warrant was issued for his arrest during the Battle of Fallujah of late 2004, a video surfaced showing that Janabi had returned to Fallujah in January 2014 after the Iraqi Army was forced out.[68] The presence of Janabi is significant, and some reports from Fallujah indicate that he might be coordinating between the groups in Fallujah Military Council.[69] It is most likely that Janabi does not have the same influence he once had in the city prior to his departure in 2004, especially now that AQI's successor ISIS has become much more influential. Reports from Fallujah indicated that Janabi was well respected by ISIS before the group established itself in the city, but that his role was greatly diminished after ISIS consolidated power in Fallujah.[70]

ISIS entered Fallujah after the Iraqi Army withdrew from cities in Anbar in the beginning of January 2014 and portrayed itself as the defender of Fallujans in the face of an impending ISF ground assault.[71] ISIS was able to gain an initial foothold in the city due to its significantly greater military capability in comparison to other groups. ISIS attempted to solidify its prominence by employing a show of force and detaining opponents, successfully driving prominent leaders out the city, creating a power vacuum.[72] Thus, within Fallujah, ISIS is the dominant force and is actively working to marginalize others.

This activity has created a rift between ISIS and other groups in Fallujah, as represented by the FMC. Indicators of this tension appeared in March 2014 when ISIS conducted a large military parade in the city.[73] Reports from Fallujah described the parade more as a show of force to local actors than as a show of force intended for the Iraqi central government.[74] Later, on April 29, members of the Fallujah Military Council

released a rare statement criticizing ISIS for assaulting, torturing, kidnapping, and confiscating the weapons of a number of Fallujah gunmen after they refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS. The statement called for ISIS to return the weapons and apologize for its actions. The passive tone of the statement, given the seriousness of the accusations, illustrates the level of influence ISIS has in the area. ISIS has, however, continued to target members of the FMC. On July 8, 2014 ISIS reportedly executed a number of Fallujah gunmen for refusing to pledge allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[75]

ISIS efforts to consolidate power in the city have included social outreach to tribes and notable figures in the city. This outreach has been publicized by ISIS in order to project an image of tribal support. These efforts included hosting tribal and notable figures of Fallujah in April 2014.[76] ISIS also publicized the alleged pledge of allegiance of the Halabsa tribe on June 26, 2014.[77] Although ISIS has attempted to portray an image of tribal support, it has been active in liquidating its opponents in the city. These efforts have effectively sidelined the Fallujah Military Council and established ISIS as the leading force in the area.[78] Even if the FMC desired to fight back against ISIS, it is unlikely that they would be successful.

COUNCIL OF REVOLUTIONARIES OF THE TRIBES OF ANBAR

Like the GMCIR and the FMC, the origins of the Council of Revolutionaries of the Tribes of Anbar (CRTA) can be traced directly to former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's crackdown on anti-government protests in Anbar. Ali Hatem is a leader of the Dulaimi tribe in Anbar and claims to be the leader of the Council of Revolutionaries of the Tribes of Anbar. He announced the Council on January 3, 2014 in the wake of the ISF's operations in Anbar, claiming to represent the tribes of Anbar.[79] In his initial statement, Hatem warned jihadi groups from taking advantage of the "revolution," stating that tribes will fight these groups but without directly referring to ISIS or any other armed group.[80]

In practice, however, the Council of the Revolutionaries of the Tribes of Anbar is simply Ali Hatem himself. There is no visual evidence of any presence by the CRTA in Anbar aside from a separate appearance by Ali Hatem alongside a flag with the name of the Council written on it.[81] It is not clear to what extent Hatem has influence on the ground, although he was endorsed by a group of alleged GMCIR fighters who claimed to be from Fallujah.[82] This endorsement, however, described him as a symbol of the tribes and of jihad rather than a military leader with command authority. In 2014, Hatem has openly collaborated with other anti-government leaders such as Ahmed al-Dabash of the Islamic Army, as will be discussed.

The alleged existence of the CRTA raises an important point within the Iraqi Sunni anti-government insurgency. Not every leader or group is equally effective; some, such as Ali Hatem, release numerous statements without evidence of their leading an actual fighting force. Ali Hatem has claimed to represent tribal forces in Anbar, but in actuality his activity is an attempt to use recent events for political posturing and to appeal to his anti-government base. Hatem does indeed have a modicum of popular support, but this has not historically translated into political success. Ali Hatem participated in the 2010 national elections under the State of Law Alliance of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, but received very few votes and did not secure a seat.[83] In the 2014 elections, however, Hatem was disqualified by the Independent High Electoral Committee (IHEC) along with a number of other anti-Maliki politicians for allegedly "enticing hatred and sectarianism."[84]

