

# THE RESURGENCE OF AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ

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## JOINT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,  
NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE

AND THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## THE RESURGENCE OF AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE  
AND SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 1 o'clock p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ted Poe (chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific) presiding.

Mr. POE. Committee will come to order. The witnesses will be seated, please. Just so you know, as a former judge, I like starting on time, and I start on time.

Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules.

Al-Qaeda is back in Iraq.

Would somebody shut the back doors?

From the Summer of 2012 to the Summer of 2013, al-Qaeda in Iraq was responsible for 24 major suicide bombings and 8 prison breaks. The prison breaks allowed al-Qaeda to free their fellow killers who were captured. Many of these operatives have turned up on the battlefield in Iraq and Syria with intent to cause chaos and anarchy and to kill people. Jail breaks, massive suicide attacks, and assassinations are the norm.

Not since 2008 has it been this bad. I would direct your attention to the screen. There should be a chart up on the screen that shows the—I am going to hold it up. So maybe you can see this one better. It shows the massive spike in killings from 2008 and then how now in 2013, it has even gotten worse, gotten worser.

One of the most frustrating parts about this is that the al-Qaeda in Iraq is the same bunch of killers that the United States special forces took apart from 2007 through 2011.

Prime Minister Maliki, a close friend of the Iranian regime, didn't want our help anymore. He is suffering the consequences. And now he wants help once again. He talks out of both sides of his mouth while trying to cozy up to the United States. He cozies up to the Iranians at the same time.

Prime Minister Maliki came here dragging the sack in November, wanting more American taxpayer money. He wanted attack helicopters and all sorts of advanced equipment. But is that what he needs to go after al-Qaeda? Does he have other reasons for wanting this type of equipment?

Maliki has centralized power, alienated the Sunnis, brought back the Shia hit squads. This, in part, has allowed al-Qaeda to return to be back in Iraq.

What Maliki needs is a new strategy to fight al-Qaeda. This includes doing a better job of reaching out to the Sunni population so they feel like he represents all Iraqis, not just 1 group.

The chaos next door in Syria is not helping at all. Al-Qaeda in Iraq gave birth to al-Qaeda in Syria. And the groups essentially act as the same. Their goal, it seems, is to establish an extremist area that spans the entire region of the world in that area.

This problem is not going away. Over the past 2 years, we have heard from the administration al-Qaeda is on its last legs or it is defeated. It doesn't seem that is the case. Over the world, al-Qaeda affiliates are gaining size and strength. Many continue to follow commands from core al-Qaeda in Pakistan, as I call them, the Benedict Arnold ally of the United States. That would be Pakistan.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq is creating a troubling trend. The United States doesn't have the luxury of turning our back on the situation. Sectarian war in Iraq would be a disaster for the entire region and American national security.

Containing Iranian influence in the region is a top priority. Al-Qaeda reestablishing a safe haven to plan and launch attacks outside the region is unacceptable. And it is a threat to American security. Maintaining the free flow of oil to the global market out of Iraq is essential; in fact, some way that al-Qaeda in Iraq could hit the Iraqi oil infrastructure to weaken Baghdad.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq has little to lose and everything to gain. They are alive, and they are well.

We are here today to learn from our experts about al-Qaeda in Iraq, its resources, its strategy, its tactics, and what we are going to do about it, if anything. I look forward to the testimony.

And I now yield time to the ranking member, Mr. Sherman, from California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Judge, thanks for your convening these hearings. And thanks for starting on time.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq reached the height of its destructive capacity in late 2006 and early 2007 before it was largely decimated by a counterterrorism campaign, by coalition troops and Iraqi security forces, which basically means our troops. The organization was weakened to a fraction of its members and its capacities.

In the past 2 years, al-Qaeda in Iraq has regrouped, regained capacities, and expanded in the areas from which it was expelled during the latter stages of the Iraq war in 2008. The result has been perhaps 8,000 deaths this year in a revitalization of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

One of our witnesses, Dr. Pollack, says in his testimony that in 2013, Iraq is on track to experience a 100 percent increase in violent deaths when compared to 2012. And 2012 was no walk in the park.

There is a cycle of violence in Iraq where AQI targets Shia communities and the Iraqi Government responds with massive security sweeps against Sunni regions that eliminate some extremists but also lay the groundwork for AQI recruiting in the future. AQI was largely decimated when we left in 2011. Now its ranks have

regrown to at least a couple of thousand fighters, according to most reports.

In July 2013, al-Qaeda in Iraq successfully attacked the prison Abu Ghraib, leading to the escape of 500 prisoners, most of which were people we put in that prison for terrorism. That builds a case for perhaps helping Prime Minister Maliki. And he wants American weapons. And his biggest argument is that we should give him American weapons because his enemies hate us. The problem is his friends hate us, too. And his friends in Teheran are more dangerous to us than his enemies in Fallujah.

Now, Maliki's argument goes something like this. He holds office today solely as a result of various actions taken by the United States, some of which were mistakes. And since, therefore, he is our product, therefore, we have to protect him and do whatever he wants. And, therefore, he is "one of the good guys," no matter who he allies himself with today. The fact is allegiance to Teheran is only a bit less than Assad's allegiance to Teheran. But Maliki's argument goes something like this. Since he has been the beneficiary of a series of American mistakes in the past, we have a legal duty to continue to make mistakes for his benefit in the future.

If we are going to provide him with weapons, there ought to be at least 4 conditions. The first is that he start trying to reach a compromise with at least some elements of the Sunni community. He has taken provocative actions against Sunnis, such as postponing elections in Sunni regions and forcing prominent Sunni politicians out of the government. He shouldn't be seeking the best deal he can for the Shiite community. He should be seeking a peace that would benefit not only him but the United States. And he needs to allow proper Sunni representation in his government.

Second, if he wants our weapons, he ought to pay for them. People involved in foreign policy seem to be so focused on foreign policy that whether we get paid for the weapons or not is, at most, a footnote. The fact is Iraq has plenty of oil now. We will have even more oil in the future. They have got enough cash to pay for the weapons now. And they can certainly borrow in the international markets. And, at a very minimum, they can agree to pay us later in cash or in oil.

Third, he has got to stop Iranian flights over his airspace into Syria. Now, he will say, "Well, then give me an air force." We don't have to. All he has to do is authorize the Saudi, the Turkish, or the American Air Force to ensure that his airspace is not used wrongfully by Iranian thugs transitioning to Damascus so they can deploy and kill many innocent people and some non-innocent people in Syria.

And, finally, he has got to focus on the hostages from Camp Ashraf and the human rights of those in Camp Hurriya, also known as Camp Liberty. These are international responsibilities that he has.

So if there is no penetrating analysis, the argument will be we created him; therefore, he is a good guy, he is in trouble; therefore, we give him weapons for free. That is the default position of our foreign policy. My hope is that through this hearing and other forms, we are able to penetrate a little bit more deeply.

I yield back.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman. The Chair will recognize the gentleman—the gentle lady?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Yes.

Mr. POE. The gentle lady from Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. It is all about timing.

Mr. POE. Perfect timing.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Well, as we know, so much as been going on with the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Just last month, our Subcommittee on the Middle East on North Africa held a hearing on U.S. policy toward Iraq as we tried to establish what the administration's strategic goals and objectives are in Iraq. And the most common theme and cause for concern that came up throughout our hearing was the threat posed by the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Unfortunately, as we have seen in many of our other hearings this year, al-Qaeda is resurgent throughout the Middle East and North Africa, not just in Iraq. The grim reality is that al-Qaeda is on the rise. It continues to be a grave threat to U.S. national security, despite the administration's assessment that it is on the run.

It has now been 2 years since we withdrew all U.S. forces from Iraq, leaving behind a fragile Iraq that perhaps was not ready to become stable. Since our departure, we have seen a drastic increase in sectarian violence at levels not seen since 2008, with over 7,000 civilian deaths so far this year. Leaving Iraq with so much uncertainty caused irreparable repercussions to our regional and national security interests, not to mention all of the sacrifices made by our brave men and women in uniform.

The administration's failure to find a mutually agreeable resolution to extend our presence in Iraq has severely weakened our influence in the country and left a vacuum that is currently being filled by forces who seek to harm us and our allies.

On one side, we see a growing Iranian influence in Iraq as the regime in Tehran strengthens its ties with the Maliki government. Nowhere is this more evident than with the unwillingness of the Iraqi Government to halt the Iranians from using Iraqi airspace to ship Assad and his regime weapons, supplies, and even Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC, members to fight along Hezbollah and Assad's forces.

On the other hand, we have seen a dangerous rise in extremism as we witness a clear resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq, AQI, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, ISIS, and other groups, due to the fact that the Iraqi security forces are struggling to combat these extremists and their government is not willing to be tough on the Iranian regime.

AQI took advantage of the uncertain security situation created there by U.S. disengagement in Iraq, and reemerged stronger and more popular than before the surge. Viewed as a theater of jihad, Iraq, along with Syria, has been among one of the top destinations for foreign fighters who seek to engage in jihad. These foreign fighters pose a serious threat to our national security, that of our regional allies and beyond, and may soon be able to create a large safe haven that spans from Syria to Iraq due to the instability and lack of security in both countries.

Not only do these fighters threaten our European partners, where many of these foreign fighters come to train, to wage jihad, and then take what they learn back to their home countries, they also threaten our friends and allies in the region like Israel, Jordan, the UAE, who all fear that the extremists will soon turn their attention toward them.

It is important for the administration to not lose sight of what is going on in Iraq and the region. Instead, it must strategically implement clear, constructive, goal-oriented policies that are geared toward advancing U.S. national security interests in the long run.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the time.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentle lady.

The Chair will now recognize other members for 1 minute. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Vargas.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you, Your Honor. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

Two years after the U.S. forces departed Iraq, al-Qaeda's influence and capabilities have grown significantly, particularly in the Sunni communities. The number of civilian casualties continue to rise. And al-Qaeda in Iraq remains a destabilizing force in the region through its support of terrorist networks. Iraq is in danger of becoming a failed state. And our national security interests are undermined by the growing insecurity of the Maliki government.

I look forward to hearing from our panel of experts on the recommendations on how U.S. can play a strategic role in defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq. Thank you. And I yield back, sir.

Mr. POE. The Chair will now recognize the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Kinzinger.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is no secret I have been very critical of this administration. And Iraq, as a veteran of Iraq, somebody who was there a number of times, I saw, frankly, the bravest political move I think in 50 years, the surge in Iraq, doing it in opposition to what many on Capitol Hill demanded of the President. The President decided to surge, send a message to the bad guys that not only is America not leaving. We will never be defeated on the battlefield. And we are doubling down our commitment to Iraq. Unfortunately, this administration completely threw away that gain when we completely withdrew from Iraq. I think it is one of the most embarrassing and shameful foreign policy decisions that this administration has made. And I will continue to remain critical of it.

When America retreats from the world, chaos follows. And when American retreats from Iraq, chaos follows. And what we are seeing was an American retreat followed by chaos. So I am interested in finding out how we can stay engaged, despite the difficulties we see there.

And I yield back.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman.

Without objection, all of the witnesses' prepared statements will be made part of the record. I ask that each witness remember that I like to start on time and quit on time. You have 5 minutes. I will introduce each of the witnesses and then give them time for their opening statements. And, once again, the members do have copies of your prepared remarks.

Dr. Kenneth Pollack is a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy. Dr. Pollack began his career as a Persian Gulf military analyst at the CIA and has served twice on the staff of the National Security Counsel. He has also been a senior research professor at the National Defense University and director of the National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Jessica Lewis is the research director at the Institute for the Study of War. Prior to joining the Institute for the Study of War, she served 8 years on the active duty as an intelligence officer for the United States Army. Her military career includes 3 deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, where she served as tactical, operational, and theater-level commands. She has twice been awarded the Bronze Star medal for her impact on operations. Ms. Lewis, as a side note, thank you for your service in the military.

Dr. Michael Knights is the Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy specializing on Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government. He has worked almost exclusively on Iraq for the last 15 years, working in every Iraqi province and most of the country's 100 districts as an adviser to government, military, reconstruction agencies, and the oil sector.

Dr. Daniel Byman is a professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and the research director for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. Dr. Byman previously served as a professional staff member with both the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States—that is the 9/11 Commission—and the joint 9/11 inquiry staff of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

We have an excellent group of panelists today. And we will start with Dr. Pollack. You have 5 minutes.

Mr. POLLACK. Thank you, sir.

**STATEMENT OF KENNETH M. POLLACK, PH.D., SENIOR FELLOW, SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

Mr. POLLACK. Mr. Chairman, Madam Chairman, Congressman Sherman, distinguished members, thank you very much for affording me this great honor in addressing you today on this extremely important topic.

I would like to focus my remarks on the strategic context that has produced the resurrection of al-Qaeda in Iraq in the expectation that my very able colleagues will be better able to handle the tactical aspects and the technical aspects of that resurgence.

I would simply like to make 4 remarks about what we are seeing in Iraq. First, the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq is not the malady itself. It is a symptom of the malady. The real problems in Iraq are the problems of Iraqi politics. It has been the problem ever since 2003. From 2003 until 2006, as a result of our catastrophically mis-handled early reconstruction of Iraq, Iraqi politics were a mess. They enabled the infiltration of al-Qaeda into Iraqi society, pushed the Sunni tribes into the arms of al-Qaeda and other Salafist groups and built the foundation for the heavy terrorist campaign insurgency that we faced in Iraq during that period of time.



It is not a coincidence that from 2007 until at least 2010, during the period of the surge, Iraqi politics turned in a very different direction. They moved in a very positive direction, toward greater inclusiveness, toward greater democratization. It is no coincidence that, as a result, al-Qaeda in Iraq was enormously marginalized. The Sunni awakening was a critical element of that, but it was only 1 element of that larger process.

And it is also no coincidence that beginning in about 2011, as Iraqi politics faced a very significant downturn following the removal of American troops from Iraq that, once again, we have seen a resurgence of al-Qaeda's activities, its ability to recruit, its ability to insinuate itself, and its acceptance within the Sunni community of Iraq.

There has been a tendency to ascribe al-Qaeda in Iraq's resurgence to Syria. And there is no question that the Syrian civil war has contributed to this state of affairs.

From 2009 to 2010, however, while Iraqi politics were doing quite well, there was no shortage of jihadists coming from Syria, but there was simply no acceptance in Iraq. And so we cannot attribute the problems entirely to Syria. It is true that the Syrian civil war has helped re-radicalize the Iraqi population. It has empowered Iraqi extremists. But it is only part of what is going on.

Second, the obvious follow-on from my first point that the rise of al-Qaeda is primarily a function of the problems in Iraqi politics should lead us to a focus on Iraqi politics as the real solution to that problem. Certainly greater counterterrorism assistance, more proficiency with counterterrorism will help, but it will help primarily to treat the symptom. Unless we are willing, unless the Iraqis are able to deal with their political problems, the symptoms will recur. And they could recur in a far more virulent form. And, therefore, it is incumbent upon us to help the Iraqis deal with their political problems if we are to eradicate al-Qaeda in Iraq once again. And this focuses on bringing the Sunnis back into the government and rebuilding the power-sharing arrangement that the United States brokered as part of the surge in 2007–2008.

Third, the upcoming elections in Iraq could turn Iraq in a more positive or a potentially much more negative direction. In particular, if Sunnis and other Iraqis who feel marginalized believe that they have political recourse to address their grievances, they will be far less likely to support both actively and passively groups like Iraq. But, unfortunately, the opposite is also true. And if the elections produce an outcome that Sunnis and others believe has further alienated them, made it more difficult for them to address their grievances through the political process, it is likely that they will more closely embrace al-Qaeda and other radical groups and the violence will worsen.

And, finally, it is important to remember that while American influence in Iraq has waned and has waned quite considerably, it is not nonexistent. We still do have levers of influence with the Iraqis. And, what is more, we could rebuild our influence further, in particular, by conditioning our aid in exactly the manner that Congressman Sherman described in his opening remarks. There is a great deal that the Iraqis still want from us. And all of that that Iraq wants from us is a source of leverage, a source of leverage that

we could be employing without a dramatic increase in our actual funding of Iraq but that could, nevertheless, make a very important impact on Iraqi politics and, therefore, on al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pollack follows:]

Testimony of

**Kenneth M. Pollack**

Senior Fellow

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at  
The Brookings Institution

**The Resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq**

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
The United States House of Representatives

December 12, 2013

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Representatives, I am honored to be able to appear before you to discuss the situation in Iraq and the resurrection of al-Qaeda since the departure of U.S. forces in December 2011. It is a great credit to this committee that at a time when the nation appears determined to forget our interests in Iraq, you refuse to do so. It is absolutely vital. Since 2003, the United States has invested an enormous amount in Iraq, and the future of Iraq remains of great importance to the interests of the United States and our allies. Iraq has replaced Iran as the second leading oil exporter in OPEC, and projections of future low oil prices are highly contingent upon the continued growth of Iraqi oil exports. Remembering that virtually every postwar American recession was preceded by an increase in oil prices, Iraq and its oil production remain critical to the prosperity of the United States.

Unfortunately, over the past two years, Iraq has taken a noticeable turn for the worse, although how bad things will get still remains uncertain. Our topic today, the reemergence of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), is among the most visible and frightening manifestations of Iraq's downward turn. AQI has been one of the principal culprits in the worsening violence across Iraq. In 2012, Iraq experienced a 10 percent increase in violent civilian deaths. That was the first annual increase since 2006, prior to the so-called "Surge." In 2013, Iraq may very well experience a 100 percent increase in violent civilian deaths over 2012. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that violence is multiplying in Iraq by orders of magnitude.

However, we need to recognize that the increasing violence in Iraq, and the reemergence of groups like AQI do not constitute Iraq's problems per se. They are instead the symptoms of those problems. They are the outward manifestations of deep-seated structural conflicts and unresolved differences among Iraq's various constituencies. Although it is not impossible to mitigate or even resolve those underlying problems, they will not be overcome easily, and few of Iraq's political leaders are making the kind of effort that would be needed to do so. Instead, most of Iraq's leaders concentrate on achieving short-term tactical gains against their rivals, often in ways that exacerbate those problems rather than ameliorating them.

For this reason, it will be difficult even to meaningfully reduce the levels of violence in Iraq without addressing Iraq's fundamental political (and, to a lesser extent, economic and social) problems. Iraq will never be peaceful, prosperous and free of the scourge of AQI and groups like it until Iraq's leaders properly grapple with those underlying problems and forge reasonable compromises to allow the country to move forward. The converse is also true. The longer that Iraq's fundamental political problems are allowed to fester; the longer that Iraq's bad, old political culture is allowed to hold sway; and the longer that Iraq's leaders obsess over how to beat their adversaries rather than fixing what ails the nation, the worse the violence is likely to get and the stronger that groups like AQI are likely to grow. In the end, as they hope, these groups might succeed in pushing the country back into civil war.

#### **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**

The initial rise of AQI and the other Salafist groups was a product of the many mistakes of the United States after the fall of Saddam. The United States invaded, toppled the totalitarian dictatorship of Saddam Husayn and put nothing in its place. In so doing, Washington created a failed state and a security vacuum. These circumstances quickly spawned widespread organized and unorganized crime, terrorism, an insurgency among the Sunni tribes of Western Iraq who felt threatened by the ham-fisted American efforts to create a Shi'a-Kurd dominated government, and eventually an inter-communal civil war in 2005-2007.

Indeed, the creation of a power vacuum in Iraq did what it often does, and has done in places like the former Yugoslavia, Congo, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere: It enabled various criminals, sociopaths and opportunists to lash out at their rivals and use pre-existing (even long-dormant) differences as causes to mobilize support and employ violence. This in turn prompted other groups to take up arms to defend themselves, setting off a fear-based spiral of attacks and reprisals that pushed the country into all-out civil war. AQI and its ilk took advantage of the security vacuum and the fear it inspired to become a dominant force among Iraq's Sunni population by 2006.

AQI has both home grown and foreign elements. It was founded by foreign al-Qaeda operatives who entered Iraq in the wake of the U.S. invasion to kill both Americans and Shi'a. They insinuated themselves with the Sunni tribal community of Western Iraq, which had been badly alienated by the Bush Administration's disastrous mishandling of the post-invasion reconstruction. During that time, many Sunni Iraqis believed that the United States had handed the Iraqi government to the worst elements among the Shi'a—warlords, extremists and thieves—expressly to crush the Sunni population. Believing they had no other allies and nowhere else to turn, many Sunni Iraqis saw the foreign al-Qaeda operatives with their combat experience, expertise, weapons and money as heaven-sent to help them in their hour of need. The Sunni tribal community largely embraced al-Qaeda as allies in their fight against the Shi'a militias and the Americans, who seemed in Sunni eyes to be aiding and abetting those militias.

Consequently, AQI's initial, mostly foreign cadre, quickly gained numerous local recruits. Over time, AQI became a largely Iraqi affair. One of its goals was to drive the Americans from Iraq to reclaim the territory for the Muslim world as part of al-Qaeda's larger aspiration of creating a new Islamic Caliphate to rule all Muslim lands. Another was to slaughter, convert or expel the Shi'a, whom al-Qaeda's rabid Sunni Salafists regard as apostates and heretics who must be

cleansed from the land to create a pure, Sunni Islamic state. AQI, both its foreign and domestic personnel, set about these goals with a vengeance.

Nevertheless, it is also important to recognize that AQI was actually only one of many Sunni insurgent/terrorist/militia groups operating in Iraq against the Shi'a, the Americans and to a lesser extent, the Kurds. At the height of Iraq's civil war, dozens of groups like the 1920s Revolution Brigade, Ansar al-Sunnah, Jaysh al-Muhammad and Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa Naqshbandia (JRTN). Many, but not all, of these groups embraced the same Salafist theology as AQI, but all of them espoused the same virulent Sunni chauvinism. To a considerable extent, we have come to use the term "AQI" as a shorthand term describing a wider range of violent Sunni extremist groups.

For several years, primarily from 2004 to 2007, these Sunni groups helped wreak havoc upon Iraq and the American forces deployed there. They formed the core of the Sunni order of battle against the Shi'a in Iraq's horrific civil war. They also constituted the bulk of the insurgency against the United States presence.

The partnership between the Salafi jihadists and the Sunni tribal community of Iraq was never an easy one, however. The Sunni tribes were never as religious as the Salafist zealots, and certainly they did not care for the fundamentalism imposed by their new allies on parts of Iraq that they came to control. Their excesses always rubbed most Sunni tribesmen the wrong way. Arguably of greater importance, al-Qa'ida in Iraq had turned the traditional tribal hierarchy upside down. When they entered Iraq, their first recruits were the dispossessed of Iraqi tribal society—the misfits, the outsiders, the lowest men on the totem poles. As al-Qa'ida grew in power, these were the men who benefitted most in power, wealth and prestige. They lorded it over the shaykhs, dismissing the millennia-old hierarchy of the region. Moreover, while their losses to Shi'a militias, especially in Baghdad, had convinced the traditional Sunni hierarchy that the civil war needed to end, not so al-Qa'ida and the other violent fanatics who were willing to fight on to the last, even if that meant the extermination of Iraq's Sunni community.

Not surprisingly, by 2006, many Sunni tribesmen and many more of their shaykhs had had it with al-Qa'ida. They tried to evict the terrorists on their own but failed. Meanwhile, the U.S. Marines, charged with the pacification of Anbar since 2004, had already begun applying low-intensity conflict tactics intended to divide the tribes from the terrorists. American personnel began reaching out to the tribal shaykhs to try to reconcile with them, offering them protection, services, resources, even bribes if they would throw off the terrorists, insurgents and militias.

For the Sunni shaykhs, it was that combination of threat and opportunity that moved them. They increasingly foresaw that the longer that al-Qa'ida and other Salafi groups were able to hold sway in Anbar and Salah ad-Din, the harder it would be to evict them and the more that they would reshape Iraqi Sunni tribal society to suit themselves, to the detriment of the traditional power structure. And by observing the Marines, seeing the consistency of their behavior and their determination to reach out to the Sunni community, the shaykhs concluded that they finally had a real partner who they could rely on to break al-Qa'ida, extirpate it from Sunni society and return them to their traditional status. Thus was born the Anbar Awakening which started in late

2006 but gathered tremendous steam from the further application of those same tactics to the rest of the country.

Perhaps the least understood element of that story, however, was the reintegration of the Sunnis into the wider Iraqi state and society. It was not just that the Marines (and later, the entire U.S. mission) promised to protect and aid the Sunni tribes against al-Qa'ida and the other zealots. It was also, that the Americans promised to protect the Sunni community against the Shi'a as well.

Thus, one of the most important shifts that occurred as part of the "Surge" was that the United States went from being the enablers of the Shi'a to the defenders of the Sunnis. In the past, American forces had largely stood idly by while Shi'a militias and death squads slaughtered the Sunnis, drove them from Baghdad and other towns—often under the camouflage of the government's own security services. As a result of America's shift to population security during the Surge, the Sunnis saw American troops stop the Shi'a conquests cold. American troops prevented the Shi'a militias from consummating their victory in the Battle of Baghdad with a final slaughter of the remaining Sunnis holed up in the Mansur district, the last remaining Sunni enclave in the city.

More than that, the United States promised—and then made good on those promises—to force the Shi'a and Kurdish leaders to give the Sunnis a place at Iraq's table again. Sunni political leaders were given cabinet posts and other high-ranking jobs. Sunni fighters were re-integrated into Iraq's security forces, most notably as the "Sons of Iraq" but most importantly as ordinary soldiers and commanders in Iraqi field units as part of the reform of the ISF. Indeed, some units composed largely of Sunni troops and officers would later play key roles in the government campaigns to break the power of Jaysh al-Mahdi. The United States also brought goods and services to a Sunni community that had been denied them by the Shi'a (and Kurdish) warlords and chauvinists since 2003. At first, these were furnished by American military forces themselves, but later, as Sunni leaders regained their political influence, by Iraq's nascent government itself. Suddenly, the Sunnis had a reason to cooperate with the government of Iraq and to try to build a new Iraqi state, rather than tear it down.

Thus, what broke AQI in 2007-2008 was the major effort, undertaken as part of the Surge strategy, to actually address Iraq's problems. The shift to a population security strategy in particular suppressed the violence, broke the links between the militias/insurgents and the Iraqi people and allowed American officials to forge a new power-sharing arrangement among Iraq's various ethno-sectarian groups. This in turn ended the sense of alienation among the Sunni community and allowed for the creation of a new political process. That, not more aggressive special forces or more powerful weaponry, were what crippled AQI and the other Salafist groups by turning Iraq's Sunni population against them. Mao Zedong once famously observed that the guerrilla is like a fish that swims in the sea of the people. The best way to kill the fish is to turn the sea against it. The Surge of 2007-2008 turned the sea of Iraq's Sunni tribal populace against AQI, and the result was their rapid collapse and suffocation.

By 2009, AQI and its Salafist brethren were effectively defeated. AQI had been reduced to a few small cells hiding in the caves of Jabal Hamrin mostly just trying to survive and unable to mount meaningful attacks. For most Iraqis, AQI had become little more than a bad memory,

easily put out of their minds as they contemplated what seemed to be Iraq's hard, but brighter future.

### **The Rebirth of AQI**

Of course, even then Iraq was still a far way from stability, tranquility, prosperity or true democracy. In an absolute sense, it remained a mess. But in a relative sense, it had made enormous progress. It was finally headed in the right direction. And it had taken some remarkable steps forward, steps that had seemed impossible even three years before.

Looking back, Iraq may have reached its political, military and economic apex in 2009 and early 2010. In 2009 Iraq held provincial elections, and in 2010 national elections, that had resulted in stunning victories for those parties considered the most secular, the most vested in improving governance and services, the least tied to the militias and the least sectarian. They also handed equally stunning defeats to the parties most closely tied to the militias and the civil war. Indeed, the militias—Sunni and Shi'a—were withering, as were the vast majority of terrorist groups. Violence and deaths were way down. Secular, peaceful, nationalistic Iraqi leaders (including Sunnis like Osama al-Nujayfi and Rafe al-Issawi) were emerging and becoming dominant figures in government. There was a widespread feeling that everyone had to play by the democratic rules and no one could get caught subverting the will of the Iraqi people or even being too corrupt.

All of this progress was very real, but it was also very fragile. Like a bone that had been fractured but was now mending, it needed a cast to protect it, hold it, and allow the bones to knit together and become strong. That role was played by the United States, in particular by our military forces in Iraq. During that time frame, it became an increasingly symbolic role as the drawdown in troop strength meant that we did less and less of the actual provision of security for Iraqis, but it was an absolutely critical role.

As long as American forces remained, Iraqis did not fear the re-emergence of the security vacuum or the widespread use of violence by any group (including whichever group controlled the government, thereby giving it by far the greatest capacity to use violence against its rivals). It also meant that Iraq's political leaders had to abide by the democratic rules of the road laid down by the Americans. This enabled good Iraqis to act constructively, and prevented the bad ones from acting too destructively. Iraqis could assume that the future would be better, not worse, and make decisions based on their hopes, not their fears.

The problems began after Iraq's 2010 national elections. The elections themselves were wonderful—the best yet. Iraqis voted overwhelmingly for Ayad Allawi's mostly-Sunni Iraqiyya and Maliki's overwhelmingly Shi'a State of Law coalitions, the two groups seen as most secular, least sectarian and least tied to the militias. Of the two, Iraqiyya garnered slightly more votes. But Maliki refused to believe that he had lost, insisting that the vote had been rigged (perhaps by the Americans, his aides claimed) and refusing to allow Allawi to take the first turn at forming a government. Then he pressured Iraq's high court to rule that he could get the first shot at forming a government, which deadlocked the entire political system. And the United States (and the UN) went along and said nothing. Rather than insist that Allawi be given the first chance, as is customary in most democracies and as was clearly what was best for Iraqi democracy. The

U.S. did nothing. Ten months of political backstabbing followed, and in the end, the Iranians forced Muqtada as-Sadr to back Maliki, uniting the Shi'a behind him. At that point, the Kurds fell into place, believing that the prime minister had to be a Shi'a, and Iraqiyya's chances were finished.

It was also a defeat for Iraqi democracy. The message that it sent to Iraq's people and politicians alike was that the United States under the new Obama Administration was no longer going to enforce the rules of the democratic road. Washington was not going to insist that the will of the people win out. America was willing to step aside and allow Iraq's traditional political culture of pay-offs, log-rolling, threats and violence to re-emerge to determine who would rule the country. It undermined the reform of Iraqi politics and resurrected the specter of the failed state.

Having backed Maliki for prime minister simply to end the embarrassing political stalemate, the Administration compounded its mistake by lashing itself uncritically to his government. No matter what Maliki did—good, bad or indifferent—Washington backed him. Whether it was out of fear of being criticized for allowing him to remain in office in the first place, or sheer lack of interest and a desire to simply do what was easiest and required the least effort on the part of the U.S., the Administration applauded and overlooked everything he did. Maliki certainly did some good. He was not all bad. But he also did some very bad things—things that were highly subversive of Iraqi democracy. Among the worst was to thoroughly politicize the ISF, ousting huge numbers of the competent, apolitical officers that the United States had worked so hard to put in place and replacing them with people loyal to him, regardless of their credentials. Very quickly, the ISF went from an apolitical force that most Iraqis trusted, to a servant of the Maliki government deeply distrusted by those outside the prime minister's camp.

In 2011, with U.S. elections in sight, the Obama Administration decided to end its military commitment to Iraq. Technically, the Administration was willing to keep roughly 3,000 troops in the country, and technically it was the Iraqis who were unwilling to meet our legal needs to stay. But these are technicalities that do not bear up on closer examination. The 3,000 troops were a far cry from the 20-25,000 troops that the U.S. military felt were needed to keep the peace. Few Iraqi politicians were willing to fight for such a meaningless presence. Similarly, there were other ways that Washington might have handled the legal issues surrounding an American follow-on force, but the White House made clear it was uninterested.

The withdrawal of the last U.S. troops in December 2011 re-opened Iraq's security vacuum. Perhaps just by a crack, but it was enough. Over the next two years the security vacuum forced the doors open wider and wider. It wasn't so much that when the U.S. left there was nothing that could enforce law and order, it was the fear of all Iraqis—particularly their leaders—that the American departure would mean that violence was once again an option. And as it always does, that fear drove the parties to pre-empt one another to gain the advantage of surprise.

It was the prime minister who moved first. We don't know Maliki's motives, but it seems that while he was in Washington in December 2011, before the last American soldier departed, his aides claimed that various Sunni leaders were plotting to mount a coup against him as soon as the Americans were gone. So he deployed troops and tanks outside the homes of three key Sunni leaders and arrested hundreds of lower-ranking Iraqiyya officials. When Sunni Vice President

Tariq al-Hashimi fled, Maliki had an arrest warrant issued in absentia, “confessions” (quite possibly coerced by torture) by Hashimi’s bodyguards implicating him personally were broadcast on Iraqi TV and then Iraq’s captive courts tried, convicted and sentenced him to death in absentia.

A series of similarly frightening moves followed over the next 18 months. Although his opponents insist that Maliki had always intended to make himself the new despot of Iraq, the evidence suggests something different, although perhaps no less dangerous. Maliki was driven by genuine fear. Fear that all of his rivals were out to get him. He wasn’t necessarily wrong about that. For many of them, if they could have overthrown him or killed him, they probably would have. But because he was the prime minister, the head of the government itself, Maliki’s intentions were meaningless. All that mattered were his actions, and these were deeply subversive of Iraqi democracy, undermined all of the factors that had brought about Iraq’s resurrection in 2007-2009 and revived the four problems that had produced the descent into civil war, and enflamed the Kurdish issue to boot.

As a Shi’a Islamist, Maliki was always most suspicious of the Sunnis. Then, when Iraqiyya bested him in the 2010 elections, it seems to have convinced him that he had been right all along and the Sunnis—all of whom seem to be crypto-Ba’thists in his mind—were his greatest threat. So it was against the Sunnis that he came down hardest. Between his attacks and their counterattacks, many Sunni leaders were arrested or driven from politics. They lost their positions and their patronage networks. Many promises to the Sunni community were never honored. And the Iraqi military ceased to be apolitical guardians of the people, and became instead loyal executors of the prime minister’s particular agenda.

To the Sunnis, Maliki was tearing up all of the promises that they had won from the Americans and from him. They felt they were again being deprived of their fair share of political power and economic resources. They felt that once again, Shi’i chauvinists were in charge of the government and were using its apparatus, particularly the security services, to wage a sectarian war against them. They increasingly came to believe that they had no peaceful, political recourse to address their grievances, let alone secure their legitimate aspirations. Once again, they felt that they had no choice but to fight. And so, various Sunnis began to discretely reach out to their old terrorist friends again. By 2012, al-Qa’ida in Iraq was back from the dead, conducting coordinated nation-wide bombings, contesting control of parts of Diyala province, killing scores or even hundreds at a time.

#### **The Impact of the Syrian Civil War**

To hear it from many Iraqi officials, the increase in terrorist attacks across Iraq over the past two years has been entirely the product of the Syrian civil war. The Syrian civil war has unquestionably contributed to the problems of Iraq, but this claim is not just overstated, it is potentially dangerous. Focusing on spillover from the Syrian civil war is convenient for the Iraqi government to shift blame away from its own mistakes. Stemming spillover from Syria into Iraq—difficult in its own right—will not get at the real causes of the problem. It could raise expectations artificially, and when they inevitably crash because the violence does not abate, this could exacerbate popular unhappiness with the government. Alternatively, it could cause the



Iraqi government to take precipitous action to deal with spillover from Syria (like intervening in the Syrian civil war) that could instead undermine Iraq's own fragile stability.

The impact of spillover from the Syrian civil war has affected Iraq in several different ways. It has meant a flow of Salafi fighters, weapons, money and other supplies into the Sunni tribal lands of Iraq from Saudi Arabia. The Saudis and other Gulf Arab states have been using Iraq as a conduit to help the opposition in Syria, which is predominantly Sunni. From the Saudi perspective, this makes sense in two ways. In an immediate sense, the Sunni tribes of this area span the borders from northern Saudi Arabia to western Iraq to eastern Syria. Thus, these tribes provide an excellent delivery network for supplies from Saudi Arabia into Syria. However, at a broader level, the Gulf Arabs recognize that the Iraqi tribesmen are keeping some portion of the men and materiel to help them in their own fight against Baghdad. The suppliers generally see this as a bonus. As one well-connected Saudi explained it, "We see the Syrian civil war and the (coming) Iraqi civil war as the same and we will treat them as the same." From Riyadh's perspective, there are Iranian-backed Shi'i governments in both Syria and Iraq that are oppressing their Sunni populations—Sunni populations that Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states feel increasingly determined to support.

The wider impact of the Syrian civil war has also exacerbated the Sunni-Shi'a rift in Iraq by conjuring the possibility that in a new Iraqi civil war, the Sunnis could expect greater help from the Sunni Arab states than they did the first time around. As I noted earlier, one reason that the Sunni tribal leadership partnered with the U.S. military to launch the Awakening was their realization that the Shi'a were winning the Iraqi civil war, driving the Sunnis from Baghdad and surrounding towns, and threatening to ethnically cleanse the Sunni community from the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. They understood that they needed American help to prevent such a catastrophic defeat. Today, there are no Americans to turn to if a new civil war goes as badly as the first, so the Sunnis have had to go looking for new allies.

The mobilization of the Sunni Arab world brought about by the Syrian civil war has seemed to at least some Iraqi Sunni leaders to have provided an answer to that dilemma. Thus, although Iraq's Sunnis no longer have the Americans to protect them, many now believe that they have the entire Sunni world to support them. In their minds, their struggle against Maliki has gone from one in which they were the underdogs in a fight against a much larger Iraqi Shi'a community, to one in which they are part of a vast Sunni army mobilizing to crush the puny Shi'a apostasy.

#### **What is to be Done?**

What this history should make clear is that the problems of Iraq produced and enabled the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq. AQI did not cause the problems of Iraq (although it unquestionably did exacerbate them).

When the Sunni community has felt threatened by the Shi'a-dominated government—in 2004-2006 and again since 2011—AQI and other Salafist groups have found receptive audiences among the Sunni tribes. Initially, they were embraced. Today they seem more tolerated. Both work for AQI. Many Sunnis remember the bad old days when AQI and the Salafists ruled over swathes of western Iraq. But they fear the Shi'a-dominated government intends to oppress or

even slaughter them, and so they provide both passive and active support to the Salafist groups. Passive support by allowing the terrorists to operate without alerting the authorities. Active support because a slowly increasing number of Iraqis are again joining AQI, JRTN and other groups and/or providing them with money, explosives and weaponry. Some do so to fight back against what they see as their Shi'a oppressors. Others because they hope that doing so will force the Shi'a leaders to compromise and return to the power-sharing arrangement worked out by the Americans during the Surge.

Thus, addressing the rise of al-Qaeda, halting and reversing it, will mean addressing Iraq's underlying political problems and particularly the renewed alienation of Iraq's Sunni tribes. Until that is accomplished, anything else will be merely treating the symptoms, not the underlying disease. And no matter how hard we or the Iraqi government may battle the symptoms, if they do not cure the underlying disease, the symptoms will recur, quite possibly in ever more virulent form.

However, the United States government is not the government of Iraq. It is not even guiding the government of Iraq. Thus, an important question for this Committee is what the United States might be able to do about this situation? How can the United States help guard its interests in the stability of Iraq?

And that is not easy to answer. Frederick the Great once said that diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments. In today's world, we might add things like trade, economic aid, technical assistance and other aspects of soft power to the Soldier-King's 18<sup>th</sup> Century notion of diplomatic instruments. Yet even by that measure, the United States has dramatically fewer assets to call upon to advance its Iraq policy than it had in years past. The end of the American military presence, the dramatic reduction in American aid to Iraq, and the increasing influence of Iran in Iraq all mean that the United States will find it far more difficult to guide Iraq's course. Consequently, one of the most important tasks for the United States if we are to help Iraq address both the symptoms and the problems is to forge new instruments that will provide us with new leverage to replace what we have lost.

#### **Creating New Sources of American Influence**

The key to increasing American influence in Iraq moving forward is conditionality. Virtually all American assistance to Iraq should be conditioned on Iraqis doing the things that the United States needs them to do, which in every case is likely to be something that is in the long-term interests of the Iraqi people and the Iraqi nation, albeit not necessarily in the short-term interests of various Iraqi politicians. Conditioning assistance means linking specific aspects of American activities to specific, related aspects of Iraqi behavior. It also means tying wider aspects of American cooperation with Iraq to the general course of the Iraqi political system. Ultimately, the United States must condition the continuation of the U.S.-Iraqi relationship on the willingness of the Iraqi political leadership to guide their country in the direction of greater stability, inclusivity and effective governance.

***Operationalizing the Strategic Framework Agreement.*** Ultimately, the greatest source of American influence in Iraq is the provision of additional assistance in a vast range of different areas—from military support and weapons sales, to capacity building, education, almost every

aspect of economic reform, and a slew of major diplomatic matters. The foundation for this future cooperation is a little-known but critically important document known as the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA), which the United States and Iraq signed in late 2008. It is important not to make too much of the SFA. It is nothing but a framework; an empty shell for the United States and Iraq to flesh out as they see fit over the years—but which neither side has filled out as intended. There is little more than general exhortations regarding the broad types of aid that could be provided, without any specification of time, dates, quantities, or other details.

Having failed to do so for so long, it is now vitally important that the United States work with Iraq to transform the SFA from a theoretical framework into a functioning program. A key challenge will be reconciling U.S. and Iraqi expectations for the SFA and finding creative ways to use it to pursue these critical aims in an era of sharply declining resources. The United States will have to think creatively about how to provide valuable assistance without the need for large-scale American financing. Moreover, as Iraq's oil revenues increase over time, Iraq should be able to pay for more of its reconstruction needs. Therefore, the real value added from the American side will be insight and advice on how best to employ those resources rather than adding in more resources—something that neither the administration nor Congress has any interest in providing.

Consequently, the United States should focus the assistance it provides to Iraq under the rubric of the SFA primarily on capacity building by providing technical advice, consulting services, and technology and knowledge transfers to key areas of the Iraqi economy. The United States must now consider both how it can be most effective in this role and how it can maintain the leverage to encourage Iraqis to build a transparent and accountable government when America is no longer putting up large amounts of its own money for projects.

There are, fortunately, a number of areas of the Iraqi economy both inside and outside the SFA where the United States can deliver tangible added value at a relatively low financial cost. These include:

- International engagement and mediation on issues such as Iraq's Chapter VII UN obligations, including annual reparations to Kuwait and disputes over the Iraq-Kuwait maritime boundary (which have the potential to hamper Iraq's primary oil export route through the Persian Gulf), dialogue with Iraq's northern neighbors, especially Turkey, on regional water-sharing agreements, and the protection of Iraq's oil revenues from legal claims relating to actions of the former regime, something that if left unaddressed could hamper long-term investment in the oil and gas sector;
- Formation of a joint economic commission under the SFA, which, when requested by Iraqis, could serve as a central oversight body to coordinate, monitor, and provide technical expertise for reconstruction and capital investment projects initiated with Iraqi funds;
- Technical advice, knowledge sharing, and technology transfer to vital areas of the Iraqi economy and society such as improved domestic water efficiency and management and agricultural development and productivity;

- Legislative actions to create a business environment that encourages Western business investments.

#### *Conducting Counterterrorism Operations*

Assistance with Iraqi counterterrorism operations falls into a similar category. The Iraqis have made clear that they want American assistance, and that creates leverage. It is certainly true that Iraq could benefit from American assistance in its CT efforts, especially as the threat from AQI and other Salafist groups expands. Thus, there is a legitimate reason to provide such assistance. However, we should never lose sight of the critical point that counterterrorism operations is a poor means of countering terrorism, and that eradicating the resurgent terrorism problem will require the same kinds of efforts to address Iraq's fundamental political, economic and social problems as were made in 2007-2009. CT assistance can help, but it cannot solve the problem of terrorism.

In addition, it may be useful for the United States to continue to assist Iraq's own CT efforts both as a means of keeping AQI and other Salafist terrorist groups in check and as a way of maintaining some oversight of how the Iraqi government employs its elite counterterror formations. Iraq's highly-trained CT units have often been used to round up rivals (and brand them as terrorists). Thus, greater American oversight of their operations could only be beneficial.

*American Arms Sales to Iraq.* It is critical that the United States be willing to provide Iraq with major arms purchases. Ideally, the United States should furnish every aspect of Iraqi military equipment, from mess kits to main battle tanks and everything in between. As long as Iraq desires them (which it currently does) and can afford them (which it increasingly can), such arms sales, when provided by the United States, could be inherently stabilizing if managed effectively and in tandem with political reform in Baghdad; it could also help stabilize the region by preventing the emergence of an aggressive Iraq that would pose a threat to its neighbors. In addition, arms sales represent yet another source of influence with the Iraqi leadership since they are items Baghdad greatly desires. Consequently, these sales should be considered from a strategic perspective, not a commercial one and from that perspective, they are not just desirable but critical. Indeed, one of the most important lessons of the Arab Spring and Mubarak's fall has been the tremendous utility American arms sales can have in the Middle East.

