

Iraqi Security Forces after U.S. Troop Withdrawal: An Iraqi Perspective

by Najim Abed Al-Jabouri

Key Points

As U.S. Armed Forces draw down in Iraq, there is increasing concern about the possibility of resurgent ethnic and sectarian tensions. Many Iraqis believe that the United States may be making a grave mistake by not fully using its remaining leverage to insulate the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) from the political influence of the incumbent Iraqi sectarian political parties. U.S. efforts to rebuild the ISF have focused on much needed training and equipment, but have neglected the greatest challenge facing the forces' ability to maintain security upon U.S. withdrawal: an ISF politicized by ethno-sectarian parties. These ties pose the largest obstacle to the ISF in its quest to become genuinely professional and truly national in character.

U.S. leaders may not realize that by not doing more to ensure that incumbent parties stay away from influencing ISF behavior, the United States risks training and arming security forces that will be the instrument for provoking, rather than preventing, future ethno-sectarian conflict. In the end, supporting and strengthening the national character of the ISF is the best hope for a stable and integrated Iraq.

U.S. Assessments

Recent U.S. assessments of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have shown a slow but constant improvement in overall performance and combat capability, but have

noted the continuing destructive effect of political influence on the forces. Major challenges remain, including corruption, weak rule of law, overlap in responsibilities, sectarianism, logistical deficiencies, and the lack of professionalism. Despite the overall improvement in the Iraqi forces, as recently as March 2009 the Department of Defense (DOD) reported that they are *incapable* of operating independently.¹

This report highlights a number of challenges similar to those cited 2 years ago by General James Jones, the current National Security Advisor, when he oversaw an independent commission examining the ISF. Its findings suggested the main challenge to the ISF was political party meddling in its responsibilities, especially in the Ministry of Interior. This challenge of political interference was also mentioned by General Raymond Odierno in his latest comments on the U.S. withdrawal from Iraqi cities. He stated that his biggest fear:

has to do with the potential political drivers of instability that remain. We still have much work to do in terms of Arab-Kurd relations. We still have reconciliation to go through. We've made some good steps towards reconciliation, but they have to continue to address the area of reconciliation in Iraq. So I think it's these political issues that will be the most important as we move towards the national elections. And I think these could cause some insta-

bility, and that's what I worry about. What I hope is these will be solved through politics and diplomatic measures and not through violence.²

The DOD report makes a similar comment, concluding that in the last 2 years there has been much improvement in combat capability and training in the ISF, but that "national reconciliation and political accommodation continue to be hindered by the pursuit of ethno-sectarian agendas and disagreements over the distribution of power and resources at all levels."³ The Jones report suggests that this political problem is an issue that only Iraqis can ultimately resolve.⁴ The success of the provincial elections in January 2009 gave U.S. policymakers hope that Iraqis would now choose political means to settle their differences, rather than resorting to violence. The United States also assessed that since security for the elections was maintained by the ISF independently, they are now nationalistic enough to operate independently across the country. However, there is danger in assuming that these recent successes characterize a fundamental change in the trajectory of Iraqi political and security force behavior. The United States fails to notice that it is mainly the incumbent ethno-sectarian political parties who share U.S. optimism in the ISF ability to maintain security and in an Iraqi resolve to use the political

process to resolve differences rather than violence. The incumbent ethno-sectarian parties share this optimism because they are now in the position to gain the most from a decrease of U.S. involvement in Iraq.

Iraqi Assessments

Independent Iraqi assessments of the future of the ISF mirror the three U.S. assessments. At the same time, however, Iraqis tend to see the ramifications of the assessments differently from U.S. conventional wisdom. Both agree there are generally three main challenges to ISF development: first, political party meddling in ISF responsibilities; second, the lack of professionalism and training; and third, logistics and organization. The United States appears to be adequately addressing the second and third challenges, but some Iraqis do not think it is doing enough to address the first and arguably most important challenge: halting political party meddling in ISF duties. Iraqi assessments suggest that without separating the ISF from the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties, the ISF will be a tool for creating instability in the country.

Iraqis realize that the reasons and justifications for a civil war are still at play in Iraq. When the country lacks security, it is easy for political parties to manipulate sectarian and ethnic differences in a way that divides Iraqis. If high-profile mass murder attacks and assassinations continue, the ISF will be confronted with a dilemma: if they are not able to provide security for the people, then the people will seek alternative means of protection. During these times of uncertainty, there are two ways in which the ethno-sectarian parties seize the initiative: first, by allowing partisan militias to operate in their areas of influence; and second, by allowing security to overshadow their deficiencies in governance and public services. The first method is discriminatory protection and deepens feelings of distrust in the mixed areas of Iraq. As communities fall in on themselves to improve

security, they become more susceptible to terrorist groups' offers of protection and retribution attacks, and ultimately a return of large scale communal violence. Chaos associated with a return of communal violence increases the likelihood of corruption and reverses improvements in the delivery of public services. The violence encourages incumbent ethno-sectarian parties to husband resources and gain power relative to other parties, which in turn would accelerate the downward spiral of ethnic and sectarian violence.