Although Ali Hatem has refrained from openly criticizing ISIS by name, the takeover by ISIS of the Gwer and Makhmour areas proximate to Arbil prompted Ali Hatem to strongly criticize ISIS.[85] He along with two other anti-government figures held a press conference in Arbil on August 7, 2014 and spoke critically of ISIS, describing its attacks near Iraqi Kurdistan as derailing from the path of the "revolution." They maintained that the revolution is ongoing and that ISIS only represents a minor part that should not be used to condemn the entire movement. This change of rhetoric was meant to calm the ethnic tension between Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds in Arbil, which came to a very high point between August 7-8, 2014 when the Peshmerga vacated their positions in the face of an ISIS assault on the Ninewa Plains, east of Mosul; and Gwer, and Makhmour, west of Arbil. It was also to convey a message to the hosting Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that Hatem and other Arbil-based anti-government figures did not support the ISIS advance toward Iraqi Kurdistan.

1920 BRIGADES

The 1920 Brigades fought against Coalition forces during the U.S. presence in Iraq, but their activities decreased following the U.S.-led surge.[86] The group is small in comparison to JRTN, and likely only a fraction of their former strength from 2003-2011. On May 17, 2014 the group started rebroadcasting attacks claimed by the GMCIR, suggesting that the 1920 Brigades is affiliated with, or a component of, the GMCIR.[87] It is not clear, however, the extent of their real cooperation. Even given affiliation between the two groups, it is unlikely that they have a unified command that drives an effective national campaign. The group's name references the 1920 anti-colonial uprising against the British occupation, and although not Salafist in orientation the group deploys Islamist, jihadist rhetoric. Despite their likely present-day association with the Ba'athist-aligned GMCIR, in 2006 the 1920 Brigades denied any links to Ba'athism.[88]

Twitter post of the 1920 Brigades, showing alleged attacks of the GMCIR.

The 1920 Brigades is, however, closely affiliated with the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq (AMSI) which is led by Harith al-Dhari, a Jordan-based Iraqi Sunni figure. Dhari and AMSI oppose the current structure of the Iraqi government created in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion.[89] While calling for a "united" Iraq, the group has called for a complete change in the government and the abolishment of its structures. On September 6, 2014, Dhari called for a temporary government after the "revolution prevails" and for conducting elections that starts a new political process.[90]

The AMSI issued a statement in the wake of the declaration of a "Caliphate" by ISIS.[91] AMSI rejected the announcement and acknowledged ISIS as a fighting group rather than a state. The statement argued that a pledge of allegiance to the "Caliphate" was not required because the "requirements for success" in terms of having uncontested control of terrain and being able to provide services had not been properly established. The 1920 Brigades does not itself aim to establish an Islamic Caliphate; their response to ISIS was instead an attempt to separate themselves from ISIS while promoting a religious image for themselves.

Similar to the GMCIR, the 1920 Brigades may share near-term goals of expelling the ISF from Iraqi Sunni areas with ISIS, but the statement by AMSI makes it clear that their visions for the future of Iraq are starkly different. Their interactions in the past have also reflected this feud: al-Qaeda in Iraq accused the 1920 Brigades in 2007 of fighting other

mujahidin and taking actions "contrary to the jihad."[92] On the issue of other religious groups, AMSI released a statement on July 20, 2014 criticizing ISIS for expelling Iraqi Christians from Mosul and called for their return.[93] Politically, Dhari's call for elections in the wake of the "success" of the revolution directly contradicts ISIS's fundamental rejection of any democratic process.

The 1920 Brigades, while rhetorically prolific, are not a major force on the ground. Although there is evidence of their activity during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, their activities at present appear dramatically reduced. The group releases statements and magazines containing political, military, and religious content. For example, one of the pages of a magazine released on September 5, 2014 was an article that analyzed the U.S. and Iranian stance toward the Iraq crisis,[94] Another page discussed Islamic legal issues. [95] However, the bulk of their online communication is closely linked to that of the GMCIR making it impossible to determine its areas of operation outside of GMCIR activity. It is likely that the group has seen serious attrition, and either carries out sporadic attacks or is merely a shell organization as a minor component of the GMCIR.