As with all American interactions toward Iraq in future, however, Washington's critical consideration when weighing arms sales to Iraq must be their impact on Iraq's domestic politics. Again, such sales can be extremely helpful in this area, as I discuss below. However, they can also be destabilizing if mishandled. Moreover, they too represent a critical element of American leverage with Iraq. In particular, American arms sales to Iraq should be conditioned on continuing improvement (or at least no significant deterioration) in Iraq's civil-military relations. The Iraqi military should understand that Washington's willingness to provide the arms they so desperately want will be possible only to the extent that the ISF stays in its lane and stays out of politics. So too should the government understand that American arms sales—among other things—will be jeopardized by efforts to politicize the ISF. Finally, because the KRG is terrified that the central government will imagine it has a military “solution” to their dispute once the ISF is armed with American tanks and fighter-bombers, Washington must lay down clear red lines to

both sides regarding what is permissible. Furthermore, the United States should extract guarantees from the government that it will not invade the Kurdistan region, except perhaps in the highly unlikely event that the Kurds use their own forces to attack other parts of Iraq.

#### **Bolstering the Sources of Restraint**

It is also important to recognize that, as bad as things have gotten, all is not lost in Iraq. Despite the resurgence in violence—and in the perpetrators of violence like AQI—and the reemergence of the many factors that pulled Iraq into the vortex of civil war in 2005-2006, Iraq has not yet returned to a state of civil war. Indeed, given how bad things have gotten, what is striking is that Iraq is not worse off than it already is. Three unexpected, interrelated factors have emerged to slow Iraq's reemergent violence in 2013.

***The Iranians.*** According to a range of Iraqi sources, Iran believes that it has its hands full with Syria and does not want to open up another front in the grand Sunni-Shi'a civil war that many Sunni extremists are now stoking. The Iranians apparently recognize that they are not benefitting from fears of a wider sectarian conflict and are trying to prevent one from emerging—which is precisely what would happen if civil war resumed in Iraq. Moreover, Tehran no doubt recognizes that a civil war on its doorstep would be particularly dangerous because the spillover could easily affect Iran's own fractious minorities and fragile internal politics.

Other Iraqis report that Tehran sees a new civil war in Iraq as being potentially deleterious to its currently enviable position within Iraq. Unless the Shi'a could win a quick, overwhelming victory in a new civil war, the status quo is preferable to any other outcome for them. In any other scenario, Iraq would be torn by fighting and the Shi'a dominated government would likely lose control of parts of Iraq. Much better, from Tehran's perspective, to have the Shi'a in nominal control over the entire country—in part to enable Iran to move supplies across it to their allies in Syria.

***The Kurds.*** The Kurds have never been more than half-hearted citizens of the modern Iraqi republic, having attempted to distance themselves from—or cut ties completely with—Baghdad on a half-dozen occasions since the fall of the Ottoman empire. This desire has sharpened markedly among the leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since the unfulfilled Erbil agreement of 2013, which defined a road-map for all parties in return for agreeing that Nuri al-Maliki would remain prime minister. By early 2013, KRG President Mas'ud Barzani, seemed committed to a precipitate move toward secession so furious had he become with Maliki, and so enchanted by new economic and political opportunities created with Turkey as a result of both Erdogan's Kurdish policy and the Syrian civil war. Kurdish officials openly discussed a declaration of independence that year or the next.

Thus, it was a dramatic turnabout when in the spring of 2013, as the violence between Sunni and Shi'a intensified in Arab Iraq, that Barzani suddenly came down to Baghdad to play peacemaker. Kurdish sources suggested a variety of reasons for Barzani's change of heart. First, the Turkish-PKK ceasefire included provisions for PKK fighters to redeploy from Turkey to the KRG. Making this work is critical to Barzani both to bolster his status as the leading figure among all Kurds, and to cement his relationship with Erdogan and the Turks, which in turn is critical for

Kurdistan's future hopes of autonomy and eventual independence. Barzani needed the rest of Iraq to remain quiet while he took in the PKK to placate the Turks.

However, Barzani and his KDP have also been deeply concerned about their position within Kurdish internal politics. Jalal Talabani, the president of Iraq and head of the rival PUK suffered a stroke in late 2012 from which he has not recovered. Most Kurds expect he never will. But the question of who will succeed him as head of the PUK has been an open question with a variety of candidates vying behind the scenes. Here as well, Barzani and his trusted lieutenants concluded that they needed peace in the rest of Iraq to ensure that the PUK comes out in the right place—with a leader Barzani can work with, if not dominate.

Meanwhile, Barzani's term as president of the KRG was running out. He called elections for September 2013 and then fought a bruising battle with the opposition to have the KRG constitution altered to allow him to serve as president for an additional two years. The September KRG elections returned the KDP as the largest party with 38 seats, but Gorran, the main Kurdish opposition party, claimed 24 seats, besting the PUK's paltry 18. These results raise the possibility that Gorran might be able to take over the PUK's territory, which would then threaten the KDP's dominance within the KRG. Again, Barzani felt that he did not need a fight with Baghdad during this delicate period of intense internal machinations.

***Fear of Losing.*** Finally, as Iraq seemed to be lurching back to civil war in the spring and summer of 2013, important figures among both Sunnis and Shi'a called into question the desirability of pursuing belligerent courses of action for a simple reason: they might lose.

As I noted earlier, some Sunni tribal leaders see the mobilization of the Sunni world against the Shi'a threat as being a critical change since 2006, one that could bring them victory in a new Iraqi civil war. Others are not so sure. When confronted with promises of aid from the Gulf Arabs, some Sunni leaders have apparently demanded, "how many battalions will the Bahrainis send?" A battle is going on among the Sunni leaders over whether to roll the dice of war and risk the fate of their community on the evanescent promise of a Sunni Arab world that has done little concrete to help in Iraq for decades.

As for the Shi'a, they know that they were on the brink of victory in 2006, but they too fear the mobilization of the Sunni world and what this could mean in a new Iraqi civil war. Moreover, Iraqi Army formations have performed poorly in various confrontations with the Kurds and Sunnis over the past year. Kurdish Peshmerga forces have repeatedly out-maneuvered Iraqi formations in a series of shadow battles. Several Iraqi Army brigades have effectively broken down into their separate ethno-sectarian components and rendered combat ineffective. Thus, Maliki seems equally unsure that he would win this time.

Finally, Maliki also faces new divisions within the Shi'a camp that threaten to undermine his ability to use force to bring either the Kurds or Sunnis to heel. In particular, the Sadrists have again split from his coalition. There has never been any love lost between the Prime Minister and Muqtada, but in the past the Iranians had put tremendous pressure on the Sadrists to support Maliki. During the summer of 2012, Sadr defied Iranian wishes and broke with Maliki.

altogether, at least for now. However, Tehran has managed to turn this to its advantage by helping to forge a new ISCI-Sadrism coalition to counterbalance Maliki.

In truth, the Iranians have never liked Maliki. They remember his role in helping the Americans crush their militia allies in 2007-2008 and believe (probably correctly) that Maliki hates them and would like to build a strong Iraq able to stand up to Iran. Tehran has repeatedly looked for a more pliable alternative to Maliki but have yet to find one, and so must grudgingly continue to rely on him. Building up an alternative Shi'a coalition to Maliki's State of Law serves Tehran's interests by keeping Maliki weak and keeping all of the Shi'a dependent on Iran as the fulcrum of Iraqi Shi'a politics. The result is that Maliki has been left with a divided power base, and many Shi'a rivals willing to side with the Sunnis and Kurds to oppose him. That too has forced him to throttle back his confrontational approach to Iraq's other communities.

#### **The Impending National Elections**

It is against this backdrop that Iraq will hold national elections in 2014 to choose a new parliament and a new prime minister. These elections offer an opportunity for the United States and other like-minded countries to help Iraq deal with their internal political problems and so deal with the underlying sources giving rise to the new wave of terrorism gripping Iraq. Unfortunately, they also hold the potential to do the opposite: dramatically worsen Iraq's political problems, which could only greatly exacerbate the violence and possibly push the country back into civil war.

His protests to the contrary notwithstanding, it is widely expected that Prime Minister Maliki will run for parliament and seek to remain prime minister. (He has already had Iraq's highest court strike down a newly-passed law that set a two-term limit on the prime minister and president. His opposition fears that if Maliki secures a third term, he will never step down. In fact, many worry that if he believes that he will lose, Maliki will rig the election or declare martial law and suspend it altogether. So far, the prime minister has given no indication that he would do so, but many of his closest advisors insisted that the 2010 elections had been rigged against him (by the United States—a ludicrous claim given that the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad staunchly supported Maliki). Certainly no one can rule out the possibility that if the Prime Minister's coterie believed that the vote were being rigged against him, they might try to fight fire with fire.

On the other side, Iraq's opposition also has a great deal riding on the election. For them, it is a crucial test. In their eyes, it will establish whether there truly is a way to handle Maliki through a peaceful, political process and whether politics more generally are a viable path to achieve the political, economic and security needs of their communities. For the moderates, it is critical that the elections demonstrate that such an alternative is possible. For the extremists, if Maliki wins—legally or illegally—they will use it to claim that the peaceful, political course is a dead end and violence the only way to defend themselves against a “dictatorial” prime minister.

Consequently, the national elections could be the last push needed to send Iraq over the cliff of renewed civil war. These fears loom especially large because, historically, Iraqi elections have more often hurt its democratic development than helped. In 2004 and again in 2005, in the midst of the security vacuum, misbegotten elections demanded by the United States empowered the

worst elements in Iraqi society, enflamed the sectarian fears, and hastened the country's descent into all-out civil war. In 2010, national elections should have been a major step forward, as the Iraqi people voted overwhelmingly for the parties considered most secular and least tied to the militias. The problem came afterwards. Once the United States failed to enforce the rules of the democratic process, it became a free-for-all, with Iraqi political leaders falling back on their worst habits and producing a government in a way that compromised democracy and set-up the problems to come.

Still there is other evidence worth considering. Iraq's provincial elections in 2009 rewarded the political parties that stood for secularism, democracy, the rule of law, and an end to conflict. But they were held in the warm afterglow of the Surge and at time when large numbers of American troops remained in Iraq. Thus, many fear that they merely represent the exception proving the rule.

Finally, in April 2013, Iraq held provincial elections again and they turned out very well. There was little to no vote tampering. No one claimed that the vote was rigged or voting suppressed. The government did not shut down the elections, and even held them (albeit three months later) in the Sunni-dominated provinces where unrest has been greatest. Moreover, the results were striking: The Prime Minister's coalition lost big and the rival Shi'a parties of ISCI and the Sadrists (both hewing to a more moderate line than in the past) did surprisingly well. Thus, this year's provincial elections suggested that Iraq could hold elections without American forces present and get both a good process and a good result that all parties would honor without resorting to violence. That is definitely a hopeful sign. We just do not know if it is enough.

That uncertainty is why it is so important for the United States to rebuild its influence in Iraq and employ it to help the Iraqis address their internal problems—political especially, but eventually economic and social as well. There is reason for optimism. We did it before, albeit with a vast toolkit of resources to draw upon, something we lack this time around. There are also forces in Iraq trying to push the country in the right direction, but they are not strong enough. There is some time, but it is impossible to know how much. Now is not the time to throw up our hands and say that it is too hard. As former Ambassador Ryan Crocker used to say, everything about Iraq is very hard, and it is very hard all the time. But try we must because the rising terrorist violence in Iraq and the specter of renewed civil war threatens America's interests just as it threatens Iraq's.



Mr. POE. Ms. Lewis?

**STATEMENT OF MS. JESSICA D. LEWIS, RESEARCH DIRECTOR,  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR**

Ms. LEWIS. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members. It is an honor to speak to you today. And I thank you as well for your service.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq is resurgent. As you have mentioned levels of violence in Iraq this year compared to 2008 according to multiple sources, the pattern of car bomb attacks attributed to al-Qaeda in Iraq compared to early 2007, these attacks are not haphazard; instead, demonstrating clear patterns and operational intent as well as a sophisticated military bureaucracy that can design, resource, and execute phased military campaigns. It is necessary to observe their capabilities and organization as well as their expressed goals in order to estimate what threats al-Qaeda may pose to governments in the region and ultimately to U.S. interests.

The two al-Qaeda campaigns I will discuss are the Breaking the Walls campaign from July 2012 to July 2013 and the ongoing Soldiers' Harvest campaign. The testimony I provided reports extensively on the former to support the conclusions I will address here.

The first, the Breaking the Walls campaign, was executed primarily through al-Qaeda in Iraq's signature weapons system, the vehicle-born improvised explosive device, or VBIED, which is a highly specialized and signature car bomb. The campaign involved 2 main objectives: To reconstitute the veteran al-Qaeda network in prison in Iraq, as mentioned; and to target Shia civilians in order to stoke a sectarian war. Al-Qaeda in Iraq was successful at both. Two prison attacks resulted in mass prisoner release, including the most recent Abu Ghraib attack. The wave of car bomb attacks against Shia civilian attacks escalated dramatically in February of this year. And by May, there were indications of Shia militia remobilization in Baghdad. The waves of car bombs showcased al-Qaeda in Iraq's robust supply chain and specialized weapons skills.

The second campaign, the Soldiers' Harvest, involved 2 new objectives to target the Iraqi security forces directly and to establish control of terrain in Iraq as well as Syria. The Iraqi security forces are now targeted in their homes as an intimidation tactic. They are also being targeted through combined arms attacks upon security compounds, particularly in Kirkuk and Anbar provinces. The attacks upon hardened facilities are complex, involving car bombs, indirect fire, small arms fire. And they represent al-Qaeda's contests for control of terrain in Iraq.

As of November 2013, there are indications of al-Qaeda's moving to establish control in southern Anbar province, in Diyala province, and northern Babil province, along with multiple locations in Syria, including northern border towns in areas around Aleppo City.

The control of terrain serves more than a military purpose. Al-Qaeda in Iraq's goals include governance, which also extends to Syria. In April 2013, the organization's leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, announced the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, referring to Iraq and Syria. This indicates not only that Al-Baghdadi's goal is the establishment of an Islamic emirate

but also that he envisions his emirate as transnational, spanning territory in Iraq as well as Syria.

It is likely that al-Qaeda's military resurgence in Iraq was made possible because of the war in Syria as well as political conditions in Iraq, but given the attention that al-Qaeda continues to direct to attacks in Iraq, it is also likely that al-Qaeda's military achievements in Iraq have allowed it to assert greater control over territory and organizations in Syria.

As the moderate opposition in Syria falters, al-Qaeda in Iraq stands to gain without rivals to limit its advances on that front. In Iraq, the Iraqi security forces are mobilized to fight al-Qaeda, but their operations are not succeeding. And al-Qaeda's operations are driving security force response.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq's resurgence poses a direct threat in the region in 2 ways that I see. First, al-Qaeda establishes control of terrain. It does so at the expense of state legitimacy, which extends conditions of lawlessness from Syria to Iraq and further threatens Turkey, Jordan, and other states in the region.

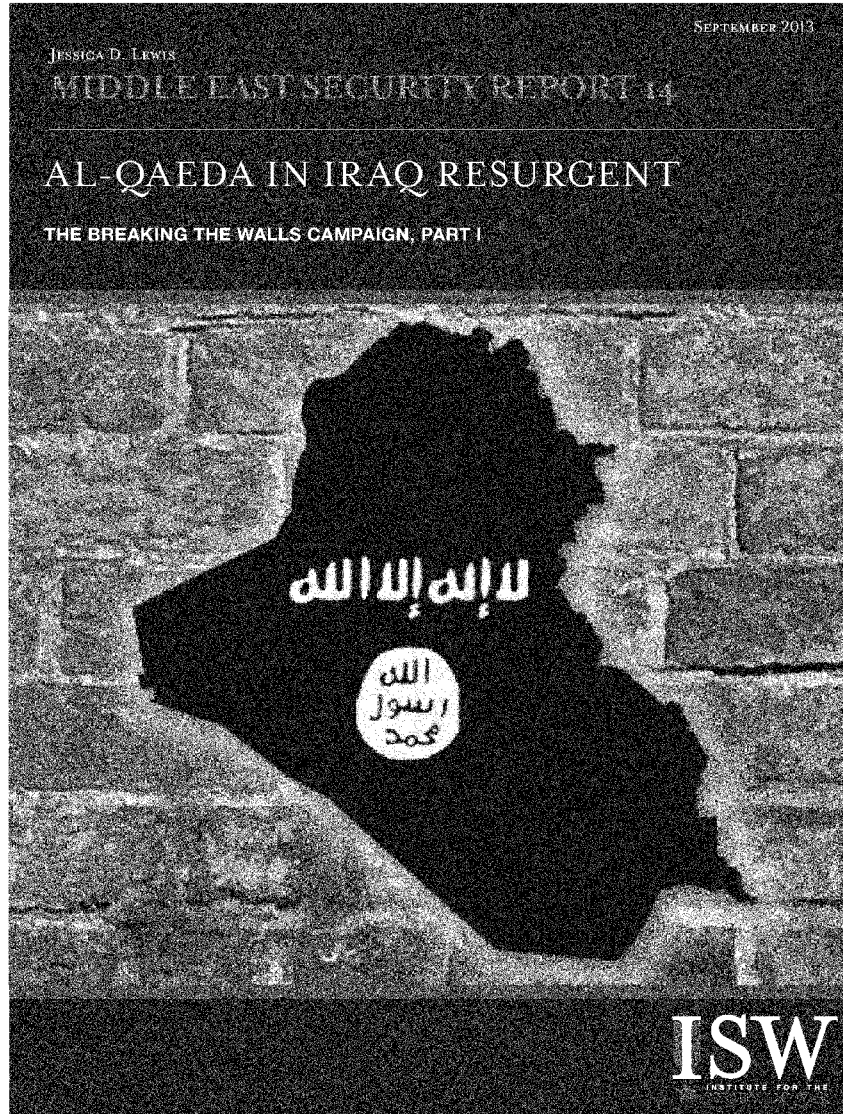
Second, al-Qaeda's campaign against Shia civilians and holy sites in Iraq escalates regional sectarianism and necessarily invokes Iranian concern. In this way, al-Qaeda in Iraq accelerates other regional threats.

Aside from associated threats to U.S. interests that are physically located in the region, the greatest threat that al-Qaeda in Iraq poses to U.S. security today is the military professionalism of the foreign fighter network, as mentioned, which connects al-Qaeda's affiliates globally. Foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria today are learning al-Qaeda in Iraq's style of warfare and potentially forming strong bonds. As these fighters return to Africa, to Chechnya, to Europe with experiences and relationships in hand, they will pose new threats. They may precipitate attacks in the West.

At this time, al-Qaeda in Iraq has not voiced the intent to target the U.S., which has been interpreted to mean that it should be a lower-priority terrorist threat. While it is likely that the broader al-Qaeda network benefits from al-Qaeda in Iraq's success, which should concern us, it is also important to recognize that al-Qaeda in Iraq is not solely operating as a terrorist organization. It is operating like a military vanguard. And it is necessary to evaluate the threat to the region and to the U.S. that an al-Qaeda-led emirate in Iraq and Syria may pose. Conditions point to their increased strength over the coming year, making this goal a greater concern.

I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lewis follows:]



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JESSICA D. LEWIS

## MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 14

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### AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ RESURGENT

THE BREAKING THE WALLS CAMPAIGN, PART I

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica D. Lewis is the Research Director at ISW. Jessica joined ISW in the summer of 2012 following eight years of service on Active Duty as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army. Her military career includes 34 months deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, where she provided intelligence support to tactical, operational, and theater commands. She has twice been awarded the Bronze Star Medal for her impact upon operations. Jessica additionally served on tours in Germany and the United States as a company commander, staff officer, and counter-terrorism analyst.

Jessica directs the research program. She is also the lead architect for ISW's technology and data strategy as well as the lead analyst for ISW's al Qaeda in Iraq portfolio. Jessica specializes in data visualization, network analysis, and intelligence support to operational design. She is charting a course to advance ISW's signature analytical methodologies and to revolutionize the conduct of intelligence from open sources. In particular, she seeks to incorporate the function of early warning into ISW's regional work.

She has also authored several of ISW's Iraq Updates including "Al Qaeda in Iraq's "Breaking the Walls" Campaign Achieves Its Objectives at Abu Ghraib", "From Protest Movement to Armed Resistance", and "Iraq's sectarian crisis reignites as Shi'a militias execute civilians and remobilize."

Jessica holds a B.S. in Strategic & International History and International Relations from West Point and an M.A. in Strategic Intelligence from American Military University.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization. ISW advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education. ISW is committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats in order to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.

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ISW believes superior strategic insight derives from a fusion of traditional social science research and innovative technological methods. ISW recognizes that the analyst of the future must be able to process a wide variety of information, ranging from personal interviews and historical artifacts to high volume structured data. ISW thanks its technology partners, Palantir Technologies and Praescent Analytics, for their support in this innovative endeavor. In particular, their technology and implementation assistance has supported creating many of the maps and graphics in this product.



Praescent Analytics is a Veteran Owned Small Business based in Alexandria, Virginia. Our aim is to revolutionize how the world understands information by empowering our customers with the latest analytic tools and methodologies. Currently, Praescent provides several critical services to our government and commercial clients: training, embedded analysis, platform integration, and product customization.



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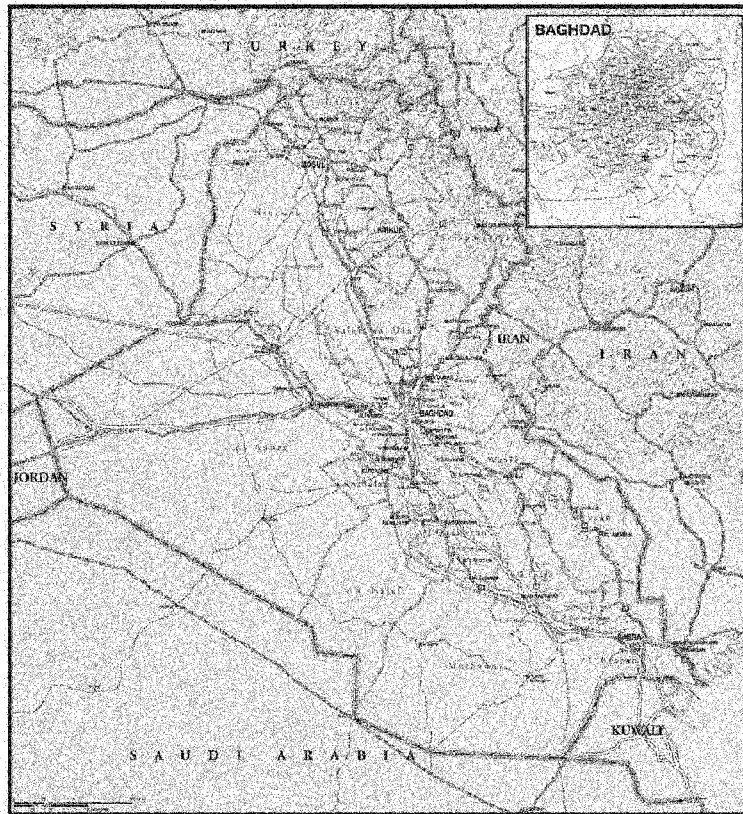
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MAP 1 | IRAQ



## MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 14

### AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ RESURGENT

#### THE BREAKING THE WALLS CAMPAIGN, PART I

By Jessica D. Lewis

**A**l-Qaeda in Iraq is resurgent. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) reached its apex of territorial control and destructive capability in late 2006 and early 2007, before the Surge and the Awakening removed the organization from its safe havens in and around Baghdad.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent operations pursued AQI northward through Diyala, Salah ad-Din, and Mosul, degrading the organization over the course of 2007-2008 such that only a fraction of its leaders, functional cells, and terroristic capabilities remained and were concentrated in Mosul.<sup>2</sup> As of August 2013, AQI has regrouped, regained capabilities, and expanded into areas from which it was expelled during the Surge.

AQI in 2013 is an extremely vigorous, resilient, and capable organization that can operate from Basra to coastal Syria. This paper traces AQI's revival in Iraq since July 2012, when the organization launched a year-long operation they named the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. This campaign consisted of a series of 24 major vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks and eight prison breaks that demonstrate the evolution of AQI's military capability over that time (See Part 2 of this report, which describes these attacks in detail). VBIEDs had been the signature attack type of AQI from 2006-2008.<sup>3</sup> Since May 2013, AQI has consistently exceeded the number of VBIED attacks per month that it conducted in June 2007, while sustaining operations in Syria as well.

The "Breaking the Walls" campaign ended on July 21, 2013, when al-Qaeda in Iraq successfully breached the prison at Abu Ghraib, leading to the escape of 500 or more prisoners,<sup>4</sup> the majority of whom were detained during the Iraq War for terrorist activities.<sup>5</sup> The United States has reacted by reaffirming the \$10 million bounty placed on Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of AQI, whom officials said was based in Syria in August 2013.<sup>6</sup> Targeting AQI's leader, however, will not be effective in halting the organization's growth. AQI is no longer a small cadre based around a single leader, but rather an effective reconstituted military organization operating in Iraq and Syria.

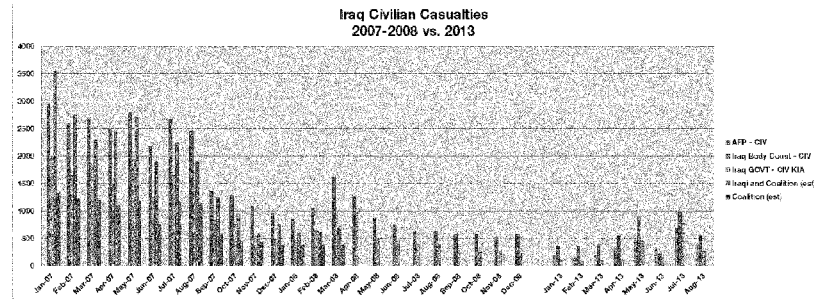
The United States has also agreed to provide counter-terrorism support to the government of Iraq. As a senior State Department official said, the United States wants Iraq to "have the information to be able to map the network, to get at its financing, and to be very precise in

its targeting, because Iraqi forces are under threat and they're liable to make mistakes such as going at the threat in a symmetrical way, rounding up too many people, targeting the wrong person, which makes the whole problem worse."<sup>7</sup> Yet the AQI network has grown robust over the past fourteen months, and mapping the network and its finances may not suffice to halt its expansion.

A senior U.S. administration official noted the unexpected growth of AQI's suicide bombing campaign. Briefing on August 15, 2013, he stated that "Over the last two years, we've had an average of about 5 to 10 suicide bombers a month, in 2011 and 2012.... We've seen over the last 90 days the suicide bomber numbers approach about 30 a month, and we still suspect most of those are coming in from Syria."<sup>8</sup>

AQI's path to war was not abrupt, however. Violence began to escalate in June 2012 just before the start of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. Casualty levels in Iraq have risen significantly over 2012-2013, caused primarily by AQI's VBIED attacks. The overall violence level in Iraq in July 2013 was commensurate with wartime levels last observed in Iraq in April 2008. Total monthly fatalities at the end of July 2013 exceeded 1,000 for the first time since that date, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission - Iraq (UNAMI).<sup>9</sup>

AQI has been able to grow not only because of its safe-havens and recruiting grounds in Syria, but also because it has replenished its veteran manpower through prison breaks inside of Iraq. The "Breaking the Walls" campaign involved a total of eight complex attacks upon Iraqi prisons, two of which successfully freed hard-core veterans who had likely participated in AQI's



signature VBIED network during the period 2006-2007.<sup>10</sup> This study will focus upon AQI's use of VBIEDs throughout the "Breaking the Walls" campaign as the principal indicator of AQI's growing organizational and operational capacity inside Iraq, even if suicide bombers flow into the country from Syria.

A study of the success of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign elucidates the renewed capability of AQI's military organization. VBIEDs require an extensive planning and logistical structure, and the VBIED waves witnessed in 2012-2013 showcase the development of a force-level planning effort within AQI's military organization to orchestrate simultaneous attacks involving many cells. It is critical to estimate AQI's combat power in order to assess the level of threat AQI represents to the Iraqi state and further to U.S. interests.

The "Breaking the Walls" campaign supported AQI's expressed operational objectives to retake territory that it had formerly controlled and to establish governance in parts of Iraq and Syria. VBIEDs enhanced AQI's overall operations by overwhelming Iraqi Security Forces and degrading popular confidence in their ability to protect the population. AQI accomplished its 2012-2013 goals sufficiently and announced a new 2013-2014 campaign named "The Soldiers' Harvest," on July 30, 2013.<sup>11</sup>

Iraq Security Forces (ISF) and Shi'a militant groups have mobilized in response to AQI's attacks.<sup>12</sup> ISF has also mobilized on several occasions to address the predominantly Arab Sunni anti-government protest movement that has been active since December 2012.<sup>13</sup> The ISF launched new operations into western Anbar, northern Diyala, and other provinces in May 2013 in

pursuit of AQI. This operation, as well as the ISF's "Revenge of the Martyrs" campaign in August 2013, may widen the gap between the Maliki government and Iraqi Sunni Arabs.<sup>14</sup> The "Revenge of the Martyrs" campaign in particular also resulted in mass arrests.

The addition of alternate security measures in Baghdad, including the deployment of plain-clothed intelligence personnel and increased security patrols, likewise runs the risk of being counter-productive for Iraq's security, should marginal security gains in Baghdad come at the price of insurgency outside the capital. These operations, furthermore, have limited potential to counter AQI because the ISF is not effectively pursuing the organization throughout its depth inside Iraq. For example, AQI in August 2013 projected VBIED operations from the southern Baghdad belts as effectively as from the northern belts, but only the former are contested by ISF.

The threat of insurgency has also increased because of the growing regional sectarian dynamic emanating from Syria; the longstanding political and economic grievances of Iraqi Sunni Arabs; the instances of violent confrontation between ISF and protesters in 2013; and the mobilization of Shi'a militias. These conditions have provided AQI with ample opportunity to exploit a principal vulnerability of the Maliki government, namely the perceived exclusion of the Sunni from the political process. Even though most Iraqi Sunni Arabs still vehemently reject AQI, the terrorist organization may be able to drive a wedge between the population and the state. They will succeed if they are able to counter Maliki's majoritarian political strategy by producing new cleavages in the national government ahead of elections

in 2014 and shatter popular confidence in the ISF, upon which Maliki has relied for his strong-man image since the Basra campaign in 2008.

General Ray Odierno, commander of U.S. Forces-Iraq described AQI's goals in June 2010, when its capabilities were minimal. He noted, "al-Qaeda in Iraq... hasn't changed. They want complete failure of the government in Iraq. They want to establish a caliphate in Iraq."<sup>24</sup> He continued, "Now, that's a tall task for them now, as compared to maybe it was in 2005 or '06. But they still sustain that thought process. And it has nothing to do with the United States. You know, they continue to look around the world for safe havens and sanctuaries. And what they look for is ungoverned territories. And so what they want... is to form an ungoverned territory or at least pieces of ungoverned territory, inside of Iraq, that they can take advantage of."<sup>25</sup>

Control of territory in Iraq remains one of AQI's goals in 2013, but AQI also seeks to govern in Syria as well.<sup>27</sup> AQI declared itself the *Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham* (ISIS) in April 2013, an expansion of its historical political identity now to include Syria. At a teaching tent in Aleppo, Syria during its Ramadan fair, ISIS displayed a map of its emirate with no border between Iraq and Syria as part of a wider al-Qaeda caliphate stretching from North Africa to the eastern frontier adjoining Iran.<sup>28</sup>

AQI has been instrumental in the Syrian conflict. By studying known instances of SVBIED attacks in Syria, one sees AQI has operated there alongside the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra since at least December 2011.<sup>29</sup> AQI had initially supported Jabhat al-Nusra by reversing the flow of fighters and resources that once streamed into Iraq from Syria.<sup>30</sup>

The growth of the two franchises created competition. AQI declared in April 2013 that Jabhat al-Nusra was subordinate to the *Islamic State of Iraq and Sham*. Jabhat al-Nusra rejected AQI's leadership, declaring fealty to al-Qaeda core directly.<sup>31</sup> Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri directed that the two affiliates operate in their separate geographic zones and put both organizations on probation as franchises.<sup>32</sup> Al-Baghdadi at first flatly rejected this instruction and reinforced his single-organization vision. Since June 2013,<sup>33</sup> the two organizations have apparently overcome their differences and often choose to cooperate tactically inside Syria. AQI's military, governance, and social investment in Syria has increased since this time, most recently through

a combined arms attack upon Minnakh airbase north of Aleppo,<sup>34</sup> through an offensive in northern Latakia,<sup>35</sup> and the sponsorship of a Ramadan social outreach program in Aleppo in August 2013.<sup>36</sup>

AQI also drastically increased VBIED attacks in Iraq in 2013. As of August 2013, AQI's new operation, "the Soldiers' Harvest," has increased the frequency and volume of VBIED waves and also incorporated spectacular attacks upon critical infrastructure, such as the Um Qasr port at Basra.<sup>37</sup> AQI will also likely continue to target hardened ISF facilities with complex attacks involving VBIEDs now that it has tested its greatest complex operational ability. AQI's success in Iraq at the expense of the ISF will add relative strength to the organization in Syria. AQI would then prosper in a deteriorating security environment that transcends state boundaries.<sup>38</sup>

## BACKGROUND

Characterizing the evolution of al-Qaeda in Iraq's military capabilities requires an understanding of the state of play in Iraq after the withdrawal of U.S. forces in December 2011. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)'s operational capability had been degraded three years prior by Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and local security elements known as "Sahwa" who took up arms to drive out al-Qaeda and prevent their return.<sup>29</sup> In the spring of 2010, U.S. and Iraqi forces "either picked up or killed 34 out of the top 42 al-Qaeda in Iraq leaders, and by June of 2010 the organization had "lost connection with [al-Qaeda Senior Leadership] in Pakistan and Afghanistan."<sup>30</sup>

By 2011, AQI was still able to conduct attacks, but the organization was isolated, disrupted, and did not pose an existential threat to the state. From September 2010 to December 2011, monthly fatalities in Iraq stabilized in the 300-400 range, according to Iraq Body Count database, which provides historical data covering this time period.<sup>31</sup> This range establishes a baseline for "normal" violence levels as reported from open sources, against which to compare observations of security conditions in post-war Iraq.

The resurgence of AQI followed two trends: first, the rise of internal, Iraqi Sunni political disenfranchisement after the departure of U.S. forces, and second, the escalation and radicalization of the Syrian conflict. Immediately after the withdrawal of U.S. Forces in

December 2011, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki arrested and tortured the bodyguards of Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi on the grounds that he had supported terrorism.<sup>32</sup> Hashemi ultimately fled the country and was sentenced to death in absentia.<sup>33</sup> Violent activities rose following the departure of U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I) and the Hashemi arrest, although one cannot establish the causal relationships between these contemporary events.

Fatalities rose above 500 for the month of January 2012, with two attacks on January 5 and January 14 most likely responsible for the overall increase.<sup>34</sup> These attacks involved multiple strikes, including many suicide attacks, upon Shi'a civilian targets in holy cities including Karbala, Nasiriya, and Kadhimiyyah, and also Sadr City and Basra during the Shi'a religious observance of Arba'een. Other attacks documented in early 2012 include a large wave of explosions on February 23 that struck Baghdad, Basra, and Salah ad-Din.<sup>35</sup> This wave primarily targeted Iraqi Police and government institutions, and it appeared to involve vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). AQI evidently had an enduring ability to coordinate spectacular attacks, including the use of VBIEDs, in the post-USF-I period.<sup>36</sup>

The rise in attacks in Iraq paralleled attacks in Syria in ways that show the overall involvement of al-Qaeda (AQ) senior leadership with the reconstitution of AQI and its Syrian offshoot, Jabhat al-Nusra. VBIEDs detonated in Aleppo and Damascus in Syria on February 10 and 13, 2013.<sup>37</sup> A newly announced al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, claimed credit for these attacks in a formally produced video.<sup>38</sup> This coincided with a landmark statement by al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri calling for Muslims in the region, specifically Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, to support the Syrian opposition.<sup>39</sup> AQI also launched a media campaign on February 24, 2012, just after its VBIED attacks inside Iraq. AQI announced a campaign to strike military headquarters on behalf of Sunni prisoners in Iraq during a 23-minute speech demonizing Shi'a Islam and the government of Iraq.<sup>40</sup> This distinctly sectarian speech typifies AQI's strategic voice and disposition in post-war Iraq before the campaign of attacks detailed in this report.

AQI also executed significant operations targeting Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in early 2012. Most notably, AQI launched a sophisticated raid on ISF units in Haditha, Anbar on March 4, 2012. AQI assassinated

two police commanders in their homes and seized a police checkpoint, killing 27 ISF personnel in total.<sup>41</sup> AQI claimed credit for the Haditha attack and described the operation in detail in a message posted to jihadist forums shortly thereafter.<sup>42</sup> AQI recorded the incident in a video illustrating how multiple AQI units surprised ISF by masquerading as Iraqi national police.<sup>43</sup> AQI also launched a wave of 26 attacks across the country on March 20, likely to disrupt and discredit the Iraqi government before the Arab League Summit on March 27-29, 2012.<sup>44</sup> AQI claimed credit for this wave of attacks as well.<sup>45</sup>

Overall violence began to increase sharply in June 2012, at which point Agence France Press (AFP) began to track daily casualties in Iraq in detail. AFP casualty records identified June 13 and June 16 as high-casualty days coinciding with multiple bombings.<sup>46</sup> The dataset of violent events that the author curated for this study documents an additional SVBIED on June 4, 2012, which targeted the offices of the Shi'a Endowment in Bab al-Muadham, Baghdad. AQI claimed credit for the attacks on June 4 and June 13.<sup>47</sup> The June 4, 2012 event produced a massive number of casualties for a single attack, an estimated 215 (26 killed/190 wounded).<sup>48</sup> This attack further demonstrates the capability and intent of AQI to deliver large-scale VBIEDs. Multiple VBIEDs incurring fewer casualties preceded this attack, and similar attacks continued into early July 2012.

AQI emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced on July 21, 2012 the start of what he called the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. "Breaking the Walls" began just after Ramadan, and three days after a failed assassination attempt against Bashar al-Assad that killed important members of his inner security circle.\* In a recorded speech, Baghdadi described his intent to "target the pressure points of the Safavid project."<sup>49</sup> This message may be understood to target Maliki's government, but AQI's message at the start of the 2012-2013 campaign also reflected its broader intent to establish governance in Iraq and Syria.

\* Open source reporting has not resolved the method of the attack, with Syrian state media asserting it was a suicide bomber and competing sources suggesting a remotely detonated IED or VBIED. Liwa al-Islam (LI) claimed the attack, and from subsequent events is a more likely perpetrator than the Free Syrian Army, which also claimed it. This paper does not presume to establish a correlation or causation between these events, but rather temporal proximity.

The simultaneous detonation of many VBIEDs against civilian targets in Iraq became an immediate hallmark of AQI's "Breaking the Walls" campaign. This VBIED wave phenomenon had been typical for AQI during the height of the Iraq war, and it appears that AQI reconstituted this core competency well before July 2012. Based on the sheer volume of attacks at the start of the campaign, it also appears that the early VBIED waves were scheduled and planned well in advance. AQI likely capitalized upon veteran expertise achieved while fighting U.S. Forces during the Iraq War and Assad's forces in the Syrian War to amplify lethal effects in 2012-2013, particularly through the utilization of VBIEDs.

U.S. officials described how, by August 2012, al-Qaeda inside of Syria had evolved from "disparate, disconnected units" and was "building a network of well-organized cells" that "are now communicating and sometimes cooperating on missions, with a command-and-control structure evolving to match more sophisticated operations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan."<sup>60</sup> The officials stated that "The units are spreading from city to city, with veterans of the Iraq insurgency employing their expertise in bomb-building to carry out more than two dozen attacks so far."<sup>61</sup> They estimated the number of fighters in Syria at a couple hundred.<sup>62</sup> The level of organizational capacity indicated by this assessment sets the foundation for this study. AQI has re-emerged as a military force in Iraq and Syria, and it is critical to understand what capabilities the organization has regenerated in Iraq in order to assess the threat that AQI now presents to the region.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Detecting AQI's Signature*

Estimating the combat power and organizational culture of secret organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) may be approached through detailed analysis of the attacks they perpetrate. This study considers the violent events in Iraq that are documented in unclassified sources for what they indicate about AQI's renewed organizational capacity. Closely examining the public record of violent events, particularly the use of "spectacular attacks" in Iraq in 2012-2013, enables us to draw conclusions about AQI's broader operations.

AQI executed a wide array of attack types from July 2012 to July 2013 during the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. These attack types include small arms fire, indirect fire (IDF) via mortars and rocket-propelled grenades (RPC), improvised explosive devices (IED), suicide bombers (SVEST), vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), and a subset, suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED). VBIEDs are the most complex attack type within this set, characterized by the rewiring of a vehicle into a traveling high-yield bomb rather than the placement of an explosive parcel within or outside of a vehicle.<sup>63</sup> All of these attack types were used for combined arms effects during the July 2013 Abu Ghraib and Taji prison attacks, and all of them appeared in dispersed fashion across Iraq throughout the course of the previous year.

A blanket study of attacks in Iraq is difficult because violent events are habitually underreported. Attribution is another challenge, as AQI was not the only group conducting attacks in Iraq during this time period. Other groups operating in Iraq today include Ansar al-Islam, Shi'a militias, and very likely Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN), a Ba'athist militant organization.<sup>64</sup> All of these organizations are known to use small arms, IDF, and IEDs, and in some cases they are also suspected of suicide attacks and car-borne explosions.

Violent events in certain locales, furthermore, might be attributed to popular uprising rather than AQI.<sup>65</sup> This becomes a legitimate consideration in light of the anti-government protest movement, which began in December 2012 after Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki attempted to arrest Rafia al-Issawi, a leading Sunni national political figure. The protest movement continued at least through September 2013, when this report was published. As more violent actors take up arms in Iraq, attack patterns of established groups become obfuscated, as the groups begin to overlap and react to one another. Nevertheless, it is possible to isolate coherent attack signatures for AQI within the available data. This study will focus specifically upon one of AQI's classic signatures, waves of vehicle-borne explosive improvised devices (VBIED). The VBIED waves of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign are identified and characterized in Part II of this report. Once attributed, these attacks may be used to evaluate AQI's operational capacity, depth, and targeting strategy.

*Spotting VBIED Waves*

VBIEDs constitute the most useful AQI fingerprint for several reasons. First, VBIEDs are generally the most lethal attack type, and therefore the most consistently reported publicly.<sup>\*</sup> Second, VBIEDs are the most complex attack type, which best illustrates the full capacity of AQI's supply chain. Third, VBIEDs have historically been assessed as AQI's signature attack type.<sup>56</sup>

Although it is likely that AQI bears sole responsibility for all VBIEDs in Iraq, it is worthwhile to challenge and reprove this assessment, particularly given that Ansar al-Islam, another Salafist group, claimed credit for SVBIED attacks in Iraq over the course of 2012.<sup>57</sup> Although VBIED attacks are a core competency for AQI, other groups can adopt this technique, and therefore each VBIED attack by itself is only a moderate signal that AQI is responsible.

A stronger signal emerges in the detection of multiple coordinated VBIED attacks. AQI's signature massing of VBIEDs over the course of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign will be referred to here as a "VBIED wave," and defined for the purposes of this study as the detonation of six or more VBIEDs on a given day in Iraq.<sup>†</sup> AQI has claimed credit for several such VBIED waves since the launch of the campaign, beginning with a wave of 30 VBIEDs that detonated on July 23, 2012, just two days after the announcement of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign.<sup>58</sup>

\* VBIED identification from public sources involves a qualitative assessment of each incident and the context in which it occurred. Not all attacks that are reported in news media as "car bombs" are technically VBIEDs. For example, an Adhesive Explosive Device (AED), or sticky bomb, is not a VBIED, but an assassination technique designed to target the occupants of a vehicle. A genuine car bomb, likewise, is a bomb that is placed in a vehicle in order to target the occupants. By contrast, even though they are often reported as car bombs, VBIEDs direct explosive power externally, usually to inflict mass casualties or significant structural damage. This requires thoughtful design, which is why VBIEDs are characterized as a highly technical operation.

† The threshold of six VBIED attacks was chosen through holistic assessment to be the minimum volume of a VBIED cluster that otherwise bore characteristics suggestive of orchestration by a central VBIED command. Clusters of five or less VBIEDs, by contrast, appeared to be feasibly organized by a single VBIED cell assigned to a particular geographic area, or alternately a co-occurrence of singleton VBIEDs that were not necessarily synchronized.