Another U.S. misperception gaining acceptance on Capitol Hill—and even with the Defense Department—is that current ethno-sectarian divisions with the ISF have

Iraqi assessments suggest that without separating the ISF from the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties, the ISF will be a tool for creating instability in the country

helped with stability in Iraq, and are therefore a positive short-term development in light of a pending U.S. withdrawal. However, it is important for the United States to understand that Iraq does not have three or four homogeneous regions, but rather is a country saturated with socially mixed and integrated urban areas. Because of the memories of Iraqis, sectarian and ethnic differences are easily exploited to start conflict where strong national security forces are not present. For example, the issue of Kirkuk and the areas mixed with Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen could lead to an ethnic war; a high-profile attack on a Shia or Sunni religious site could restart a sectarian war at any moment. Iraq's main provinces are "crazy quilts" of ethno-sectarian cohabitation (that is, in Baghdad, Diyala, Basra, Ninevah, Ta'mim [Kirkuk],

Salahadeen, and Hilla). The ethno-sectarian parties with political interests in these respective areas seek greater influence over the ISF than their competitors, forcing the ISF, in both the Iraqi police and Iraqi army, to align their loyalty to the party that sponsors them. Consequently, during times of ethnic and sectarian tension, the ISF do not behave as national forces, but rather as militias loyal to their paymasters. This is a recipe for disaster. The first priority for the ISF must be professionalism based on loyalty to the state, not to the party.

The ISF track record since 2003 has not been good in this respect. The forces have been partially responsible for Iraqi suffering because a portion of them were the means for ethnic and sectarian killing. These factions of the ISF, especially the infamous death squads that worked within the Ministry of Interior—responsible for the Iraqi police—were one of the main causes for the migration of millions of Iraqis inside and outside of the country. The ISF behaved in this way because of its ties to political parties, and as long as these political parties retain influence, the risk of similar behavior still exists. The ISF are so deeply connected to political parties that even Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who is the commander in chief of the armed forces, has had to form his own personal security forces that are not connected to the Ministries of Interior or Defense because of the fear of political party influence over those ministries. As a response to what the prime minister has done to create his own security forces, the political parties accuse him of building a new dictatorship in Iraq.

U.S. Assessment Falls Short

What the United States fails to realize is that the ISF itself is the battleground in the larger communal struggle for power and survival. Middle Eastern concepts of civil-military relations are fundamentally different than Western ones. Western militaries have developed a culture of political control over armed forces. While this may have been a tool for the development of Western democracies, this is not the established culture in

Major General (Ret.) Najim Abed Al-Jabouri was an officer in the former Iraqi Air Defense. He was also Police Chief and later Mayor of Tel Afar, Ninevah, from 2005–2008. General Najim is now a Senior Fellow in the Near East South Asia Center at the National Defense University and is working with the Institute for National Strategic Studies.

either Iraq or the greater Middle East. In Iraq, there is a culture of “he who owns the security forces, owns the politics.” When the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties took over responsibility of the government after 2003, their first priority was to fill positions of ISF leadership with people who would be loyal to their party. Since these political parties were sectarian in nature, the ISF, and in particular the Iraqi police—political parties have not been able to influence the Iraqi army as much as the police because U.S. forces have been more involved in training the army—were heavily infiltrated by sectarian and ethnic militias loyal to the political parties that hired them.

In 2006–2007, as Iraq suffered through a grueling sectarian conflict, the different political parties each controlled factions of the Ministry of Interior, and used them to create competing sectarian militias that were all approved as official ISF. Recruits to both the police and army were hired or fired depending on loyalty to a political party, or whether they were seen as a threat to the party’s interests. For example, the volunteers of the Anbar Awakening, a Sunni tribal uprising against al Qaeda, were accepted by the ministry from the beginning as official recruits and received salaries from it, yet they were heavily influenced by the rising Sunni Awakening political movement. The U.S. forces, in an effort to expand the influence of the Awakening, started the Sons of Iraq program, in which it usually paid Sunni tribesmen in al Qaeda–infested areas to work as paramilitaries, hoping that someday they would be integrated into the Ministry of Interior.⁵ The ethno-sectarian parties in the government were more favorable to integrating the Anbar Awakening fighters into the ministry because they were from a homogeneous Sunni province that was a former al Qaeda sanctuary. Integrating these fighters was not a political threat to these parties, and these Anbari fighters were seen as reducing the threat of al Qaeda in Iraq. However, the Sons of Iraq were later employed by the United States in mixed areas such as Salahedein, south Baghdad, Diyala, and west Baghdad neighborhoods where the Iraqi police and army units were mainly Shia. The

Sunni paramilitary fighters being paid by the United States in these areas were not as interested in reconciling with the Iraqi government as the Anbar Awakening leaders were, and they posed a political threat to the Shia parties in their areas. As a result, the Ministry of Interior has been reluctant to integrate them into the ISF.

what the United States fails to realize is that the ISF itself is the battleground in the larger communal struggle for power and survival

Thus, the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties, which the United States will strengthen by not doing more to decrease their influence over the ISF, are the main challenge to ISF development. The state security institutions have been built upon a foundation of shifting loyalties that will likely collapse when struck by the earthquake of ethnic and sectarian attacks. Iraq’s best hope for creating a long-term stable democracy will come from an independent national security force that is controlled by the state, and not by political parties competing to control the state.