THE ISLAMIC ARMY IN IRAQ

The Islamic Army in Iraq, similar to the 1920 Brigades, was originally founded to fight against Coalition forces in Iraq until their withdrawal in 2011. Like others armed groups that were active during this period, the Islamic Army's activities declined after 2008 following the U.S.-led "Surge." The organization resurfaced as of February 2014, and its leader, Ahmed al-Dabash returned to the public eye in the wake of the 2014 Anbar clashes portraying himself and his men as tribal revolutionaries.[96] The Islamic Army is likely active in carrying out attacks against the ISF, but its description of its activities through videos posted online do not reflect a national campaign or the conduct of spectacular attacks against major military targets. The group claims that it has an operational presence in Ramadi, Udhaim, Sadia, and Fallujah and posts videos of gunmen allegedly part of their group as they operate in these areas.[97]

The Islamic Army in Iraq has expressed a desire to participate in a political solution for Iraq. Their conception of what that political solution would look like, however, is one that is unacceptable to the continued unity of Iraq in that it is predicated on the abolishment of the current system of government. On June 23, 2014, Dabash held a joint press conference along with the previously-mentioned Ali Hatem. The event took place in Arbil, in the wake of the fall of Mosul.[98] They listed six demands in a their statement: 1) the resignation of then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; 2) the formation of a temporary salvation government by independent Iraqi figures; 3) a general conference calling for Islamic, regional, and global support, including "southern

Alleged members of The Islamic Army in Iraq posing with captured HUMVEE of the Iraqi Army in Udhaim, in northern Diyala.

Iraqi tribes" [referring to Shi'a areas of Iraq], to support the "revolution;" 4) national reconciliation in which "conflicting parties" forgive each other for past fighting; 5) rejection of "terrorism" in any form; and 6) rejection of external intervention while ensuring the "protection" of the interests of Arab, Islamic, and foreign countries. Dabash and Hatem also spoke in support of President Barazani and the KRG.

Although their list of demands almost certainly overstates the actual influence of these two figures and their ability to affect the situation on the ground, it reflects the desire by groups of Iraqi Sunnis to piggyback on the momentum achieved by ISIS to accomplish the desired ouster of Maliki from power. The statement was reconciliatory in tone, seeking to present an acceptable face to the events of the preceding weeks by reaching out to Iraqi Shi'a and offering to work with regional neighbors to establish a "salvation" government that could accomplish national reconciliation.

After the joint statement by these leaders, however, a backlash occurred against them from other armed anti-government groups. A leader in the GMCIR who was based in Anbar rejected their list of demands stated that they do not represent those of the GMCIR.[99] This leader ridiculed Dabash and Hatem for their media appearances, calling them "part of the problem" and denying that they represent the GMCIR. In particular, the GMCIR figure rejected any possibility for negotiation with the government.

The Islamic Army has attempted to distance itself from ISIS. A gunman described as a field commander in the Islamic Army appeared in a video posted on June 23, 2014 after the fall of Mosul.[100] When asked about the goals and aspirations of the group, he stated that their desire is to conquer Baghdad and to provide Iraqi Sunnis with self-governance in their areas. He added that this desire does not extend to attacking

Shiʻa areas such as Najaf and Karbala provinces as "others" aim to do, an oblique reference to an official statement released by ISIS on June 11, 2014 that expressed the desire of ISIS to attack the Shiʻa sacred cities of Najaf and Karbala[101] He did maintain, however, that the groups cooperate with unspecified other anti-government armed groups. Later, on July 7, 2014, Dabash stated that the Islamic Army did not and will not pledge allegiance to Baghdadi, but at the same time maintained that it will not fight ISIS.[102] Unlike ISIS, Dabash indicated that the Islamic Army is willing to negotiate with Iraqi Shiʻa leaders, specifically mentioning Ammar al-Hakim, the leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Sadrist trend.

Dabash has acknowledged that ISIS is the leading military actor on the ground in Iraq, but claimed that ISIS gunmen depart areas after expelling the ISF and relinquish control to "other armed groups."[103] This does not, however, appear to be true. The Islamic Army, similar to the GMCIR, demonstrates the balancing act that Dabash tries to achieve by denying the relationship with ISIS in order to gain credibility with potential partners for negotiations, while at the same time acknowledging the role of ISIS in order to protect his own safety and maintain credibility with supporters of anti-government movements. His acknowledgement of ISIS's role may also seek to prevent potential retaliatory measures by the Islamic State. Nevertheless, the proximity of some Islamic Army members to ISIS positions and their likely refusal to pledge allegiance to ISIS leader Baghdadi resulted in clashes with ISIS on July 14 near Sadia which resulted in the death of 11 Islamic Army members and eight ISIS elements.[104]

Although language calling for elections and reconciliatory statements directed at Iraq's Shiʻa population may seem like a positive indicator, the Islamic Army of Iraq is likely not reconcilable within the current political system. Dabash is willing to work with other parties in pursuing his goal of self-governance for Iraqi Sunnis, but, like the Baʻath party and its associated groups, his stated long-term goal is the reversion of Iraq to a pre-2003 state.