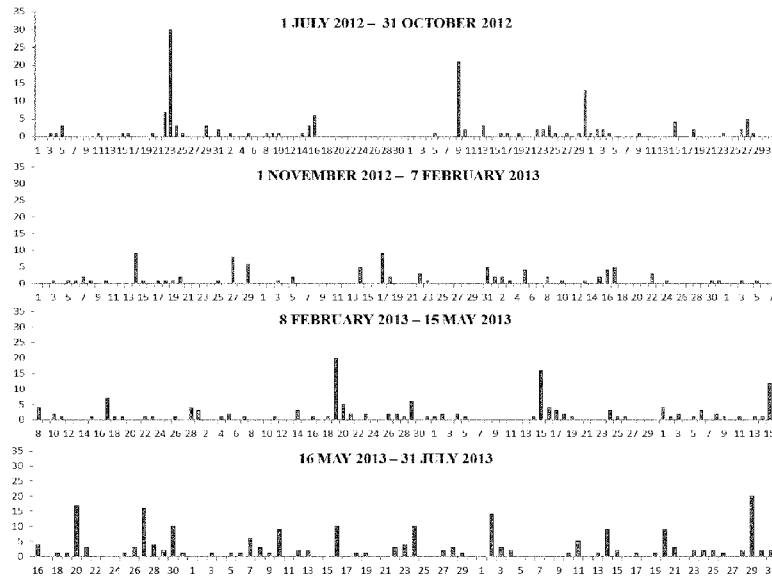
This study will examine the "Breaking the Walls" campaign in detail, particularly the VBIED waves that characterize this campaign. These waves can be broken down for the purposes of analysis into four "Phases" of the campaign. These phases were not announced, but rather assessed by observing qualitative and quantitative differences in attack patterns over time. The waves of VBIED attacks across these phases will be evaluated for their geographic spread, target selection, overall volume, and lethality. The VBIED waves will be considered in the context of individual VBIEDs that occurred outside of the 24 VBIED waves as well as other explosive events, such as IEDs and SVESTS, in order to refine an overall characterization of their complementary use by AQI. Part I of this report will address these waves in aggregate to describe phase changes that illustrate organizational growth within AQI, and a detailed examination of the individual waves is available in Part II.

In order to estimate lethality, the volume of the VBIED waves will be compared to daily casualty records maintained by Agence France-Presse (AFP).<sup>59</sup> AFP data provides a conservative and specific estimate for casualties, and as compared to other casualty data sets, represents a cautious minimum bound. The AFP dataset begins to provide daily casualty records from violent events in August 2012. Casualty insights prior to this date will be drawn from Iraq Body Count database, whose records begin in 2003.<sup>60</sup> The principal data set for the violent events considered in this study is proprietary and derives solely from open sources, including *National Iraqi News Agency*, *al Sunaria News*, *al Mada Press*, *All Iraq News Agency*, and the online *Iraq Body Count* (IBC) database.

**THE FIRST CAMPAIGN: "BREAKING THE WALLS"***The Architects of "Breaking the Walls"*

Al-Qaeda in Iraq's "Breaking the Walls" campaign began on July 21, 2012 and ended on July 23, 2013. During that time, AQI executed 24 VBIED waves that showcased the technical, logistical, and training capacity underlying AQI's VBIED program. The enlistment of these functions to deliver synchronized VBIED waves across Iraq reveals the presence of a robust and specialized VBIED planning capability within AQI's military organization. The style of execution of the VBIED waves demonstrates the growth of the VBIED organization in terms of its skilled leadership, its support to combined arms attacks, and its

## VBIED ATTACKS OVER TIME



ability over time to train small effective teams.

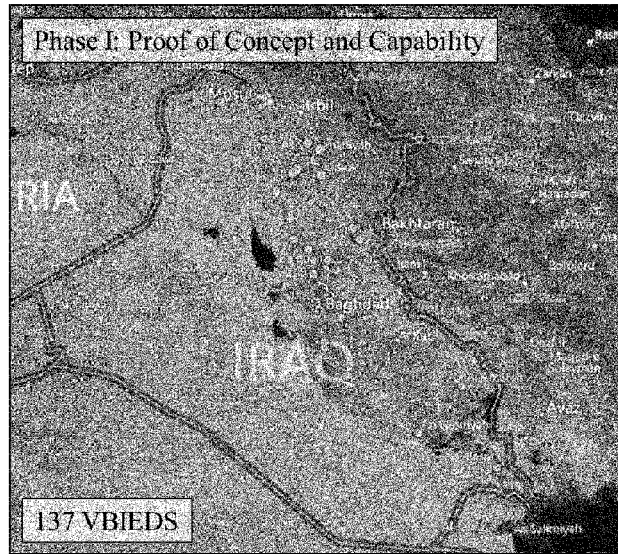
The following section will identify four phases of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign based upon the patterns and characteristics of the VBIED waves and prison attacks perpetrated by AQI between July 21, 2012 and July 23, 2013. The four phases demonstrate centralized planning and direction of VBIED waves; the growth of AQI’s VBIED capability; and the presence of multiple high-functioning VBIED cells in Iraq by the end of the campaign. The four phases constitute an assessment of AQI’s battle plan and adaptation during the “Breaking the Walls” campaign.

*PHASE I: Proof of Concept and Capability*

The first phase of “Breaking the Walls” began in July 2012 and ended in September 2012. This phase constituted AQI’s proof of concept and capability to execute repeated large-scale VBIED waves across Iraq. The VBIED waves

on July 23, 2012 and September 9, 2012, involving 30 and 21 VBIEDs spread over a wide geographic area, were the largest and farthest spread among the waves across all four phases. They served, therefore, to demonstrate the depth and breadth of AQI’s ability to operate. They also indicate the presence of a VBIED construction facility and technical experts with the available materiel to generate many VBIEDs. Furthermore, they indicate the level of command and control already in place within AQI’s VBIED apparatus, as the orchestration of so many VBIEDs on one day required effective communication to a very large team. It also required a plan. In this case, the plan arrayed attacks deliberately by province so that the whole of northern Iraq and Baghdad would feel the effects.

The two large VBIED waves, as well as several smaller waves and clusters of attacks between them, generally oriented on the northeastern front with a heavy density in Kirkuk City. Because the targeting strategy varied



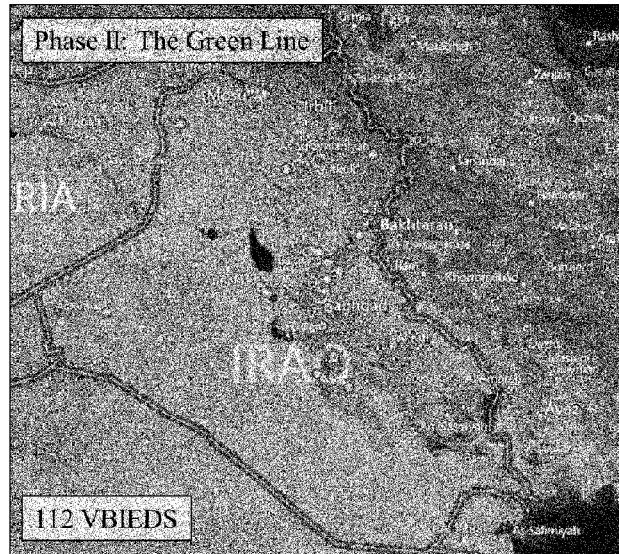
between civilian, military, and government targets, this geographic orientation does not necessarily evidence a clear operational intent. Rather, it may serve to illustrate the physical point of origin of the early VBIED campaign, assessed to have been more centralized then than it is now, particularly in terms of VBIED construction. Phase I constituted an impressive show of force, but not yet exceptionally focused operational planning. This contrasts with patterns observed in later phases.

The early waves of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign involved a large fighting force in addition to the explosive attacks. Very few of the early VBIEDs were documented as suicide attacks, which suggests that the drivers of the attack vehicles required an exit strategy. Drivers were likely deployed as part of teams to spot targets and aid in recovery. A wave of 30 VBIEDs, like that witnessed on September 9, 2012, therefore involved potentially many times more fighters, in addition to a vast VBIED construction apparatus and organizational leadership. This observation points immediately to a critical requirement for command and

control that was successfully fulfilled at the beginning of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. It also points to sophisticated campaign planning, which deliberately shifted operational objectives from the beginning to the end of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign.

The geography of the early attacks was also widespread, stretching from Basra in the south to Mosul in the north (see Part II for further details). This raises the question of whether the original fighting force was gathered together and then dispersed for attacks; or engaged remotely at various locations with guidance to synchronize attacks on a given day. The initial wide spread of attacks may lend to the impression that localized teams were established early on in the campaign, but rigor must be applied to this idea. The requirement to generate 30 VBIEDs and to prepare a deployable force for a specific mission with targeting guidance, training, and ready-made VBIEDs would take much time, but these early waves involved long periods of time in between attacks to “reset,” commensurate with these constraints. It is instead plausible that the greatest





initial constraint for the VBIED organization was technical expertise, and this expertise, if limited to few persons, would suggest centralized VBIED planning, construction, and training.

In addition to VBIED waves, Phase I also incorporated four prison attacks against the Baghdad Counterterrorism Directorate; a police headquarters detaining 10 AQI personnel in Hibhib, Diyala; the Taji Tasfirat prison, which was subsequently struck several times; and the Tikrit Tasfirat prison. The attack against the Tikrit Tasfirat prison on September 27, 2012 in particular involved VBIEDs among other capabilities, including mortars, SVESTS, and small arms. This highly successful complex attack, which would have been planned from an echelon above the smaller VBIED cell organizations, secured the escape of 100 prisoners, 47 of whom were reportedly AQI affiliates on death row. Apparent from a break in attacks is that AQI engaged in a “strategic pause” after this prison break in order to absorb new human networks into its organization.

#### *PHASE II: The Green Line*

Phase II began in November 2012 and ended in February 2013. It began with an operational pause in VBIED and prison activity. This may be explained by several conditions: first and foremost, AQI received into its ranks the fugitives of the Tikrit Tasfirat prison, which likely required reorganization and restructuring within AQI. The marked increase in VBIED activity observed in later waves depended upon a rise in human capacity, suggesting that this event triggered new organizational growth within AQI's military. It may also have produced a shift in the leadership of AQI's VBIED operation, which assumed a distinctly different character in the later Phase III. The pause in VBIED activity may also indicate a defensive requirement to protect against ISF counter-terrorism efforts in the wake of the prison break. Nevertheless, as the month of October 2012 coincided with Eid al-Adha, AQI still managed to conduct significant attacks, including small, clustered VBIED activity on October 15, 2012 and October 27, 2012. Sadr City was struck more than any other location

in these two clusters in conjunction with the religious holiday (see Part II for more detail).

Phase II focused many attacks upon civilian and government targets along the Green Line separating Iraqi Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq, coinciding with an escalation in tension between the Government of Iraq and Iraqi Kurds. This tension ignited over the establishment on October 31, 2012 of the Tigris Operations Command, encompassing Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces and placing ISF in close proximity to Kurdish territories.<sup>61</sup> Kurdish response was uncompromising. Anwar Haji, the Undersecretary of the Kurdistan Peshmerga Ministry, stated on November 6 that the Iraqi Army would not be allowed to enter Kurdish territories.<sup>62</sup> Shortly afterwards, on November 8, the Kurdistan parliament rejected Maliki's decision to create the Tigris Operations Command.<sup>63</sup> Phase II of AQI's "Breaking the Walls" was accordingly oriented on Kirkuk, reflecting a deliberate targeting strategy to exploit a critical vulnerability of the Iraqi government.

This targeting strategy was not manifest to the same extent as in those attacks observed in Phase I. The waves in Phase II were significantly smaller, closer together in time, and in many cases involved well-chosen individual targets such as Kurdish political facilities. Phase II therefore demonstrated tighter operational focus, but also more importantly a temporary reduction in the overall scale of the VBIED activity. It is possible that this decrease was the result of a fundamental resource limitation; however, there are also indicators that AQI's VBIED activity was reorganized during this period. Namely, Phase II demonstrates a pattern of smaller waves of VBIED attacks that begins to suggest the presence of independent VBIED cells that had not been clearly visible during Phase I.

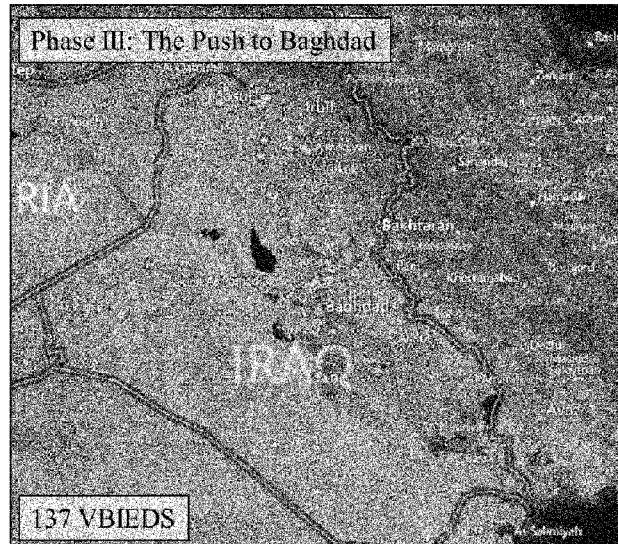
Examining closely the clusters of VBIED attacks that occurred during this period, significant groupings of attacks below the "wave" threshold occurred on January 16 and 17, 2013. On January 16, three VBIEDs clustered in Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu struck facilities associated with the KDP and PUK, yielding very high casualties. These attacks may reasonably be attributed to one cell operating with the intent to exploit ethnic tension. On January 17, four VBIEDs struck in Karbala and Hilla in southern Iraq, targeting Shi'a civilians. These attacks may also be attributed to a single cell, and very likely a different one, intent on this mission to exploit sectarian tension. The signatures of these two attack clusters point

to two different cells on account of the near simultaneity, geographic disparity, and divergent target selection of the two VBIED clusters. These cells appear capable of conducting multiple simultaneous VBIED attacks in close proximity without guidance to coordinate attacks with adjacent cells.

The tight control evidenced by these small attack clusters points to the self-contained capability of a VBIED cell by January 2013. Based on the presence of VBIED waves indicative of coordination across multiple teams in addition to individual VBIED clusters after this date, it appears that a VBIED cell may at times determine its own mission and acquire VBIEDs without assignment, which would suggest that the VBIED construction sites are also forward deployed by this time. This represents a key growth step in AQI's evolution during the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. The combined occurrence of independent VBIED cell activity and synchronized attacks across many cells would come to typify later phases. It does not follow that VBIED construction teams are necessarily part of VBIED cells, but construction sites and their logistics require some form of protection that VBIED cell personnel may assist with providing. If instead VBIED cells have no role in this site protection mission, protection must instead be assigned to other AQI elements, such as local security battalions, because protection of these sites is an operational requirement.

Moreover, the leadership that had been in place to plan elaborate VBIED waves during Phase I apparently paused, particularly in January 2013, when no VBIED waves occurred that exceeded five VBIEDs on one day. The leadership's planning re-emerged profoundly during Phase III, which underscores the assessment that Phase II signifies a transformation period of the VBIED force at the leader level. This transformation might also have involved the manning, training, and deployment of additional VBIED cells, given that the overall volume and frequency of coordinated VBIED waves subsequently increased.

VBIED attack waves occurred on November 14, November 27, November 29, and December 17, 2012. These waves occurred in quicker succession, were relatively few in number, and consequently incurred fewer overall casualties than the attacks in Phase I. In fact, the four VBIED waves in Phase II cumulatively amounted to roughly the same number of VBIEDs witnessed within one wave on July 23 or September 9. The ability to synchronize attacks in more rapid fashion,



and in particular to reset for repeatable attacks upon Kirkuk, appeared to be the focus of continued Phase II VBIED wave activity while the rest of the VBIED force reorganized. Phase II also concluded with a pair of prison attacks, including a second attempt at Taji base.

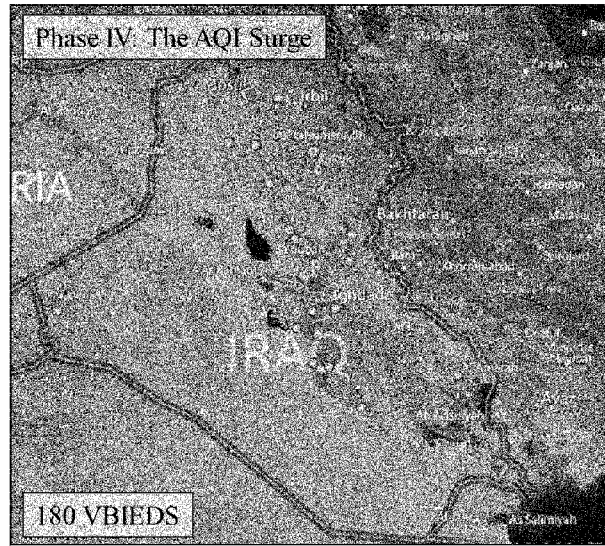
#### *PHASE III: The Baghdad Campaign*

Phase III began in February 2013 and ended in May 2013. Phase III shifted the nation-wide VBIED campaign to Baghdad with large VBIED waves striking at a steady tempo of 30 day intervals. This geographical change and stabilized rate of attacks demonstrate the return of the VBIED planning cell, not only to coordinate highly sophisticated VBIED waves, but also now to direct action elements to mass upon a particular objective. Furthermore, some of the Baghdad waves in Phase III include as many as 20 VBIEDs in Baghdad on a given day, suggesting the requirement for three cells to deliver the observed attack volume, and perhaps more in a surge capacity. This high concentration of localized attacks over several months also suggests the presence of multiple

VBIED construction sites on the outskirts of Baghdad.

A preceding mini-wave on January 22, which consisted of three VBIEDs in Taji, Mahmudiyah, and Shula, may support placing two such cells in the belts around Baghdad. If so, the first projected force from Taji or Tarmiyah in the northern Baghdad belts, and the second projected from Mahmudiyah in the southern belts. The likely location of the third cell does not, however, emerge from the data. Historical support zones for AQI would suggest that Jisr Diyala and Arab Jabour southeast of Baghdad are possible candidates.<sup>64</sup>

The attack patterns in Phase III also point to complementary geographic clusters within the attack data. Strike patterns within the main VBIED waves outline three distinct attack zones within Baghdad: one to the north, one to the southeast, and one to the southwest within the city. This pattern validates the assessment of three separate VBIED cells operating in the Baghdad vicinity at this time. To strike similar targets at regular intervals four months in a row suggests that AQI enjoyed



incredible freedom of maneuver at this time, which points to the Baghdad belts as the optimal environment from which to launch attacks upon Baghdad.

There was no operational pause after Phase II, likely because Phase II functioned in many ways as a strategic pause in VBIED planning. Phase III appeared to capitalize upon the launch of the anti-government protest movement on December 26, 2012 and the first violent clash between ISF and protesters near Fallujah on January 23, 2013. Phase III applied maximum pressure to ISF in Baghdad by targeting Shi'a communities in an apparent effort to demonstrate ISF's incapacity, and thereby to stoke the resurgence of Shi'a militias. Such an environment of uncontrolled violence has the potential to threaten the integrity of state security in Iraq, which translates directly to strategic gains for AQI in its declared pursuit of a caliphate. The VBIED wave on February 17, 2013 demonstrated the full shift of the national VBIED campaign to Baghdad, a trend that lasted until the end of May 2013. By the end of May 2013, Shi'a militias were once again actively engaged in violence in Baghdad.<sup>65</sup>

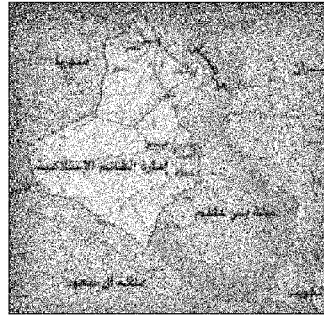
#### *PHASE IV: The AQI Surge*

After May 15, 2013, the VBIED campaign quadrupled in frequency and remained focused upon Shi'a targets in Baghdad. Nearly half of the VBIED waves documented in this study occurred during this last quarter of the campaign. Four additional observations serve to explain AQI's acceleration.

#### *Declaring the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham*

The Syrian provincial capital of al-Raqqa fell to the opposition on March 4, 2013.<sup>66</sup> AQI had likely been operating in Syria alongside Jabhat al-Nusra well before this, but their role may have intensified as al-Raqqa loomed as a near victory. Soon after, al-Raqqa became a throne for Jabhat al-Nusra and AQI alongside the secular opposition, and it is likely that AQI shifted military assets in Syria to secure this seat of governance, to recruit, and to advance further into Syria's military battlefronts.<sup>67</sup>

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the *Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham* on April 8, 2013 following this military victory.<sup>68</sup>



AQI STATE VISION MAP (SOURCE: MEMRI, 2006)

The U.S. State Department assessed as of July 2013 that al-Baghdadi is personally in Syria, which is reasonable given this governance disposition.<sup>69</sup> This does not imply that the military command of AQI has shifted to Syria, however. A strong military operating base near the Iraqi capital, which has long been a principal attack zone, would be an optimal configuration for AQI's military command.

Al-Baghdadi also declared that the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra was subordinate to the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham. This announcement did not gain ready acceptance by Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. The Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate rejected al-Baghdadi's leadership, declaring its independent affiliation to al-Qaeda core.<sup>70</sup> Al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri resolved the dispute with guidance on June 9, 2013 to the two groups to remain separate and operating in their respective geographic zones, namely Iraq and Syria.<sup>71</sup> Al-Baghdadi rejected this guidance on June 14, affirming his intent to pursue an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria.<sup>72</sup> AQI may have sought to increase attacks during this period in order to demonstrate capability and legitimacy to the al-Qaeda core grouping.

#### *ISF Fires on Protesters in Hawija*

A major inflection occurred in Iraq on April 23, 2013, however, that may have caused AQI's military presence to shift back to Iraq as a main effort. On April 23, ISF surrounded an anti-government protest sit-in camp in Hawija and conducted a search and raid.<sup>73</sup> Armed men inside the camp fired back, and a clash ensued which

claimed the lives of over 20 civilians in the camp and wounded over 100 others.<sup>74</sup> The response across the anti-government protest community was explosive. Clashes ensued between ISF and armed gunmen reportedly part of the neo-Ba'athist organization Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN). JRTN seized temporary control of Sulaiman Beg until tribal leaders brokered a deal with local officials to end the fighting.<sup>75</sup> The armed men in the protest camp at Hawija were likely not AQI. While Hawija falls along a likely axis of support for AQI, it is more likely that the camp housed militant elements of the nationalist JRTN, whose platform more directly coincides with the character and grievances of the Sunni protest movement. It is unlikely that AQI's fortunes had shifted to the degree that the organization would be welcome in a Sunni Arab camp in Iraq by that time.

Additional clashes following the one in Hawija occurred in Mosul and Fallujah, and several tribes in Anbar announced the formation of a tribal army to repel attackers, including the Iraqi Army.<sup>76</sup> The inflection also piqued ethnic tensions in Kirkuk, as Kurdish officials announced that Peshmerga forces would deploy "to fill the [security] vacuums... especially around the city of Kirkuk."<sup>77</sup> This inflection occurred immediately following the April 20 Provincial elections, from which Anbar and Ninewa were excluded ostensibly for security reasons.<sup>78</sup> This created another opportunity for AQI to amplify operational effects to exploit the gap between Iraq's Sunni Arabs and the state. It is likely that so many redundant opportunities caused AQI to double down on its efforts in Iraq. Maximizing force to target the Shi'a in Baghdad indicates AQI's principal strategy remained focused upon igniting a civil war that would mobilize the segments of the Sunni Arab community already teetering on the edge of an uprising.

#### *The Extremist Regional Sectarian Face-Off*

Shi'a militant activity in the region also coincided with this phase change in AQI's VBIED operation. On April 30, 2013, Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah overtly announced the organization's role in the Syrian civil war, stating that Hezbollah "will not let Syria fall."<sup>79</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra, Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate, responded by declaring Hezbollah militants in Syria its top priority.<sup>80</sup> These events demonstrate that extremist groups on both sides of the sectarian divide had faced off in Syria. They also influenced the mobilization of Shi'a militias in Iraq to the benefit of AQI.



AQI RAMADAN 2013, ALEPPO (SOURCE: HALAB)

On May 4, the Iranian-sponsored Shi'a militant group in Iraq, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) held a massive rally in Baghdad. AAH had also recently made its presence known in Syria as part of the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade (AFAB).<sup>83</sup> AAH leader Qais al-Khazali called on members at the Baghdad rally to maintain readiness.<sup>82</sup> This event constituted a significant measure of AQI's ability to provoke a response, and AQI may also have increased operational tempo in order to mass on this objective.

#### *Other Considerations*

Yet another factor may have influenced AQI's battle plan in May 2013. Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, a senior Sunni cleric active within the anti-government protest movement, announced on May 13 that he would form a 'Commission of Goodwill' to begin negotiations with the Maliki government on behalf of protesters from all six provinces.<sup>85</sup> The protests had become divided between reconciliation and insurgency influences since the beginning of May 2013, and protesters in Salah ad-Din and Anbar demonstrated favor toward al-Saadi's initiative.<sup>84</sup> The cessation of protests would have directly undercut AQI's political strategy; it is possible that AQI increased attacks in order to mobilize ISF to block this effort.

But contemporaneous events alone do not explain this phase change. AQI greatly increased the frequency and sophistication of its VBIED operations at this time, indicating that added resources and organizational growth were installed months earlier. In most cases,

attacks occurred weekly, indicating an increased ability to sustain attacks in repeatable fashion. This escalation demonstrates AQI's refinement of its ability to recover and reset after attacks and the establishment of multiple fixed sites for preparing and staging VBIEDs.

Furthermore, the waves occurring during the last quarter of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign (May 2013 - July 2013) often achieved casualty levels in excess of 300, most with fewer than 12 VBIEDs per wave. This indicates that the lethality of individual VBIEDs increased over time, and emphasizes improved construction, improved execution, and reorientation primarily on civilian targets. The organizational growth may also be a direct result of the Tikrit Tasfirat prison break, which replenished AQI with new veteran manpower, potentially for use in Iraq and Syria. The source of AQI's amplified material resources are as of yet unexplained. Phase IV of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign concluded with the final two prison attacks on July 21, 2013. The Abu Ghraib prison attack resulted in the escape of 500 prisoners and the death of 68 ISF troops. The attack upon Taji prison was the third unsuccessful attempt over the course of the campaign. AQI then declared the conclusion of "Breaking the Walls."

#### *Effects of the attack on Abu Ghraib*

The effects of the Abu Ghraib prison attack upon Iraq have been profound. First, it permitted a huge manpower infusion to AQI, five times greater than that produced by the Tikrit Tasfirat prison break in September 2012, assessed in this report to have significantly enhanced AQI's operational capability in 2013. This manpower infusion may now be directed toward Syria as well, for safe haven as well as operational deployment. Though ISF has conducted operations to the north and west of Baghdad to interdict AQI,<sup>85</sup> it is likely that most of the prisoners are still at large and will become a part of the fighting force by 2014.

Additionally, this prison break demonstrated to the Iraq population that AQI can break hardened ISF defenses. Even though Abu Ghraib may be considered the least defensible prison facility for a number of reasons, this was still a shocking victory for AQI, which was also able to match ISF in a sustained firefight for a number of hours. This success gave significant advantage to AQI by demonstrating its capacity to the rest of the al-Qaeda network. It also supports the legitimacy of AQI as a political entity in Syria by showcasing its military might

and operational initiative on the Iraq front. This success has likely contributed to AQI's operations inside Syria, where their operational initiative as well as governance strategy may now be observed north of Aleppo.<sup>85</sup>

AQI's operations at the end of "Breaking the Walls," especially the attack upon the Abu Ghraib prison, demand an aggressive ISF response, though the Iraqi government must be equally careful not to trigger Sunni popular backlash. If the ISF is able to mount effective counterterrorism operations to reestablish security in Baghdad, to clear the Baghdad belts, and to regain momentum to project force into the provinces, the Iraqi government may be able to regain enough legitimacy to consolidate gains. Targeting the AQI cells producing these VBIED attacks should be a top priority because such attacks are inflicting more civilian casualties than any other AQI operation, and constitute a principal threat to Iraqi stability at present.

If the ISF instead conducts blind search and raid operations into Sunni neighborhoods and communities that result in mass arrests, the government may precipitate a Sunni insurgency. JRTN, defected ISF units, and departed Sahwa could amplify this revolt, and effectively negate the advance of the ISF. Aside from crafting a more effective counterterrorism strategy, it is imperative that the Iraqi government reconcile anti-government protestors to the state. There must be a healthy perspective of Sunni participation in governance among the Arab population if Iraq is to emerge from the threat of al-Qaeda.

#### THE NEXT CAMPAIGN: "SOLDIERS' HARVEST"

AQI announced the start of a new campaign on July 30, 2013, claiming the VBIED wave on July 29 as the inaugural attack of the "Soldiers' Harvest" campaign.<sup>87</sup> As of September 1, 2013, there have been five large VBIED waves following the conclusion of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign, on July 29, August 6, August 15, and August 20, and August 28, 2013. These waves focused upon Baghdad and southern Iraq. During this first month, AQI has also struck critical infrastructure, specifically the port of Um Qasr near Basra.<sup>88</sup> This suggests that AQI may escalate to strike more heavily protected facilities over the course of the next campaign.

Forecasting how else AQI will prosecute the 2013-

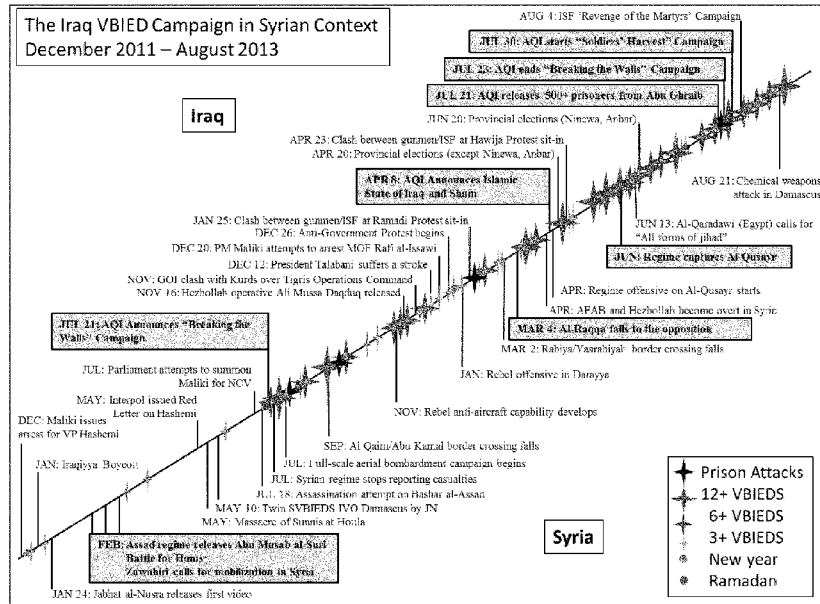
2014 campaign requires a study of the other elements of AQI's military organization, how they relate to AQI's governance strategy, and how this relationship translates to new operational objectives. It also requires a parallel study of Iraqi Security Forces, Maliki's scheme of maneuver, and how AQI will plan to disrupt national elections in 2014. The new campaign will likely capitalize upon AQI's amplified VBIED capability and continue its integration into attacks targeting hardened government facilities. Prison attacks and spectacular attacks targeting Shi'a civilians will likewise continue. Political assassinations of Sunni as well as Shi'a figures will likely escalate as Baghdad becomes more permissive for AQI at the expense of ISF.

Outside of Baghdad, AQI will likely begin to operate with impunity in villages where its control becomes palpable. In northern Diyala, southern Baghdad, northern Anbar, and Samarra, AQI may begin to project security battalions into urban areas, causing populations to displace. Population displacement will serve as the principal indicator that AQI has reestablished conditions that reflect the state of play in Iraq before the Surge.

#### AQI'S MILITARY ORGANIZATION

This study seeks to interpret VBIED wave patterns over time for what they indicate of AQI's organizational evolution into a professional military force. Maintaining a high volume of attacks at short and regular intervals demonstrates measurable growth in capacity to plan, operate, and sustain multiple VBIED cycles, revealing a broader array of technical expertise as well as increasingly sophisticated operational design. VBIEDs and prison breaks do not encompass the whole of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. AQI's 2012-2013 campaign likely also involved dedicated operations to establish and secure safe havens. Nevertheless, the VBIED campaign demonstrates how well AQI reconstituted as a fighting force in the wake of U.S. withdrawal. It dispels the possibility that AQI remained a small network of disparate fighters loosely led by a central political personage, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. As such, it reduces the expectation that removing one key leader will defeat al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Instead, AQI's campaign showcases the depth of a multi-echelon military organization with well-established command and control that can design and implement coordinated attacks across the whole of Iraq. This



organization enjoys unconstrained communication among teams as well as unconstrained access to human capacity and materiel. This negates the assumption that the Syrian civil war caused AQI to neglect the Iraq front. Instead, AQI seized the initiative in Iraq as it gained ground in Syria. Al-Baghdadi is now capitalizing upon a position of military strength in order to assert initiative on both fronts.

The most impressive and visible aspect of AQI's new military organization is its reconstituted operational art. AQI maintained the initiative in Iraq throughout the "Breaking the Walls" campaign, particularly from February 2013 – July 2013. This initiative bears a distinctive operational design signature at the force-level as well as the VBIED organizational level. The force-level planning element is assessed to have designed the prison attacks, while the VBIED planning team designed VBIED waves and provided support to force-level operations as

directed.

Indicative of this operational art, AQI maintained its initiative while reacting to events in Syria; to the actions of political figures in Iraq; and to the operations of Iraqi Security Forces. The organization exploited the creation of the anti-government protest movement, the clash between protesters and ISF at Hawija, and other unpredicted opportunities to their gain. And yet it appears that these events merely solidified AQI's campaign plan for "Breaking the Walls." The assessed four phases of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign described in this report align with a shockingly symmetrical planning calendar that may very well have progressed with minimal disturbance for the entire year, at least where VBIED waves and prison attacks were concerned (For more on this, see Part II of this report).

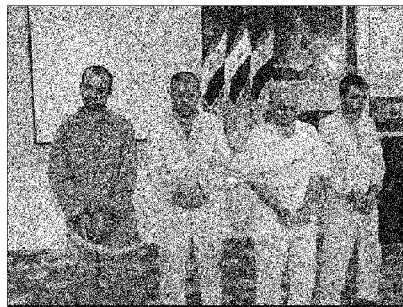
The principal action arm leveraged by AQI to inflict



human casualties in Iraq in 2012-2013 appeared to have been the VBIED organization. VBIEDs also struck military and political targets, but particularly in Baghdad, the VBIED campaign followed a classical 2006-2007 model of striking civilian targets in Shi'a and mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad. What is perhaps a new phenomenon is the synchronization of these attacks with attacks in the north, south, and west of Iraq. This suggests that VBIED operations have evolved to include not only a campaign plan, but also the capability to train, resource, and deploy VBIED teams as part of a unit.

It is possible that the reconstitution of AQI's VBIED capacity carried over directly through veteran technical experts from the original 2007 network, which may mean that the VBIED capacity developed ahead of the rest of AQI's military organization in 2012. It is also clear that AQI additionally executed many IED, IDF, and AED attacks that were likely prosecuted by other teams apart from VBIED cells. It has been suggested throughout this study that AQI will attempt to re-establish local emirates in conjunction with the declaration of the *Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham*, and that these emirates would require local security elements. The presence of emirate structures built to execute attacks was validated when ISF detained the AQI Deputy Wadi of northern Baghdad on April 13, 2013.<sup>89</sup>

SVEST attacks were also increasingly reported during the last quarter of "Breaking the Walls," many as part of complex attacks. The VBIED dataset also shows a significant increase in SVBIED activity beginning in April 2013. These attacks do not overwhelm non-suicide



AQI DETAINEES, 2013 (SOURCE: AL GHAD PRESS)

attack incidence, but they are nevertheless important to track for several reasons. First, suicide attacks are an indicator of foreign fighter activity, and the rise in suicide attacks in Iraq suggests that foreign fighters are again flowing into Iraq from Syria. Second, the rise in suicide attacks indicates another organizational shift within AQI in order to capitalize upon attack types that can only be executed with suicide bombers — namely SVESTs. VBIEDs likely require less organizational adjustment to absorb suicide drivers, though optimizing their lethal potential requires new thought.

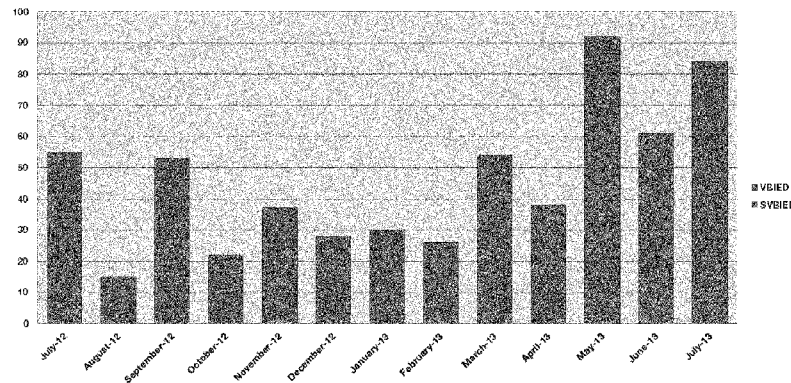
Negating the consolidation of local emirates in Iraq will depend upon the renewed cooperation of Arab Sunnis with the ISF and Maliki's government. The departure of Sahwa from their posts in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison break would be an alarming sign to the contrary.<sup>90</sup> Destroying AQI's VBIED capability, on the other hand, requires a direct approach by the ISF to dismantle and destroy the VBIED command and its component cells. ISF may do this by replicating Coalition Force operations to destroy the Baghdad VBIED cells in Rusafa and Karkh in 2007.<sup>91</sup> These operations involved aggressive interdiction of VBIED factories as well as the erection of concrete barriers in Baghdad to limit vehicular mobility.

In 2013, the cells are more likely located in the Baghdad belts rather than the city center, which may provide new opportunities to interdict along primary and secondary lines of communication into the city. This strategy may cause AQI to increase targeting of ISF at checkpoints. It may also cause AQI to respond in other ways, either by attempting to shift operations to the city center or increasingly to rely upon SVESTs. Both of these responses would degrade AQI's ability to operate, however, and reduce their present momentum. They may also be mitigated through early anticipation and planning against AQI's next move.

#### Combat Power of VBIED Cells

The ability to forecast AQI's tactical and operational planning also requires considerate thought for how the VBIED enterprise is organized. Observing VBIED waves drives provides key insights into the shape of the organization that plans, resources, and executes VBIED attacks. A very large wave, such as those witnessed on July 23, 2012 and September 9, 2012, demonstrates exceptional logistics and depth of technical expertise across the organization carrying out the attacks (see

**VBIEDs vs. SVBIEDs**  
JULY 2012-JULY 2013



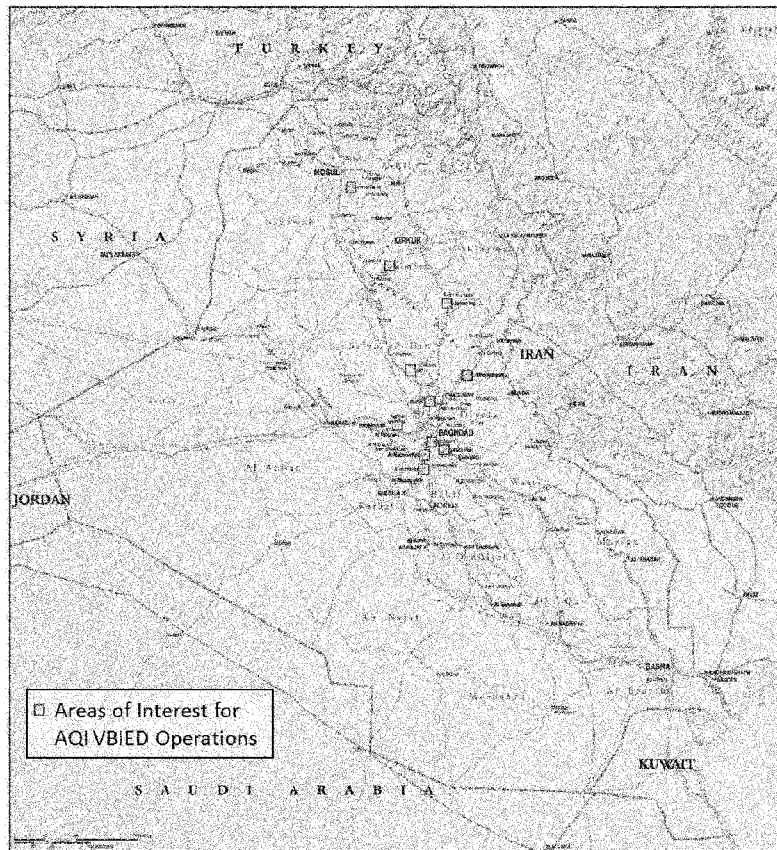
additional information on the waves discussed in this section in Part II of this report). These elements of control require both centralized support and decentralized execution, which frames a core question concerning which organizational model best describes the institution responsible. A highly centralized organization that prepares VBIEDs and deploys fighters may be regarded as less organized, less capable, and less resilient than one that is merely centrally guided, comprised of multiple self-contained cells that are capable of independent operations with minimal support. As of August 2013, AQI's VBIED wave pattern suggests AQI has developed a VBIED organization involving two echelons — one to plan, support, and communicate; and one to construct and deploy VBIEDs.

The VBIED waves at the end of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign were highly controlled, of a consistent interval, and high yield, indicative of continued thoughtful planning, but also the presence of high-performing forward-deployed teams capable of executing the plan in repeatable fashion. For example, the VBIED waves that focused attacks upon Baghdad on May 15, May 20, May 27, and May 30, 2013 were not likely dependent upon a central command for all manner of support in execution; this interval does not allow time for teams to gather and disperse, for central leadership to provide training and specific guidance, or for new fighters to

err. The more likely scenario involves multiple teams already refined in their execution receiving instruction to attack on a given day and executing with little further management or interference.

In order to maintain this volume of attacks at close interval, these teams were also likely able to access VBIEDs from multiple construction sites. This hypothesis is supported by the improbability that one VBIED facility was able to maintain the throughput required for the waves seen in the later stages of the campaign. Whereas the July 2012 and September 2012 VBIED waves required a high one-time volume, such that the VBIEDs might have been manufactured centrally over time and then staged; the pattern of attacks towards the end of the campaign suggests a system more akin to multiple assembly lines for mass production. The pace of attacks is determined in part by the pace of VBIED construction, and the pace of attacks drastically increased. Decentralized VBIED construction is also easier to mask and harder to interdict, and it is an observable indicator of the expanded organizational depth of AQI's VBIED activity.

Expanding this idea further, the apparent shift in the VBIED construction system is one possible explanation for the overall shift in VBIED waveform observed over the course of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. The pattern began in Phase I as few high amplitude waves spanning a wide geographic footprint, and it shifted



by the final phase to many successive smaller waves that were focused geographically. This waveform may depend upon many factors, to include planning guidance to accomplish phased operational objectives, resource limitations, and available combat power, but the rate-determining step for the VBIED capability is foremost VBIED construction. Increased VBIED construction may have been the principal reason for the shift over the course of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign to enable AQI to mass attacks upon Baghdad in 2013.

In addition to ready access to VBIED construction sites, forward deployed VBIED cells of the variety estimated in the summer of 2013 required a degree of internal organization to perform minimum key functions: to communicate with a higher headquarters; to receive and deploy fighters; to receive and deploy VBIEDs; and to spot and designate specific targets. The footprint of individual VBIED cells may be traced in the attack data based upon evident geographic clusters, though it does not follow that these high performing teams are tethered to local geography in every case. What a team lacks in local familiarity it must recover in preparation, and the characteristic VBIED cells observed in this study are capable of surging to new attack zones rather than being restricted to a maximum radius of attack.

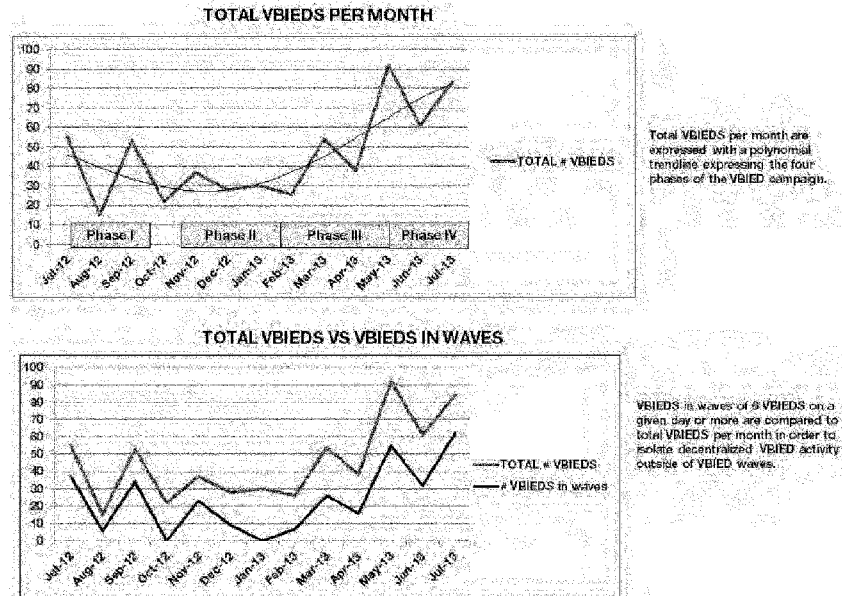
The idea that VBIED cells may not be geographically delimited emerges with the campaign swing to Baghdad in February 2013. This nationwide consolidation of VBIED combat power indicates a surge role for VBIED cells that had been operating far from Baghdad prior to February 2013. Almost no VBIEDs are documented in this study between February 17 and April 14, 2013 in Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad-Din provinces, within or outside of VBIED waves. Attacks in Kirkuk resumed on April 15, 2013 in a wave that synchronized attacks with effects in Baghdad. The hiatus in northern VBIED activity, like the January 2013 break in VBIED waves, is not yet fully understood. These cells may have shifted to Baghdad, shifted to Syria, or been disrupted by the ISF or internal constraints. However, because they preceded a drastic rise in VBIED wave activity in Baghdad in May 2013, they may reasonably be considered as indicators of a growth step in the AQI VBIED organization and evidence that cells can lift and shift fire.

Rather than identifying VBIED cells exclusively based on geography, VBIED cells may instead be bounded

by feasible attack volume.\* It is clear from the data that smaller clusters of VBIEDs with common geography occur frequently between VBIED waves. The occurrence of small clustered VBIED activity is a key insight into the presence of VBIED cells. For example, as the graph above depicts, the high overall level of VBIED activity continued in January 2013 despite the temporary break in VBIED wave activity. This suggests that VBIED cells were capable of mounting independent groupings of attacks without guidance to synchronize with other teams. It is also clear evidence of the presence of a centralized VBIED wave planning element that was absent only during this time before resuming operations in February 2013.

VBIED construction sites are a critical vulnerability of the VBIED organization because they are not mobile like VBIED cells, and because they are laden with high visibility material resources, such as many cars, components, and explosives. It is not yet clear what explosive material comprises most VBIEDs, though the high volume of attacks suggests a steady supply chain. One report from Iraqi Police in Najaf in December 2012 indicated that a VBIED was seized containing two men and a large amount of TNT and C4.<sup>92</sup> Another report from the Tigris Operations Command on August 20, 2013 indicated that a raid on a VBIED factory included ammonium and C4.<sup>93</sup> Still another police raid in Salah ad-Din on August 20, 2013 reported seizure of an explosives factory in Suleiman Beg that involved 37 containers of DDT, TNT, and 20 motorcycles.<sup>94</sup> These are isolated reports at this time, though the nature of the explosives is a critical line of inquiry for further study. It is important to establish how AQI procures explosive material in order for the ISF to disrupt logistics

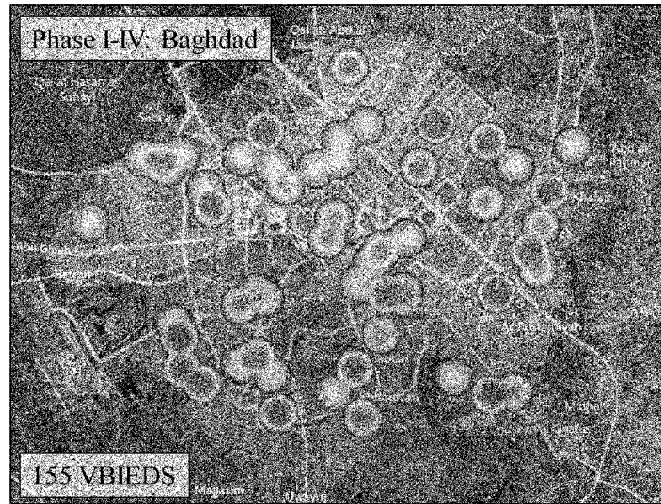
\* To re-engage the definition of a VBIED “wave” as six or more VBIED attacks, which theoretically represents coordination across multiple cells, one VBIED cell is therefore not estimated to deploy more than 5 VBIEDs on one day. This threshold is reasonable because the detonation of 5 VBIEDs likely requires a team of 5-10 fighters in addition to support staff and leadership. Effective organizations larger than this require further subdivision because of the dictates of span of control. A functional team this size is therefore an effective unit of measure for a basic VBIED cell. For the purposes of framing the data, it is useful to identify smaller VBIED clusters as having structure and meaning even when they do not involve the high organization of a VBIED “wave.” Organizing a VBIED wave of more than 5 VBIEDs is therefore considered to require coordination across cells. Recent reports from the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Task Force also indicated on August 21, 2013 that they conducted a raid on a 16-man VBIED cell operating IVO Baghdad.



supporting spectacular explosive attacks.

The fact that these cells are also responsive to centralized guidance to synchronize attacks further indicates the professionalization of the VBIED organization. It is unclear how they communicate, though ISF has reported confiscating motorcycles with forged documents upon site exploitation;<sup>95</sup> and security battalions at least reportedly receive instruction by courier.<sup>96</sup> AQI has also lately warned Syrian jihadist organizations to exercise communications security as a principal lesson learned from fighting Americans in Iraq.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, because the early waves of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign bear a top-down quality as compared to later waves, it becomes apparent both that the AQI VBIED command has developed new organizational depth over the last year; and that a distinct planning vision is still driving VBIED waves as of August 2013.

The enumeration of VBIED cells is critical to the estimation of AQI’s combat power. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how to match ISF operational design to eradicate AQI’s VBIED capability. For example, the ISF search and raid operation into northern Baghdad on August 4, 2013 may have had the potential to disrupt a VBIED cell in the vicinity of the northern Baghdad belts; however, VBIED waves continued without interruption in August 2013. This is likely due to the presence of additional VBIED cells projecting attacks in Baghdad from the southern belts. The total volume of VBIEDs occurring within “waves” from February 2013 to August 2013 also clearly indicates the presence of multiple operational cells that cannot each produce a full wave of VBIEDs in isolation. A wave involving 10 or more VBIEDs may be estimated to involve a minimum of two, and likely three VBIED cells. The attacks mentioned below are discussed in further detail in Part II of this report.



Baghdad

The dense geographic clustering into three distinct zones of Baghdad and the overall high volume of attacks, usually in excess of 12 VBIEDs per wave, suggest there may be three cells conducting attacks in the city as of August 2013. There appears to be a northern Baghdad attack zone extending from Shula in the northwest to Sadr City in the northeast; along with a southeastern zone and a southwestern zone. Considering the relative permissibility of the Baghdad belts, these cells may be operating on the periphery of Baghdad, to the north, south, and southwest, where AQI had enjoyed sanctuary historically.<sup>98</sup> One or both of the southern belt cells may also be responsible for attacks in downtown Baghdad, in Karrada and Sadoun, particularly.

Perhaps the best illustration of the presence of multiple cells operating in Baghdad, and in particular from the southern belts, is the spread of the Baghdad attacks on July 20, 2013, the day before the prison attacks upon Abu Ghraib and Taji base. These attacks largely avoided the traditional northern zone. This spread indicates that the northern cell was not in play that day, likely because it had been re-tasked to support one or both

prison attacks on July 21, 2013.

AQI had an operational presence in Baghdad from the beginning of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. The day before the very large July 23, 2012 wave, a smaller wave of seven VBIEDs struck a number of locations. Three of those VBIEDs detonated in Mahmoudiyah, south of Baghdad, which is a possible area of interest for further study to detect one of the southern belt VBIED cells. Northern Baghdad neighborhoods such as Sadr City, Husseinia, and Ur were struck as part of the first large July 23, 2012 wave the following day, which may indicate that multiple staging areas had emerged in the vicinity of Baghdad from the early days of the campaign.

It is important to consider the full spectrum of possible locations for VBIED cells, and VBIED construction sites particularly, in order to focus collection of intelligence to confirm or deny. It is especially important at this time to understand the depth of AQI in the southern belts because ISF counter-AQI operations in the northern zone will fail if not synchronized with operations in the southern zones. They will also fail if they target the local Sunni population and not the high-performing VBIED teams perpetrating attacks in Baghdad. Instead, if the ISF

is able to disrupt the logistics of the VBIED apparatus, and to block their avenues of approach to Baghdad, the operations may be able to dampen the societal effects of VBIEDs long enough to generate domestic policy changes.

#### *Northern Iraq*

Next to Baghdad, Kirkuk city and its environs were slammed with VBIED attacks at intense periods at the beginning of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. Nine VBIEDs detonated in Kirkuk on July 23, 2013, along with two VBIEDs in Tuz Khurmatu to the south of the city. Three additional VBIEDs detonated in Muqaddiyah, south of Tuz Khurmatu, with further attacks in Baquba, Diyala. Again based upon estimated volume of attacks in each location, this VBIED wave appeared to involve a large number of fighters operating in the northeast of Iraq. This northern group of VBIEDs within the July 23, 2012 wave compared to four VBIEDs that detonated in Baghdad that day, and the three aforementioned VBIEDs south of Baghdad in Mahmoudiyah the day before. The relative density of attacks in the North dissipated by September 9, 2012. Attacks in the North generally matched Baghdad attacks until February 2013, when northern attacks generally ceased for two months.

Northern attacks resumed in April 2013 to a lesser degree. As of August 2013, it appears that there is still a cell conducting attacks in Kirkuk city and Tuz Khurmatu. Because the volume is low and the rate inconsistent, it is possible that the same cell is responsible for attacks in Kirkuk, northern Salah ad-Din, possibly southern Salah ad-Din, and even Mosul. The assignment of a wide geographic assignment to one cell may be feasible, particularly if the VBIED cell and the construction site are based along the road that connects Kirkuk city to Baiji, or Tuz Khurmatu to Tikrit. Furthermore, the northernmost east-west route between Baiji and Kirkuk forms the southern boundary of the Za’ab triangle which stretches northwest to Mosul. This region had also been another historic support zone for AQI.<sup>99</sup>

By contrast, it does not appear that there is a VBIED cell operating in Diyala at this time. The last VBIED documented in Diyala province was defused by ISF on June 13, 2013.<sup>100</sup> Given that VBIED attacks had concentrated at various points in the early campaign in the Diyala river valley, it now appears that AQI has regained control of this support zone. A report from the Tigris Operations Command on August 20, 2013

indicated that operations in the Hamrin Mountains area beginning in northern Diyala had resulted in the arrest of 48 personnel, six vehicles, 23 motorcycles, a VBIED factory, a training camp, and 21 rifles.<sup>101</sup> It is possible that this had been a command and control node within AQI’s support zone, and potentially that which had played a principal role at the beginning of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign, when VBIED operations were likely more centralized. It is not yet clear how this ISF operation will affect AQI’s combat power, but VBIED waves continued in Baghdad on August 20 and 28, 2013.<sup>102</sup>

#### *Mosul*

Single VBIEDs detonated intermittently in Mosul throughout the campaign until June 10, 2013, ahead of provincial elections on June 20, 2013.<sup>103</sup> On June 10, three VBIEDs detonated in Mosul, synchronized with attacks in Tuz Khurmatu, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. Two days later, ISF defused two VBIEDs in East Mosul.<sup>104</sup> This might suggest that a cell might have formed in close proximity to Mosul, but attacks do not cluster again in Mosul as of the time of this report. This suggests first that the northern VBIED cell that likely covers Kirkuk and northern Salah ad Din also covers Mosul and Tel Afar as needed. It may also suggest that Mosul began as a permissive support zone for AQI, and thus that the organization, as in the Diyala River Valley, did not need or want VBIED attacks within their support zone.

#### *Anbar*

A VBIED cell in Anbar also appears among the original constellation of actors at the beginning of “Breaking the Walls,” although the cell participated minimally in synchronized waves. Only one VBIED detonated in Anbar on July 23, 2012, and none detonated on September 9, 2012. However, a cluster of three VBIEDs in Ramadi and Fallujah occurred on September 13, 2012. Clusters of local VBIEDs occurred again on September 24, 2012 and May 1, 2013, again offset in timing from the main wave. The apparent trend of independent cell activity and minimal participation in synchronized waves continued through August 2013. As of the time of this report, the Anbar VBIED cell never participated in a coordinated VBIED wave with more than one VBIED. This may indicate that the cell has difficulty communicating with the rest of the VBIED organization, or that it suffers from some other constraint. It may also be unresponsive to tasking.

*Southern Iraq*

AQI has deliberately targeted Shi'a population centers in southern Iraq since the beginning of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. This is a particularly impressive feat, given the great distance between the support zone needed to construct a VBIED and the attack zones observed. From September 9, 2012 onward, AQI struck Basra, Amara, Imam al-Sharqi, Nasiriyah, Diwaniya, Najaf, Karbala, and Shi'a communities south of Baghdad. VBIEDs began to cluster there in late December 2012, and clusters occurred several times before the February 2013 push to Baghdad began. The southern cell appeared to participate in this push to Baghdad.

On June 16, 2013, a wave of nine VBIEDs struck most of these locations in southern Iraq. A similar wave happened again on July 14, 2013. Because this concentration does not usually occur, it is reasonable to assess that the southern VBIED cell and the southern Baghdad belt cells interoperate, such that the southern Baghdad belt cells assist in waves directed at cities in southern Iraq; and that the southern Iraq cell assists in attacks upon Baghdad from the southern belts. This hypothesis accounts for the volume of attacks in southern Iraq on June 16, 2013 and July 14, 2013, which exceed the estimated capability of a single cell. It is possible but unlikely that the southern belt cells are solely responsible for the attacks in southern Iraq. Instead, there is likely an additional cell, possibly located in Iskandriyah or Mussayib in northern Babel, or Arab Jabour north of Wasit, that covers the southern zone.

*Southern Salah ad-Din*

Like Mosul, only single VBIEDs occurred in southern Salah ad-Din province throughout the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. Single VBIEDs occurred in the cities of Samarra, Balad, Taji, or Tarmiyah in conjunction with most of the Phase I waves, and several independent VBIEDs detonated in isolation during Phase II. This early pattern does not indicate the presence of a self-contained VBIED cell capable of conducting multiple independent attacks. Furthermore, the largest observed cluster of four VBIEDs in Taji occurred as part of the September 9, 2012 wave, and VBIEDs never clustered in this region again as of August 2013. In fact, the last VBIED documented in southern Salah ad Din occurred on June 9, 2013 in Taji.<sup>105</sup> Given that this region is key terrain for the northern approach to Baghdad, it is more likely that AQI has decided not to strike this area with

VBIEDs than that AQI is limited from doing so. For the same reason, this region is critically important for ISF to clear and protect in order to re-establish security in Baghdad.

**WHAT WE KNOW**

This study has raised many possibilities and many questions about the disposition of al-Qaeda in Iraq today. It is therefore necessary to take inventory of the facts, assessments, and remaining unknowns at this time.

*Facts*

It is a fact that AQI announced the beginning of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign on July 21, 2012 and its end on July 23, 2013. It is further known that AQI has claimed credit for numerous attacks in Iraq over the course of the same period, including many of the VBIED waves and prison breaks identified in this study, attributed them to an overarching campaign plan, and even published a statistical report to credit themselves with measures of their performance.\*

It is a fact that violence levels in Iraq in 2013 by various measures, including documented casualty totals and the volume of VBIEDs documented in this study, compare to wartime levels when the U.S. military was thoroughly engaged in the fight. It is a fact that VBIEDs were chiefly responsible for the rise in casualties from December 2011 to August 2013. It is a fact that they were often synchronized to strike on the same day at locations that were sometimes geographically concentrated and sometimes widespread.

It is a fact that AQI's military organization is capable of other attacks besides VBIEDs, including IEDs,

\* On August 13, 2013, AQI published a campaign update in its military periodical, "al-Naba." According to SITE Intelligence Group, AQI took inventory of its attacks from November 26, 2011 to November 15, 2012, documenting 4,500 operations broken down by region and type. The statistics in AQI's periodical have not been fully compared to those documented in this study, but the number of VBIED attacks claimed by AQI during this period greatly exceed those documented from open sources.

"ISIL Claims 4,500 Operations in One-Year Period in Iraq, Gives Statistics," translated and published by SITE Intelligence Group, August 13, 2013.



SVESTs, indirect fire, and direct fire, and that all of these capabilities have more than once been brought to bear upon a single tactical objective to achieve combined arms effects. The attack on the Abu Ghraib prison is the most visible and most recent example to demonstrate this capability.

It is therefore a fact that AQI has reconstituted as a military organization capable of planning, directing, and resourcing the attacks documented in this study. AQI capitalized upon a position of military strength in Iraq to project not only lethal force into Syria, but also to exert governance and control of territory in Syria under the banner of the *Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham*.

#### Assessments

It is assessed that AQI means to assert governance and control of territory also in Iraq. It is possible that AQI already controls territory in the vicinity of northern Diyala province, the Thar Thar desert area northwest of Baghdad, the Jazcera desert west of Tikrit, and the Za'ab triangle spanning northern Salah ad-Din, southern Ninewa, and western Kirkuk. AQI likely maintains unrestricted access into Syria across the western Jazcera desert, and sanctuary and training may be established there.

It is also assessed that AQI leaves the protection of these areas to other military and security elements outside the VBIED organization, while this high-performing team and signature weapons capability are brought to bear to spearhead an offensive campaign plan in Iraq. This campaign has been successful both in stoking sectarian violence in Iraq and in demonstrating outwardly the inability of the ISF thus far to protect the population from AQI's attacks.

It is assessed that AQI's VBIED capability has grown over the course of the last 12 months in three critical ways. First, the organization likely now performs decentralized VBIED construction operations, with multiple VBIED factories deployed forward close to primary attack zones. Second, the organization now likely contains multiple independently functioning VBIED cells that are capable of mounting their own attacks. These cells can also communicate with higher military echelons and are responsive to centralized guidance to coordinate attacks on a single day or in support of a single operation. Third, the VBIED organization still appears to engage central leadership that specializes in VBIED wave planning, but has the potential and intent to broaden

its implementation to include spectacular attacks against critical infrastructure as well as complex attacks upon hardened ISF facilities.

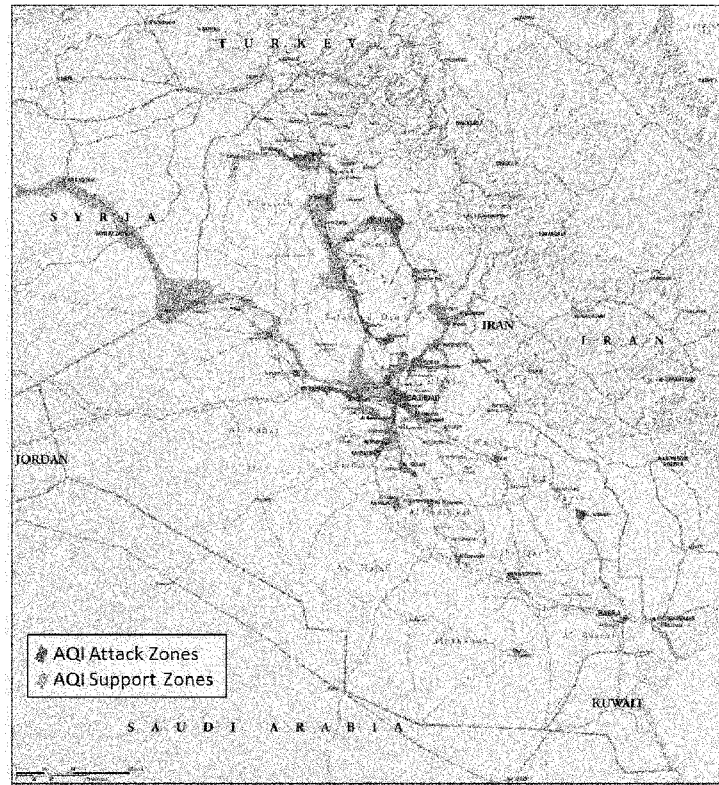
It is assessed that AQI's VBIED operations are not the only military capability developed by AQI over the course of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. Thousands of violent events, including SVEST attacks, IEDs, small arms fire engagements, and indirect fire, have been documented and as of yet not analyzed fully. They likely contain rich insight into the shape of the overall military organization as well as its relationship to the security apparatus which undergirds AQI's burgeoning governance initiatives in Iraq.<sup>106</sup>

#### Unknowns

It is unknown at this time how AQI supplies VBIED attacks. VBIEDs require basic components, including vehicles, explosive material, and detonation triggers, among other niche components. Several reports from ISF interdiction operations indicate that military grade explosives, and not homemade explosives or munitions, comprise the explosive content of VBIEDs. This would suggest that AQI's supply chain for explosive attacks begins outside of Iraq, which would follow that AQI requires funding, and not supplies, in order to sustain operations.

If this is indeed the case, it is unknown how AQI funds VBIED attacks, though domestic and regional criminal activities, such as kidnapping, extortion, and theft, are suspected.

The personalities and relationships which comprise the human networks operating within AQI's military organization are also unknown from open sources. It is also unknown how VBIED cells communicate with central leadership in order to coordinate VBIED waves, though couriers are suspected. It is unknown how they communicate. The veteran AQI network may generally be regarded as sparse communicators, based upon AQI's historical behaviors. In addition, a recent prisoner statement claims that instructions and funding are provided by courier.<sup>107</sup> This demonstrates one of the most remarkable qualities of the VBIED wave phenomenon described in this report. It showcases a dependency upon communications tradecraft that may be interdicted if isolated and understood. These two critical requirements, namely finance and communications, constitute key opportunities to disrupt AQI's VBIED operations.



The locations of the forward VBIED cells, forward VBIED construction sites, and central VBIED leadership are yet unknown, but the adjacent map depicts named areas of interest for these locations that may focus collection for further refinement of the assessments delivered in this study. The hypothesis of many VBIED factories has lately been corroborated by ISF reporting on site exploitation during the “Revenge of the Martyrs” security operation in Northern Baghdad.<sup>108</sup>

#### *Advising Iraqi Security Forces*

It is necessary for ISF to reduce the VBIED threat in Iraq in order to preserve the state against the threat of al-Qaeda. VBIEDs are the single highest source of casualties in Iraq. Reducing VBIEDs requires targeting high confidence locations and disrupting operational flows. Reducing VBIEDs will not reduce AQI’s force-level military command or planning capacity. In fact, one can expect that reducing VBIEDs will translate to

an increase in other attack types, such as SVESTs. Given that the VBIED effort is not demonstratively driven by suicide attacks, this would not be an easy transition for AQI to accomplish, although the increase of suicide bombers in the summer of 2013, originating from Syria, suggests that the organization is already increasing this capability.<sup>109</sup> Disrupting AQI to this degree may shift the momentum of the counter-terrorism fight in Iraq in favor of ISF.

Reducing the military command of AQI likely means a focused desert operation. But this operation should not attempt to clear the Jazeera Desert that forms western Ninewa and Anbar provinces.<sup>110</sup> Instead, attacks should be focused upon regions such as Thar Thar, The Za'ab Triangle, and Hamrin where AQI has been known to establish command and control previously, and from which to project into urban centers.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, it is imperative to protect Baghdad. Focused operations to pursue VBIED cells and local security battalions in the Baghdad belts, to the north and south of Baghdad, are advised. It is also imperative to increase security of Iraq's prisons, especially Taji, which has been attacked multiple times without success.

Focused operations upon the Baghdad belts will likely cause attacks to swell in northern Iraq, namely in Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces. Particularly in Kirkuk, it is necessary to address counter-terrorism in a cooperative manner with Kurdish Peshmerga forces. AQI has likely targeted Kirkuk in order to exacerbate ethnic violence rather than to establish safe haven, but the overlapping presence of JRTN amidst protest camps represents a redundant threat to ISF. JRTN is also likely mobilized in Ninewa, particularly in Mosul. The present security situation in Mosul, which involves multiple threat streams apart from AQI, must be studied in greater detail.

Above all, it is necessary to reduce the threat of insurgency in Iraq as counter-terrorism operations increase. A counter-terrorism strategy that propels a Sunni uprising or even a Federalism effort will cripple ISF. Furthermore, history has shown that the successful defeat of AQI principally occurred at the hands of Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Likewise their alienation from the state will condemn ISF to fight all at once a terrorist threat, a secular insurgency, and a sectarian civil war. This had been the nature of the war in Iraq in 2006. This is the nature of the war in Syria today. It is imperative that such a crisis be averted in Iraq lest

the battlefronts of Iraq and Syria merge.

## CONCLUSION

It is critical to the development of U.S. policy options to address the security situation created by AQI in Iraq and Syria to understand that it is both necessary and possible to interdict this threat. Interdiction depends first and foremost upon expert intelligence and operational design, both of which the U.S. can provide in mentorship as the veteran force which lately assisted ISF in the near defeat of AQI. It is foremost necessary that ISF mount effective operations to disrupt AQI's attacks upon the population if the legitimacy of the state is to endure. VBIEDs are AQI's most lethal and specialized attack vector, and it should be targeted and defeated first.

Second, defeating AQI depends upon the active participation of Iraq's Arab Sunni population in national defense, which ultimately drove AQI from its strongholds in western and northern Iraq in 2007-2008. This population is instead teetering on the edge of an uprising as of August 2013 for lack of opportunity to participate in national government exacerbated by recent mass arrests in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison break. The U.S. must ensure that support which is offered to the government of Iraq to counter AQI will not increase this risk of popular insurgency. In fact, it should be a precondition of any proffered security support that Maliki reconcile with the anti-government protest movement so that it participates as an enfranchised party within the Iraqi state.

Third, it is necessary that the government of Iraq approach the containment of AQI in conjunction with Kurdish security forces, given the assessed strong presence of AQI along the Green Line. AQI is effectively exploiting the territorial gap between the two erstwhile rival security forces, and this gap must be refined as a seam that is synchronously approached by ISF and the Kurdish Peshmerga if AQI is to be dislodged from this linear stronghold. If AQI is instead allowed to increase in the east, it will realize its potential to develop multiple centers of gravity in Iraq and Syria and thereby become much more difficult to defeat.

Prime Minister Maliki has claimed now on multiple occasions that AQI represents a real threat to his government.<sup>112</sup> Taking inventory of the effects of AQI's initiative, attacks against the population have caused Shi'a militias to remobilize. Attacks against ISF

installations have successfully damaged facilities and secured the release of hundreds of prisoners, most of whom are veteran AQI fighters and leaders. Attacks against Sahwa may cause them to abandon their posts in the midst of a broader domestic potential for a new Sunni uprising. Attacks against port facilities in Iraq's south may degrade Iraq's industrial base, or threaten it enough to affect outside investment. While the international community muses over the potential for the Syrian civil war to achieve broader effects upon the region, it is also necessary to observe the effects of AQI's resurgence in Iraq, which reduces the potential for Iraq to buttress regional stability against the Syrian tide.

The resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria also presents a direct threat to U.S. interests in Iraq and the region. AQI has not expressed the intent to target U.S. interests, but it has demonstrated the capability and will to target government installations which contain U.S. citizens as well as critical infrastructure tethered to U.S. corporate interests. Furthermore, as an al-Qaeda affiliate, AQI fundamentally supports the broader al-Qaeda network with potential sanctuary which may very well serve to support attacks against the West. It is vital to U.S. national security that AQI be prevented from its goal to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria.

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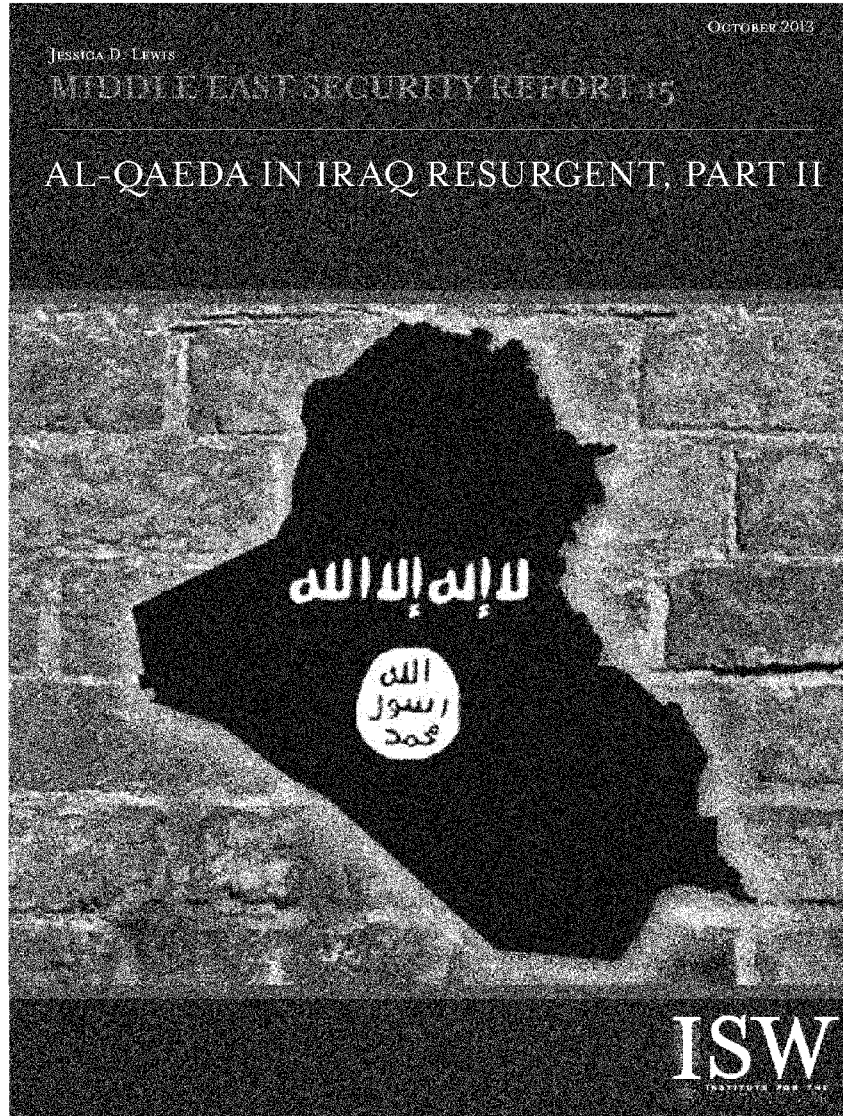
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JESSICA D. LEWIS

**MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 15**

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AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ RESURGENT, PART II

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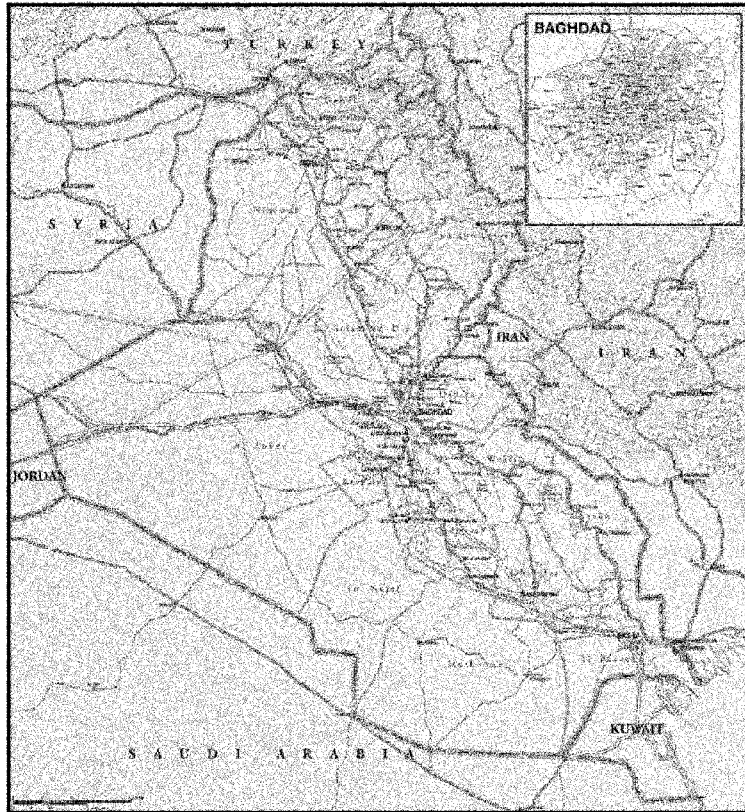
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MAP 1 | IRAQ

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## MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 15

### AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ RESURGENT, PART II

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By Jessica D. Lewis

This report is a continuation of a previous publication entitled “Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I.” Part I of this report put forth the assessment that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has reconstituted as a professional military force capable of planning, training, resourcing, and executing synchronized and complex attacks in Iraq, in particular waves of Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED), and combined arms attacks involving VBIEDS, mortars, suicide bombers, and small arms fire. This assessment derives from careful study of the 24 VBIED waves and 8 prison attacks observed during AQI’s “Breaking the Walls” campaign from July 21, 2012 to July 23, 2013. This report will describe these events in detail in order to provide the necessary tactical evidence to support the strategic and operational assessments presented in Part I.

This continuation will focus upon the geography, volume, interval, and selected targets which characterize the individual waves and prison attacks. Careful study of the individual attacks supports the estimation of AQI’s combat power applied to VBIED operations in 2012–2013. Part II will also show how the four phases of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign that are described in Part I were derived and assessed. It will provide further insight into the evolution of AQI’s military organization over the same time period. The primary object of Part II will be to explain AQI’s battle plan and adaptation over the course of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. The paper observes how AQI employed VBIEDS, its historical signature and current weapon of choice, to increase operational momentum in Iraq and establish the initiative at the expense of the Iraqi Security Forces. Part II will also establish the key indicators of the presence and reactivity of AQI’s VBIED planning cell and its distinction from the force-level planning cell assessed to be responsible for combined arms attacks upon prisons.

Part II uses the definitions and key terms that are established in Part I, including *VBIED*, *VBIED wave*, and *VBIED cell*. A VBIED is distinguished by its design to project explosive power outside of a vehicle. VBIEDS are identified in context either to kill many people outside of the vehicle; as a battering ram to achieve structural damage; or in select instances to assassinate a person in another vehicle. By contrast, car bombs and sticky bombs are small parcel bombs placed on or in a car in order to target its occupants. A VBIED is therefore considered to be a much more sophisticated weapon, requiring

explosives expertise and automotive expertise to re-wire a car as a traveling high-yield bomb.

A VBIED wave is an observed phenomenon often repeated by AQI in 2012–2013, in which many VBIEDS are detonate on the same day. Throughout the “Breaking the Walls” campaign, these waves often struck multiple cities on the same day, which provides insight into the minimum command and control mechanisms in place to direct and coordinate attacks. For the purposes of both Part I and Part II, the threshold for distinguishing a VBIED “wave” as opposed to other groupings of attacks is six VBIEDS in a single day. This serves to isolate the distinction between coordinated VBIED activity at a national level and VBIED activity that may be more decentralized. Likewise the methodology to isolate VBIED attacks and to evaluate VBIED waves presented in Part I applies also to Part II. The methodology described in Part I is re-printed in Appendix A of this report.

Part I of this report described the presence of a national VBIED organization within AQI’s military that designs, resources, and directs VBIED waves. Decentralized components of the national VBIED organization are called “VBIED cells.” VBIED cells are not assumed to have been present for the duration of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. Rather, a principal object of this more in-depth study will be to observe key indicators that decentralized VBIED cells are active, where they may be active, and when they may have emerged. The disposition of independent VBIED cells, which may correspond with increasingly decentralized VBIED construction, is a measure of the operational depth of AQI’s military

organization. Individual VBIED cells that can operate without guidance but remain responsive to tasking are difficult to defeat corporately. Destroying one cell, or even communication among across echelons, does not destroy their aggregate lethal capability.

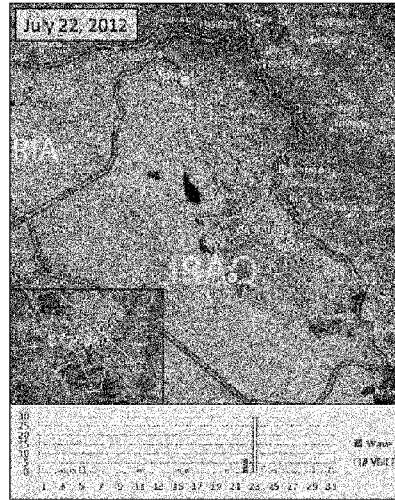
Part II will also discuss indicators of the presence of two echelons of planners within AQI's military, one that specifically pertains to VBIED operations, and one that incorporates VBIEDS into combined arms attacks. This observation yields a key assessment that AQI has reconstituted as a military organization typified by its operational planning, as opposed to a disrupted and leader-centric terrorist organization. The VBIED command, assessed to be a national-level asset within AQI's military structure, is further assessed to possess its own planning capability, its own supply chain, and its own training apparatus to propagate technical expertise. The overarching military command, assessed to design and direct combined arms attacks, appears sometimes to task the VBIED command with support to these complex attacks, for example the prison attacks of 2012-2013. This report will explore the phases of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign for what they indicate of the objectives and planning culture of these two military headquarters.

#### PHASE 1: PROOF OF CONCEPT AND CAPABILITY

##### *Waves 1 & 2: 22-23 July 2012*

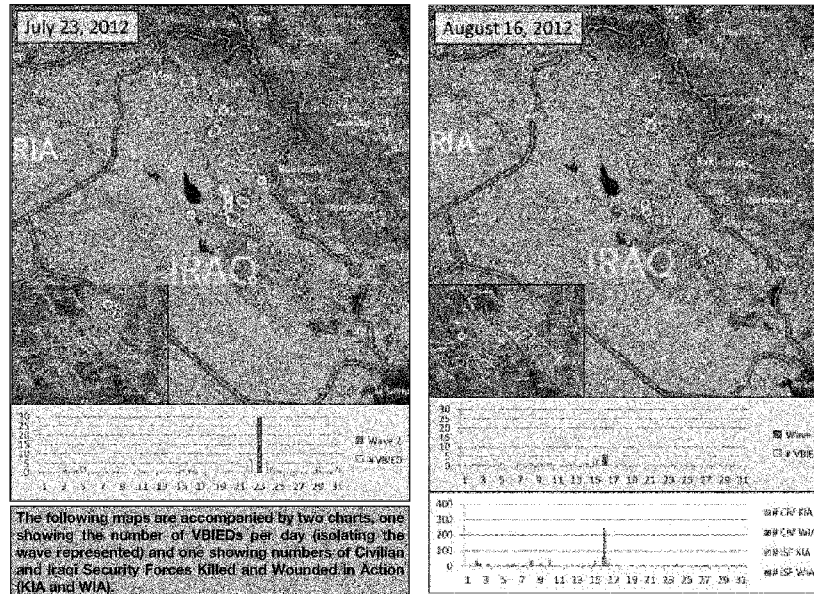
The wave on July 23, 2012 was the first to draw international attention to AQI's "Breaking the Walls" campaign. A wave of seven VBIEDS, however, detonated the day prior, on July 22, 2012 and was actually the first wave of the campaign. This wave consisted of two clusters of events in Mahmoudiyah south of Baghdad and Ramadi and additional singleton VBIEDS in Mosul and Najaf. It is unclear at this time if these two waves were staggered deliberately. Given the assessment offered in Part I that the organizational structure of AQI developed over the course of the campaign, it is possible that the July 22, 2012 wave and the July 23, 2012 wave were meant to be a single wave, but were inadvertently offset in time.

30 VBIEDS detonated on July 23, 2012, striking civilian, ISF, and government targets. Most of the VBIEDS detonated across northern Iraq in Mosul, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah ad Din, and Anbar. In comparison, only four of the VBIEDS detonated in Baghdad, with one just north in Tarmiyah. Additionally, a simultaneous spike



in other explosive events also occurred on July 23, 2012, and some of these attacks may have been part of a larger coordinated strike by AQI. In particular, two waves of house-borne IEDs (HBIEDs) detonated in Sharqat and Taji.<sup>1</sup> Violent events were not observed to cluster on any other day in July 2012, suggesting that these HBIED events were also orchestrated to occur on the same day as the VBIED wave. Wave 2 may therefore provide an early indication of a force-level planning effort within AQI's military to synchronize disparate lines of operation. It is worth noting that VBIEDS were several times observed to correlate with spikes in other types of attacks during the early months of "Breaking the Walls," but that VBIED waves began to occur independently and generally to assume their own character and focus in February 2013 in conjunction with the start of Phase III.

The AQI operatives who executed the VBIED wave were likely not the same operatives who executed the HBIED attacks. This assessment is based on several observations. First, VBIEDS constitute a highly technical operation requiring automotive as well as explosives expertise, and the combination is specific to this highly-focused attack type. Second, VBIED preparation sites have niche



requirements, namely a car repair shop than can be converted into a VBIED factory. Third, because this is the largest VBIED wave documented in this study, it is therefore reasonable to regard this wave as an illustration of AQI's maximal effort applied to VBIEDS. This suggests that other activities occurring outside of this wave were performed by teams with no VBIED capability. It has also lately emerged as an assessment in September 2013 that HBIED attacks are now used deliberately to displace populations from areas where AQI seeks to exert control.<sup>5</sup> As such, the HBIED attacks on July 23, 2012 may demonstrate AQI's early push to control terrain in Taji and Sharqat, though more importantly to amplify the effects of a national wave of attacks.

#### Wave 3: 16 August 2012

An interval of 24 days separated Wave 2 from Wave 3. This wave was much smaller overall, consisting of only 6 VBIEDS, but it appeared to produce a considerably higher

casualty-to-attack ratio than Wave 2.<sup>6</sup> The effectiveness of the VBIEDS in this wave may indicate that the targets for this wave were more carefully selected, that the smaller wave was easier to control for maximum effect, or that the first wave of VBIEDS and prison breaks had already generated lessons learned that were employed in Wave 3. The limited size also indicates that this wave did not require a full planning effort like the waves on July 23, 2012 and September 9, 2012.

The Wave 3 distribution may serve to isolate the attack zones selected by AQI for emphasis or shaping. Three of the VBIEDS that detonated on August 16, 2012 struck targets in or near Kirkuk. The others exploded in Baghdad, Kut, and Taji. Additional explosions that

<sup>5</sup> The total casualties recorded by AFP on August 16 exceeded 200 (63 KIA/149 WIA). One of the VBIEDS in Kirkuk and two of the IEDs in Baghdad, in Sadr City and Zafaraniyah respectively, appeared most responsible for the fatalities.

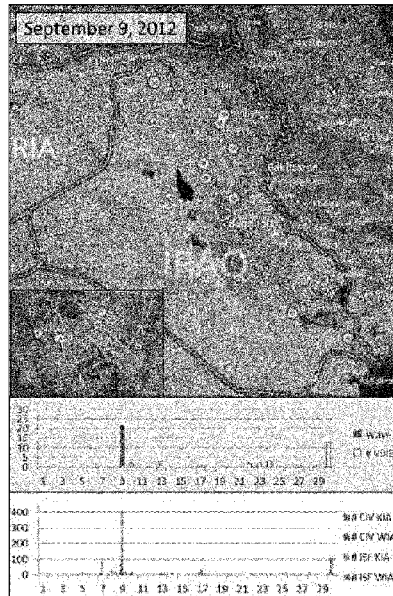
day detonated in Kirkuk, Hawijah, Tuz, Baqubah, Baghdad, Tikrit, and Tal Afar. This spread suggests that AQI maintained operational depth in northeastern Iraq at the beginning of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. It also suggests that the VBIED logistics and staging effort were also located in the northeast, along with the headquarters of the VBIED command containing the planning cell.

A small cluster of VBIED attacks occurred the day prior, on August 15, 2012, comprised of three VBIEDs in Baqubah and Muqdadiyah. The cluster on August 15 may have been planned and executed in conjunction with the August 16 attacks as a two-phased operation. One of the VBIEDs in Muqdadiyah reportedly exploded near the house of an Interior Ministry intelligence officer.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, gunmen attacked two police checkpoints in Baqubah.<sup>4</sup> The attacks’ geographical dispersion validates the hypothesis of an eastern headquarters for the early VBIED command, possibly centered on or north of Muqdadiyah in the Diyala river valley. Muqdadiyah had been the site of one of the longest standing VBIED factories and significant AQI command and control centers in late 2007.<sup>5</sup>

Two prison attacks also occurred in the interim, involving VBIEDs among other attack methods. AQI struck the Baghdad Counter-terrorism Headquarters on July 31, 2012, inflicting 65 casualties and claiming credit on August 13, 2012.<sup>6</sup> The attack upon the Taji Tashrat Prison on August 1, 2012 incurred over 30 casualties.<sup>7</sup> This pair of prison attacks established the relationship between the VBIED campaign and the prison attack campaign. The grand scale of these sequential efforts suggests a strong linkage between the VBIED planning cell and the force-level planning cell at the beginning of the campaign. Accordingly, the VBIED waves and prison attacks, which each required significant prior planning, were likely not planned separately, but together, before “Breaking the Walls” was announced. This coincides with the assessment that a centralized organization is less sophisticated and more vulnerable than one that sub-divides by specialty and develops greater operational depth, which will be observed as a growth step within the VBIED organization in later phases of the campaign.