THE JORDAN CONFERENCE

The positions of some of these groups were revealed in an anti-government conference that was held in Jordan in mid-July 2014.[105] The conference was attended by approximately 300 anti-government Iraqi figures, including major figures from the Iraqi Baʻath Party, representatives from the AMSI associated with 1920 Brigades, former members of the Iraqi Army, Iraqi Sunni religious figures, and tribal figures.[106] Although the government of Jordan did not comment on the conference, the spokesperson for AMSI claimed that it was held by "official invitation" of and sponsored by the Jordanian monarchy.[107] Confusingly, the conference was

also referenced by different names. While some reporting referred to it as the "Amman Conference for Support of the Revolution and Rescue of Iraq" and the "Conference of National Iraqi Powers," the official final statement of the conference was titled "The Amman Preparatory Conference for Iraq's Revolutionaries."[108]

The Iraqi Baʻath Party faction of Izzat al-Duri summarized its conditions for an end to hostilities in a statement given at the conference by party leader Abdul-Sammad al-Ghrairi.[109] Essentially, the party called for a "reset" of Iraq back to 2003 by cancelling the new constitution, dismantling the security forces, annulling anti-terrorism laws that were perceived to target Iraqi Sunnis, and rolling back the de-Baʻathification law that prevented many former high-ranking officials from holding government positions. The party also stressed the need for "Iraq's unity," opposing the partition of the country into independent regions. These demands, although explained in a political frame, are based on the abolishment of the current Iraqi state,

The official spokesperson of JRTN stated in an interview with satellite channel Al-Mosul, uploaded to YouTube on July 17, 2014, that the conference was "successful" and that it represented all Iraqis regardless of their descent.[110] Although representatives of other groups were present, JRTN was the highest-profile group in attendance.

Also present at the meeting was the prominent Iraqi Sunni religious figure Abdul-Malik al-Saadi. Saadi played an important role in mobilizing Iraqi Sunnis against the government at the beginning of the 2013 protest movement. In the beginning of the Anbar crisis, Saadi gave a speech on December 30, 2013 calling for Anbaris to defend themselves and for the people of Fallujah to block the roads in order to prevent "Maliki's troops" from advancing in Anbar.[111] His call for mobilization gave the anti-government movement a perceived sense of legitimacy separate from ISIS, and served as one of the sparks that ignited an anti-government uprising after a year of sit-ins.[112] Although Saadi is not publicly affiliated with any armed groups, his presence is significant as an indicator of popular support for anti-government movements.

The closing statement of the conference was read by Ahmed al-Dabash of the Islamic Army, who appeared in the video recording of the statement at the same table with Abdul-Malik al-Saadi; speaker of the AMSI Bashar al-Faidhi; representative of the Baʻath Party Abdul-Sammad al-Ghrairi; and lawyer for Saddam Hussein Khalil al-Dulaimi.[113] The statement called for a unified Iraq, global and regional acknowledgement and support for the "revolutionaries," and boycott of the Iraqi government, in addition to support for displaced persons.

Interestingly, this conference was not attended by Ali Hatem or Grand Mufti of Iraq Rafi al-Rafaie. The absence of the

Mufti and his rejection of the meeting were significant given his role in the beginning of the Anbar crisis mobilizing Iraqi Sunnis by giving a statement on December 30, 2013 supporting operations carried out by those he described as "revolutionaries" and "mujahidin" against the "sectarian and hateful militias."[114] Although Rafaie still supports what he described on June 25, 2014 as the "revolution," he criticized the conference. According to him, the attendees limited their dialogue on criticizing Maliki rather than discussing the "problem of the constitution and the political system."[115]

Ali Hatem rejected the conference for not representing the "Sunni revolutionaries."[116] He added that such conferences should be held on "liberated Iraqi lands." This represents a departure from the perceived alliance between Hatem and the Islamic Army since Ahmed al-Dabash, the leader of the Islamic Army, was present at the meeting. Indeed, Hatem may not have been invited to the conference; unlike Hatem, all other attendees are notable for their lack of participation in politics after 2003.[117]

Although not all anti-government Iraqi Sunni representation agreed on this meeting, all of them are pushing to describe the current events as a revolution and are strongly minimizing the role of ISIS. For example, Sheikh Abdul-Malik al-Saadi discounted the role of ISIS by stating that the organization controls a "simple" part of the terrain. The fairly unified position of these prominent Iraqi Sunni figures lends legitimacy to the idea of an uprising against the Iraqi Government. Although the individuals and groups described above have taken different approaches, they agree that the anti-government movement constitutes a "revolution." This viewpoint will make it challenging for Iraqi Sunni politicians who are participating in the political process to gain credibility as authentic representatives of Iraqi Sunnis and to re-establish the legitimacy of the Iraqi central government as a government that is representative of all Iraqis.