#### *Wave 4: 9 September 2012*

Wave 4 greatly expanded the geography of the attacks. Wave 4 extended attacks to Basra and other southern cities, as well as Tal Afar in the north. This wave stands



out among others in the “Breaking the Walls” set as one that was clearly intended to demonstrate the ability to launch attacks anywhere in Iraq, including southern Shi’a strongholds. An interval of 24 days separated Wave 3 from Wave 4, replicating the VBIED recovery cycle between Waves 2 and 3. Wave 4 consisted of 21 VBIEDS. The total casualties recorded in Iraq that day exceeded 526 (76 KIA, 420 WIA), which is the single highest casualty-yield day within this data set. Wave 4 was a second very large wave and the most deadly, again indicating that target selection and execution improved the lethality of individual VBIEDS as part of a larger wave. The VBIEDS causing the highest casualties were in Maysan province, Kirkuk, Amara, and Sadr City, which are Shi’a majority areas.<sup>8</sup> The attack in Maysan targeted civilians near the Imam al-Sharqi shrine.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the attacks were again geographically concentrated in close proximity to Muqdadiyah, in Baghdad, Baqubah, and Kirkuk. Taji was targeted more prominently than in

the previous wave, though VBIEDS in Taji inflicted more material damage than human casualties.<sup>10</sup> These VBIEDS may therefore have reinforced a push to establish control in Taji. Additionally, this wave sustained VBIED activity within Kirkuk city. In addition to VBIEDS in the city center, a VBIED struck the parking lot outside the state-owned North Oil Company as well as Iraqi Army soldiers west of the city.<sup>10</sup> VBIED attacks upon critical infrastructure targets were not commonly observed during the “Breaking the Walls” campaign, but they signify a critical vulnerability of the state and are as of September 2013 assessed to be a potential objective of the AQI’s new 2013-2014 campaign.

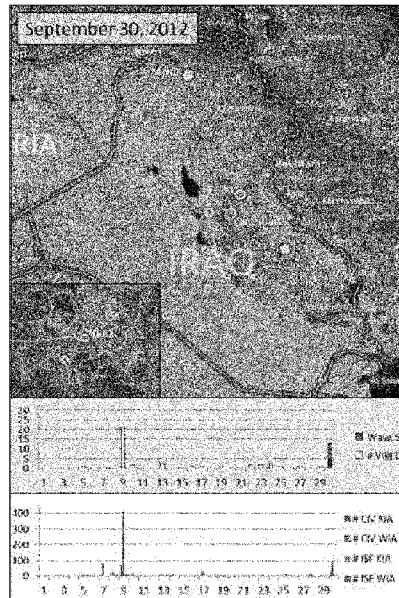
Smaller VBIED clusters followed on September 13 and 24, which appear unconnected to the September 9 wave. These attacks repeatedly struck Fallujah and Ramadi, most often targeting the ISF. In one notable exception, a suicide bomber targeted a primary school in Hit, Anbar, killing 4 children and wounding 8.<sup>11</sup> AFP data does not indicate that these attacks otherwise generated significant casualties. These VBIED clusters demonstrate that the AQI campaign in Anbar diverges from that in the east.<sup>\*</sup> Independent activity occurs outside of VBIED waves and in high enough volume during this period to suggest that an independent VBIED cell was already in place in Anbar at this time. Such a VBIED cell would likely involve independent leadership, and possibly also independent VBIED construction, to prepare and execute attacks if not assigned and resourced by a higher command.

#### Wave 5: 30 September 2012

The significance of Wave 5 is that it occurred immediately after the attack upon the Tikrit Tasfirat prison on September 27, 2012, in which VBIEDS played a supporting role. The attack upon the Tikrit Tasfirat prison was highly successful. Over 60 ISF were killed or wounded and 100 prisoners escaped, including 47 AQI death row inmates.<sup>12</sup> The attack involved VBIEDS, silenced weapons, explosive belts, and hand grenades, and reportedly began from inside the prison. This was a well-planned and well-executed operation in which VBIEDS played only a minor role. AQI claimed credit for this attack.<sup>13</sup>

The Tikrit Tasfirat prison attack occurred one week after

<sup>\*</sup> AFP data additionally points to moderately high casualties on September 7, 2012, which is unexplained by available data on explosive events at this time.



the September 19, 2012 attack on the Hib Hib police directorate, where 10 AQI leaders were reportedly detained. This attack involved suicide bombers and small arms fire.<sup>14</sup> AQI also claimed credit for this attack.<sup>15</sup> The larger attack upon the Tikrit prison involved the integration of VBIEDS as combined arms complements to degrade infrastructure in support of small unit tactics and large scale prisoner ground movements. Wave 5 occurred three days after the Tikrit Tasfirat prison break. Wave 5 consisted of 13 VBIEDS, the majority of which targeted Baghdad and Taji, with additional attacks in Baquba, Kut, Fallujah, Hit, and Mosul. AFP casualty records indicate relatively low total casualties in Iraq that day, and none of the VBIEDS are reported to have inflicted high casualties individually.

Several of the VBIEDS in this wave appeared to target the ISF, in Mosul, Hit, Baghdad, and Kut. The ISF is generally a harder and smaller target than civilians in public places, which may account for the low casualties.

Although it would seem logical that AQI would target the ISF as a defensive reaction to new ISF operations launched in the wake of the prison break, it is unlikely because none of the VBIEDS detonated in the vicinity of Tikrit. Consequently, we should hypothesize instead that the VBIED organization was not able to reset quickly in the Tikrit zone; that this VBIED wave was a diversion to protect prisoner escape; or that the wave is not directly related to the prison break. AQI claimed credit for the wave, indicating that the ISF had been targeted in a “bill of blood” for recent execution of Sunni prisoners.<sup>16</sup>

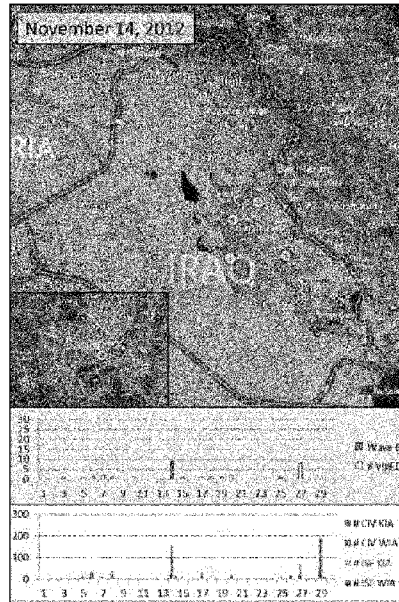
#### PHASE 2: THE GREEN LINE

*Wave 6: 14 November 2012*

A 45-day interval separated Wave 5 from Wave 6. Wave 6 was a smaller wave, consisting of 9 VBIEDS detonating in Kirkuk, Baquba, Baghdad, and also the southern provinces. Kirkuk sustained three VBIEDS targeting civilians. One of them reportedly targeted the KPD headquarters in Kirkuk. The VBIED in Baghdad struck the central neighborhood of Karrada, which was the third time this neighborhood near the Green Zone was targeted in the early months of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign.<sup>17</sup> Launching successive attacks upon Karrada demonstrates that AQI can project attacks into the heart of the city despite the presence of ISF. The southern provinces of Wasit and Babel were also struck. This geographic spread suggests that AQI had begun to extend persistent VBIED lines of effort into three regions: Kirkuk, Baghdad, and southern Iraq by November 2012.

Kirkuk appeared to remain the main effort. The targets in Kirkuk were likely selected to exploit ethnic tension, while the Baghdad and southern VBIEDS targeted Shi’a communities to stoke sectarian tension on the eve of the Muslim New Year.<sup>18</sup> Striking targets in southern Iraq, while witnessed during Phase I, was still uncommon during Phase II. This wave contained only the second VBIED to strike Babel during the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. It contained only the fourth to strike in the vicinity of Kut in Wasit province. It is therefore unlikely that separate cells had formed to focus upon southern Iraq targets by this time. It is more likely that AQI operatives dispatched from another location and staged in the southern Baghdad belts to execute this wave.

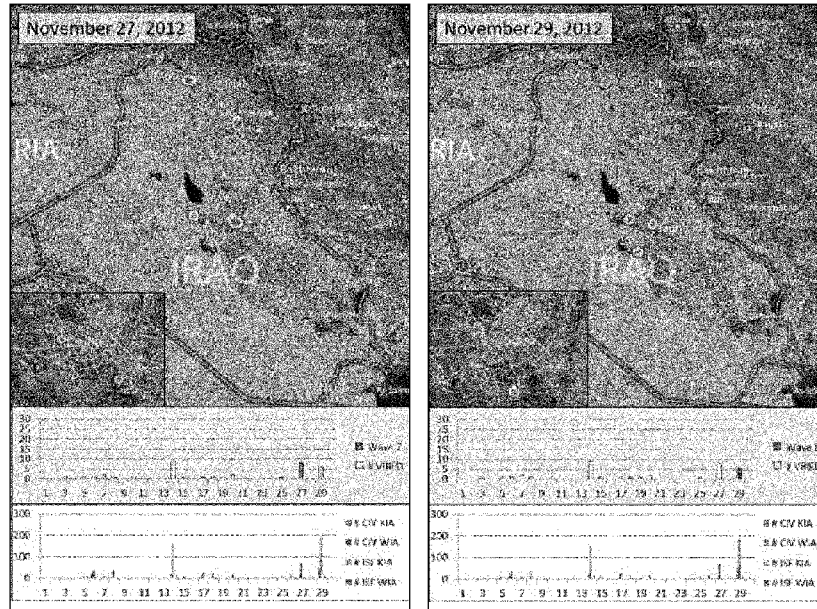
Separately, a very large SVBIED targeted the military installation at Taji on November 6, eight days prior



to this wave. This attack inflicted significant casualties for a single VBIED.<sup>19</sup> The SVBIED targeted a group of Iraqi Army recruits gathering outside the gate to load onto buses. Taji base has sustained several off-cycle independent attacks over the course of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. Among military installations, it is the hardest and most frequently struck with VBIEDS. This indicates both the significance of Taji base to AQI as a main objective and possibly also its proximity to one or more of AQI’s principal support zones. AQI combined arms operations directed against hardened facilities may be planned at the force-level rather than by the VBIED organization itself, given that they involve other weapon systems besides VBIEDS.

*Waves 7 & 8: 27 & 29 November 2012*

An interval of 14 days separated Wave 6 from Wave 7. This interval constitutes a dramatic reduction in the recovery time between VBIED waves. It is possible that



smaller elements were assigned primary responsibility for Phase II execution, leading to the false perception of faster recovery. Wave 7 consisted of 8 VBIEDS. Two of the VBIEDS exploded in Kirkuk, one specifically in front of the PUK Youth Union headquarters. Three additional VBIEDS exploded in Baghdad, another two in Mosul, and one in Ramadi. One of the Baghdad VBIEDS targeted the Ali Basha Shi'a mosque and inflicted significant casualties. The Mosul VBIEDS targeted an Iraqiya MP and an Iraqi Police patrol, on the northeast and northwest of the city, respectively. AQI's attack zones in Mosul therefore shifted geographically. Previously, during Wave 1 and Wave 3, three attacks per wave focused upon the southwest and southeast quadrants of Mosul.

Once again, only a single VBIED detonated in Ramadi during this synchronized wave. Six other singleton VBIEDS detonated in Ramadi and Fallujah at other times during Phase II. The most organized VBIED effort in Anbar occurred two months prior, four days after Wave

4. On September 13, a small VBIED cluster consisting of four VBIEDs struck civilian and government targets in Fallujah and Ramadi.<sup>20</sup> An AQI cell in Anbar was likely executing VBIED attacks during this time; however, this cell does not appear to be effectively synchronized with centrally directed VBIED waves or routinely able to construct and deploy more than one VBIED at a time. With the exception of a complex attack upon a government compound in Ramadi on January 15, 2013 involving VBIEDS, IEDS, SVESTS, and Direct Fire, none of the VBIED attacks in Anbar during Phase II incurred more than 4 casualties.<sup>21</sup> Most focused upon the harder to target ISF, which may contribute to the low casualty count.

Wave 8 occurred two days later on November 29, 2012, consisting of 6 VBIEDS. AFP data also indicates that more than 250 casualties (50/200) occurred on that day. VBIEDS detonated in Mosul, Baghdad, Fallujah, Hilla, and Karbala. In contrast to previous attacks that



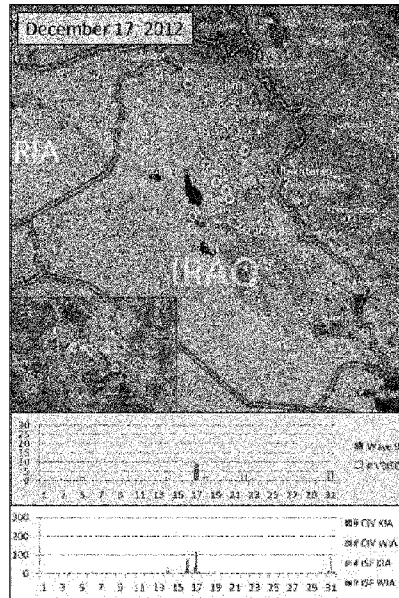
appear to emanate from east of the Hamrin Mountains, this small wave was west-leaning. The VBIED attacks upon Hilla and Karbala drove the casualties up, as they inflicted a combined total of 120 casualties (24/96). This attack pattern is interesting because it suggests several possible configurations of the VBIED organization at this time. It is possible that the VBIEDS in Wave 8 originated with teams gathered at a central location and then dispatched for attacks. It is also possible that the Baghdad, southern Iraq, and Anbar teams were semi-permanently or permanently deployed forward with their own VBIED construction capabilities by this time. We see evidence of this forward-deployed disposition of groups later on, and this is the first VBIED wave in which that disposition is possible. The organizational transition to multiple VBIED construction sites may therefore have occurred during Phase II.

#### Wave 9: 17 December 2012

An interval of 18 days separated Wave 8 from Wave 9. This interval initially appears to signal a longer recovery time, but it was interrupted by a significant mini-wave on December 16, which included a substantial strike against the PUK headquarters in Jalula, northeast of Muqdadiyah, a contested area along the Green Line.<sup>20</sup> The attack upon a satellite PUK headquarters clearly represents AQI's intent to exacerbate ethnic tensions, and it also points back to Hamrin as a principal support zone. It further demonstrates that AQI focused its targeting along the Green Line, characteristic of Phase II, through smaller VBIED clusters as well as synchronized VBIED waves.

Wave 9 consisted of 9 VBIEDs, and AQI claimed credit for this wave.<sup>23</sup> Three of the VBIED attacks occurred in Baghdad, four occurred in Salah ad Din, and additional events occurred in Mosul and western Diyala. The VBIEDS in Balad and Tuz Khurmatu appeared to inflict the highest casualties. Two of the Baghdad attacks occurred to the west of the city for the first time. Three of the Salah ad Din attacks occurred in a deliberate striated pattern, with one VBIED each in Samarra, Balad, and Tikrit. The VBIED attacks along the northern arc likewise occurred at precise and distant intervals, with one VBIED each in Diyala, Tuz Khurmatu, and Mosul. It is difficult to discern a new cell configuration from this pattern, but new and highly defined targeting guidance is visible, almost as if it were drawn on a map.

December presented AQI with several new campaign



opportunities. First, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani suffered a catastrophic stroke on December 17, 2012.<sup>24</sup> Talabani had served as a stabilizing force to mollify ethno-sectarian strife in Iraq. His removal from Iraqi politics might have created a genuine opportunity for AQI, but Maliki seized it first. On December 20, 2012, PM Nouri al-Maliki targeted for arrest the Minister of Finance, Rafi al-Issawi, one of the four remaining Sunni national political figures.<sup>25</sup> This event ignited a nationwide predominantly Sunni Arab anti-government protest movement that endures past the publication date of this report. It does not appear that AQI fully absorbed these changes operationally until January 2013, after the conclusion of pre-planned attacks upon Kurdish political targets. AQI immediately adjusted its messaging to target Sunni protesters, however.

AQI executed a small VBIED cluster on 31 December 2012, for which it claimed credit while issuing advice

to Sunni protesters to abandon Maliki's government.<sup>26</sup> This VBIED cluster dispersed over a wide area, with 5 VBIEDS striking Kirkuk, Balad Ruz, Khalis, Baghdad, and Babel. While this cluster does not meet the threshold for a full VBIED wave, it was likely coordinated at least loosely to target Shi'a populations in these locations. Targeting Shi'a communities in order to stoke sectarian violence that overwhelms the ISF and results in the further disenfranchisement of the Iraqi Arab Sunni community is a principal theme of AQI's "Breaking the Walls" campaign, and it dominates AQI's VBIED wave targeting in 2013. If this VBIED cluster was a reaction to current events rather than a pre-planned attack, AQI was capable of quickly shifting attacks to these specific locations, indicating the enduring presence of an active VBIED support zone in the Diyala area.

#### SPECTACULAR ATTACKS: 16 JANUARY 2013

A 30-day interval separated Wave 9 from a small cluster of four spectacular VBIED attacks on January 16. This interval stabilizes for the duration of Phases II – III. Between January 2013 and May 2013, there was consistently a 30-day interval between attacks. After May 15, the VBIED waves suddenly became much more frequent. Two of the VBIEDs on January 16 inflicted significantly high casualties. One VBIED struck a KDP motorcade near the KDP offices in Kirkuk, claiming 123 casualties (33/190). The other struck PUK offices in Tuz, claiming 45 casualties (5/40). These attacks correspond with AFP's high casualty daily total, at 289 (49/240). They resonate as the crescendo attacks of the ethnically orientated Phase II. AQI claimed credit for both, taking care to specify that a Libyan fighter targeted the KDP headquarters, and an Iranian fighter targeted the PUK.<sup>27</sup> This is a noteworthy message, indicating a desire to demonstrate use of foreign fighters to al-Qaeda core. It is likely that these fighters began in Syria, not only because the fight there has been drawing international attention from al-Qaeda, but also because the foreign fighter ratlines to Iraq ran from Damascus at the height of the Iraq War.<sup>28</sup>

AQI also claimed credit for the suicide bombing on January 15 that targeted and killed MP Ifan Sa'doun al-Issawi in Anbar. In this statement, AQI celebrated the cooperation among military and security units to accomplish coordinated attacks, highlighting the careful selection of targets and the demonstrated ability to "simultaneously and in a coordinated manner,

[pound] a number of strongholds."<sup>29</sup> This artifact validates several core assessments, including the organizational distinction between military elements, such as VBIED cells, and local security battalions; as well as the deliberate planning and command and control functions performed by AQI in order to synchronize VBIED attacks.

Additionally, a separate trend in VBIED attack clusters becomes visible in January 2013. Apart from the small cluster of five VBIEDS that occurred on December 31, there were four other clusters consisting of 4-5 VBIEDS each in January 2013. Each appears to have its own character and its own timing, which indicates the emergence of localized VBIED cell activity that had been indiscernible prior to this point. Furthermore, these VBIED clusters demonstrate the ability of a VBIED cell to synchronize VBIED attacks internally at a small scale. The VBIED cluster on January 5 included attacks in Karbala, Kanaan, Hilla, and Mosul. The attacks in Karbala and Hilla were likely executed by the same cell. Similarly, the aforementioned cluster on January 16 was tightly oriented upon the Green Line, with attacks on Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, and Baiji. These attacks also appear to be the work of a single cell.

In a separate cluster on January 17, five VBIEDS detonated in Karbala, Babel, and Dujail. Dujail is oddly placed geographically in this cluster, but like the other attacks that day, it targeted Shi'a pilgrims. In this case, the pilgrims were en route to the Al Askari mosque in Samarra.<sup>30</sup> This attack was actually a VBIED pair, and it is documented as the highest casualty event in this wave. AFP data indicates that this was a second high casualty day with 149 casualties (29/120). In still another small cluster on January 2, three VBIEDS struck in the vicinity of Baghdad. An additional southern cluster occurred on February 8, striking Kadhimiyah, Karbala, and Babel. In sum, based upon visible separate efforts, it appears that decentralized VBIED capabilities existed in the north, near Baghdad, and in the south at this time.

Comparing this decentralized pattern to the pristinely appointed configuration of Wave 7 demonstrates a core shift in the national VBIED organization. New cells likely deployed forward by this point, and the VBIED cells appeared to contain a level of planning expertise and independent access to VBIED construction sites. This new pattern may also indicate that the national VBIED planning cell went offline for a time, for one of several reasons: either because it experienced some form

of disruption; or because it was further reorganizing; or because it focused on planning future VBIED attacks in Iraq, such as the next pair of prison attacks and the rapidly approaching campaign for Baghdad; or because it was active instead on the Syria front.\*

#### PRISON BREAKS: 3 AND 5 FEBRUARY 2013

Phase II also concluded with a pair of prison attacks. The attack on Kirkuk Tashrat prison on February 3, 2013 involved an SVBIED painted as a police vehicle and three suicide bombers dressed as police. This attack was unsuccessful, but reportedly inflicted over 130 casualties. AQI claimed credit for this attack, which reportedly involved a team of Iranian, Saudi, and Tunisian fighters.<sup>†</sup> Again, foreign fighters may have arrived via Syria. The attack on Taji Tashrat prison incurred 21 casualties. It was also unsuccessful in breaching the prison. This is the second time that Taji Tashrat prison had been hit with a complex attack in order to free prisoners, and it was at least the third time that the installation has been targeted with VBIEDS.

The most significant aspect of these prison attacks is the application of VBIEDS as a supporting effort to a combined arms attack involving multiple functional teams within AQI. The planning cell for prison attacks likely exists at an echelon above the VBIED organization. The VBIED organization, possessing specific technical expertise, specialized requirements, and a distinctive planning signature, appears to have been tasked by a higher echelon to provide support to prison attacks. This higher headquarters likely leverages information and derives support from various specialized combat teams within AQI. The prison attacks witnessed thus far include VBIED, SVEST, IED, mortars, and small arms fire components. It also evidently recruited and dispatched foreign fighters to support the effort. Outside of support to prison attacks, the greatest incidence of combined arms

attacks recorded in this dataset occurs in June and July 2013, most visibly before, during, and after the final pair of prison attacks on July 21, 2013.

IEDs, IDF, and small arms fire are likely core competencies associated with AQI's primary maneuver units. AQI named four battalions following the attack upon an IP checkpoint north of Haditha, Anbar in March 2012, so one can assess confidently that they existed from the spring onward.<sup>‡</sup> They are likely geographically based and fixed upon fundamental security objectives to consolidate and expand AQI's control of territory. This study of the VBIED campaign within "Breaking the Walls" does not explore the operations of these security battalions; however, prison attacks featuring VBIEDS also feature their involvement, and the functional relationship among these units and AQI's budding governance apparatus warrants future study.<sup>§</sup> The terrain defended by these security battalions will become the best indicator of AQI's physical support zones over time.

#### PHASE 3: THE PUSH TO BAGHDAD

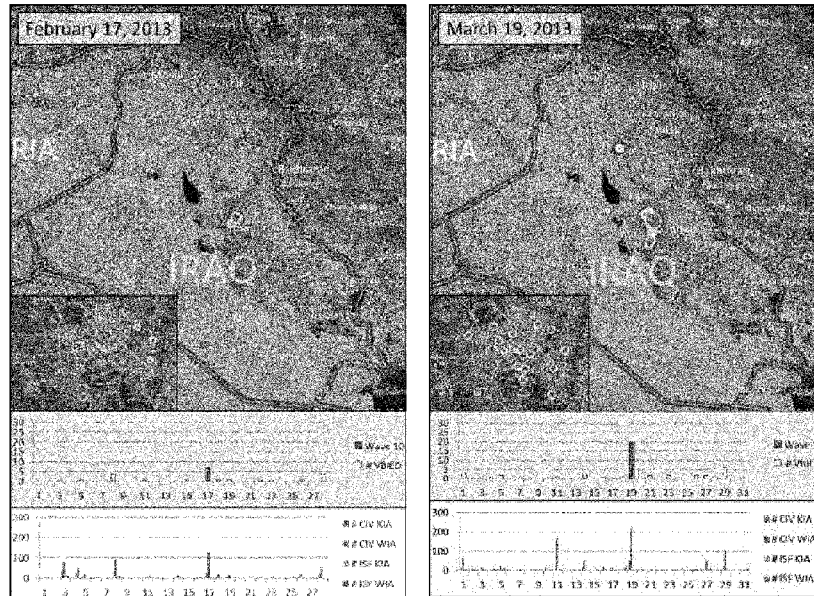
##### *Wave 10: 17 February 2013*

A 30-day interval separated the VBIED events on January 16, 2013 from Wave 10, though this VBIED wave occurred only two weeks after the twin attacks upon Taji and Kirkuk prisons. At least 7 VBIEDS detonated on February 17, 2013, all in Baghdad, which is a first time occurrence within the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. AQI also claimed credit for this wave.<sup>§§</sup> These attacks uniformly targeted the capital's Shi'a and mixed neighborhoods, including Sadr City, Kamaliya, Saidiya, Karrada, Husseinliya, and Amin, confirming the sectarian orientation of the wave. It is difficult to discern from reporting which VBIEDS inflicted the highest casualties, but AFP's daily casualty total is on the lower bound of the Phase III VBIED waves, with 150 total casualties (23/127), consistent with the relative size of the wave.

The Baghdad VBIED campaign, beginning with this wave, appears to consist of attacks in three distinct geographic groupings, namely, one to the north in Sadr city; one to the south in Saidiyah, and one to the southeast near Jisr Diyala, that likely indicate the presence of three cells. One of these cells also maintains responsibility for attacks in central Baghdad, in Karrada, Sadoun, and the Green Zone. No other explosive events occurred in Baghdad in conjunction with this wave, which is important to note.

\* Isolated reports indicated that 26 Army officers defected from the 3rd Regiment, 12th Division forces stationed in Hawija. "26 army officers split in Kirkuk and Dijla Operations Command declined the News," Shafaq News, January 18, 2013, available online at <http://www.shafaq.com/en/archive/4814-26-army-officers-split-in-kirkuk-and-dijla-operations-command-declined-the-news.html>.

† AQI did not describe this attack as a prison break, but rather as a successful complex attack upon a police headquarters involving VBIEDS, SVESTS, small arms, and hand grenades. "ISI Claims Suicide Bombings, Raid in Kirkuk Among 32 Claimed attacks," SITE Intelligence Group, March 19, 2013.



This suggests that the VBIED planning effort began to direct wave operations independently of the combined arms and multi-functional force.

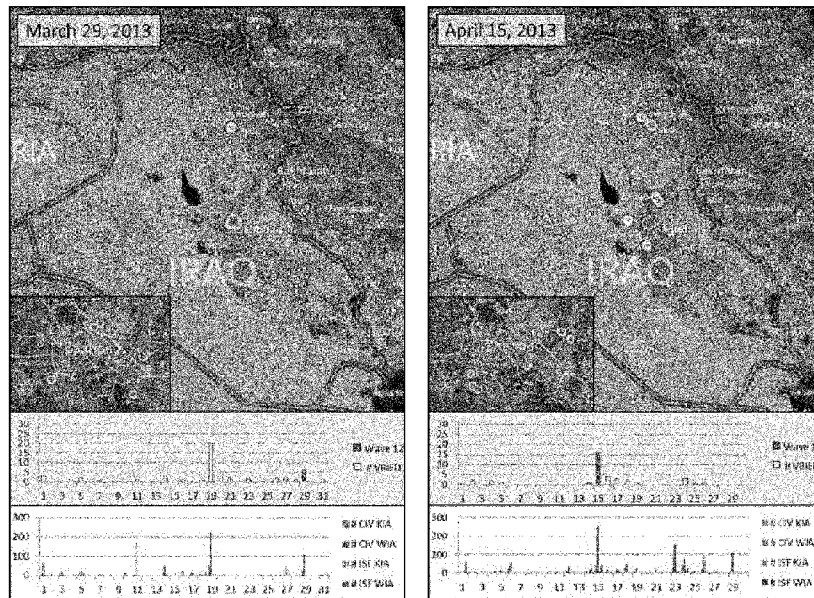
#### *Waves 11 & 12: 19 & 29 March 2013*

A 30-day interval separated Wave 10 from Wave 11. At least 20 VBIEDS detonated on March 19, 2013, generating the largest VBIED wave since Phase I.<sup>8</sup> AFP's daily casualty total exceeds 232 (56/226), but reporting does not point to a particular VBIED or other attack that is chiefly responsible for the high casualties. Rather, all appeared to achieve a small number of casualties that collectively arrived at this total. AQI claimed credit for this wave, associating it as the tenth anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. All but three of the VBIEDS in Wave 11 were placed in Baghdad. Within Baghdad,

attacks occurred across a wide array of neighborhoods, appearing to distract ISF attention from any one neighborhood by striking a maximum number of independent sites. The VBIED attacks in Baghdad formed three clusters along the north, southwest, and southeast of the city. Once again, the geographic spread indicates that multiple VBIED cells acted in unison to project attacks into Baghdad from different points of origin in the Baghdad belts. Two of the attacks outside of Baghdad detonated south of the city in Iskandriyah and Mussayab. These attacks may have been launched from a cell in Mahmudiyah that projected into Baghdad's southwest quarter. Another VBIED occurred in Baiji, north of Tikrit, and it may be attributed to another cell operating farther north. This wave was followed by a small cluster of five VBIEDS which detonated across Baghdad on the following day, March 20, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Five of the 20 VBIEDS were interdicted by ISF. Other explosive events also appeared to spike on March 19, 2013.

A significant small wave of six VBIEDS also occurred on 29 March 29, 2013, generating 232 casualties in Iraq



that day (22/110) according to AFP's daily count.<sup>9</sup> All of them targeted Shi'a mosques on a Friday, which accounts for the very high casualties. All but one VBIED were located in Baghdad, in the neighborhoods of Zafaraniya, Qahira, Binook, Jihad, and Talabiya. The last mosque VBIED detonated in southern Kirkuk. These are not the only VBIEDs or explosive attacks to target Shi'a mosques during "Breaking the Walls," but it is the single most deliberate sectarian strike within the campaign. Wave 12 is also the first full VBIED wave to occur on a Friday, indicating that AQI deliberately planned this wave in

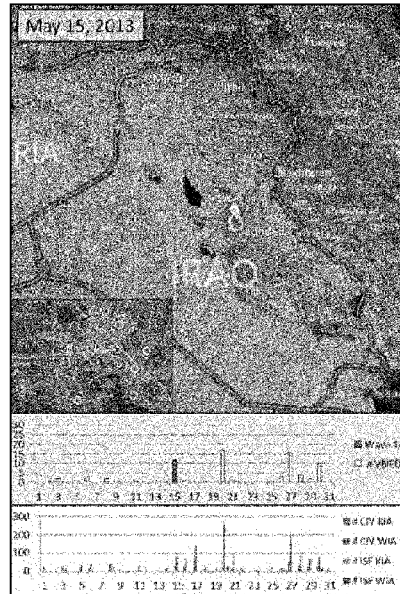
<sup>9</sup> AFP data indicates very high casualties on March 11, 2013 that are unexplained by VBIED wave data. It appears that a single SVBIED in Dibi, Kirkuk is the most significant violent event to occur in Iraq on that day. It is not reported to have inflicted the number of casualties tracked by AFP: 177 (12 KIA / 165 WIA). <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15203>; <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/03/11/officials-suicide-bomber-hits-police-station-in-northern-iraq-killing-5-people/>

order to maximize effects to stoke sectarian violence.

#### Wave 13: 15 April 2013

A 27-day interval separated Wave 12 from Wave 13. Wave 13 consisted of at least 16 VBIEDs, corresponding to the highest daily casualty count since September 2012 according to the AFP data. Nine of the VBIEDs detonated in Baghdad, which represents a significant reduction in number from Wave 11. The others occurred along the northern arc tracing the Green Line, as well as in Fallujah. This suggests that various surge elements participating in Baghdad during Wave 11 resumed normal operations outside of Baghdad during Wave 13. Additionally, a single report that the ISF interdicted a team that was building a VBIED in Samarra raises the possibility that additional cells were forming and embedding themselves into new forward locations during this time.<sup>31</sup>

The VBIEDs along the Green Line are occurred in Tuz



Khurmatu, northern Baquba, and Kirkuk, suggesting once again that the VBIED cell had greater freedom of movement and ability to stage attacks in that area. Because the ISF conducted operations into this area in early June 2013, AQI and possibly other violent actors, such as JRTN, had established a strong and detectable presence in the area.<sup>35</sup>

Attacks into the northern quadrant of Baghdad appear to have paused during this wave, an important anomaly that indicates that the northern VBIED cell near Baghdad was disrupted in some way or that missioned elsewhere during this wave. One can deduce the cell's absence because the Baghdad attack waves normally occur in distinct and repeatable geographic clusters to the north, southeast, and southwest of the city. Sadr City still sustained an attack, which may indicate that this key Shi'a neighborhood was approached from the south, since that neighborhood falls within reach of the Jisr Diyala cell. The Sadr City VBIED in this wave inflicted

the greatest recorded casualties among the set. Another VBIED in this wave targeted Shi'a MP Bahaa al-Araji on Route Irish near Abbas Ibn Firnas Square in western Baghdad.<sup>36</sup> VBIEDS are not typically used to conduct assassinations as part of the VBIED waves observed in this study, and the anomaly stands as a reminder that AQI's operational planning also consists of determining how in particular the VBIEDS are used.

VBIEDs persisted in Baghdad after this wave over the course of the following several days. One targeted Iraqi Police in Tarmiyah on April 16 and April 24, supporting a theory that Tarmiyah is a possible launch site for the northern Baghdad cell. Two VBIED attacks occurred in Abu Ghraib on April 17, the first time this location appears in the data set. Given the retrospective insight that Abu Ghraib prison would be attacked on July 21, 2013, this early VBIED clustering provides an early indication of potential pre-conditions. One struck government offices, and another struck an IA patrol, killing 8 Iraqi soldiers. Shortly thereafter, four VBIEDS struck police and Sahwa targets in Fallujah and Ramadi on May 1, 2013, the most cohesive attack upon targets in Anbar in this dataset.

#### Wave 14: 15 May 2013

A 30-day interval separated Wave 13 from Wave 14. Wave 14 consisted of at least 12 VBIEDS. Nine of the VBIEDS detonated in Baghdad, one detonated in Tarmiyah, and two detonated in Kirkuk. Two of the Baghdad VBIEDS struck in Khadimiyah, where the ISF reportedly interdicted two additional VBIEDS. This is the first in a series of successive VBIED strikes focused upon Khadimiyah in May 2013. Khadimiyah is the site of a premier Shi'a shrine in Baghdad and constitutes key political terrain for the competitive array of Shi'a political and militant factions.<sup>37</sup> It had during various phases of the Iraq war represented a sectarian battleground, as Sunnis displaced and Shi'a communities consolidated. It was a premier VBIED target to stoke the revival of Shi'a militias in early 2013.

Asai'b ahl al-Haq (AAH), an Iranian-backed militant offshoot of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), established political offices in Khadimiyah in June 2012.<sup>38</sup> This neighborhood has since reemerged a battleground for intra-Shi'a political competition, which has also turned violent as Shi'a militias mobilize further. On June 2, 2013, AAH elements opened fire on Sadrist key leader Hazem al-Araji, killing a member of

his party.<sup>39</sup> This event shows that AAH had resumed an armed presence in Khadimiya by early June. Another sign of AAH's 2013 re-mobilization was a political rally held near Sadr City on May 4.<sup>40</sup> This event predated Wave 14, but it likely occurred in response to the previous three months of focused VBIED attacks upon Shi'a communities across Baghdad as well as the overt mobilization of Shi'a militant groups for the fight in Syria as Hezbollah's participation in the siege of al-Qusayr intensified.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, ISF launched operations on May 16 to pursue AQI in western Anbar<sup>42</sup> in response to AQI's May 4 assault upon an ISF convoy carrying a platoon of Syrian regime forces that had fled into Iraq via the Rabiya border crossing in order to escape Syrian rebels. AQI claimed credit for this attack, which killed 48.<sup>43</sup> These operations mobilized elements of Maliki's new Al-Jazeera and Al-Badia Operations Command, the JBOC, created in February 2013.<sup>44</sup> Despite AQI's demonstrated security presence in the Jazeera, the ISF chose a poor time to prioritize securing remote areas while Baghdad's security rapidly deteriorated.

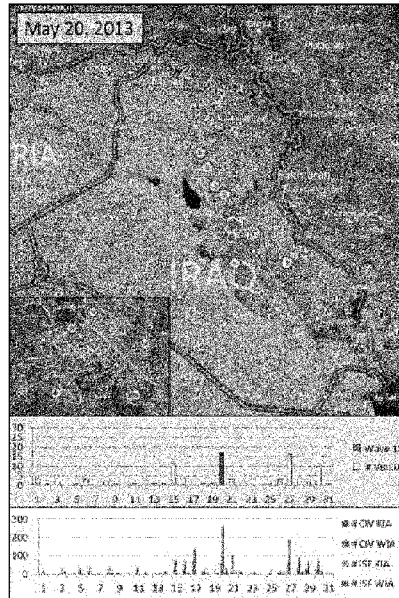
The VBIED wave on May 15, 2013 marked the transition between Phase 3 and Phase 4, generally following the pattern of the Phase III attacks.

#### PHASE 4: THE AQI SURGE

##### *Wave 15: 20 May 2013*

The VBIED trend in Baghdad dramatically escalated the following week and has not abated as of September 2013. A 5-day interval separated Wave 14 from Wave 15. Wave 15 consisted of 17 VBIEDs. Three discrete and localized efforts were synchronized in this wave, pointing to VBIED cells in Baghdad, along the northern zone, and during this wave in Salah ad Din. Seven VBIEDS detonated in neighborhoods across Baghdad, Kadhimiyah among them, clustering in the same three sectors of Baghdad observed in prior waves. The attacks in Baghdad all fell along the outskirts of the city in close proximity to sites that had been struck in the weeks prior.<sup>45</sup>

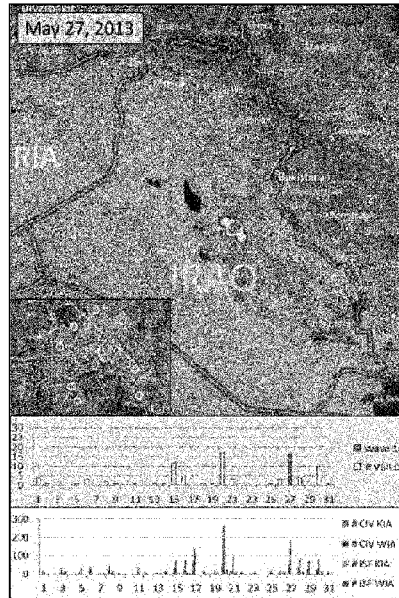
Four of the VBIEDS detonated in towns in Salah ad Din province, including Balad, Samarra, Tikrit, and Baiji, suggesting the presence of an additional cell in the area, whether temporarily or permanently. One of the VBIEDS in Balad reportedly targeted a bus full of Iranian pilgrims travelling to the Shrine of Imam Mohammed.<sup>46</sup> Four more VBIEDS detonated in the south, in Basra



and Hilla in Babel province. An additional VBIED in Wasit was dismantled prior to detonation. The VBIED in Babel province targeted the Shi'a Wardiya mosque and inflicted high casualties.<sup>47</sup> The southern wave points to the establishment of a new southern front, with a cell operating out of Iskandariyah, Mussayib, or Salman Pak.

##### *Wave 16: 27 May 2013*

A 7-day interval separated Wave 15 from Wave 16. Wave 16 consisted of 16 VBIEDS. 15 of the VBIEDS detonated in Baghdad, and one detonated in Mada'en, just to its southeast. Kadhimiyah was struck for the third week in a row, elevating the stakes for Shi'a militant revival. AFP data indicates that there were 245 casualties (58/187) in Iraq that day. This wave targeted the same neighborhoods that were struck the two weeks prior and additionally hit targets in Sadoun and Sadr City.



Waves 14, 15, and 16 occurred in rapid succession, suggesting that the planning and preparation for subsequent waves began before the preceding wave concluded. This begins to form an image of a VBIED cell with subordinate teams that can alternately plan and attack in successive waves, one firing while the other reloads. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that not all of the teams operating in Baghdad attacked as part of Wave 15; it appears that many more attacked in Wave 16. This further signifies that the VBIED cells in Baghdad had not only become large enough to support alternating teams, but had also each acquired logistical and engineering support to generate at least 5 VBIEDS a week for many weeks. This cellular formation would easily permit the integration of new teams in training, which had likely become a sustained effort by this point in the VBIED campaign.

There also appear to be heavy follow-on VBIED attacks in Baghdad on May 28 and May 29. There were sustained

attacks in Baghdad every day from May 27 - 30. The number of daily VBIED attacks is an important threshold by which to compare present and historic trends; in February 2007, Baghdad was struck with an average of three VBIEDS a day.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, a VBIED targeting the Samarra Mosque detonated on May 25, 2013.<sup>19</sup> The Samarra Mosque bombing in February 2006 had been the principal incendiary attack that mobilized the Shi'a militias in Iraq to cleanse Sunni areas.

#### Wave 17: 30 May 2013

A 3-day interval separated Wave 16 from Wave 17. Wave 17 consisted of 10 VBIEDS, six of which detonated in Baghdad, two in Mosul, one in Kirkuk, and one in Ramadi. AFP data indicates a daily casualty total of 131 (35 KIA/ 96 WIA), which is lower than the other waves in Phase IV. The Baghdad events occurred in the neighborhoods of Sadr City, Binoq, Karrada, Bayaa., Maghrib, and immediately south of Baghdad.

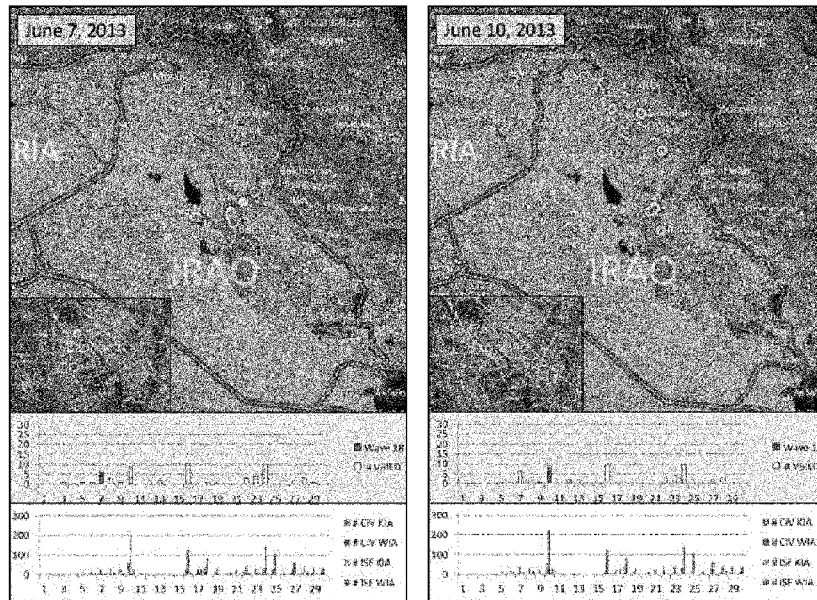
This wave is most significant because it is the second VBIED wave within a week in Baghdad, which would appear to double the frequency of attacks. However, because no VBIED wave occurred the following week, it appears instead that this wave was essentially an aberration. All three Baghdad cells would normally have conducted this wave on the following Monday, but it was likely accelerated, perhaps to test the organization's capabilities. It did not occur again in Baghdad during "Breaking the Walls."

The appearance of Mosul in Phase IV is important to note, because it persists for several weeks after this wave. VBIEDS in this Mosul cluster targeted ISF and likely reflect AQI's intention to deter Sunni Arab voter turnout. The single VBIED event in Ramadi confirms that the cell there was operating at a different pace, but was perhaps responsive to tasking by the VBIED planning team in this instance. The ISF operations into western Anbar and the Jazeera that started on May 16 evidently did not disturb the VBIED activity in Ramadi.

#### Waves 18 & 19: 7 & 10 June 2013

A 9-day interval separated Wave 17 from Wave 18. Wave 18 was a coherent SVBIED wave on June 7, with six SVBIEDS detonating in Ramadi, Muqaddiyah, Alharaniyah northeast of Baquba, and Baghdad and another non-descript VBIED in Taji. This mini-wave departs even further from the pattern, with only one





attack in Baghdad. In fact, it suggests an independent and event-driven SVBIED operation coordinated outside of Baghdad. This is the first time in the dataset that multiple SVBIEDs were recorded in one day. It is possible that SVBIEDs were more regular prior to this wave and simply underreported as such.

The following attack on Monday, June 10 also occurred outside of Baghdad, nearly uniformly in the north. Wave 19 consisted of 9 VBIEDs and a number of additional explosive events. AFP documents 330 casualties (78/252) that day. VBIEDS detonated in Mosul, Tuz Khurmatu, and Dibis in Kirkuk province. Additionally, another cluster of SVBIEDS occurred in Kirkuk, Mosul, Tanak west of Mosul, and Madaen southeast of Baghdad. The colocation of the VBIED and SVBIED attacks in Mosul and Kirkuk negate the theory of a separate SVBIED cell in either location.

Whether SVBIEDS are conducted by normal VBIED

cells or developed separately is an important question. SVBIEDS are not just VBIEDS with suicide bombers to drive them; they are fundamentally different technical operations involving redundant triggers and more sophisticated support teams. Regardless of whether June 2013 signified an uptick in SVBIED activity or just in SVBIED reporting, it is important to note that the June 7 and June 10 waves involved clusters of SVBIEDS. If it is a genuine increase in SVBIED activity, it may signify that foreign fighters were again routing to Iraq, possibly from Syria.

VBIED and SVBIED attacks in Mosul began to increase significantly at the beginning of June 2013. A number of singleton VBIED attacks are noted in the dataset across several sectors of Mosul. Rescheduled provincial elections in Ninewa and the political vulnerability of leading Arab Sunni politicians such as Osama al-Nujaifi may have drawn particular attention from AQI. The

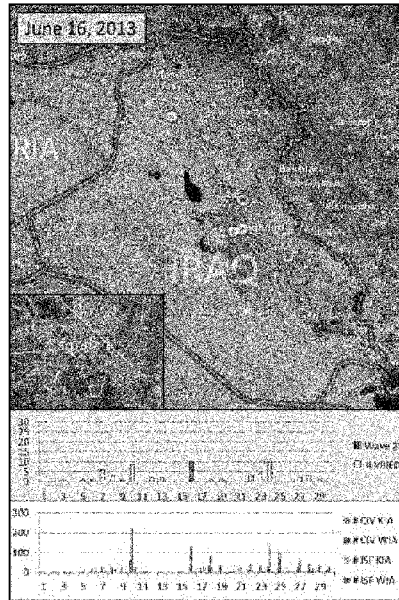
attacks mostly targeted ISF, which might undermine the incumbent provincial council.

#### Wave 20: 16 June 2013

A 5-day interval separated Wave 19 from Wave 20. Wave 20 consisted of 10 VBIEDS and 4 other explosive events. AFP indicates a daily total of 188 casualties (33/135) that day. With the exception of one VBIED which detonated south of Mosul, all of the VBIEDS in this wave occurred in southern Iraq. They also occurred in pairs: two VBIEDS detonated in Basra; two VBIEDS detonated in Nasiriyah; and two VBIEDS detonated in Kut. Additionally, single VBIEDS detonated in Najaf, Mahmudiyah, Mada'en, and Mosul. This wave confirms that there was a VBIED cell by this time dedicated to attacks in southern Iraq. It also appears that one or both of the southern Baghdad cells supported this wave, which involved no attacks in Baghdad proper.

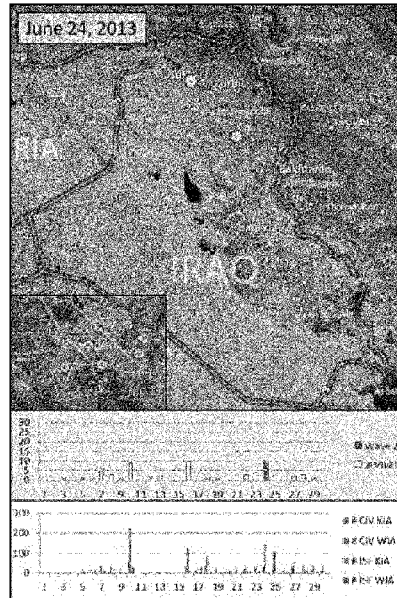
Focusing on southern Iraq during this wave reflects AQI's deliberate intent to target pilgrims during the Shabaniyah festival at Karabala on June 25, 2013. ISF took extensive precautions to protect civilians ahead of this event.<sup>50</sup> Attacks did not occur in Baghdad and Karbala, which may indicate ISF defenses were successful. Similarly, as ISF reportedly seized an AQI camp northwest of Kirkuk in Dibis district on June 19, it is possible that a portion of the northern VBIED network was also disrupted at this time.<sup>51</sup> The ISF remained in Anbar after operations in the western desert through provincial elections on June 20, perhaps causing similar disruption. Apparent ISF gains began to deteriorate within a month, however. Two VBIEDS struck Dibis and another Tuz on July 11, the same day that another pair of VBIEDS struck Ramadi and Fallujah. The VBIED in Ramadi was a suicide attack.<sup>52</sup> Tuz was the biggest blast in this wave, killing over 30 Iraqi Police and destroying 12 houses.<sup>53</sup> The Dibis VBIEDS wounded 10.<sup>54</sup>

A series of SVEST attacks also occurred June 16–19. The first detonated in an internet café in Amin, Baghdad.<sup>55</sup> The following day, an SVEST targeted a police station near a polling center in Fallujah.<sup>56</sup> This event preceded provincial elections in Anbar, rescheduled for June 20, 2013. On June 18, an SVEST targeted a mosque in the al-Qahira neighborhood of Baghdad, with a total of 87 casualties (30 KIA/57 WIA).<sup>57</sup> The fourth was a targeted assassination of Sheikh Younis al-Rammah in Mosul.<sup>58</sup> The combined increase in SVBIED and SVEST attacks observed in June points to the increasing integration



of foreign fighters into AQI's operations on the Iraq front. Foreign fighters were historically designated for suicide operations in Iraq by al-Qaeda in 2006.<sup>59</sup> Based upon this precedent, foreign fighters may be viewed as national-level assets that must be organized in transit and dispatched to the field by a central command. Their increasing presence highlights the human resource role of the AQI military command structure.

Meanwhile, Sahwa in Diyala threatened a collective resignation due to irregular salary payments on June 20, 2013.<sup>60</sup> The salary payments were likely not the issue, as Sahwa withdrawal is a prime indicator of AQI intimidation. Another indicator is the targeting of high-value Sahwa leaders, which had already occurred in Khanqin on June 7 with the attempted assassination of Sheikh Ahmed al-Karkoshi, the mayor of Saadiya district.<sup>61</sup> Diyala had not been struck with VBIEDS since April 15, 2013, which viewed in light of these other indicators suggests that AQI had developed a strong



presence in northern Diyala well beforehand. Indeed, the Dijla Operations Command conducted operations into Hamrin from June 11-22, further demonstrating that AQI is exerting control over this terrain.

#### Wave 21: 24 June 2013

An 8-day interval separated Wave 20 from Wave 21. Wave 21 consisted of 10 VBIEDS. One VBIED detonated in Mosul, another in Kirkuk, and the remainder detonated in Baghdad. The VBIEDS in Baghdad resumed their normal distribution, indicating the involvement of three cells projecting into Baghdad from the north, southeast, and southwest. AFP recorded a daily casualty total of 183 (35 KIA / 148 WIA). This wave signifies the reengagement of the Baghdad cells on their primary target set. AQI's operations in Baghdad appeared to have paused for the three weeks prior in June 2013. Meanwhile in Kirkuk, the 12<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Division under the

Dijla Operations Command arrested Khaleen Mafraji, leader of the anti-government protest sit-in in Kirkuk on June 21, 2013.<sup>62</sup> AQI executed two VBIED attacks on June 23 in Tuz Khurmatu and central Kirkuk that might have intended to exacerbate the protest movement's opposition to the ISF, evident since the clash that occurred within the protest sit-in near Hawija on April 23, 2013. The VBIED in Tuz Khurmatu incurred 50 casualties (19 KIA/21 WIA).<sup>63</sup>

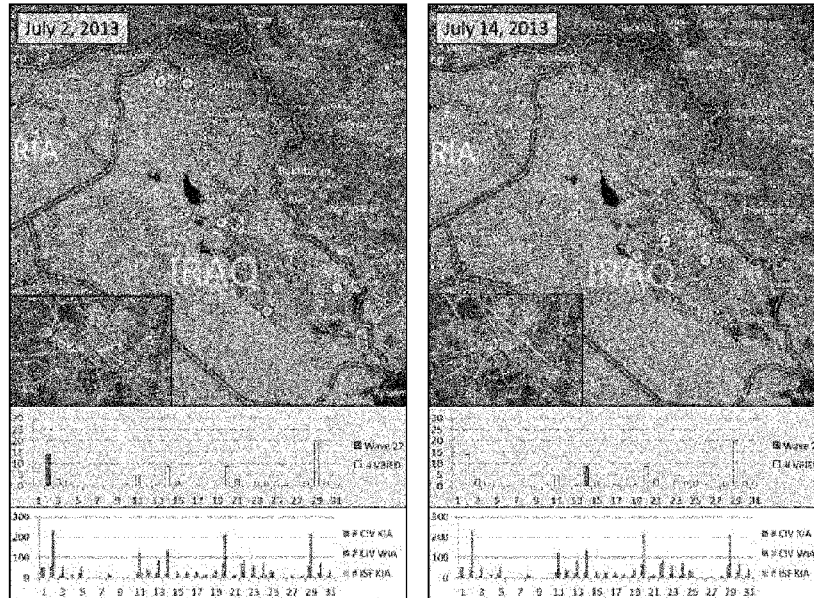
Additionally, AQI executed singleton VBIEDS in Anbar province on June 22-23, in Saqlawiyah north of Fallujah and Qaim. Both attacks targeted ISF. In Saqlawiyah, an SVBIED targeted a police checkpoint, and then additional forces reportedly bombarded the checkpoint with mortars and light weapons for one hour.<sup>64</sup> The VBIED in Qaim targeted an Iraqi Army convoy.<sup>65</sup> This attack aligns with the launch of ISF operations on June 22 into Rawa, Anbar to track down those responsible for an IED blast on Rawa bridge the day prior.<sup>66</sup>

#### Wave 22: 2 July 2013

An 8-day interval separated Wave 21 from Wave 22. Wave 22 consisted of 14 VBIEDS that fell into three regional clusters: Baghdad, Ninewa, and southern Iraq. The wave occurred on a Tuesday, which is off-cycle from the typical Sunday/Monday weekly attack pattern that typified Phase IV. In Baghdad, eight VBIEDS detonated in neighborhoods across the city, including some atypical locales on the western side of the city, such as Shula and Hurriyah. Otherwise, the neighborhoods commonly struck were unfailingly struck again, in Kamaliya, Shaab, and southern Baghdad. AFP recorded a daily casualty total of 293 (57 KIA/ 236 WIA), which is a fairly high casualty rate for a smaller wave.

Three VBIEDS also detonated in Muthanna, Maysan, and Basra provinces in southern Iraq. Muthanna and Maysan were not often struck throughout the campaign. The Muthanna VBIED inflicted more casualties than the rest, but not by much. Generally, each VBIED achieved 30 total casualties. This string of very effective VBIEDS suggests that the same teams that had conducted prior waves in the south were also responsible for these attacks. Two SVBIEDS were also intercepted in Ninewa, one south of Mosul and another near Tel Afar. The SVBIED in Tel Afar reportedly involved a tank.<sup>67</sup>

The new targets and off-cycle hits do not necessarily signify a shift in targeting strategy; rather, they suggest



either displacement from normal attack zones by ISF, attempts to broaden the attack zone ahead of Ramadan, or shaping operations to prepare for impending attacks. Ramadan began one week later on July 8, 2013. AQI's operations ahead of Ramadan tended to be more deliberate, as we saw at the genesis of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign.

There were also two SVESTS on July 1 in Diyala, one in Baquba and another in Muqdadiyah. These operations validate the observation at AQI had purposefully shifted VBIED attacks away from the Diyala river valley. It is possible that ISF operations, Sahwa activities, and local law enforcement applied enough pressure to reduce VBIED operations, which has historically resulted in a surge in SVEST activity. However, because Muqdadiyah has higher value as a C2 node, and because indicators of intra-tribal rivalry and population displacement were occurring in the area,<sup>68</sup> it is more likely that the decline in VBIED activity since April 2013 indicates

the reconsolidation of AQI's stronghold in northern Diyala.

#### Wave 23: 14 July 2013

A 12-day interval separated Wave 22 from Wave 23. This interval is almost double that of the previous 8 VBIED waves. Wave 23 only consisted of 9 VBIEDS, all of them oriented on southern Iraq. This suggests that the Baghdad VBIED cells were out of play for the third consecutive week. This tidal ebb at the beginning of Ramadan signals an imminent and large attack. Given the retrospective insight that AQI would conduct a dual prison attack on July 21, it is worthwhile validating this observation and assessing whether the Baghdad cells stood down in order to prepare for the capstone operation the following week. VBIEDS detonated in Basra, Karbala, Kut, Suwayra, Jabala, and Nasiriya, which may have exceeded the lethal capability of the southern VBIED cell. This was only the third time in a year that Nasiriya had been struck

with a VBIED, but as it also occurred the week prior, it generated a more direct response by the ISF, which announced the capture of the cell responsible for the Nasiriya VBIEDS on July 22, 2013.<sup>69</sup> One can conclude, therefore, that the cell in Nasiriya was not a displaced Baghdad cell.

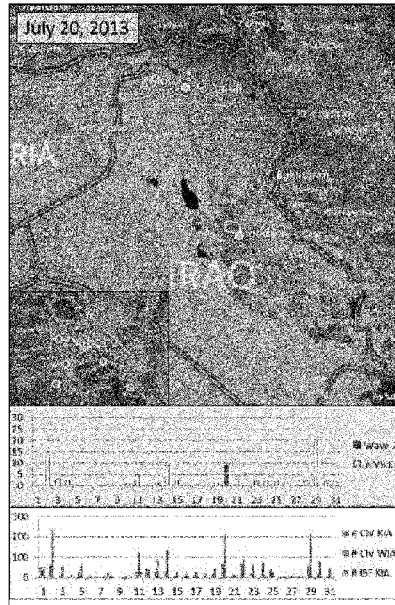
In the meantime, a number of singleton VBIEDS detonated in early July in Mosul. On July 3, one VBIED and two SVBIEDS detonated in Mosul. On July 10, an SVBIED detonated in southern Mosul. This trend of intermittent Mosul VBIEDS continued into the final VBIED wave of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign on July 20 which otherwise struck only in Baghdad. The June 20 VBIED targeted an IA convoy east of Mosul and appears disconnected from the rest of the set, which was focused on the prison attacks. One can conclude from this pattern that the cell acting upon Mosul was operating on an independent program and in response to different stimuli.

A rise in reported SVEST attacks also occurred at the beginning of Ramadan. SVESTS detonated in Muqadadiyah on July 11; in Mussayab on July 14; in Mosul on July 15; again in Mosul on July 17; and on July 19 in Muqadadiyah, Mosul, and Hilla.

#### Wave 24: 20 July 2013 & Twin Prison Attacks

A 6-day interval separated Wave 23 from the final wave, Wave 24. Wave 24 consisted of 9 VBIEDS, all of which struck targets in east and west Baghdad, principally in the same places previously observed. But the attacks largely avoided the northern zone of the city. This omission likely indicates that the northern Baghdad VBIED cell engaged in the Abu Ghraib or Taji prison attacks, though there may also have been VBIED cells in Anbar and Salah ad Din in close proximity that could have supported those events. The VBIED wave on July 20 may reasonably be assessed to complement the prison breaks on July 21. First, they inflicted a heavy total casualty count. Second, they occurred on a Saturday, which is atypical for the Phase IV pattern. The VBIED wave was likely choreographed as a diversion from the twin prison breaks upon Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons, which would occur the following night.

On Sunday evening, July 21, 2013, AQI attacked the hardened facilities at Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons with combined arms tactics.<sup>70</sup> The perimeter at Abu Ghraib was breached by VBIEDS,<sup>71</sup> assaulted by AQI's

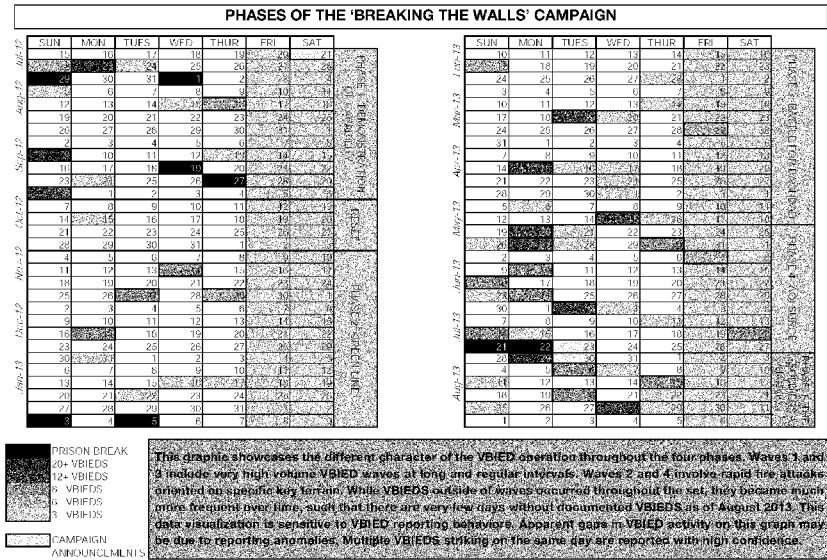


ground battalions bearing small arms and mortars,<sup>72</sup> interior-breached by SVESTS, and reinforced by synchronous riots inside the prison.<sup>73</sup> ISF returned fire into the morning, killing an unknown number of AQI fighters and 71 prisoners and incurring 68 casualties of their own.<sup>74</sup> Despite their efforts, over 500 prisoners escaped Abu Ghraib that night.<sup>75</sup>

An estimated 12 VBIEDS were used between the two prisons, Abu Ghraib and Taji.<sup>76</sup> The perimeter at Taji was

<sup>69</sup> Several reports indicate that the prisoners inside Abu Ghraib were in contact with the AQI organization on the outside prior to the attack. Suad al-Salhi, "Insight- Iraq security forces outmatched as 'open war' returns," Reuters, July 30, 2013, available online at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/07/30/uk-iraq-security-jailbreak-insight-idUKBRE96ToX420130730>.

<sup>70</sup> AFP indicates a combined daily casualty total covering July 21-22 of 214 (95 KIA/ 119 WIA).



not breached, and no prisoners escaped, though some sources indicate that more VBIEDS were used there than at Abu Ghraib.<sup>73</sup> The total number of VBIEDs implies that more than one VBIED cell supported the Abu Ghraib and Taji operations, very likely a total of three cells. The operation obviously required coordination of subordinate cells by the central VBIED planning cell. This is particularly true, given the assessment that two additional cells perpetrated the VBIED wave on July 20, 2013.

Most importantly, the operation demonstrates the necessary presence of the force-level planning cell, which tasked VBIEDS to support a complex, specialized, and atypical operation. The Abu Ghraib prison attack was a full-fledged military operation, conducted by an organization that had reconstituted as a military force rather than as a militant network. Moreover, it was a planned operation orchestrated to conclude the year-long "Breaking the Walls" campaign and free the prisoners who could provide cadre to the AQ organization.

## CONCLUSION

Taking inventory of VBIED attacks in this way enables a tactical review of AQI's application of available combat power to maximize the effects of planned attacks. At an operational level, it is necessary to evaluate the planning thought process behind the attacks that have been documented over the 2012-2013 period. VBIED waves are not an environmental condition, nor a disorganized and frenzied attack phenomenon, but a highly organized and meticulously planned military operation with forensic signatures that can be tracked. Part I of this report places this observation in the context of AQI's expressed strategic goal to establish a transnational caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Part I also explores the possibility that the tactical footprint of AQI in Iraq relates directly to its operations in Syria.

Within Iraq, it is possible to use this material in order to track, observe, and counter AQI's national VBIED campaign. Destroying the VBIED organization will not destroy AQI's military capability in Iraq or Syria,

but it may provide vital opportunities for the Iraqi government to consolidate its forces and overturn AQI's present operational momentum. The location of VBIED construction sites, the method of communication from the national VBIED organization to VBIED cells, and AQI's steady explosives supply chain are critical requirements that may be targeted to great effect. Targeting the military headquarters of the VBIED command that generates plans for VBIED waves will not degrade independent VBIED cell activity at this point, but it may degrade access to suicide bombers, finance, and other resources. It may also be measured in the disruption of the VBIED wave phenomenon. It is advisable for Iraqi Security Forces first to protect Baghdad by clearing possible VBIED construction sites in the Baghdad belts north and south of the city.

It is also possible to evaluate future VBIED waves by comparing them to those observed in 2012-2013 to determine if the frequency or lethality is increasing, if the targeting strategy or geography apparently shifts, or if the patterns described in this study shift in other ways. August and September 2013 have witnessed the continuation of VBIED waves as well as the introduction of VBIED attacks against critical infrastructure, such as the Um Qasr port facility, as described in Part I. Part I expresses the requirement to determine what new operational objectives AQI has identified for its new campaign, the "Soldiers' Harvest." While this campaign may not be principally defined by VBIED waves and prison attacks, as the "Breaking the Walls" campaign is assessed to have been, it will clearly continue to involve AQI's weapon of choice as a means to maintain the initiative against the ISF and to stoke sectarian violence. It may become apparent that AQI's efforts to establish territorial control in parts of northern and central Iraq diverge from the VBIED trend, such that AQI's efforts to displace populations occur in different regions from those where they conduct VBIED attacks. It is important to recognize that the VBIED campaign directly supports this effort to control ground, and by continuing VBIED attacks, AQI's opportunity to establish control of terrain increases.

This conclusion points back to the assessment of a force-level military command that incorporates VBIEDs into a broader military strategy. It may become visible over the course of further study that the VBIED command in Iraq is tasked at times to support VBIED attacks and combined arms attacks in Syria, both of which

have been observed and referenced in Part I. VBIEDS have been observed in Syria since December 2011.<sup>76</sup> It may also become apparent that the Iraq VBIED waves of 2012-2013 correspond to events in Syria as well as Iraq, and that the mutual rear support provided to AQI by its presence in both countries directly enabled the exponential growth of the VBIED supply chain observed in 2012-2013.

How AQI is fighting in Iraq provides critical insight into what capabilities it may yet bring to bear in Syria. Three of the signature capabilities that now are hallmarks of AQI's contemporary military force include deployable VBIEDS; combined arms attacks; and VBIED waves. While deployable VBIEDS and combined arms attacks involving VBIEDS have been observed in Syria, VBIED waves have not yet been documented, though this is another subject for further study. VBIED waves are not expected to present themselves to the same degree in Syria for several reasons. First, the principal objective of the 2012-2013 VBIED campaign in Iraq was to stoke sectarian violence by targeting vulnerable Shi'a civilians who were otherwise living in peace. In Syria, Alawite and Christian communities have long been actively engaged in a civil war and therefore targeted by other means. In this wartime context, al-Qaeda affiliated groups are optimizing their VBIED firepower by focusing upon regime military and government targets. Second, the conflict in Syria already has a sectarian dimension and therefore al-Qaeda groups do not need to stoke it in order to create space for the kinds of chaos and authority vacuums on which they customarily capitalize. Rather, the loss of regime control especially in the northern and eastern provinces has allowed al-Qaeda groups to enter existing vacuums. Consequently, AQI has attempted to establish governance in rebel held areas of northern Syria, sponsoring social services and expressing its vision for the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham in more palatable terms. VBIED waves would be counter-productive to this messaging and governance strategy.

AQI is unmistakably brutal, and its influence and control within rebel-held zones is challenged, not only by Syrian opposition elements, but also potentially by Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate. Miscalculations in the use of vicious tactics like population-focused VBIEDS have the potential to alienate AQI from the Syrian opposition and thus erode their opportunity to control terrain and

populations. However, if AQI perceives that it is losing influence with the population to competing groups, AQI may attempt to reverse these developments through VBIED waves comparable to those observed in Iraq. The application of VBIED waves, either against pro-regime minority elements or against anti-regime or neutral populations, would undercut the legitimacy of the moderate opposition and maintain conditions of violence that enhance AQI's position. AQI may begin to consider this requirement after the latest formation of an alliance among influential rebel groups on September 25, 2013, which may be viewed as an attempt by opposition groups to limit AQI's potential to establish control near Aleppo.<sup>77</sup>

This forecast leads to an important final conclusion about the operational utility of VBIED waves. VBIED waves are designed to start a war. If necessary during war, they have the potential to separate the population from the insurgency. The Assad regime's population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, typified by its year-long aerial bombardment campaign against the Syrian population, has generally driven the wedge between the population and the government. In this context, AQI's potential to use terrorism against the population generates a grave hypothetical issue for the Syrian opposition. The most dangerous scenario for the U.S. in Syria is for the Syrian moderate opposition to face two enemies both bent on alienating them from the Syrian population. If Assad continues his aerial bombardment campaign, and if AQI concurrently launches VBIED waves against any population in Syria, they will collectively decimate the moderate opposition and strengthen each other as opposing forces in the process. The fact that AQI has not yet done so suggests that they are not threatened enough by the moderate opposition to resort to VBIED waves in Syria. In order to maintain the possibility that relatively moderate forces will prevail in Syria, it is necessary to preclude AQI's ability to target the population.

It is therefore vital to the prosecution of a U.S. strategy for Syria to understand AQI's VBIED tactics and organization in Iraq, from which the organization may launch VBIEDS into Syria. AQI will use VBIEDS to cultivate a protracted war because this condition is essential to its growth as a military organization protecting an emerging al-Qaeda emirate. AQI adds capacity to the broader al-Qaeda network in the process. The VBIED command is a strategic-level asset

within AQI's military, but it can be defeated tactically by targeting VBIED construction sites and command and control nodes in Iraq. This is extremely difficult because AQI now likely has many such sites and can shift to new locations when pursued. The U.S. military has, however, succeeded in this mission before. Destroying AQI's VBIED capability presently rests squarely on the shoulders of the Iraqi Security Forces, whose recent desert operations and urban search and raid operations have failed to achieve this effect. It is imperative for U.S. national security objectives in Iraq, Syria, and in its counter-terrorism campaign to advise and assist the Iraqi Security Forces in this effort with precise information and oversight. The Maliki government is proceeding with mass arrests and Shi'a militias are mobilizing. The United States has only a narrow window to provide precise assistance to and leverage the Iraqi Security Forces before the security problem becomes one not only of destroying VBIED factories, but also managing the instability generated by the spiraling escalation and interaction of Iranian-backed Shi'a militias and AQI. Otherwise, the United States will lose permanently the gains it made in Iraq in 2007, and Iraq will become a front in an increasingly regional conflict.



## APPENDIX : METHODOLOGY

### *Detecting AQI's Signature*

Estimating the combat power and organizational culture of secret organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) may be approached through detailed analysis of the attacks they perpetrate. This study considers the violent events in Iraq that are documented in unclassified sources for what they indicate about AQI's renewed organizational capacity. Closely examining the public record of violent events, particularly the use of "spectacular attacks" in Iraq in 2012-2013, enables us to draw conclusions about AQI's broader operations.

AQI executed a wide array of attack types from July 2012 to July 2013 during the "Breaking the Walls" campaign. These attack types include small arms fire, indirect fire (IDF) via mortars and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), improvised explosive devices (IED), suicide bombers (SVEST), vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), and a subset, suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED). VBIEDs are the most complex attack type within this set, characterized by the rewiring of a vehicle into a traveling high-yield bomb rather than the placement of an explosive parcel within or outside of a vehicle.<sup>53</sup> All of these attack types were used for combined arms effects during the July 2013 Abu Ghraib and Taji prison attacks, and all of them appeared in dispersed fashion across Iraq throughout the course of the previous year.

A blanket study of attacks in Iraq is difficult because violent events are habitually underreported. Attribution is another challenge, as AQI was not the only group conducting attacks in Iraq during this time period. Other groups operating in Iraq today include Ansar al-Islam, Shi'a militias, and very likely Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN), a Ba'athist militant organization.<sup>54</sup> All of these organizations are known to use small arms, IDF, and IEDs, and in some cases they are also suspected of suicide attacks and car-borne explosions.

Violent events in certain locales, furthermore, might be attributed to popular uprising rather than AQI.<sup>55</sup> This becomes a legitimate consideration in light of

the anti-government protest movement, which began in December 2012 after Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki attempted to arrest Rafia al-Issawi, a leading Sunni national political figure. The protest movement continued at least through September 2013, when this report was published. As more violent actors take up arms in Iraq, attack patterns of established groups become obfuscated, as the groups begin to overlap and react to one another. Nevertheless, it is possible to isolate coherent attack signatures for AQI within the available data. This study will focus specifically upon one of AQI's classic signatures, waves of vehicle-borne explosive improvised devices (VBIED). The VBIED waves of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign are identified and characterized in Part II of this report. Once attributed, these attacks may be used to evaluate AQI's operational capacity, depth, and targeting strategy.

### *Spotting VBIED Waves*

VBIEDs constitute the most useful AQI fingerprint for several reasons. First, VBIEDs are generally the most lethal attack type, and therefore the most consistently reported publically.\* Second, VBIEDs are the most complex attack type, which best illustrates the full capacity of AQI's supply chain. Third, VBIEDs have historically been assessed as AQI's signature attack type.<sup>56</sup>

Although it is likely that AQI bears sole responsibility for all VBIEDs in Iraq, it is worthwhile to challenge and re-prove this assessment, particularly given that Ansar al-Islam, another Salafist group, claimed credit for SVBIED attacks in Iraq over the course of 2012.<sup>57</sup> Although VBIED attacks are a core competency for AQI, other groups can adopt this technique,

\* VBIED identification from public sources involves a qualitative assessment of each incident and the context in which it occurred. Not all attacks that are reported in news media as "car bombs" are technically VBIEDs. For example, an Adhesive Explosive Device (AED), or sticky bomb, is not a VBIED, but an assassination technique designed to target the occupants of a vehicle. A genuine car bomb, likewise, is a bomb that is placed in a vehicle in order to target the occupants. By contrast, even though they are often reported as car bombs, VBIEDs direct explosive power externally, usually to inflict mass casualties or significant structural damage. This requires thoughtful design, which is why VBIEDs are characterized as a highly technical operation.

## APPENDIX : METHODOLOGY

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and therefore each VBIED attack by itself is only a moderate signal that AQI is responsible.

A stronger signal emerges in the detection of multiple coordinated VBIED attacks. AQI's signature massing of VBIEDs over the course of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign will be referred to here as a "VBIED wave," and defined for the purposes of this study as the detonation of six or more VBIEDs on a given day in Iraq.<sup>58</sup> AQI has claimed credit for several such VBIED waves since the launch of the campaign, beginning with a wave of 30 VBIEDs that detonated on July 23, 2012, just two days after the announcement of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign.<sup>59</sup>

This study will examine the "Breaking the Walls" campaign in detail, particularly the VBIED waves that characterize this campaign. These waves can be broken down for the purposes of analysis into four "Phases" of the campaign. These phases were not announced, but rather assessed by observing qualitative and quantitative differences in attack patterns over time. The waves of VBIED attacks across these phases will be evaluated for their geographic spread, target selection, overall volume, and lethality. The VBIED waves will be considered in the context of individual VBIEDs that occurred outside of the 24 VBIED waves as well as other explosive events, such as IEDs and SVESTS, in order to refine an overall characterization of their complementary use by AQI. Part I of this report will address these waves in aggregate to describe phase changes that illustrate organizational growth within AQI, and a detailed examination of the individual waves is available in Part II.

In order to estimate lethality, the volume of the VBIED waves will be compared to daily casualty records maintained by Agence France-Presse (AFP).<sup>60</sup> AFP data provides a conservative and specific estimate for casualties, and as compared to other casualty data

sets, represents a cautious minimum bound. The AFP dataset begins to provide daily casualty records from violent events in August 2012. Casualty insights prior to this date will be drawn from Iraq Body Count database, whose records begin in 2003.<sup>61</sup> The principal data set for the violent events considered in this study is proprietary and derives solely from open sources, including *National Iraqi News Agency*, *al Sumaria News*, *al Mada Press*, *All Iraq News Agency*, and the online *Iraq Body Count (IBC)* database.

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<sup>58</sup> The threshold of six VBIED attacks was chosen through holistic assessment to be the minimum volume of a VBIED cluster that otherwise bore characteristics suggestive of orchestration by a central VBIED command. Clusters of five or less VBIEDs, by contrast, appeared to be feasibly organized by a single VBIED cell assigned to a particular geographic area, or alternately a co-occurrence of singleton VBIEDs that were not necessarily synchronized.

# NOTES

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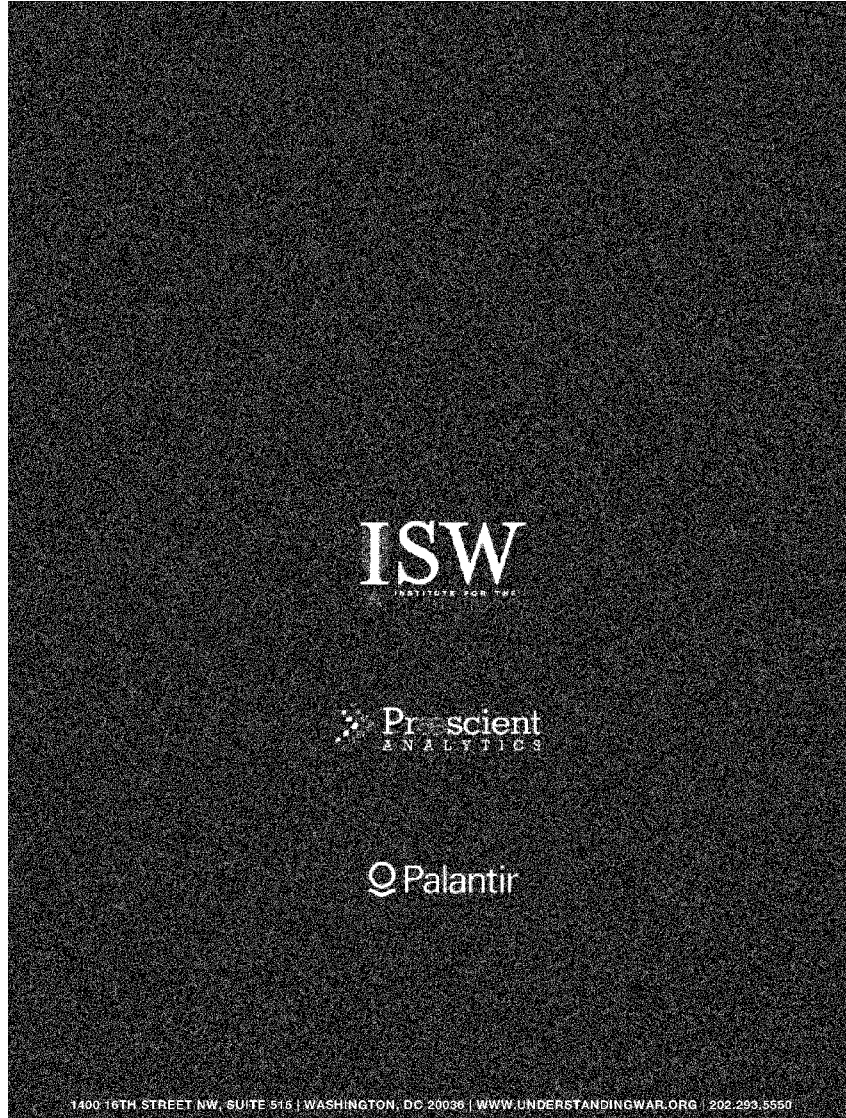
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Mr. POE. Dr. Knights, you have 5 minutes.

Mr. KNIGHTS. Thank you very much.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL KNIGHTS, PH.D., LAFER FELLOW,  
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Mr. KNIGHTS. It is an honor to appear before you this afternoon. I clearly remember the first moment that I felt that al-Qaeda was making its comeback in Iraq. In July 2011, security forces found in the desert district of Rutba the corpses of 3 prominent sheikhs, 3 brothers, who had been beheaded by al-Qaeda and their bodies booby-trapped to prevent a prompt burial, a sign of disrespect. I camped in that desert area just a year beforehand, spending a memorable 4th of July there.

It is my firm belief that al-Qaeda's resurgence was both predictable and preventable, but, just as firmly, I believe the counterterrorism situation in Iraq is recoverable.

This is a rare problem in that we know exactly how to fix it. We defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq just 5 years ago, comprehensively dismantling their network's propaganda campaigns. In the coming years, the United States can help Iraq to do it again.

Put simply, Iraq needs to do 2 things. The Iraqi Government needs to make the right political choices during the next parliamentary term. And the Iraqi military needs to turn back toward population-focused counterinsurgency. It wasn't easy last time. It is going to be even harder this time with Iraqi brigades, rather than U.S. brigades.

The good news is that today's al-Qaeda in Iraq is vulnerable. It is expanding rapidly. It is conventionalizing. I knew a New York Times report from I think a couple of days ago talking about al-Qaeda convoys of 40 vehicles moving around in the desert. Well, that is very scary for Iraqis, but I will bet to an AC-130 targeteer, that is quite a tempting target.

As they conventionalize, they expose themselves to attack. And try as they might, al-Qaeda in Iraq cannot resist the urge to control territory, to tax populations, to impose Islamic scripture on the locals, to kill and insult local power brokers, and to fight with other insurgents. It is already over-reaching. It is already alienating Iraqis.

And also al-Qaeda in Iraq has only succeeded because the Government of Iraq has made egregious errors in the last couple of years. Al-Qaeda in Iraq still has no positive manifesto for how it would run Sunni parts of Iraq or Syria or anywhere else. It is wholly reliant on the Iraqi Government, continuing to make grievous political mistakes in its treatment of the Sunni Arabs and in its counterinsurgency operations.

My experience in Iraq, whether it is the Mahdi Army militia or whether it is al-Qaeda, is that these groups only expanded because others let them. They only expanded because they exploited others' mistakes, not because they were so great themselves. They are certainly not 10 feet tall. We beat them before, and we can do it again.

So the stage is set for a major new counterterrorism campaign undertaken by Iraq if the Iraqi Government could embrace this opportunity. What should be our role, the U.S. role, in helping them to defeat al-Qaeda again?



Well, Iraq cannot kill its way out of this crisis. Unfortunate evidence of this was shown in 2010. We killed al-Qaeda's 2 senior leaders. They had been making a lot of mistakes. Their successors have made very few.

Al-Qaeda has a strong believable narrative at the moment. And this is what we have got to break down. This narrative is that an Iranian-backed, Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad is determined to collectively punish the Sunni Arabs and that the only force capable of resisting the government and avenging the Sunnis is al-Qaeda. This narrative has to contain fewer seeds of truth than it does today if al-Qaeda in Iraq's growth is to be checked.

What can the U.S. do? Well, the first thing we can do, which doesn't require a lot of money, weapons, or troops, is to help the Iraqi Government to stop making mistakes by using our voice persistently and at moments of leverage, like the government formation process that is going to come in 2014. We need to encourage them to hold punctual, free, and fair elections, to undertake judicial reforms to de-Baathification, counterterrorism laws, a modernized prison system, and also some kind of landmark rehabilitation of the major persecuted Sunni Arab leader, such as Rafi al-Issawi, that the U.S. Government has defended in the past from legal threats and charges against him and should do so again.

Most importantly, the U.S. should stay engaged. By staying engaged in Iraq, by paying attention to the details of Iraq's politics, the U.S. can reduce the Sunni Arab perception, in Iraq and elsewhere, that Iraq is being ceded to Iran in some diabolical great game. That is not the case. The U.S. still has a lot of influence in Iraq and should continue to use its voice as well as to provide behind-the-scenes counterterrorism support.

I yield back to the chair.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Knights follows:]



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## The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq

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Testimony Submitted to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-Proliferation and Trade, and Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

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Chairman Poe and Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Members Sherman and Deutch, distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-Proliferation and Trade and Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, it is an honor to appear before you this afternoon to discuss the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The subject of Al-Qaeda in Iraq is one that has been close to my heart throughout the last decade. Like others I was disheartened to watch the group grow from 2003-2006 and relieved to see it crash and burn in 2006-2009. I was saddened but not surprised to watch it rebound strongly from 2010 onwards. Indeed since the autumn of 2010 I have been telling all who would listen that the group was poised to make a comeback.

Since 2004 I have worked in all the Iraqi provinces and most of the country's hundred districts, including some of those where Al-Qaeda is strongest. I have worked alongside the Iraqi security forces, the U.S. military and the reconstruction community as they battled Al-Qaeda. It is my firm belief that Al-Qaeda's resurgence was both predictable and preventable.

Just as firmly, I believe that the counter-terrorism situation in Iraq is still recoverable. We defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq just five years ago, comprehensively dismantling their networks and propaganda campaigns. In the coming years the United States can help Iraq to do it again.

### The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of 2010, Al-Qaeda in Iraq was dead on its feet. The organization suffered critical setbacks in late 2006 and early 2007 as Sunni Arab tribal militias – the Sahwa (Awakening) – turned against Al-Qaeda. In parallel the U.S.-led military effort protected the Sahwa and executed high-tempo remorseless counter-terrorism operations that ripped Al-Qaeda in Iraq to pieces. The group's foreign volunteers and money started to dry up. Al-Qaeda cells began to process of disintegrating into local criminal franchises that now kidnapped and extorted to pay their salaries rather than fund insurgency. In April 2010 Al-Qaeda in Iraq lost its two most senior leaders – AQI emir Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and war minister Abu Ayyub al-Masri – and stood in the verge of “disintegration” according to the US commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno. In a press conference on June 4, 2010, Odierno noted: “Over the last 90 days or so, we’ve either picked up or killed 34 out of the top 42 Al-Qaeda in Iraq leaders.”

In the summer of 2010 new leadership was announced by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the proto-caliphate and umbrella movement led by Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The new ISI emir was named as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husayni al-Qurashi (alias Abu Dua), an Iraqi Salafist from Samarra who received doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence before 2003 and was detained in Camp Bucca until his release in 2009. The new ISI war minister was named as Al-Nasir Li-Din Allah Abu Sulayman, a figure about whom little is known (he is rumoured by press reporting to be a Moroccan Arab-Afghan and a former detainee).

By early 2012 it was clear that the deaths of AQI's senior leaders were a watershed event that unfolded just as the movement sought to find a new way to operate in Iraq. Numerous processes have unfolded since Al-Qaeda's defeat in 2006-2009, including the release of large numbers of experienced militants from U.S. detention facilities, changes in the balance of foreign and Iraqi fighters within the movement, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and determined attempts by Al-Qaeda in Iraq to learn from its mistakes. These changes crystallized in the year after the deaths of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri, culminating in a successful re-launch of the movement in April 2011 and a significant recovery of operational space within Iraq's Sunni Arab communities. The movement appears to have rationalized its near-term objectives and synchronized its propaganda with the mounting concerns of Iraq's Sunni Arabs.

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<sup>1</sup> The following three paragraphs are an updated précis of a piece I first wrote in early 2012 when I assessed that the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq had been underway since the spring of 2011. See Michael Knights, *Back with a vengeance: Al-Qaeda in Iraq rebounds*, in IHS Defense, Security & Risk Consulting, February 24, 2012.

The metrics of Al-Qaeda in Iraq's resurgence are undeniable.<sup>2</sup>

- In 2010, the low point for the Al-Qaeda effort in Iraq, the movement's signature attacks like car bombings declined to an average of 10 a month and multiple-city coordinated attacks occurred only two or three times a year.
- In 2013, so far there has been an average of 71 car bombings a month and a multiple-location strike every 11 days.

Suicide operations are on the increase too: in 2010 these had dropped to an average of six per month, and this average was maintained throughout 2012. In 2013, so far there has been an average of 22 per month. According to U.S. government officials providing background briefings in October 2013, the uptick has been mostly driven by foreign jihadists who entered Iraq via Syria.<sup>3</sup>

This last metric is particularly disturbing because it shows that young jihadist volunteers drawn to the Syrian conflict are willing to be played into Iraq, where suicide operations are more regularly undertaken than in Syria. Even taking into account the relative ease with which terrorist groups can manipulate and shape the psychology of young volunteers once they are physically in the conflict zone, it is remarkable that such would-be "martyrs" are more than willing to leave the iconic theatre of Syria and go to next door Iraq to die. Al-Qaeda is clearly succeeding in convincing its own operators that Iraq, Syria and Lebanon are one continuous conflict zone. Indeed, on July 9, 2013 Al-Qaeda car bombs detonated in areas spanning from Beirut to the Iranian border with Iraq, an operation Al-Qaeda websites coined "From Beirut to the Diyala," referring to the river in eastern Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

#### Impact of the Al-Qaeda Resurgence in Iraq

Al-Qaeda's resurgence in Iraq is undeniably damaging to U.S. interests in Iraq, in the broader region, and potentially in the homeland security environments in Europe and the United States.