JAYSH AL-MUJAHIDIN

In addition to the "revolutionary" groups described above, more extreme jihadist groups are also active in Iraq since December 2013. Jaysh al-Mujahidin (JM) is active in launching attacks, primarily against fixed targets using both direct and indirect fire. It does not appear to have a national campaign, and generally works locally in parts of Anbar and Kirkuk provinces.

Compared to groups such as JRTN, JM is a more extreme Sunni group that does not believe in working through any sort of political process. Although it does not seek to conquer territory like ISIS does, JM shares a jihadist orientation and maintains, for example, a Shari'a committee.[118] The group is secretive about its leadership, but reports indicate that the military leader of the group is Haqi Ismael al-Shortani.[119]

Although like ISIS the group is anti-Shi'a, it has not claimed or expressed desire to carry out attacks on Shi'a civilian populations.

JM has a media presence and posts visual reporting of their military operations, including the capture of ISF weapons and ammunition, maneuvering a tank, and capturing IA soldiers. The group also released a 42-minute video on August 27, 2014 that showed its gunmen launching attacks using direct and indirect fire on an ISF position in what was claimed to be Mishaniya in Garma district, northeast of Fallujah and the area of Dhabitiya, northwest of Baghdad.[120] Operations of the group mainly take place in Garma, near Fallujah, and their claimed attacks use indirect fire, primarily Grad rockets and mortars in the northern belt of Baghdad.[121] It claims an operational presence in Taji, Kirkuk, and Baiji, in addition to their notable presence in Garma.[122]

The group released an additional video on August 30, 2014 that showed how goods were transported to and from Garma.[123] According to the speaker and several other individuals shown in the video, the ISF blocked all roads to and from Garma in an effort retake the area. Therefore, Jaysh al-Mujahidin established a corridor on the Dhira Dijla canal, north of the district. This corridor is used to supply Garma with goods coming from Samarra in addition to giving herdsmen in Garma access to a route they use to sell their cattle. This is notable as an attempt to provide aid to local populations, beyond simply anti-government fighting.

Jaysh al-Mujahidin has claimed to work with other anti-government groups, including joint operations with Ansar al-Islam, which will be described later, in southwestern Kirkuk, near Hawija, a tribal area known for being a hub for Iraqi Sunni anti-government armed groups.[124] The group was, however, quick to release a statement on July 17, 2014 denying that it had participated in the Jordan meeting with JRTN and other anti-government groups with political

Members of JM allegedly assaulting an Iraqi Army headquarters in Kirkuk Province.

agendas.[125] Although jihadist in orientation, JM is opposed to both ISIS and al-Qaeda as represented by Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Shari'a Committee of JM released a book in January 2014 criticizing ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, seeking to delegitimize the "Islamic State."[126] JM summarized the points of its disagreement with ISIS, specifically opposing the practice of *takfir* [claiming some Muslims to be apostates] and extra-judicial killings, while accusing ISIS of lying, ignorance, and not abiding by the regulations of jihadi conduct.

The committee also ridiculed the position of Zawahiri toward ISIS prior to its expansion into Syria in which he acknowledged a "state" in Iraq, but still sought to issue orders to the leader of the "state" while himself being only a member of a "group." Essentially, they accused Zawahiri of maintaining a self-contradictory and therefore invalid position. Given this strong anti-ISIS and anti-al-Qaeda orientation, it is likely that the group will come into conflict with ISIS wherever the two groups' members are intermingled.

The contention between ISIS and JM escalated further in August of 2014 when ISIS demanded that JM pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or depart Garma.[127] When JM refused, ISIS kidnapped several JM members and shelled and demolished JM members' homes, refusing tribal mediation to solve the dispute. As a result, JM released a statement on August 22, 2014 announcing that the group had decided to withdraw to spare the area the repercussions of clashes between the two groups.[128] It is unclear if this statement was followed by an actual large-scale withdrawal of JM from the area. The events that took place in Garma proved that JM does not rival ISIS in military force. However, their inability to confront ISIS militarily on a large scale did not compel them to pledge allegiance to ISIS. JM will likely continue to pursue its military efforts against the ISF in conjunction with groups that share its objectives, such as Ansar al-Islam. JM is unlikely to pursue reconciliation with ISIS, and would be strengthened in areas where ISIS is disrupted.

ANSAR AL-ISLAM

While all other groups discussed in this report were formed after the U.S. invasion of 2003, Jund al-Islam (the initial name for Ansar al-Islam, or AI) was announced in September 1, 2001.[129] Ansar al-Islam was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department in March 2004. The State Department announcement described the group's founding with support from al-Qaeda and Usama bin Laden, which included funding and training for some of its members in Afghanistan.[130] The group has worked with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as recently as November 2012, at one point reached out to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to mediate between it and AQI.[131] Ansar al-Islam is a Salafist Jihadist group that has conducted suicide attacks and killed

Members of Ansar al-Islam posing with a captured tank belonging to the Iraqi Army.

civilians it believed were working with Coalition forces. This group is significant for its long history, and has clashed with ISIS despite their ideological affinity.

Background

Ansar al-Islam is a splinter group from the Islamic Movement, an Islamic Kurdish party based in Iraqi Kurdistan that was formed in 1988.[132] Although initially a political movement, a 1992 electoral defeat against the KDP and PUK led eventually to the fragmentation of the party into smaller, more extreme groups based in mountains adjacent to the Iranian border in northern Iraq.[133] These groups carried out attacks, including suicide attacks, inside Iraqi Kurdistan, and have fought with Kurdish armed forces.[134]

Ansar al-Islam was formed after a merger between Jund al-Islam and members of the Islah Movement, both splinter groups from the Islamic Movement. Jund al-Islam was formed under the leadership of Warya Holori, also known as Abu Abdullah al-Shafei.[135] Shafei left Iraqi Kurdistan for Afghanistan in 1993 after heavy fighting between the Islamic Movement and the PUK in the areas of Halabja, Twila, and Bayara.[136] The Islah Movement was led by Najm al-Din Faraj Ahmed, known as Mullah Krekar. Krekar was appointed the leader of Ansar al-Islam at the time of its formation, but was expelled from the group only two years later for making "secular" statements.[137] Despite occasional media claims to the contrary, Krekar is no longer the leader of Ansar al-Islam.

Jund al-Islam was initially based in Halabja, Sulaymaniyah, but was expelled by Kurdish forces after it attacked PUK fighters on September 23, 2001 in a village near Halabja named Khili Hama.[138] After leaving Halabja, the group took control of Bayara in addition to 19 other small villages, all located in a valley around the Shinroy Mountains.[139] It was shortly after this time, on December 5, 2001, that the group

carried out its merger with members of the Islah Movement to become Ansar al-Islam. Between 2001 and 2003, the group imposed a strict interpretation of Shari'a law in Bayara, banning women and girls from receiving education, forcing the population to attend prayers in the mosques, and banning music.

Although the group was based in Kurdish areas and was composed of Kurdish fighters, it also included Arab fighters from Baghdad and foreign fighters from Afghanistan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.[140] This includes Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, a senior figure in Ansar al-Islam who later became the leader of AQI.[141] The group was accused of cooperating with the regime of Saddam Hussein in testing chemical weapons in Bayara and therefore was attacked by joint Kurdish and U.S. ground forces in addition to the U.S. Air Force during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. This joint ground assault coupled with airstrikes drove the group out of Bayara.[142]

Operations

After the bulk of the group was forced out of the mountains where the group had traditionally maintained its front line against the PUK in Northern Iraq, the group expanded its operations to urban terrain. This shift meant that the group had to change its Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) away from prolonged firefights to more hit-and-run tactics, including emplacing IEDs. After 2003, the group changed their name from Ansar al-Islam to Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna to Jama'at Ansar al-Islam and then back to Ansar al-Islam which remains the current name of the group.[143] Although the group changed its name back to Ansar al-Islam, disagreements within the group escalated leading to the formation of the splinter group Ansar al-Sunna Shari'a Committee (ASSC) in 2007.[144] In May of 2007, ASSC joined with the previously mentioned Islamic Army and Jaysh al-Mujahidin in distancing themselves from AQI for carrying out attacks on civilian targets.[145] This split confirms the assessment that Ansar al-Islam falls on the extreme end of the spectrum of groups examined in this report.

Ansar al-Islam claims that it has deployed Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) against U.S. forces in Iraq, and it has used at least one Suicide VBIED (SVBIED) in targeting an ISF headquarters in the Rabia sub-district on the Iraqi-Syrian border in November of 2012. Ansar al-Islam specifically expressed gratitude to AQI in the Jazeera area for facilitating and participating in the operation.[146] The group also claimed that it carried out several suicide attacks targeting U.S. forces in Iraq after 2003.[147]

Ansar al-Islam has or is affiliated with a media operation, Al-Ansar Media Foundation, which published an e-book history of the group as well as tens of issues of a magazine titled *Hasad al-Mujahidin* [Harvest of the Mujahidin].[148] Although the media organization was announced in 2008, the group claims to have begun Hasad al-Mujahidin in video format in a release dating to 2006.[149] Subsequent issues of the magazine have included religious content, messages from then-leader al-Shafei, "how-to" content such as how to fire a pistol, and lists of attacks claimed by the group. The attacks listed are typically IED attacks, with some VBIED and suicide attacks.