In Iraq the accelerating pattern of anti-Shiite bombings is rekindling sectarian revenge attacks.<sup>5</sup> Retaliation has begun slowly, in part because of the "conflict fatigue" felt by Iraqi communities. At the low point of violence in Iraq in early 2011, the country suffered about 300 major security incidents a month. Throughout 2013, the monthly total of incidents has regularly topped 1,200. But this is still well below the 6,000-plus incidents that were reported each month during the darkest days of the civil war-like conditions in late 2006 and early 2007. What this tells us is that violence in Iraq remains largely limited to attacks undertaken by small militant cells, whilst the general population continues to stay uninvolved and civilian-on-civilian ethno-sectarian violence is still relatively rare. If this dynamic

<sup>2</sup> My metrics are drawn from liaison relationships with the Iraqi Security Forces and various private security companies still operating in Iraq. I maintain a private database to catalogue Significant Activity (SIGACT) data.

<sup>3</sup> See senior U.S. State Department official's comments during the October 30, 2013 conference call entitled: "Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Washington and the U.S.-Iraq Partnership under the Strategic Framework Agreement."

<sup>4</sup> See the Islamic state of Iraq's propaganda video, "From Beirut to the Diyala," July 28, 2013, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVwAxk6KwIk>

<sup>5</sup> The following section draws on my October 3, 2013 BBC piece, "Iraq's Never-Ending Security Crisis," see <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iraqs-never-ending-security-crisis>

changes, violence in Iraq will undergo a step-change that could tear the society apart again – but this time with no U.S. military to step in.

Will civilians continue to largely sit out the conflict? Nearly two years of intensified Al-Qaeda mass-casualty attacks and sectarian massacres are beginning to severely test Shia patience, resulting in growing evidence of revenge attacks on Sunni mosques, preachers and civilians. Sectarian tensions in the region, particularly those emanating from the crisis in Syria, and domestic Iraqi politics provide background drivers for the strengthening of local militant groups, many of whom act as “agents of influence” for Iran’s intelligence services. In Baghdad, the epicentre of sectarian tension, the Shia-dominated security forces collude with low-profile retaliatory actions by Iranian-backed groups like Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and the followers of the radical Shia cleric, Moqtada Sadr. And to many Sunnis in Baghdad, the Iraqi security forces appear to be the ultimate Shia militia, corralling Sunnis into ghettoized neighbourhoods, where they are subject to repressive policing and economic isolation. Sectarian attacks on the Sunni minority are even accelerating in Basra, the oil-rich province in the “deep south” of Iraq. In the last six months an average of 25 Sunnis have been killed there each month, with some corpses dumped with notes explaining that they were killed in retaliation for the increasing number of al-Qaeda bombings in Basra. So within Iraq, Al-Qaeda’s resurgence is making the country less stable and cohesive, splitting apart Sunni and Shia powerbases, whilst Iran’s influence grows stronger.

In concrete terms, Al-Qaeda in Iraq is making certain key economic projects untenable, making the U.S. economy more vulnerable to oil shocks. One example is the U.S.-backed Haditha-Aqaba pipeline that will need to run through Al-Qaeda’s new desert emirate in Anbar province. Likewise the U.S.-backed effort to get Basra oil and gas flowing through Turkey will require driving a new pipeline through Al-Qaeda heartlands northwest of Lake Tharthar in the Jazira area and into the terrorist hub of Mosul in the north. This undermines the U.S. goal of helping Iraq to develop three export pipelines versus the current single export hub to the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, which is threatened by Iran.

The Syrian crisis is strengthening Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and Iraqi militants are, in turn, complicating Syria’s future path. Operating as the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Shams (ISIS), Al-Qaeda in Iraq has ambitions to dominate the Salafi terrorist scene in Syria. Al-Qaeda in Iraq wants to expand, to be adjacent to Lebanon and the Mediterranean, Israel to the West and Turkey in the north. The Islamic world that Al-Qaeda harkens back to was frequently led by a major caliphate based in Baghdad, dominating the world bridge between Asia, Africa and Europe. This is what Al-Qaeda wants to rebuild. Sudan, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Somalia were fine as temporary hideouts, but they are not symbolic centres for Islam. Libya and even Yemen are likewise peripheral to the Arab civilization in historical terms. In Iraq and the adjacent Syrian and Lebanese conflict zones, Al-Qaeda can claim to be fighting on the front line of the Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict, directly confronting what they portray as Iran’s proxies in the Iraqi and Syrian governments plus Hezbollah. The most attractive possible centre for an Al-Qaeda caliphate is thus Iraq – operationally, politically and culturally. This is why Al-Qaeda’s operations in Iraq and Syria have such dangerous potential, touching so many ring states – Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

More broadly there is the issue of returnees from the Iraq-Syrian jihad and the effect they could have on security in North Africa, the Gulf, and Western countries. Whilst the threat from jihadist returnees can be overstated – many die in conflicts, some isolate their jihad abroad from their lives at home – it is clear that well-trained, blooded Al-Qaeda fighters are dangerous people to have wandering the world. Such fighters can act as a magnet for terrorist recruitment in regional and Western nations due to the respect shown to them by young Muslims. They are repositories of obscure military knowledge on bomb-making, operational planning and counter-surveillance. Thus they can potentially serve as the anchor for new terrorist cells wherever they put down roots.

A final aspect of the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq is the potential for the movement to attempt expeditionary strikes against the US homeland and overseas interests beyond Iraq. The evolution of the Yemen-based Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) springs to mind, recalling how a muscular local affiliate of Al-Qaeda's senior leadership decided to initiate attacks directly against the United States to raise its profile. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is a movement whose horizons, ambitions and operations are broadening by the day. How soon before they decide to further raise their profile, and their claim on the Syrian jihad, with international attacks? Possibly never – after all, Al-Qaeda in Iraq has been a fairly insular terrorist group for many years<sup>6</sup> – but the prospect cannot be discounted and should not be overlooked. Recalling the 9/11 attacks, it is clearly not preferable that a major Al-Qaeda terrorist franchise be allowed to develop safe havens within large ungoverned spaces adjacent to Europe, North Africa and Asia. And it is notable that due to the U.S. commitment to withdrawn from Iraq, the country has an unfortunate and unique status, for now at least: it is practically the only place in the Islamic world where U.S. armed drones cannot or will not openly operate.

### Vulnerabilities of Al-Qaeda in Iraq

The good news is that we defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq before, just five years ago. We studied Al-Qaeda in Iraq and identified its vulnerabilities, which were numerous. Today's Al-Qaeda in Iraq differs in some regards but is still critically vulnerable to a smart U.S.-Iraqi joint counterterrorism campaign.

#### A Portrait of Today's Al-Qaeda in Iraq and its Vulnerabilities

Even without access to classified information it is possible for an experienced Iraq expert to fuse together open source data and discussions with Iraqis to paint an accurate picture of today's Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The movement is Iraqi-led but taking in more foreigners every month, via the Syrian conflict.<sup>7</sup> Al-Qaeda in Iraq remains focused like a laser on themes that matter to the Sunni Arabs such as

<sup>6</sup> Setting aside some attacks into Jordan in 2005, Al-Qaeda in Iraq has always been a predominately inward-looking movement and this tendency has deepened since 2010. Though Iraqis have been involved in acts of international terrorism in recent years (notably in the Jordan in 2005, the UK in 2007 and in Sweden in 2010), AQI was at most tangentially involved in the latter two cases. In Iraq, Al-Qaeda has eschewed anti-foreign targeting since January 2010, undertaking practically no attacks on Western targets in Iraq, ostensibly because the greater threat to the Sunni Arabs is now posed by Iran and the Shia.

<sup>7</sup> See senior U.S. State Department official's comments during the October 30, 2013 conference call entitled: "Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Washington and the U.S.-Iraq Partnership under the Strategic Framework Agreement."

prisoners but it still has no positive agenda for running the Sunni Arab parts of Iraq. Thus it is largely reliant on the Iraqi government continuing to make grievous political mistakes in its treatment of the Sunni Arabs and in its counter-insurgency operations.

Since 2010 Al-Qaeda in Iraq has been self-funding through organized crime rackets involving kidnap for ransom, protection payment from large Iraqi companies, plus trucking, smuggling and real estate portfolios. At the present time extortion of commercial enterprises is rapidly accelerating, particularly in remote desert areas where the security forces can offer no real protection at present.<sup>8</sup> Foreign funding may be increasing, attracted by boosted operational activity and sectarian tensions across the region.

The movement is still small, numbering in the hundreds, but is expanding rapidly and trying to recentralize command and control. This is creating greater communications traffic, larger numbers of terrorist meetings, and rivalries. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is attacking greater numbers of targets and harder targets every month, all of which are expanding its operational footprint, its financing needs, and its thirst for fighters, vehicles, and explosives. Al-Qaeda has started to show interest in controlling areas again: initially in the open military occupation of small town centres or police stations for minutes or hours, and the issuance of “night letters” in some Sunni towns to restrict un-Islamic activities like barber’s shops, music shops and alcohol vendors.<sup>9</sup>

As these points suggest, Al-Qaeda in Iraq is undergoing an ambitious re-expansion that will naturally create added vulnerabilities which may be exploitable. First, the movement is undertaking so many more interactions per day than it did in 2010 that is increasingly vulnerable to communications intercepts, “threat finance” analysis, and network analysis. Until recently Al-Qaeda in Iraq only needed to spread the word every few months that a multi-city attack was expected on “Day X” and the local cells would participate as they saw fit. Now this is a weekly phenomenon, involving many more hubs, and every logistical requirement of the terrorist network has been multiplied. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is also in danger of over-reaching, as it did in 2005-2006 when it sought to develop mini-caliphates in Iraqi towns and impose limits on Iraqi lifestyle, such as a ban on cigarette smoking. Iraqi Sunni Arabs are growing resentful of Al-Qaeda again as they grow more powerful: the movement is scaring Sunni Arab political leaders in Iraq, challenging tribal leaders for local control, and taxing growing numbers of Iraqis. The stage is set for a return of the Sahwa and intelligence-led special operations, if the Iraqi government can embrace the opportunity.

### The U.S. Role in Defeating Al-Qaeda (Again)

A U.S.-led coalition defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2005-2009. We know it can be done. The challenge now is to understand what parts of the successful formula are still applicable, and which ones the U.S. can support in the post-withdrawal environment.

<sup>8</sup> Anecdotal conversations with multiple Iraqi national security officials suggest that Al-Qaeda is now capable of taxing local businesses as a standard practice in rural Anbar, as was the case back in 2005.

<sup>9</sup> See a treatment of these issues in Michael Knights, “Yes, Iraq is Unravelling,” *Foreign Policy*, May 15, 2013, at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/yes-iraq-is-unraveling>

The first observation I will offer is that Iraq cannot kill its way out of this crisis. Successful counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency efforts cannot succeed if the enemy recruits faster than they are dispatched. Once again we need to drain the swamp of Al-Qaeda recruiting in Iraq.

In 2007-2009 the Iraqi conflict lost its luster for many would-be jihadists (in Iraq and abroad) because it appeared to be a tawdry, confused struggle with no clear narrative to sustain the enthusiasm of Sunni Arab militants. Militant groups split, fought each other, and seemed to be more interested in organized crime and internal squabbling than fighting the coalition and Iraqi government. Now we have seen the return of a clear narrative – that an Iranian-backed Shiite-dominated government in Iraq that collectively punishes the Sunni Arabs, and that the only force capable of resisting the government and avenging the Sunnis is Al-Qaeda. This narrative has to contain fewer seeds of truth than it does today if Al-Qaeda's growth in Iraq is to be checked.

#### Draining the Swamp of Al-Qaeda Recruitment

Splitting the reconcilable Sunni Arabs from irreconcilable militants will require a number of strategic-level political steps to be completed. All have the ultimate objective of making Sunni Arabs in Iraq feel less isolated and less desperate, and thus less susceptible to support Al-Qaeda passively or actively.

One is the punctual execution of free and fair national elections in Iraq on April 30, 2014. The U.S. Government seems to have strongly cautioned the Maliki government to stick with the electoral timeline and has signaled that the U.S. will pay close attention to the implementation of elections and post-electoral government formation. This is job number one for the U.S. government and this promising start should be maintained throughout what will perhaps be a yearlong effort (based on the 249-day process in 2010). Perceptions of a stolen election, of Iranian meddling, or of non-inclusive government without Sunni Arab participation would gift the terrorists with a further propaganda coup. On the other hand a positive propaganda coup might be secured by the government if the terrorism charges against Rafi al-Issawi, a top moderate Sunni politician and Minister of Finance, can be rapidly quashed. The United States has intervened on Issawi's behalf before concerning the charges against him and should do so again.

During the next Iraqi government term (2014-2018) the counter-terrorism environment would be best-served by the success of a social peace initiative with a scope similar to South Africa's "Truth and Reconciliation" programme or the de-Nazification programme in Germany. Though all countries are different and no model can be replicated, the purpose of mentioning these precedents is to demonstrate that they can succeed. Blanket de-Baathification in Iraq is an ongoing grievance for Sunnis and strengthens their recruitment potential amongst experienced mid-aged militants and the younger relatives of purged Baathists. Judicial reform of counter-terrorism law and modernized prison system might also reduce Al-Qaeda recruitment potential. Indeed the movement has reaped significant rewards from Sunni Arab despair at the conditions and legal treatment faced by the large Sunni Arab prison population.

Energetic, well-publicized U.S. engagement in Iraq can also serve the counter-terrorism effort. Al-Qaeda is strengthened by the very real perceptions held by Iraqi Sunni Arabs that Iran is winning in



Iraq, whilst the United States has lost interest (at best) or has traded Iraq to Tehran in some Machiavellian deal (at worst). This perception also no doubt plays into the calculations of external funders of Al-Qaeda and other Sunni Arab militant groups in Iraq. Only by staying engaged in Iraq, treating Iraq as the high priority it should be, and paying attention to Iraq can the perception of Iranian influence be offset.

Ongoing well-publicized defence sales and military cooperation are also useful ways to signal U.S. commitment, especially if larger numbers of Sunni Arabs are reintegrated to the armed forces. Indeed, the Iraqi armed forces, and particularly the Iraqi Army, remains a corner of Iraq where nationalism is relatively pronounced and which could be rebuilt into an institution that would give Sunni Arabs greater hope. Any efforts taken to rebuild the Iraqi military through U.S.-supported professional military education will help on this count, including visits to the U.S. National Defense University, International Military Education and Training (IMET) grants, plus Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs.

#### **Operational and Tactical Counter-Insurgency**

In 2005-2009 the United States and Iraq cracked the code when it came to reducing the local recruiting pool of militant groups and severely disrupting their local freedom of movement and operational security. The method was population-focused counter-insurgency, which saw local paramilitaries (Sahwa) paid to fight Al-Qaeda whilst the U.S. and Iraqi forces lived amongst such communities to protect civilian and the Sahwa. Since 2009, the Iraqi government progressively demobilized the effort, stopping the pay of Sahwa, arresting some and taking weapons permits from others, and allowing their security forces to detach from local communities and use a dragnet approach of mass arrests against Sunni Arabs. If this sounds almost illogical and entirely self-defeating, this is because it was a critical unforced error by the Iraqi government.

Rebuilding the Sahwa is one plank of a new population-focused counter-insurgency in Iraq – possibly the most important one. After years of dominance Al-Qaeda was decimated by the Sahwa in a period of months in Ramadi in late 2006 and early 2007.<sup>10</sup> As a movement, Al-Qaeda is terrified, deep down, of the Sahwa because it was so brutally effective against them. Even the Shia-led government in Baghdad recognizes the efficacy of the Sahwa, though they have found it extraordinarily difficult to stomach the idea of armed paramilitaries, often led by former insurgents, operating in or near cross-sectarian areas.

The key will now be to convince Baghdad to put the most credible and influential local sheikhs in charge again, not Baghdad-selected cronies selected purely to buy Prime Minister Maliki some local influence. That means getting Ahmed Abu Risha back into the top spot.<sup>11</sup> Then comes the hard work of re-hiring, reissuing weapons permits and getting pay issued to the fighters. This has proven very

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent granular examination of the U.S.-Sahwa partnership, see Bill Ardolino, *Fallujah Awakens* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> There has been extensive speculation in 2013 that Abu Risha will return as the head of Iraq's Sahwa. For a sample see Mushreq Abbas, *Iraq to reinstate Sahwa forces*, *Al-Monitor*, August 27, 2013, see <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/iraq-revive-sahwa-qaeda-sunni-protesters.html>

difficult since the United States stopped running the programme, suggesting we need to train the Iraqis to run such a programme more effectively, potentially including advisors stationed in Iraq who have the freedom of movement to get out to deepest darkest Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Babil.

Reform of the counter-terrorism law is also required, to make it harder for the wrong Sunnis to be rounded up and held for the wrong reasons. Draft reforms to the Counter-Terrorism Law very been debated in parliament and they focus on tightening up the process by which arrest warrants can be served in Iraq, which currently only requires two anonymous tip-offs and is widely abused by the security forces. The draft law also envisages a selective amnesty for long-term detainees against whom no case has been brought. Whilst it may seem counterintuitive to strengthen counter-terrorism by weakening counter-terrorism law, this is exactly what needs to happen in Iraq due to the major role that ineffective and draconian counter-terrorism powers plays in bolstering Al-Qaeda's recruitment.<sup>12</sup>

Population-focused counter-insurgency is a difficult skillset to learn – or re-learn in Iraq's case – but there is a strong case that the Iraqi military should readopt a more open policy towards Sunni Arab communities. This means not only supporting the Sahwa but also ending the collective punishment of such communities through economic blockades, excessive checkpointing, and blanket arrests. The Iraqi security forces need to return to neighborhood-level combat outposts and reintegrate into communities. Units need to ensure a reasonable degree of ethno-sectarian balance in their officers. These developments are all probably years away but a good start could be made relatively quickly if the Iraqi government decided to embrace the proven formula of population-focused counter-insurgency. As the world's premier practitioner of this approach, the U.S. military is uniquely qualified to build these techniques into its major security assistance effort in Iraq, being that such tactics are every bit as vital and demanding as the task of absorbing U.S. equipment.

In the sphere of propaganda Al-Qaeda in Iraq is deft at reminding Sunni Arabs all the reasons why they fear Shiites, Kurds and the Iraqi government. But Al-Qaeda itself could be highly vulnerable to attack by propaganda or Information Operations. As previously noted, the organization is almost hard-wired to over-reach in terms of geographic scope, ambition and rivalry with local Sunni Arab community leaders. Though it has adopted a relatively restrained approach since 2011 vis-à-vis Iraqi Sunni Arabs, the gloves are coming off as Al-Qaeda feels more secure in Iraq. In remote desert areas, Al-Qaeda in Iraq murders local community leaders and seeks once again to impose aspects of Shari'a law. In Syria we see the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Shams (ISIS) operating in the same manner. The United States can help Iraq to undertake more effective Information Operations using state media and U.S.-supported media such as Al-Hurra television.

Sunni Arab leaders in Iraq have reacted to the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in ways that point to the beginnings of a new anti-Al-Qaeda effort, if the opportunity is grasped. Though such leaders could have stuck with the anti-government protests that were building momentum in March 2013, they

<sup>12</sup> For an introduction to these themes see Michael Knights, *Rebuilding Iraq's Counterterrorism Capabilities*, Policywatch 2112 (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 31, 2013), at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rebuilding-iraqs-counterterrorism-capabilities>

have instead begun to draw closer to the Iraqi government, in part because Prime Minister Maliki has been eclipsed by a graver danger to the status of Sunni Arab leaders in Iraq. So from top to bottom, there is a growing desire amongst Iraqi Sunni Arab politicians and citizens to undercut Al-Qaeda in Iraq before it is too late and the challenge becomes insurmountable. America's role is to continue using its considerable convening power to get Sunni Arab politicians around the table with Iraqi government, highlighting the synergies in their views on the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

#### **Hard Counter-Terrorism: Kill and Capture**

Though I have argued that Iraq cannot kill its way out of this crisis, there is nonetheless a pressing need for "hard counter-terrorism" capabilities to kill and capture irreconcilable Al-Qaeda operatives. In counter-terrorism, the hard militarized edge of the process is itself broken down into a set of sub-processes: Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze and Develop (F<sup>3</sup>EAD). These distinctions are quite useful in pinning down Iraq's weaknesses and Iraqi requirements that the U.S. government is well-postured to fulfill.

- **Find** . This is a key problem for Iraq, with the government having progressively gone "blind" in terms of timely targeting data since U.S. withdrawal began in 2009. One aspect of the target identification of Al-Qaeda is the Sahwa, who are the best means of constricting the operational security of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, particularly in cities and towns. In the remote rural and border areas, technical intelligence becomes increasingly vital but the Iraqi government suffers from a lack of wide-area surveillance systems that draw together imagery intelligence and signals intelligence. Iraq also needs help collecting financial intelligence on so-called "threat financing" – Al-Qaeda's money flows. On all of these points there is a lot that can be done - and hopefully is already being done – to help Iraq to use the systems it has, to fuse that data with U.S.-provided data, and to analyze the data and create timely targeting options, which has historically been a weakness in Iraq. The cost to the United States is twofold: the U.S. intelligence community has to open itself up again to an Iraqi intelligence community that is penetrated to some extent by Iranian-backed agents of influence. (Though Iraqi protection of U.S. sensitive equipment seems to have been relatively good, so far). And the U.S. government probably needs to accept a degree of risk in pressing the Iraqi government to accept and protect embedded U.S. advisors at a range of lower level counter-terrorism hubs such as the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) Regional Command Centres in key provinces like Anbar, Babil, Diyala, Kirkuk and Nineveh.
- **Fix and Finish**. One of the reasons that Prime Minister Maliki came to Washington DC with a strong request for Apache attack helicopters and armed drones is the recognition that Iraq's counter-terrorism forces cannot reach suspected terrorist locations with sufficient stealth, speed and striking force to kill or capture the targets. This is particularly the case in remote border and desert areas in Anbar and Nineveh province, adjacent to Syria. There is a lot the United States can do to support this effort, and this support does not necessarily hinge on handing over sensitive killing technologies (Apache, Predator/Reaper). Building up Iraqi helicopter assault capacity is vital. Ensuring that Iraq's armed helicopters and fixed-wing strike

aircraft are used effectively by Iraqi control centres is another priority area. Keeping Iraq supplied with precise air-to-ground munitions like the Hellfire is worthwhile, particularly as collateral damage from these small munitions is minimized. But setting technology aside, the real opportunity for the United States is to help Iraq expand and maintain the high-quality ISOF. The best way to do this is to help put Iraqi counter-terrorism on a sound legal footing with a law that establishes the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) as a ministry that is adequately funded and under parliamentary scrutiny, like all other ministries. The present quasi-official status of CTS deprives it of a budget of its own and limits personnel replacement to offset attrition. U.S. lobbying might help formalize CTS' role under the next government.

- **Exploit, Analyze and Develop.** One of the defining features of the "industrial-scale" counter-terrorism undertaken by U.S. Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in Iraq was the rapid processing of intelligence through Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) of computers and cell-phones plus the use of detainee-provided information and biometric and weapons intelligence. These inputs, usually derived minutes or hours after a raid, generated new arrest warrants on further suspects before news of the initial raids even reached the next level of the targeted network. Thus the onion of Al-Qaeda in Iraq was peeled faster than it could grow new layers. This is an area where the United States is uniquely qualified to build capacity in ISOF and other Iraqi forces.

## Conclusion

This testimony has argued that the counter-terrorism situation in Iraq is still recoverable. We defeated Al-Qaeda in Iraq just five years ago, comprehensively dismantling their networks and propaganda campaigns. The United States can help Iraq to do it again. The challenge now is to understand what parts of the successful formula are still applicable, and which ones the U.S. can support in the post-withdrawal environment.

It should be clear that Iraq cannot kill its way out of this crisis, though Baghdad may find this option an alluring misconception. U.S. policy should aim at guiding Iraq in the direction of holistic sectarian reconciliation and the defeat of Al-Qaeda's narrative that Iraqi Sunni Arabs have no hope of acceptance or security in post-Saddam Iraq. Splitting the reconcilable Sunni Arabs from irreconcilable militants will require a number of strategic-level political steps to be completed. All have the ultimate objective of making Sunni Arabs in Iraq feel less isolated and less desperate, and thus less susceptible to support Al-Qaeda passively or actively. The United States can provide reassurance to Iraq's Sunni Arabs by staying engaged in Iraq, treating Iraq as the high priority it should be, and paying attention to the country's political developments. The United States should continue to help Sunni Arab moderates like indicted Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi to re-enter politics. This creates a powerful symbol that progress is possible. Rebuilding the Sahwa is one plank of a new population-focused counter-insurgency in Iraq — possibly the most important one.

In terms of specific security assistance, the United States should support counter-terrorism and judicial reforms in Iraq, as well as the institutionalization of Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service as a line ministry. Capacity-building should be maintained and expanded through overt military-to-military ties and professional military education, plus covert intelligence cooperation. U.S.-supported professional military education is a vital long-term effort, including Iraqi exchanges with the U.S. National Defense University, International Military Education and Training (IMET) grants, plus Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs. Iraqi air-mobility and precision strike capabilities should be supported by the United States. Intelligence fusion, mission planning and Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) are areas where U.S. advisors should be engaged on the ground – assuming they are not already.

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Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman.  
Dr. Byman?

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL L. BYMAN, PH.D., PROFESSOR,  
SECURITY STUDIES PROGRAM, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY**

Mr. BYMAN. Chairman Poe, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, distinguished members of the subcommittees, thank you very much for allowing me to testify today.

My colleagues on this panel have handled the domestic situation in Iraq well. So, rather than repeat their points, let me focus on several of the regional aspects because al-Qaeda in Iraq both is and aspires to be a regional movement.

The conflict raging next door in Syria has proven a huge boost to this organization. Al-Qaeda in Iraq was able to relocate part of its leadership and part of its cadre to Syria, both to support jihad there and also to enjoy the sanctuary that such chaos offers to arm and train and organize. Although Syria is often referred to as the new Iraq or the new Afghanistan regarding its role in aspiring jihadists, in reality, the situation is much worse. The data are scarce, but it appears that more foreigners from the West have come to Syria in a far shorter period of time than the numbers who travel to previous fields of jihad. These fighters in Syria are remarkably well networked with each other and with other jihadist causes, especially al-Qaeda in Iraq. Many others are developing relationships while they are in Syria.

Unfortunately, a number of Arab states and movements, including a number of governments that are allied to the United States, share al-Qaeda in Iraq's view that its fight against the Maliki government is similar to the Syrian Sunni community's struggle against the Assad regime. Both rebels in the eyes of many Sunni Muslims are fighting an Iran-backed apostate regime that is brutalizing the Sunni community.

These states and movements supporting Syrian rebels often use al-Qaeda in Iraq and western Iraqi tribes to transfer resources to Syria. Naturally, al-Qaeda in Iraq has kept some arms and money for itself. Even more important, it was able to convince many volunteers who intended to fight in Syria to stay in Iraq and fight on its behalf.

A number of Sunni states, notably Saudi Arabia, see Iraq as part of a strategic competition with Iran. Riyadh fears that Teheran is bent on regional hegemony and sees Teheran's gain of an ally in Iraq after 2003 as a huge shift in the regional balance. Undermining Iran's ally in Iraq and ideally reversing Iran's gains are motivating these states to support anti-regime forces there.

As al-Qaeda in Iraq grows, the violence could spill over into the region outside Syria. Other states, especially Jordan, are targets for al-Qaeda in Iraq. Also, as the organization becomes stronger, its ability to strike Western targets outside the region, including in Europe but also in the United States, also grows. Unfortunately, since U.S. forces have departed Iraq, the United States has done its best to ignore the country. Hearings like this are rare moments when Iraq is given the attention it deserves.

Although there are regular diplomatic contacts and I commend many administration officials for trying to push Iraq in the right

direction, unfortunately, a deeper level of engagement is required if the United States is going to have any chance of dissuading the Maliki government from continuing its self-defeating policies, the ones that fuel the growth of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

But many of the keys to defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq lay outside Iraq. The United States needs to push allies, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to stop using Iraq as a transfer point for financing and arming fighters in Syria. In addition, Washington should strongly discourage their perception that Iraq could be another front in rolling back Iran. Washington should also consider backing secular Syrian opposition forces more forcefully in order to ensure that jihadist organizations do not completely dominate the opposition in Syria as this cross-border relationship has tremendous benefits for al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Finally, and given the many problems that are to be expected with the Maliki regime, the United States should prepare for the problem to get worse. It should take steps to prepare for potential spillover from Iraq to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other neighbors as well as ensure its own counterterrorism capabilities. And authorities are robust. So the United States can act unilaterally if necessary.

Thank you very much for this time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Byman follows:]

**The Resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq**

Prepared Testimony before the joint hearing of the Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Subcommittee and the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

December 12, 2013

Daniel Byman

Professor, Security Studies Program in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University

Director of Research, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution

Chairmen Poe and Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Members Sherman and Deutch, distinguished members of the subcommittees and staff, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It is a particular pleasure to testify in the company of such prominent witnesses, whose work on Iraq has shaped my thinking considerably.

Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has seemingly returned from the dead.<sup>1</sup> On the verge of strategic defeat as U.S. forces departed Iraq, AQI has since regrouped into a large and growing force, contributing to the surge in violence in Iraq and the broader region. Although the neighboring conflict in Syria partially drives AQI's resurgence, the causes of the group's comeback are much deeper. Domestically, the weakness of the Iraqi state – and thus the ability of small, violent groups to operate with considerable freedom – has been a persistent problem since the fall of Saddam's regime. Politically, the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki made progress in restoring faith in Iraq's institutions and establishing order in 2008-2009. However, in recent years he has focused on consolidating power and, in so doing, has alienated Iraq's Sunni Muslim community. Iraqi security services are now more brutal, more political, and less skilled than they were when U.S. forces departed Iraq in 2011. As the Sunnis became marginalized, AQI's popularity again grew. Iraq's neighbors contribute to the problem, sending money and volunteers directly to AQI or indirectly to the organization to support its role in the Syrian conflict. As the violence spreads, it has taken on its own dynamic. Iraqis trust the security services less, and more Sunnis support AQI for revenge or because of a perceived need for self-defense from the Shi'a-dominated security services or associated militias. This in turn leads the

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<sup>1</sup> AQI changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq in 2006 and to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (the latter term meaning greater Syria) in 2013. The group's new name is often abbreviated as ISIS. In keeping with the language of this hearing, this paper will use AQI to refer to the group.



regime and the Shi'a community to view the Sunnis with even more suspicion and in their eyes justifies greater regime repression. Unfortunately, none of these problems are abating, and several are getting worse. So AQI's power is likely to grow.

The growing strength of AQI threatens both the United States and Iraq. The organization's attacks are destabilizing Iraq and risk jeopardizing the oil flow from one of the world's largest exporters. Outside Iraq, the violence could potentially spill over into the region as AQI's ambitions include Syria and other states like Jordan. Other forms of spillover from Iraq such as refugee flows are also dangerous. As the organization becomes stronger, its ability to strike Western targets outside the region, including in Europe and the United States, grows.

Since U.S. forces departed Iraq, the United States has done its best to ignore the country. Hearings like this one are rare moments when Iraq is given the attention it deserves. Although there are regular diplomatic contacts, the administration has not made Iraq stability a priority despite the country's strategic importance and the U.S. role in worsening a number of the country's problems. This must change. Deeper engagement is required if the United States is to have any chance of dissuading the Maliki government from continuing its self-defeating policies. Many of the keys to defeating AQI, however, lay outside Iraq. The United States will need to push allies like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to stop using Iraq as a transfer point for financing and arming fighters in Syria. In addition, Washington should strongly discourage their perception that Iraq could be another front for rolling back Iran. Indeed, U.S. and Iran both oppose AQI and could work together against it. Washington should also consider backing secular Syrian opposition groups more forcefully to ensure that jihadist organizations do not dominate the opposition, as this cross-border relationship has tremendous benefits for AQI. Finally, the United States must also prepare for the problem to get worse: it should take steps to mitigate potential spillover from Iraq to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other neighbors as well as ensure its own counterterrorism capabilities and authorities are sufficiently robust so it can act unilaterally if necessary.

The remainder of my testimony has three parts. First, I will explain the causes of AQI's resurgence and why the danger it poses is likely to worsen. Second, I assess the associated risks of AQI's rise, both in Iraq and in the broader region. Finally, I offer several policy recommendations for these subcommittees to consider.

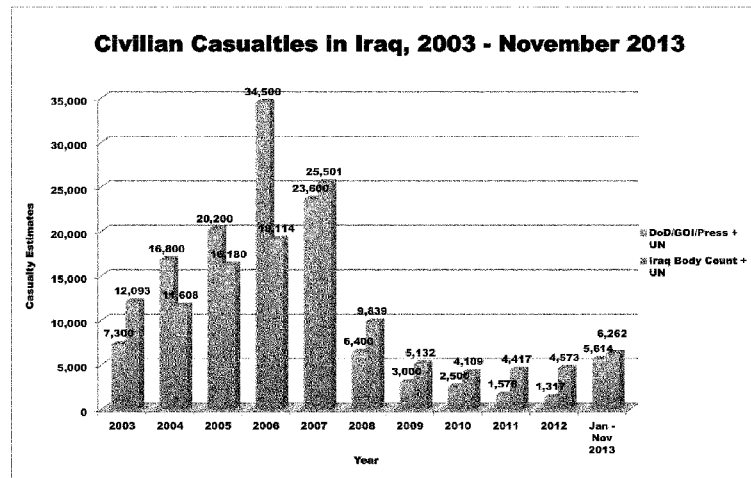
### **The Return of Al Qaeda in Iraq**

Only five years ago, AQI appeared on the verge of collapse. Then-CIA Director Michael Hayden declared in 2008, "Al Qaeda is on the verge of a strategic defeat in Iraq" – an assessment backed by a plunge in the organization's attacks, a collapse in its ability to hold territory, and widespread criticism of the organization from within the broader Muslim world, including from many former jihadist supporters.<sup>2</sup>

Five years later, the organization is back and, as the chart below indicates, civilian casualties in Iraq are again rising.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "CIA Director Michael Hayden Says Al Qaeda Is on 'Verge' of Defeat in Iraq," *Fox News*, May 30, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/05/30/cia-director-michael-hayden-says-al-qaeda-is-on-verge-defeat-in-iraq/>; Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: Al-Qaeda's Revolt against Bin Laden," *The New Republic*, June 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics from DoD/GOI/Press 2003 – June 2013 were taken from the Brookings's Iraq Index. Figures for July–November were taken from United Nations in Iraq. Statistics for Iraq Body Count for 2003 – May 2013 were similarly taken from Brookings's Iraq Index. Figures for June–November were taken from United Nations in Iraq.



Three points on AQI's return deserve particular emphasis. First, as the chart highlights, the death toll in Iraq is steadily increasing— even excluding the hundreds of deaths in December of this year already and the conservative methodologies used by the data compilers, 2013 is the worst year for civilian casualties since 2008. Government officials claim that there are now “upwards of 40 suicide bombers per month.”<sup>4</sup> Second, the scope of AQI activity has surged— something the chart does not reveal. AQI is doing more than just increasing the volume of its attacks. The group now strikes in parts of Iraq from which it had previously been eradicated, supports the rebellion in Syria, and conducts bold and operationally sophisticated raids on prisons to release its cadre.<sup>5</sup> Third and perhaps most importantly, AQI again uses insurgent tactics, such as holding territory in Iraq and Syria, in addition to terrorism. Although less dangerous than it was at the height of the Iraqi civil war, this shift represents a considerable growth in capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

Incomplete state building is one root of the problem. Saddam ruled largely by terror, and his regime was increasingly hollow by the time of its 2003 overthrow. After his fall, Iraq lacked institutions that could secure order, provide services, or otherwise fulfill basic government functions. The Iraqi civil war worsened this problem, empowering militias, destroying what

<sup>4</sup> Testimony by Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran, “U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iraq,” Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, November 13, 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/E/A/E%20A13/20131113/101473/111RG-113-E%20A13-Wstate-McGurk-B-20131113.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> For one valuable study, see Jessica Lewis, “Al-Qaeda in Iraq resurgent: The Breaking the Walls Campaign Part I,” *Institute for the Study of War*, Middle East Security Report 14, September 2013, [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept\\_0.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept_0.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Van Heuvelen, “Next door to Syria, an Al Qaeda Linked Group Is Also Gaining Ground in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, December 7, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/next-door-to-syria-an-al-qaeda-linked-group-is-also-gaining-ground-in-iraq/2013/12/07/ca9df44a-5e16-11e3-bc56-c6ca94801fac\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/next-door-to-syria-an-al-qaeda-linked-group-is-also-gaining-ground-in-iraq/2013/12/07/ca9df44a-5e16-11e3-bc56-c6ca94801fac_story.html)

remained of the economy, and further weakening faith in government and security forces. As Iraq pulled back from the brink, however, the Iraqi state began to reemerge. At the end of the last decade, the army, the police, and government performance all improved – though admittedly from a very low bar. The presence of U.S. forces and the associated high-level of engagement played an important role in these positive trends.

Sectarianism also propels AQI's resurgence. In the waning days of the U.S. occupation, Iraq held elections that reduced the influence of warlords, and Maliki took action against Shi'a militants, apparently committing his government to oppose sectarianism. Since then, however, the Maliki government has tried to consolidate power and undermine rivals. Such consolidation made the regime increasingly insular, burning rather than building bridges with the Sunni community. Promises made to Sunnis who fought against AQI were not honored. Maliki has surrounded himself with trusted advisors from the Shi'a community and visibly excluded Iraq's Sunni Muslims from positions of influence. He has politicized Iraq's security forces, making them an arm of the regime rather than of the Iraqi state. The security services often collude with Shi'a radicals in revenge attacks on Sunni Muslims, and Iraqi Sunnis perceive them as a hostile force. Even when they are not part of the problem, the Iraqi security forces are overworked, underpaid, and poorly led. Counterinsurgency methods that relied on excellent intelligence and winning over the community were abandoned in favor of indiscriminate methods that only further alienated Iraqi Sunnis.<sup>7</sup> The alienated population has proven more willing to support, or at least tolerate, AQI activities.

AQI has flourished in this environment. Where once Iraqi Sunnis rejected its extreme ideology and brutal behavior, it now poses as a defender of the Sunnis against the brutality of the regime. Those Sunnis who oppose AQI risk being painted as government tools or as willing to leave their coreligionists defenseless in the face of growing sectarianism. AQI again began to grow in size. Matt Olsen, who heads the National Counterterrorism Center, contends that AQI is stronger today than during its 2006 operational peak.<sup>8</sup>

Iraqi leaders often blame violence in Syria for AQI's resurgence. Indeed, this conflict has boosted AQI. The collapse of order in Syrian provides a permissive environment for jihadists to arm, train, and organize. The fighting, meanwhile, has energized the broader Muslim world. Individuals and social organizations have provided arms, hundreds of millions of dollars, and thousands of volunteers to various Sunni rebel groups in Syria. Although Syria is often referred to as the "new Iraq" or "new Afghanistan" regarding its role in inspiring jihadists and bringing them to the battle, in reality it is much worse. Though data are scarce, it appears more foreigners from the West have come to Syria in a far shorter period of time than the numbers who traveled to previous fields of jihad.<sup>9</sup> These fighters are remarkably well networked with other jihadist

<sup>7</sup> For reviews of these ups and down, see in particular Kenneth Pollack, "The Fall and Rise and Fall of Iraq," *Brookings Institution*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/07/30-fall-rise-fall-iraq-pollack>; Michael Knights, "Iraq's Never-Ending Security Crisis," *BBC News*, October 3, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iraqs-never-ending-security-crisis> and Michael Knights, "Yes, Iraq is Unraveling," *Foreign Policy*, May 15, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/yes-iraq-is-unraveling>.

<sup>8</sup> "Al Qaeda in Iraq Strongest Since 2006," *Associated Press*, November 14, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/11/14/shiites-iraq-bombs-ashoura/3524941/>  
<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "The Number of Foreign Fighters from Europe in Syria is Historically Unprecedented," *Washington Post*, November 27, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/11/27/number-of-foreign-fighters-from-europe-in-syria-is-historically-unprecedented-who-should-be-worried/>

causes. Many have ties to AQI already, and many others are developing relationships after arriving in Syria.

AQI also relocated part of its cadre to Syria, enjoying the sanctuary such chaos offers and perceiving the struggle there as part of its own broader fight against what it considers apostate regimes. Bashar al-Asad deliberately tolerated the creation of networks for sending fighters to Iraq to undermine the United States occupation of Iraq after 2003. Ironically, these same networks facilitated the flow of fighters (some AQI-affiliated) and arms back into Syria when order collapsed there.

A number of Arab states and movements share AQI's view that its fight against the Maliki government is equivalent to the Syrian Sunni community's struggle against the Asad regime. Both rebels, in the eyes of many Sunni Muslims, are fighting an Iran-backed apostate regime that is brutalizing the Sunni community. Over time, this has created a self-fulfilling prophecy. As fighters flocked to Syria to defend their religious communities, it prompted others to do so as well: now Shi'a militias from Iraq, the Shi'a Hizballah in Lebanon, and an array of Sunni organizations cite each other's presence as proof of a grand regional conspiracy. These states and movements supporting Syrian rebels often use AQI and western Iraqi tribes to transfer resources to Syria. Naturally, AQI kept some arms and money for itself. Even more important, it was able to convince many volunteers who intended to fight in Syria to stay in Iraq and fight on its behalf.<sup>10</sup>

Putting sectarianism aside, a number of Sunni states, notably Saudi Arabia, perceive the Syria conflict – and by extension Iraq – as part of a strategic competition with Iran. Riyadh fears Tehran is bent on regional hegemony and sees Tehran's gain of an ally in Iraq after 2003 as a huge shift in the regional balance. Undermining Iran's ally, and ideally reversing Iran's gains in Iraq, motivate these states to support anti-regime forces in both Syria and Iraq.

In addition to greater access to resources, the Syria conflict also restored AQI's credibility. Many jihadists who wanted to focus on the United States or more traditional targets had vehemently criticized AQI's sectarian bent and its killing of Sunni Muslims. The Syria conflict, however, changed this perception as fighters now mobilize along sectarian lines.

Spreading throughout the country and broader region, the violence has taken on its own dynamic. With each attack, the credibility of Baghdad's Maliki regime declines and its perceived need to crack down harder increases. And with each reprisal or mass arrest, support or at least toleration of AQI grows. Now a self-perpetuating spiral, past violence drives future violence.

There is little reason to be optimistic that this cycle of violence will break. The Syrian war is not likely to abate, and indeed the jihadist role there continues to grow as overall levels of violence increase and neighbors continue to meddle. Maliki fears losing his power base in the Shi'a community more than alienating Sunnis, and he has resisted U.S. pressure to open up decision-making. The scheduled April 2014 parliamentary elections may even worsen this problem. Fear and sectarian rhetoric will probably be used to mobilize supporters, provoking hostile reactions from rival communities. In addition, the Maliki government's likely attempt to manipulate election results and shore up his base among Iraqi Shi'as may further alienate Sunni Muslims. As Sunni Muslims feel increasingly ostracized, such frustrations may translate into even broader popular support for AQI inside Iraq.

### **The Dangers of a Resurgent AQI**

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<sup>10</sup> McGurk, "U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iraq."

AQI, of course, poses a direct danger to the lives of Iraqis and the stability of the country. Its activities helped plunge Iraq into a brutal sectarian war that killed over 100,000 Iraqis between 2005 and 2007. Today's levels of violence are high, but the risk that they will grow dramatically and Iraq will see massive death tolls and refugee flows is painfully real. Putting aside the human cost, Iraq is now one of the world's top oil exporters. Unlike several other leading producers, it is poised to increase production in the years to come.<sup>11</sup> Increased violence potentially jeopardizes its exports. In addition, over 4,000 American soldiers died in Iraq, our country spent hundreds of billions of dollars there, and U.S. mistakes during the occupation contributed to the country's instability and civil war. Return to civil war or state failure would mean this sacrifice was in vain.

AQI also may be more dangerous this time around because jihadist organizations have learned from past mistakes. Under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until his death at the hands of coalition forces in 2006, AQI alienated Iraq's Sunnis by its heavy-handed behavior, brutality toward Sunni civilians, and attempts to usurp traditional leaders. In Yemen and Syria, Al Qaeda affiliates have learned lessons from AQI's past problems and are working more harmoniously with local leaders – stances endorsed by the Al Qaeda core. In addition, these affiliates are providing limited social services in conquered areas, further boosting their popularity. Although U.S. forces killed Zarqawi and the Al Qaeda core was frustrated with AQI's sectarianism, it is unclear how much the group has taken its own past mistakes to heart. However, the changes by like-minded groups suggest AQI itself may be more careful this time.<sup>12</sup>

AQI is perhaps the most important Al Qaeda affiliate. Indeed, not only has it been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iraqis, it has sponsored jihadist insurgents next door in Syria and played a significant role in bringing groups like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb into the Al Qaeda fold. Indeed, in Syria it has even tried to establish itself as the dominant jihadist group there, leading to conflict with jihadist rivals like Jabhat al-Nusra.