The attacks claimed by Ansar al-Islam are geographically concentrated in Mosul against U.S. forces, ISF, and Peshmerga, although some attacks are listed in Baghdad and other locations. Issues are available online dating as late as 2011. The material is well-produced, and demonstrates an intent at that time to reach out to supporters and potential supporters and broadcast successful operations. Although comparable in some ways to material produced by ISIS in 2013 and 2014, ISIS has a significantly more sophisticated and robust mechanism for distributing their material and is capable of reaching a wider audience.

The group also carried out attacks against the ISF in Mosul prior to its fall to ISIS in June 2014. In Mosul, the group demonstrated a presence beyond conducting attacks, releasing a statement on June 15, 2013 that was addressed to the "distinguished figures, doctors, and merchants" of Mosul. The statement was an answer to a complaint about "taxation," likely referring to extortion. Ansar al-Islam denied responsibility for the taxation, blaming criminal actors and the Iraqi Army. However, the statement said, Ansar al-Islam would work with the residents of Mosul to counter these "gangs."

The relationship between AI and ISIS (and its predecessor AQI) has been troubled. The group released several statements to clarify its position vis-à-vis AQI and to express the discontent of its leadership with AQI harassment of Ansar al-Islam members, especially in Mosul. On October 16, 2012 AI sent a letter to AQI's national leadership to solve the dispute between the two groups in Mosul after failing to reach an agreement with AQI's local command in Mosul.[150] After AQI did not respond, Ansar al-Islam complained to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a subsequent letter dated February 17, 2013.[151]

Later that year on September 18, 2013, Ansar al-Islam agreed to a ceasefire with ISIS. The ceasefire ended less than a month later, however, after Ansar al-Islam claimed that ISIS had repeatedly violated its conditions.[152] Although AI has itself carried out suicide attacks and utilized VBIEDs in the past, the group released a statement criticizing ISIS VBIED attacks in Mosul because of the harm done to the Sunni community in the area – Ansar al-Islam is more cautious than ISIS in incurring civilian casualties, especially Sunni civilians.[153]

Ansar al-Islam has continued in 2014 to publish claims of responsibility for attacks via social media, publishing several

lists of operations in addition to video releases that show AI gunmen carrying out attacks against the ISF. The attacks were mainly concentrated around Hawija, in southwestern Kirkuk province; in Garma and Sichar, near Fallujah; in Udhaim in northern Diyala; in Latifiyah, south of Baghdad; and in Balad, Ishaki, and Yankaja in Salah ad-Din province.[154]

In a video release on March 11, 2014 that documented attacks carried out by the group in in Mosul, several members of the group "renewed" their pledge of allegiance to the "Emir" of Ansar al-Islam, Sheikh Abu Hashim al-Ibrahim.[155] A previous message released to members of Ansar al-Islam, purportedly signed by the same Sheikh al-Ibrahim, was released in December 2011.[156] That name, clearly a pseudonym, makes it unclear if Shafei remains associated with or the leader of the group.

In the wake of ISIS's rapid advance in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam has posted claims and pictures of its attacks in the Hamrin Ridge in eastern Diyala province, Tikrit, and Kirkuk.[157] On July 1, 2014 Ansar al-Islam released an official statement regarding the fall of Mosul and what they termed the "conquering" of many areas of northern Iraq by gunmen. The group congratulated the Ummah (Muslim community), but specifically stated that Ansar al-Islam had not joined any other groups or pledged allegiance or bayah to anyone.[158] This can be read as specifically reiterating the independence of the group from ISIS.[159] Although ISIS published images of dozens of Ansar al-Islam members joining ISIS ranks, Ansar al-Islam re-iterated on August 25, 2014 that it had not joined ISIS.[160]

Given the group's long history of operations, Ansar al-Islam will almost certainly persist in conducting attacks against ISF. The denial by Ansar al-Islam that its members had joined ISIS indicates that the groups remain competitors, although the fact that AI has negotiated ceasefires with ISIS in the past indicates that they may seek to avoid direct conflict. Ansar al-Islam may work with other groups, particularly Jaysh al-Mujahidin, in carrying out operations against the ISF. As with other groups described above, operations by the ISF, United States, and allied forces that degrade ISIS are likely to provide opportunities for Ansar al-Islam to grow stronger and expand their areas of operation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed a variety of groups across the ideological spectrum, from the secular GMCIR to the Salafist-jihadist Ansar al-Islam. Many of these groups had been active historically, and they reemerged as Sunni discontent escalated after the Hawija protest incident in April 2013. They have escalated further since the Anbar clashes of late 2013. As anti-government influencers, all of these groups have facilitated the recent advance led by ISIS. These groups

hold different end goals, and their relationships to ISIS will likely shift going forward as groups reject ISIS's demands that they pledge allegiance to the self-styled Caliph Ibrahim (aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi).

ISIS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani released a statement in April 2014 directed at the other armed groups operating in Iraq, specifically in Fallujah. He stated that in "the cities and areas under your [ISIS's] control, and at the head of them Fallujah, will never be ruled, with God's permission, after today by anything other than God's law." Furthermore, in the areas that ISIS controls "there is no place for secular [groups]."[161] ISIS members who entered cities like Fallujah "will never return to the desert." ISIS has already shown it will put this stance into practice as it has attempted to eliminate potential competition and undermine the GMCIR as well as other groups.

It will be important to watch for violent clashes between these groups and ISIS. JRTN, Ansar al-Islam, and Jaysh al-Mujahidin are the strongest among these groups in terms of military capability. Although they are not as organized and sophisticated as ISIS, their attacks can fix the ISF and degrade their defenses. They can potentially inflict similar effects against ISIS, but their presence behind ISIS lines will generate further difficulty for the Iraqi Security Forces rather than advantage. While the Ba'ath Party, JRTN, and the Islamic Army have expressed their demands in a political framework, this does not reconcile them to the current political process. Salafist-jihadist groups like Jaysh al-Mujahidin and Ansar al-Islam are also irreconcilable to Iraq's secular government system. ISF advances into Sunni heartland territory will meet with violent confrontation by more than just ISIS. Despite their dissent against ISIS governance, these groups have not mounted a strategic counter-attack against ISIS. This is almost certainly because they do not possess the military strength and organization to do so. It is also because all of these groups share the goal of preventing the ISF from reentering their areas, a mission that would be very challenging without the military support of ISIS. If ISIS is degraded militarily, these groups will most likely work to fill the vacuum and continue to be destabilizing actors as long as they have some popular support. This popular support was originally and by large the result of policies of the Maliki government. It is important to watch for any decrease in popular support for these groups now that a new government is formed with a wider representation of the Iraqi Sunni community.

Iraqi Sunni leaders like Usama al-Nujaifi, Atheel al-Nujaifi, and Salih al-Mutlaq have lost most of the popular support they had by the end of 2013. Unlike Iraqi Sunni politicians, the groups described in this report enjoy local support from their communities hence the locality of their operations. These social ties will present these groups as alternatives to ISIS if

the latter was successfully degraded or defeated militarily. Therefore, the efforts to incorporate Iraqi Sunni political leaders who do not have real influence in their communities will not necessarily translate to success on the ground.

The armed groups discussed above do not represent the aspirations of all Iraqi Sunni communities. Instead, there are Sunni communities that do not favor anti-government groups, some of which are actively cooperating with the government in order to defend themselves from an existential ISIS threat. These are mostly tribal communities, including the Jughaifi tribe in Haditha, west of Ramadi;[162] the Albu Issa, Fhailat, Ihrimat, Halabasa, and Albu Alwan tribes in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, southeast of Fallujah;[163] the Jubur in Dhuluiya, southeast of Samarra;[164] the Izza tribe in Mansouriya, northeast of Baquba;[165] and Shamar tribe in Rabia, west of Mosul .[166] There are also Sunni communities where ISIS quelled tribal resistance at early stages; nevertheless, these communities will likely act against ISIS if they can be assured that the government or another armed group would provide them with the necessary military and political backing.

These Iraqi Sunni communities are within or nearby ISIS territories, including components of the Jubur tribe in Alam, east of Tikrit;[167] the Ubaid tribe in and around Hawija, southwestern Kirkuk;[168] and elements of the Jubur tribe in Zowiya, northern Salah ad-Din.[169] Multiple influences exist to swing this participation one way or the other, from pro-ISIS or pro-insurgent, to neutral, to actively pro-government. These include the opportunity to participate in re-formed National Guard units, where Iraqi Sunnis can draw a government salary to defend and control their areas in a semi-independent fashion from central federal forces.[170] It may also include incentives to displaced persons to return to their homes once they have been returned to Iraqi government control.

ISIS control of tribal areas takes place on an area-by-area, ground-up level by seeking or coercing the support of localized tribal leaders and members. Therefore, a policy that supports Iraqi Sunni tribal alignment against ISIS must follow a similar model. Engaging the tribes at a distance will not be possible; remote populations will remain under the coercion of ISIS and possibly under the influence of other anti-government groups. Engaging populations in multi-cultural urban centers currently occupied by ISIS, like Mosul, will also prove difficult without forward presence. Forward military presence by the Iraqi Security Forces, which remains a perceived sectarian actor, may meet resistance motivated and fuelled by sectarian sentiments. Yet resistance is mounting to ISIS by Sunni populations. This resistance indicates that there is potential for Sunni tribal involvement in Iraq's security strategy to deny ISIS control of Iraq's Sunni heartland.

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