AQI's focus on Iraq's Shi'a government and population was never in harmony with the Al Qaeda's core's focus on the United States and the West. Now, however, AQI's sectarian focus has become the norm for many groups and extremists, and this agenda has broad support among many Sunni Muslims, enabling the group to improve fundraising and recruiting.<sup>13</sup>

Although cynics might say such a development has benefits for U.S. security – when jihadists focus on the Shi'a, they are not focused on Americans – in the long-term this is counterproductive for U.S. interests. At minimum, the spread of sectarianism is potentially destabilizing to countries with significant Shi'a populations, like Bahrain, Kuwait, and Lebanon, as well as Iraq. More broadly, sectarianism significantly catalyzes radicalization of both Shi'a and Sunni communities, thereby increasing the overall number of extremists and terrorists.

Indeed, AQI-linked conflict is at the heart of the problem of spillover in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup> What happens in Iraq does not stay in Iraq: it has already helped infect Syria, and the

<sup>11</sup> Benoit Faucon, Summer Said, and Sarah Kent, "OPEC Rift Emerging over Iraq Output," *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303562904579227632634058104>

<sup>12</sup> See Daniel Byman, "Breaking the Bonds between al-Qa'ida and Its Affiliate Organizations," Brookings Analysis Paper no 27 (August 2012), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/07/alqaida-terrorism-byman>

<sup>13</sup> Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide" (Brookings, 2013),

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2013/04/sunni%20shia%20abdo/sunni%20shia%20abdo.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> See Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Brookings, 2007) for my thoughts on this subject.

furies unleashed by the conflict shape the politics of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other states. Sectarian conflict in particular ignites passions of their peoples, increasing tension and religious discrimination at home and inspiring some young men to become foreign fighters. These states become more fearful and more prone to dangerous interventions as a result. Some of the foreign fighters will die, but others will return and radicalize their own populations.

Refugees can be a particularly dangerous form of spillover. The vast majority of refugees are victims of conflict, seeking only protection for themselves and their families. Some, however, use the refugee camps as bases, fueling the fight. In addition, militant forces often recruit from refugee camps, as unemployed young men with grudges to bear are often ideal recruits. Such militarized refugee communities can add fuel to the fire of existing conflicts and contribute to new conflicts in their host lands.<sup>15</sup>

The spillover may even go beyond the Middle East. These conflicts are magnets for foreign fighters, and hundreds have traveled to Syria to fight from the West – a cause of immense concern for America’s European allies. Because many go through Iraq, and because still others work with groups in Syria like AQI that have links on both sides of the border, AQI’s growth may pose an indirect terrorism threat to the United States and its European allies.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

History haunts American perceptions about any future U.S. role in Iraq. Understandably most Americans would prefer to leave this country behind once and for all, but we must recognize that U.S. policy toward Iraq has failed to stabilize this critical country and has done little to dent the growth of AQI. Recognizing the unpopularity of any major U.S. role in Iraq among the American people, there is still more that can be done.

The United States’ minimal level of engagement, rather than actual policies, hinders meaningful impact in Iraq. U.S. efforts to promote better relations between Iraqi Kurds and the central government, to push Maliki to refrain from discriminatory policies, to depoliticize and improve the security services, and to win over the Sunni community (and in particular former anti-AQI fighters) are well-intentioned and sensible. However, these are often implemented without engagement at the highest levels, diminishing their impact.

Beyond increasing the overall level of U.S. engagement, Washington should consider several steps. First, the United States should ramp up efforts to aid the non-jihadist components of the Syrian opposition. Such steps are fraught with problems – the fragmentation of the opposition, the risk of U.S. arms being diverted, the conflicting agendas of U.S. allies, and so on – and may not dramatically shift the military balance in Syria. They are nonetheless worthwhile. By building up credible alternatives to the jihadists, the United States helps shrink their influence and control of territory. In addition, the direct risk to the United States remains low. This is valuable for the long-term in Syria, decreasing the odds of a radical regime coming to power or that terrorists would control significant swaths of territory. This has consequences not only for Syria but also for the country’s neighbors, particularly Iraq. The two civil wars are intertwined, and reducing the influence of jihadists in one conflict will reduce their influence in the other.

Second, the United States must privately confront its Gulf allies over their support for jihadist movements. Much of this support is indirect and not done by regimes. However, these regimes tolerate their own citizens’ activities in support of jihadists in Syria, ranging from

<sup>15</sup> See Sarah Lischer, “Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict,” *International Security*, 28.1 (2003) 79-109

rhetorical support to financial backing and the recruitment of foreign volunteers.<sup>16</sup> In the long-term, the growth of sectarianism and the generation of more jihadists is detrimental to our allies' security as well as our own. In addition to reducing the power of radicals in Syria, having fewer resources transit Iraq would reduce AQI's ability to siphon off support for the Syrian jihad. Washington should particularly emphasize that Gulf allies should not try to encourage a "second front" against Iran by undermining the Maliki government.

Ironically, the United States may have an ally in Iran for some of its actions. Both countries have an interest in opposing Sunni radicalism in the Middle East and Iran, like the United States, has a strong interest in Iraqi stability. Should nuclear talks with Iran progress, Washington should encourage Tehran to use its influence on Maliki to push him to act responsibly.

The United States must also prepare for the likelihood that the above or other positive measures will only achieve limited success or even fail completely. Above all, Washington should prepare for AQI's continued growth. As such, the United States military should develop different overt and covert packages of counterinsurgency assistance for the government of Iraq -- the levels varying by how willing the Maliki government is to make changes and according to the level of threat AQI is perceived to pose.<sup>17</sup> Despite the public's overwhelming distaste for greater involvement in Iraq, the United States may need to play a stronger role, assisting the Iraqi government in order to protect U.S. interests.

Simultaneously, the United States should prepare for spillover from Iraq. In Iraq during the height of the civil war and in Syria since 2011, the scale of the humanitarian tragedy and the spread of violence across borders caught the United States off guard. Given the steady escalation of this conflict and recent experience in region, there is no excuse for not preparing for another round of spillover from Iraq. The United States should try to coordinate Iraqi neighbors to prepare for refugee flows, establish contingency plans for cross-border terrorism, and try to stifle neighboring state interventions that would only perpetuate conflict.

Finally, the United States should ensure it has the capabilities and authorities to intervene unilaterally against terrorist bases in Iraq. To be clear, the ideal approach is that the Iraqi government acts on its own. And, in most cases, the terrorists there are focused on the Iraqi and Syrian governments and thus pose no immediate threat to the U.S. homeland. But the Iraqi government remains weak and often exacerbates the problem, while the risk of AQI to Americans and U.S. interests outside Iraq is growing. The United States must ensure it has the necessary intelligence and basing infrastructure should direct strikes be necessary. More broadly, Congress should pass a new version of the post-9/11 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) legislation in order to ensure the authority for robust action.

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The mistakes and costs of past U.S. involvement and the current frustrations with the Maliki government are not a reason to completely abandon Iraq. An effective response will

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Dickinson, "Playing with Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home," Saban Analysis Paper, December 6, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/12/06-private-gulf-financing-syria-extremist-rebels-sectarian-conflict-dickinson>

<sup>17</sup> Earlier this year the United States reportedly stepped up its covert support for Iraqi counterterrorism units, working through the CIA. Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes and Siobhan Gorman, "CIA Ramps Up Role in Iraq," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324735304578354561954501502>.

require higher-level engagement with Iraq and more involvement with our regional allies, both of which are difficult. The alternative, however, is that terrorism in and emanating from Iraq grows in the years to come.



Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman. The Chair will yield 5 minutes to the chairman of the Middle East Subcommittee, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, from Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You are a Texas gentleman. Thank you. But then I repeat myself. Thank you. I have caught my breath. So thank you so much.

Well, as the hearing is entitled, as you know, there is a resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq. And that has not been the narrative from the administration. And, in fact, we hear little about how the administration plans on fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq and throughout the region. Do you believe that the administration has underestimated the growth, the capacity, the reach of al-Qaeda and its affiliates? And why has it been reluctant, if you agree or not agree, to admit that the scope of the danger is far larger than we thought, that we're facing an al-Qaeda that is stronger?

On Syria, we know that the Syrian conflict has played a role in the increase of violence in Iraq, but it is clearly not the driving force behind the deterioration of the security situation in Iraq. However, with the Iraqi Government's inability to secure the areas around the Syrian border and the instability in Syria seemingly unending, we may see al-Qaeda able to establish a safe haven across both countries. What steps should we take to combat the AQI threat to ensure that they don't establish a safe haven in the Iraq-Syria border? And to what extent has Maliki's inability to govern in an inclusive way without catering to a sectarian agenda helped to create this environment in Iraq that has allowed al-Qaeda to make these gains?

Now we have got upcoming elections in Iraq next year. And many of us are concerned with the current instability, the distrust between the different political groups and religious groups. There is a lack of political will to overcome these differences, that these elections may bring Iraq to an all-out civil war.

Are these elections going to be a calming influence, a bringing together, or is it going to be a problem? What can we do to support Iraq in this troublesome period? What measures can we take to help ensure that these elections will be free and fair and transparent and will result in a peaceful and constructive effort that can create an inclusive government, which is what we want, willing and capable of maintaining stability and the rule of law in Iraq?

And we know that Iran's influence has grown with Maliki. We have done so much to try to make that divorce happen, but we haven't seen from the administration any tangible results.

What leverage do we have left with Maliki when it comes to Iran? That is a whole lot of stuff.

Ms. LEWIS. Madam Chairwoman, I would like to tackle what I took away as 3 questions. The first, did we underestimate al-Qaeda's resurgence? While we are talking about this topic, there is still a narrative that perhaps al-Qaeda has been defeated.

And I think for me, the principal question is, what is the relationship between al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Qaeda core? And what does that tell us about what will happen to the broader al-Qaeda network if al-Qaeda in Iraq becomes stronger in Iraq as well as in Syria? And I think that over the course of this discussion, we have framed very well that 1 of the principal concerns that connects all

of these things is the draw of foreign fighters globally to the fight, which al-Qaeda in Iraq is leading in Syria as well as Iraq. So yes, I think that it does make the——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And the foreign fighters has been—okay.

So 1 minute. Have at it, Dr. Byman.

Mr. BYMAN. I think the reasons why the administration has downplayed this to me are relatively clear. I would emphasize 2. One is the answers are very, very difficult in terms of actual solutions. U.S. influence is present but limited. And many of the things we may try may not work. But, more important, I think there is very little domestic support for a strong re-engagement with Iraq. And the administration is sensitive, even though that is what is necessary if we are going to fix things. It requires taking action in Iraq. It requires taking action in Syria. And I think the administration is sensitive to the lack of American public support for that.

Mr. KNIGHTS. I will tackle 2 points. Back in late 2010, early 2011, it was extremely difficult to get anyone to take the beginning of the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq seriously. And that is the opportunity that we missed here with the administration. At that point, nobody wanted to accept that Iraq was not in a fit state to handle——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. KNIGHTS. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And I am out of time. I apologize.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. POE. Ranking Member? The Chair will yield 5 minutes to the ranking member, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

One of the things I learned from this hearing and a host of other hearings in this room is that we have to resist the Pentagon's desire to pivot toward Asia. Given all of the complexities and difficulties of dealing with the Middle East, I can understand why our generals weaned on the World War II movies that we all enjoy. Living through the great success we had in the Cold War and military confrontation with the Soviet Union long for a conventional, uniformed foe and would it be the case that we had this whole Middle East thing all handled and it was time to worry about whether Japan got to control a couple of uninhabited rocks in the East China Sea.

The gentleman from Illinois I agree with in part when he says it is a bad thing when America retreats, but I would say when America gets hoodwinked into fighting and dying for Iran's allies, that is not necessarily a good thing.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, we foolishly and prematurely turned the government over to native governments that were certainly not pro-American. We contrast this to how we not only won the war but won the peace in World War II. We did not transfer power in Tokyo. We did not transfer power to Bonn until certainly the countries were completely pacified. And, second, the government taking over was undoubtedly pro-America.

I slightly disagree with Dr. Pollack when he says we have got to have fairness for the Sunnis or we are going to have continued unrest. I have chanted in the past, "No justice, no peace," but the fact

is that Saddam demonstrated that 1 community can effectively dominate in Iraq and not necessarily a good thing.

My first question for whoever on the panel can answer it is, how much of our money does Maliki get now? How much is he asking for? And when I say, "our money," I mean free food, free weapons, military aid, civilian aid. Does anybody happen to have those numbers?

[No response.]

Mr. SHERMAN. No one does, but I know our staff will get those and supplement the record. I would point out that—and I don't know if anyone has the answer to this question. And that is, is Iraq producing all the oil it can or just all the oil it is allowed to under the OPEC cartel agreement? Dr. Knights?

Mr. KNIGHTS. Iraq is producing as much oil as it can at the moment. The main restraint on it is the export infrastructure and water injection and so on, technical details basically. But they should iron a number of those out in the first quarter of next year. And then they could be very significantly increasing the amount of oil that they produce.

Mr. SHERMAN. Will they bump up against the OPEC quota? And do they plan to produce more than that quota when it is technically capable?

Mr. KNIGHTS. For the moment, they want to produce more than that quota until they feel that they have rebuilt the country from its decades of disaster. And they will also bump up against the Iranian wish to also come back on the market hopefully from their perspective. So we could see a little bit of Iran-Iraq friction.

Mr. SHERMAN. Ms. Lewis or anyone else who has any question. You have got Maliki saying, "Hey, I don't want thugs and weapons flying over my country to kill innocent people in Syria, but I can't control my airspace." Is that true? Does he have not a single operational aircraft?

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Ranking Member, shortly I would have to go back and research who does have rotary wing aircraft. I would defer to other subject matter experts on the panel if I am missing—

Mr. SHERMAN. Because these Iranian planes, they are like 707s from the '80s, the '70s.

Mr. POLLACK. They have no fixed-wing air defenses, fixed-wing aircraft.

Mr. SHERMAN. They have no fixed-wing—

Mr. POLLACK. They could take them down, correct. They do not. They are trying to get them as fast as they can.

Mr. SHERMAN. But there is not a single operational—

Mr. POLLACK. Right.

Mr. SHERMAN [continuing]. Rotary propeller, nothing?

Mr. POLLACK. Rotary they have, but they do not have fighters that could actually shoot down jets.

Mr. SHERMAN. Even the kind of plane that my parents were flying to Europe on in the '50s.

Mr. POLLACK. a helicopter would have a hard time getting—

Mr. SHERMAN. When you say, "rotary," you mean yes, okay. You don't mean propeller. You mean helicopter.

Mr. POLLACK. I mean helicopter.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes. Helicopter probably doesn't shoot down a jet. I will just point out that they could, of course, invite the United States to patrol their airspace.

And I don't know if Dr. Knights has a comment.

Mr. KNIGHTS. Just a very quick one, which is that the Iraqis had no problem whatsoever closing their airspace to the Turkish Energy Minister just over a week ago. So it is really about political will, not whether they can shoot something down.

Mr. SHERMAN. Where was the Turkish Energy Minister going?

Mr. KNIGHTS. He was flying into the Kurdish north of Iraq to attend the oil conference.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman from California.

I want to follow up on some of your comments earlier. When I was in Iraq a couple of years, year and a half ago, prime minister—I asked him the question about the oil and how about paying for some of this nation building, military, all the things America is doing. And he literally was very vocal about Iraq would not pay the United States a dime for helping them liberate their country and rebuild their country. So I think that might still be his position.

I would like to look at this a little bit bigger. No question about al-Qaeda is back in Iraq. Maliki, the government, are they playing both sides? Are they wanting the United States to help them to defeat al-Qaeda, which is on the rise, no question about it, so that we can do their work for them so they can pivot toward Iran and Iran come in and Iraq be a new coalition, so to speak, and the United States is still the bad guy in the neighborhood?

I would like your opinion on that. I fear this possibility. So I would like to know what you experts think about that.

Mr. POLLACK. Mr. Chairman, if I could offer some thoughts on that matter? It is certainly the case that the Iraqi Government would like our help dealing with al-Qaeda. I think that if we offered to take care of al-Qaeda for them, they would be more than glad for that.

It is also the case that Iran wields a great deal of influence in Iraq, largely because we have abdicated our influence in the country and Iran has lots of different ways to do so.

That said, I think it important that in my own experience, both watching Iraq and also my own interactions with Prime Minister Maliki, I do not believe that this is a man who is an eager ally of Iran. In fact, my experience with him is he really dislikes the Iranians. He is very afraid of the Iranians. He is very much an Iraqi nationalist. He would like to separate himself from the Iranians if he could, but since there is nobody really pushing on the other side, he doesn't feel like he has got a whole lot of help.

And I also want to be clear he makes a lot of mistakes himself. He overreacts. He goes after his internal rivals in an undemocratic fashion that has alienated both his internal rivals and their external supporters. And it has left him with little choice but to turn to Iran.

Mr. POE. Anybody else want to weigh in on that with—just briefly, Ms. Lewis?

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, I would agree. I think we should consider the possibility that Maliki's fear of al-Qaeda is driving him closer to Iran as we craft what we might do about it.

Mr. POE. So do you see the scenario that I mentioned as something that we should be concerned about that he is pivoting to Iran, wants us to get rid of al-Qaeda with him and then he is buddy buddy with Iran? Is that something that we should be concerned about, the United States—

Mr. BYMAN. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. POE [continuing]. Or not?

Mr. BYMAN. Excuse me.

Mr. POE. Go ahead, Dr. Byman.

Mr. BYMAN. Mr. Chairman, we should absolutely be concerned about it, but the recognition is what he wants is a high degree of independence and autonomy to do what he wants. And right now Iran is the dominant power in Iraq. And he can't do that. We need to have our own presence there. And that is an economic presence. That is a political presence and a security presence. And then he will try to play us off.

He is a cynical politician. He is ruthless. He is conniving. But right now he has to work with the Iranians because he has no choice. We need to give him some other options in order for this to even be a possibility.

Mr. POE. All right. The United States is at a point here where—we all know where we are as far as U.S. involvement. To defeat al-Qaeda in Iraq and be an influence in Iraq, are we just there to stay? I mean, are we there—is Iraq going to become the 51st state? Are we just going to be there forever?

People I think are concerned, like a lot of Americans, about all the money that has gone to Iraq, all those things. So al-Qaeda is the problem. We are saying we are going to help them. How long is this going to take? Dr. Byman, look into your crystal ball. Help us out with this.

Mr. BYMAN. Sir, I don't think there is any chance that we are going to go in big to Iraq. So the question to me is, are we able to restore some influence? Part of that is through arms sales. Part of that is through renegotiating diplomatic agreements. Part of it is through covert action, intelligence cooperation. We can get something, sir.

Mr. POE. Does Iraq have the money to buy our equipment or do we need to continue just to give it to them?

Mr. BYMAN. Iraq increasingly has the money, but we want them to have our equipment. That is a good thing for us as well as for them.

Mr. POE. All right. Dr. Knights, last comment on this question.

Mr. KNIGHTS. Yes. Iraq is economically not a Bahrain or a Yemen or a Jordan, requiring the same kind of military assistance to buy our stuff, but they are not a Saudi or a UAE yet either. The country is totally wrecked.

Mr. POE. All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair will yield 5 minutes to Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair. I welcome the panel.

The chair has circulated a bar chart showing the upsurge in violence in Iraq. Dr. Byman, to what would you attribute this really quite stunning increase in the number of civilian deaths in Iraq?

Mr. BYMAN. Sir, I would say in the big picture, 2 things. One is a set of rather disastrous mistakes by the Maliki government ranging from very bad counterinsurgency to politically excluding the Sunni community and making them look to al-Qaeda in Iraq as a defender. And externally I would say the Syrian conflict has fueled radicalism throughout the region and put resources into this area in a very dangerous way.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And, Dr. Knights, I saw you and Dr. Pollack shaking your heads and you, Ms. Lewis. Anything you want to add to that?

Mr. KNIGHTS. From my perspective, I think all those points are right: The Iraqi Government policy poor counterinsurgency tactics, the Syrian crisis back to back with this one, and the 4th thing, that they alienated the United States at the precise moment of withdrawal, preventing a really close intimate intelligence relationships but forming. Now we have another chance to start that again after Maliki's visit.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr.—I am sorry if you wanted to comment?

Ms. LEWIS. Well, Congressman, just very quickly to provide the tactical observation that most of those deaths occurred because of al-Qaeda's car bomb campaign, which is actually a very small component of the al-Qaeda broader military organization and can actually be targeted effectively by Iraqi security forces if they could figure out how to do it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right.

Mr. POLLACK. Congressman, just to build on the points by my colleagues earlier, in 2007, the United States helped forge a power-sharing arrangement, a new power-sharing arrangement, among the different communities of Iraq. Unfortunately, since our departure, Prime Minister Maliki but also with some help from his opposition has torn that agreement apart. And that has led to once again a resurgence of fear across Iraq, which has pushed the Sunni community back into the arms of al-Qaeda, in many cases very unwillingly because they remember what it was like in 2006–2007. And so they have gone grudgingly. And that at least opens up the possibility that we could help the Iraqis once again put that power-sharing agreement back together, which I think would go a very long way to dealing with the problems.

Mr. CONNOLLY. That is very interesting because there is the political aspect of this that has real consequences.

Mr. POLLACK. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. But there is also—and I think, Ms. Lewis, you were alluding to it. And I would be interested in comments. What is the—I mean, we have helped create a security force of 800,000 in Iraq. What are we getting for that relationship, that investment? Are they capable of deterring long-term the threat that is posed by al-Qaeda? Dr. Byman?

Mr. BYMAN. Currently sir, I would say no. I would say that, despite their numbers, despite their fire power, they are pursuing a doctrine of, I will say, suppression, rather than counterinsurgency. They are going into villages. And they are often systematically ar-

resting or abusing young males. They are not trying to use intelligence to find out who the bad guys are.

And, to go a little bit further, sir, I would say that this is a problem pushing resources to them right now, which is that they will use them in the wrong way. And we need to have a training program that goes along with any arming program.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Which we need to keep in mind given pending requests by Mr. Maliki on his visit.

Mr. BYMAN. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. One final—I am probably going to get in only 1 more final question. We were talking about Iran, but I think it is really important for an American audience not to conflate Iran with al-Qaeda.

Iran has no love and the Iranian leadership has no love for al-Qaeda. As a matter of fact, they do view them as a terrorist threat. Do they not, Dr. Pollack?

Mr. POLLACK. Absolutely. The Iranians see al-Qaeda and other Salafist groups as very important adversaries. At times, they have made tacit arrangements with them. But, by and large, they fight them very hard all across the region. And I think that they are quite concerned about the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

But what has been interesting is that the Iranians have been among those who have been urging restraint on various Iraqi groups because they are afraid that this resurgence in violence will push Iraq into civil war, something that they don't want to see either. It is one of these strange areas where our interests and Iran's are at least in confluence.

Mr. CONNOLLY. If the chair would allow the rest of the panel just to comment on that, I would appreciate it.

Mr. POE. You may.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair.

Mr. KNIGHTS. I think there has been quite a lot of tactical cooperation between the Iranians over the years but ultimately agree with Dr. Pollack that they are not aligned strategically.

Mr. BYMAN. Sir, there is a tremendous anger, both among Bohra Shia populations, Bohra Sunni populations, toward each other. And the sectarianism of the civil war, the horrific images that are circulated on social media have made it hard for open and closed cooperation and, in fact, have pushed both sides farther apart.

We saw last month the bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Lebanon. And it is still a bit murky who was behind it, but the leading suspects seem to be Sunni jihadists of the sort linked to al-Qaeda. This is a very bad relationship, even though there is tactical cooperation.

Mr. POE. Ms. Lewis?

Ms. LEWIS. Congressman, I would just add that I do agree that al-Qaeda does represent a huge threat to Iran; in fact, a more direct and immediately proximate one than perhaps we may interpret, and that that should be an opportunity that we consider among our levers and relationships with all the countries in the region.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the panel. And I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. POE. The question was asked earlier about assistance to Iraq. Staff has provided these figures for the panel and members: 2011, \$1.2 billion; 2012, \$300 million; 2013, \$142 million.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Kinzinger from Illinois,——

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Mr.——

Mr. POE [continuing]. Iraqi veteran.

Mr. KINZINGER. Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, again, to the panel, thank you for being here. This is—I forget who mentioned it earlier, but it is tragic in my mind that Iraq is not discussed more here. I am not going to blame anybody for that because I don't think it is anybody's fault. I think it is just a matter of—you know, it is not in people's consciousness. I think, frankly, Afghanistan is not discussed enough. I think there are too many people that think that we still have 100,000 troops in Afghanistan that are taking the fight to the Taliban and unaware of the fact that the Afghan Government has actually begun to really stand up.

I want to say—I mentioned this in my opening statement how sad it is. I remember I was in Iraq in 2008, after the surge had begun. And, you know, you still saw. I flew ISR. So I still saw that people were stuck in their homes. They weren't out walking around.

And then when I went in 2009, a striking thing happened. We saw kids out playing soccer. We saw people visiting stores. And there was really a feeling that we had turned the corner in Iraq. And it was a good feeling.

And, again, my concern has been that we took that potential victory and we turned it into a complete failure because we decided that it wasn't worth the political points and the political cost. I believe a promise was made in an election to get out of Iraq. And that meant we are going to get out and not push hard for a status of forces agreement.

I agree with the chairman in his concern about nation building. I do want to point out, however, though, thousands of Americans gave their lives on behalf of the Iraqi people. Lots of money was given on behalf of the Iraqi people. And at the end of the day, I would love to see a successful conclusion in Iraq so in 10 years, we can look back and say, "Maybe we went through a difficult period here, but good things happened in the very end."

Ms. Lewis, you have produced some outstanding reports regarding this topic. You have been very helpful and insightful in regards to the current status of al-Qaeda in Iraq and how the violence has reached levels that we haven't seen since 2008. In light of that fact that AQI has established and named specific campaigns, carried out a high amount of targeted VBIED attacks, do you believe that al-Qaeda, AQI, is more organized, better trained, and equipped than ever before?

Ms. LEWIS. Congressman, I think they are tremendously well-organized, as we have mentioned, largely because of prison breaks that have been successful. There are al-Qaeda veterans in the field now. And I do think, particularly since September of last year, there is a tremendous amount of military wherewithal that is applied to their operations. I think they are leveraging old weapons systems that they used before and that they are maximizing the ef-



fects of these car bombs specifically and that if that capability were to go away, they would be overall much weaker.

Mr. KINZINGER. Yes. And we don't have the threat of American troops. And so it gives them kind of a freedom to breathe and operate and plan and coordinate.

Let me ask the panel. Then I will yield back when I am done asking the panel. We will start with you, Dr. Pollack. Can you explain to the American people, explain to us how the threat of al-Qaeda in Iraq actually is a threat to the American homeland?

Mr. POLLACK. Sure. I will start by saying that there is obviously a direct threat in that al-Qaeda has attacked the American homeland. It is one of the very few groups or nations that has been able to do so successfully. What we have learned from Afghanistan is that if we allow them to recruit and build up a base, they will bring the war to us if and where they can.

Beyond that, though, we should also keep in mind another point that you were getting at, Congressman, which is they were trying very hard to create a civil war in Iraq. That is their goal. They want a civil war in Iraq. If they create a civil war in Iraq, it is likely to affect Iraq's oil exports. Iraq is now the second largest producer in OPEC. Much of the expectation of future production in the world is going to come from Iraq. That will hurt oil prices globally. And that will affect the American economy.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you.

I will just ask Dr. Knights and Dr. Byman if you don't mind answering that briefly: The threat to the homeland.

Mr. KNIGHTS. So just a brief one. We saw with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen that once an al-Qaeda franchise gets to a certain level of ambition and size, sometimes it turns toward homeland attacks against the U.S. There is a lot of rivalry between al-Qaeda and Iraq and rival groups in Syria like Jabhat al-Nusra. If you want to raise your profile and be the clear leader, one way to do that is to attack the U.S. homeland.

Mr. KINZINGER. Dr. Byman?

Mr. BYMAN. I would agree with that and simply add this is an organization that poses not only a threat to the homeland but to U.S. interests more broadly. And that includes interests in Iraq but includes interests in the region. A number of the states are close U.S. allies. And it is an enemy of all of them.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you.

And, just in my brief 10 seconds left, I just want to say to folks that are watching this hearing, that is the importance of what we are talking about. This isn't just about wanting to say we won in Iraq. This is about protecting the homeland, protecting America, and looking back in 10 or 20 years without regrets and not looking back and saying that we had an opportunity and we completely failed.

So thank you for being here. Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman for his excellent questions. The Chair will recognize the gentleman, Mr. Schneider, from Illinois for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, again, thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Dr. Pollack, you talked about the goal of al-Qaeda in Iraq, AQI, being a civil war in Iraq. We have seen this great increase in the numbers of civilian deaths. And I have spoken with some of the representatives from Iraq. That has not yet turned to sectarian violence. With all of the attacks, you haven't seen neighbors attacking neighbors.

What do you see—and I will open it to the whole panel. What do you see as the reasons why the sectarian violence this time around hasn't gone up commensurate with the terrorism? And what are the things we should be watching for to be prepared if it does start to turn?

Mr. POLLACK. Congressman, I think this is an absolutely critical question because you are right. These levels of violence could easily have pushed the country into civil war already.

I would identify 3 critical forces of restraint in Iraq, all of which have been important but none of which may be permanent, the first of which I have already mentioned is the Iranians. For their own reasons, they don't want a civil war in Iraq. They have got a civil war in Syria that is consuming them enough. They don't want a second one, especially one closer to home.

A second one is the Kurds. At different points in time, the Kurds have played a more constructive or less constructive role. For now and for the past year or so, what we have seen is a Kurdish decision that creating problems in Iraq is problematic for them. And they have actually taken a number of important steps to help mollify the violence and to reach out to the government, which has been very important.

And then the last one is that both sides, Sunni and Shia, are concerned that if there is a future civil war, they may not win. And that is another calculation, I think a critical calculation, which is true at this moment, but it may not last. The Sunnis believe that they have the help from the wider Sunni world, but they don't know what that means.

And for the Shia, they know they have got the numbers in Iraq, but the Iraqi security forces have performed fairly badly in recent months. I think there is great concern on the part of the government about what would happen and how well they would perform if there were a larger war.

Mr. POE. Ms. Lewis, do you want to?

Ms. LEWIS. Congressman, 2 things I would add quickly are that among the car bombs I tracked this past year, 19 of them targeted Shia mosques and that this can have a very incendiary effect.

As well, the majority of those car bombs targeted Shia neighborhoods in Baghdad repeatedly and aggressively. And at some point, I am concerned that someone is going to step up to defend those neighborhoods. And this is the space that we are talking about that to me is actually very small between potential energy for sectarian violence and that possibly becoming virulent.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Dr. Knights?

Mr. KNIGHTS. We do see the beginnings of sectarian retaliation at very low levels, corpses with letters attached to them explaining exactly why they were killed in retaliation, but we are still down around 1,400 incidents a month, instead of the 6,000 we saw dur-

ing the height of the civil war. That is because most people have not got involved again back into the fighting.

I put it down to 2 more local reasons: Conflict fatigue. People know what a civil war looks like, and they are not sure they would win it. Everyone knows they lose from it. And, secondly, the Shia now know that the Iraqi security forces retaliate on their behalf. So there is a large Shiite militia out there attacking Sunnis, and it is called the security forces.

Mr. BYMAN. Sir, very briefly, I believe we are in a situation akin to Syria in early 2012, where we are seeing violence and we are seeing it growing and we are seeing a sectarian hue again. And my concern is that if you were to have hearings a year from now, a year and a half from now, we would be talking about the second sectarian civil war raging in the Middle East.

I think all the trend lines are negative. And the points that my colleagues have raised about what is holding us in check I think are well-taken, but I am concerned that the direction is very much the wrong way.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. The fact that this has been growing for so long and that it hasn't gone to sectarian violence, however, I think gives us some space to work in. Dr. Pollack, how do we use that space to work to make sure that it doesn't degrade into another conflict, like what we are seeing in Syria?

Mr. POLLACK. Yes. Another great question. And here I would focus, Congressman, on these impending elections, which are going to be very important for Iraq, which could either push Iraq conceivably into civil war or help pull it back. And there I think the U.S. has an important role. First, focus on the process. One of the great mistakes that we made in 2010 was that even though we were the guarantors and the builders of Iraqi democracy, we didn't enforce the rules of the road. And things came off the tracks. And Iraq went in a bad direction.

A second one, conditionality, which we have been talking about, we need to make clear to our—to the Iraqis that our aid is ultimately predicated on their good behavior following the rules and then, finally, a willingness to name and shame. The United States carries a great weight in Iraq and in the region. And simply standing up and saying that so and so is behaving in a way that subverts Iraqi democracy is a very powerful tool.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. And, with that, I am going to have to give you the last word as votes have been called and we have to go. Thank you. And I yield back.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman.

As the gentleman mentioned, we are in the middle of some votes. That is one of the things that we are supposed to do as Members of Congress, to let our voice be known. And so we would be in recess until 2:45. I thank you, all 4 of you, for your patience. We will start back at 2:45.

[Recess.]

Mr. POE. The committee will come back to order. There are some more members come their way. I am going to take the opportunity to ask some more questions. And I appreciate your diligence in being here and coming back.

How many al Qaeda fighters are there in Iraq? Anybody that knows. Ms. Lewis?

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, I don't from my own research. I have heard estimates of 3,000 to 4,000 fighters that I believe is oriented on Iraq that I don't have any reason to refute. The attacks that I have seen could be achieved by a force of that size.

Mr. POE. Anybody disagree with that? Dr. Knights?

Mr. KNIGHTS. No disagreement, but membership of al Qaeda in Iraq is kind of like an onion, so many layers. Of that 3,000 to 4,000, that probably includes everyone including the guys who steal the cars, the guys who weld them together, and all the rest of that. I think the core of card carriers could be substantially smaller than that. It could be in the high hundreds.

Mr. POE. Where do they get their money?

Mr. KNIGHTS. Okay. So starting—

Mr. POE. Dr. Knights?

Mr. KNIGHTS. A lot of it is organized crime. When we ripped this organization to pieces back in the 2005 to 2009 timeframe, it started the process of disintegrating into organized crime networks, and it became self-funding. As Iraq became a sordid place to have a jihad, not very inspiring.

It ceased to get foreign funding, and they started to turn to their own means of raising money and that has allowed them to—and they have remained running those networks. We are talking about real estate, extorting mobile phone companies, running trucking companies, exporting oil.

Mr. POE. Ms. Lewis.

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, I agree entirely. I would add that there are a few characteristics of their funding that describe this further, specifically that it is stable. They have a very stable supply chain. They are able to control the rate of their attacks. They aren't chasing money. They have a good system for this.

What I would also add over in Syria is that it appears that they are fighting for control of the border checkpoints on Syria's northern border with Turkey, and I think they are also trying to seize opportunities for resources that are coming into the country.

Mr. POE. Dr. Byman.

Mr. BYMAN. I think this is absolutely true. What I would add is I think their funding sources are changing. We are seeing hundreds of millions of dollars—or billions depending on your estimate—pouring into Syria, and they are able to extract a percentage of that because some of it goes through Iraq. And some of that is money, but a lot of it is weapons or in-kind transfers, and they are able to siphon that off.

Mr. POE. The bombings of mosques, for example, are they—do they discriminate against Shia and Sunni? And how does the—I think, Ms. Lewis, you may have mentioned this. How does the public view the security force's reaction to whether it is a Sunni or a Shia mosque, for example, that is bombed?

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, they are primarily targeting Shia mosques. I think I have seen a couple of occasions where we had explosive attacks against joint Sunni/Shia prayer sessions in Diyala in order to deter that conciliatory behavior. They are specifically

trying to make the Shia feel like they have to defend themselves and that the state is not succeeding in this.

I would actually defer to the expertise that has already been had at the panel about the primary fact that that has not actually manifested as much as perhaps it might have in former years. But ultimately it does make the Iraqi security forces look like they can't do it.

Mr. POE. Dr. Pollack.

Mr. POLLACK. Mr. Chairman, I would simply add that in terms of public reaction, among the Shia, by and large, there is a great deal of pressure on Prime Minister Maliki to crack down even harder. And, you know, we have seen large-scale operations into Anbar, into Salahadin, into Diyala, to try to go after these guys. We look at them and see them as rather indiscriminate, but there are a lot of Shia Iraqis who would like to see an even greater use of force.

Mr. POE. Let us focus back on what we need to be doing. What is our position? What are we looking for in the future? Where do we need to push? Where does Congress need to push, the United States need to push? What is in our national security interest going forward?

Now, we know the problem. We know it is increasing, al Qaeda is increasing in Iraq. How about some advice here? I want to go down the row. You are the experts, so we want to hear what you have to say. Dr. Pollack.

Mr. POLLACK. Mr. Chairman, certainly the United States has influenced, and part of what we need to do is actually employ that influence. We have been reticent to do so. The administration has not been as engaged either with Iraq or with the Middle East, as I would argue that they ought to be, as in the U.S. interest.

But I will go beyond that and say something that is probably quite controversial in these halls, which is that the United States needs to manufacture more influence in Iraq, and that may actually require some commitment of additional resources. I would actually argue that we can do a lot more in terms of technical assistance, in terms of simply advising the Iraqis.

I think that there is a certain amount that we can do that the Iraqis can pay for themselves. In fact, quite a bit that the Iraqis can pay for themselves. And I am reminded of the relationship that we had with the Saudis in the 1970s and '80s where together, using Saudi money and American expertise, we built the oil ports of Yanbu and Jubail. We built their telecommunications network. We built their road network.

But at the moment, that is a little bit off into the future. And, again, I think even setting that up, using the strategic framework agreement between the United States and Iraq, to begin to set that up, would be very helpful, because Iraqis will know it is coming and they are looking for it.

But right now they have got some needs. And as Dr. Knights was pointing out earlier, the Iraqis are mostly exhausting the resources that they have available very quickly. Obviously, if there is corruption in their system, you might be able to extract more.

But this actually is a moment when some additional assistance from the United States, additional resources from the United

States, I think could go a very long way in terms of saying to the Iraq people, "We have not abandoned you. We are still interested in Iraq. We have our interests there. We are willing to commit resources, but they are going to be committed to what we need to see happen."

Mr. POE. Ms. Lewis. We will go right down the row.

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, I do think that resources are a valid expectation for what would need to be part of—

Mr. POE. Just get a little closer to the microphone, if you would.

Ms. LEWIS. Yes, of course, Mr. Chairman. The primary deficiency that I see is how they are applying the resources that they have. I do not see that their military campaign to counter al Qaeda is a very good one. I think one of our greatest potential levers is expertise in fighting al Qaeda, and I think that we should make this very much about what an effective campaign to counter al Qaeda in Iraq looks like, and fashion that into our options.

Mr. POE. Dr. Knights.

Mr. KNIGHTS. That is absolutely right. No one is better at fighting al Qaeda in Iraq than the U.S. military. Even now the institutional memory is still there and it is still fresh. One of the dirty little secrets of operating in Iraq is that they are not very good at doing counterinsurgency in their own country.

We always thought back in 2003 we made all of these mistakes because we are new to the country and that the Iraqis knew it much better. In fact, they are worse than we are and they have no excuse. And they are worse than we are willfully. They understand the country. They just don't want to do population-focused counterinsurgency.

If they are willing to take our advice, we are able to bring a much more thoughtful approach to counterinsurgency/ counterterrorism in Iraq than they would. So I think all of the professional military education support we can provide to Iraq, IMET funding, OSCI, the security corporation command in Iraq, Section 1206 funding.

Any of these things would be pretty well spent. They are quite small amounts of money often, and I think they can maintain a thoughtful—they can build a thoughtful approach in the Iraqi security forces toward counterinsurgency. They need to—we need to be back in there proffering our advice again.

Mr. POE. Dr. Byman.

Mr. BYMAN. Mr. Chairman, rather than repeat what my colleagues have said, let me just add two points. My view is that part of Congress' role is to highlight these issues, to force the administration to engage at a higher level. I often agree with specific things the administration is doing, but it is being done at the ambassadorial level, it is being done at the deputy assistant level, it is being done by individuals who are very well meaning but in Iraqi terms don't have the clout of, say, the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense.

And as a result, they believe I think correctly that they don't have to pay attention because the United States doesn't really care.

And as my colleagues have said, a lot of the problem is not resources; it is how they use the resources. We have elections coming up, and there will be a question of, are these fair elections? There

is a question of, are the security services defending Iraqis, or are they the arm of the Shia community? And the administration needs to push harder on all of these issues, and I think Congress' role is to highlight them so the administration really has to address them one way or another.

Mr. POE. And the last question has to do, once again, with Iran. I know you all are experts on al Qaeda. But should we be concerned of a situation in Iraq that is similar to the one in Syria, or you result in civil war, you have got two sides fighting each other, and you have the Sunnis and the Shias fighting, and then you have outside countries coming in and taking sides, and we know Syria is—it is bad on the citizens. They are the ones who lose, the people who live there.

Is that a scenario that could play out, or is that not? Just kind of looking into the future if civil war erupts because of al Qaeda's presence and the things that you all have talked about. Dr. Pollack. We will go down the row, and it will be the last question.

Mr. POLLACK. Mr. Chairman, I think that is a very important concern. It is one of the great issues of civil wars. Dr. Byman and I did a study of civil wars back in 2006 when we were looking at Iraq and civil war, and that was one of the great conclusions of our work was that this was a very real risk, that an all-out civil war would almost certainly suck in all of the neighbors into the fighting itself.

Iran, because of its position, was relatively able to dominate over much of Iraq. And if Iraq falls back into civil war, which is a very real possibility at this point in time, looking at some point into the future, I think that that scenario is one that we absolutely have to be concerned about.

I will simply add, Mr. Chairman, that we have to be equally concerned about our allies getting sucked into an Iraqi civil war. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, even Turkey—these are not countries whose economies and militaries are ready to withstand the stresses of a civil war. These are not countries whose political systems can withstand that either.

Mr. POE. Thank you. Ms. Lewis.

Ms. LEWIS. Mr. Chairman, I agree. I think the primary thing I would highlight is that that is exactly what al Qaeda is trying to do and why they are stoking sectarian violence—that would set them most up for success in trying to establish an Islamic Emirate and that they will try to precipitate that end by every way that they can think of.

Mr. POE. Dr. Knights.

Mr. KNIGHTS. Back in 2006/2007 when we had civil war-like conditions in Iraq, I would argue that—and actually they did not really suck in the neighbors. But this time, if we went back into civil war in Iraq, it would because things have changed since then. The regional context is different. We have the Sunni/Shia conflict, much more heightened now. We have a number of Sunni states, like the Saudis, the Emiratis, the Qataris, who have been actively involving themselves in regional conflicts—Libya, Syria, Yemen, et cetera—and the U.S. is out. So this time it has got much more potential to drag in third parties than it did back in '06/'07.

Mr. POE. Last word, Dr. Byman.

Mr. BYMAN. I am not sure I am worthy of that, Mr. Chairman. But all I would say is that Iran feels that it has lost ground because of the Syria conflict, that it had a very strong stable ally in Syria, and now the situation is fraught and its ally might fall.

From Iran's point of view, losing Iraq as well would be a disaster, and I think they are prepared to go very hard and very strong, should the situation become quite negative in Iraq itself.

Mr. POE. Well, I want to thank all 4 of you. The testimony has been excellent, including your prepared statements.

And so the subcommittee is adjourned, and thank you once again for your help.

[Whereupon, at 3:05 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## A P P E N D I X

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade**  
**Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**  
**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held jointly by the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)).

**DATE:** Thursday, December 12, 2013

**TIME:** 1:00 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** The Resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq

**WITNESSES:** Kenneth M. Pollack, Ph.D.  
Senior Fellow  
Saban Center for Middle East Policy  
The Brookings Institution


Ms. Jessica D. Lewis  
Research Director  
Institute for the Study of War

Michael Knights, Ph.D.  
Lafer Fellow  
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Daniel L. Byman, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Security Studies Program  
Georgetown University

**By Direction of the Chairman**

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# COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Thursday Date 12/12/13 Room 2172

Starting Time 1:00 p.m. Ending Time 3:05 p.m.

Recesses 1 (2:14 to 2:45) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Poe and Chairman Ros-Lehtinen*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

*The Resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*Reps. Poe, Ros-Lehtinen, Connolly, Kinzinger, Yoho, Schneider, Sherman, Vargas, Cotton*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED 3:05 p.m.

  
Subcommittee Staff Director