Next Steps

Iraqi leaders can take a variety of steps to further insulate tomorrow’s ISF from potential cleavages across ethnic and sectarian lines. Here are six possible suggestions for action.

1. Redouble efforts at national reconciliation. It is almost impossible for the incumbent ethno-sectarian political parties to reach an agreement on how to achieve true national reconciliation. But this is to be expected; it would be similar to asking U.S. political parties to reconcile on the issues of abortion or gay marriage. However, there is a growing consensus in Iraq that true national reconciliation is fundamental to stability and that the ethno-sectarian political parties are the main

obstacle to achieving that end. For an idealist, the best means to start national reconciliation may be free and fair elections this coming year, when the Iraqi people will be able to choose platforms that make national reconciliation a genuine priority. But realists recognize that reconciliation would weaken the positions of some of the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties, which will do what they can to remain in power in spite of opposition against them. For example, one tenet of national reconciliation is the reintegration of former Ba’athists. While the de-Ba’athification laws were rescinded in early 2008, they have been applied discriminatorily. There are many former high-ranking Ba’athists currently working in the government and in the ISF, but they were given their positions because a leading political party was confident that these individuals would work in the interest of the party. Yet other qualified former Ba’athists and high-ranking officers who have proven their loyalty to the new Iraq, usually Arab Sunni officers, have not been given equal treatment because they are seen as a threat to the ethno-sectarian agenda. Theoretically, if these ethno-sectarian parties are voted out of office in the next elections, these officers will have a better chance to participate in government positions. But one can expect the incumbent parties will do all in their means to prevent this from happening. One of the key ways the parties can do this is through their influence over the ISF and the positioning of ISF commanders.

Another important aspect of true national reconciliation that has been ignored because of the current ethno-sectarian agenda is retirement payments to officers and soldiers in the former Iraqi army. There were nearly 1 million officers and soldiers in the former army, and hundreds of thousands of them rely on retirement pay. Except for those few who were deemed assets to the ethno-sectarian parties and given positions in the new ISF and Iraqi government, for the last 6 years these hundreds of thousands of former officers and soldiers who served in the ISF for over 15 years and earned pension payments have been left without means to support their families. They feel discriminated against. They are convinced that the Iranian-backed sectarian parties at the helm of the parliament block retirement

pay because Iran would consider paying these officers and soldiers who fought in the Iran-Iraq war as a direct insult to Iran. On the other hand, giving them retirement payments would be a significant step toward reconciliation not only because the payments would give much needed financial support to the officers and soldiers who are the main providers of families, but also because it would show that the government chooses national interests over regional pressures.

2. The government of Iraq needs to have a plan to remove corrupt leaders in the ISF and enforce term limits. This is especially difficult with the high-ranking political appointees in the Ministries of Interior and Defense because they are the gatekeepers for the political parties to influence the ISF.

The government must also set and enforce the professional requirements needed for leadership positions. It is well known that many Iraqis have been given ranks and positions that they clearly are not qualified for. There are reports of people who have purchased officer ranks, or have been promoted from the rank of lieutenant to general in a matter of weeks. The Iraqi government needs to fire officers who do not meet the legal requirements and qualifications for their positions.

3. The government must enforce laws that prohibit political parties from intervening in ISF responsibilities and hold accountable those parties that violate this law. To do this, the government can do two main things. First, it needs to protect Iraqi judges, and second, it must allow more media access. Currently, political parties use their positions in government as a means to intimidate judges by indirect threats not to accept or pass judgment on cases that weaken the party's power. Judges who attempt to accept or pass these types of judgments are usually fired or hunted by killers. The government can also do more to allow the media to expose the political parties that violate these laws and that intimidate the judges. The government of Iraq is sensitive to media reports. The media play more of a role of checks and balances on the government than does the government party structure of power-sharing. The media can be an effective means of transparency to discourage political

party meddling in the ISF, especially during election season.

4. The Ministry of Defense needs to interchange battalions across Iraqi army (IA) divisions. The majority of these divisions are under the patronage of a political party. For example, the 8th IA division in Kut and Diwana is heavily influenced by the Dawa party; the 4th IA division in Salahadeen is influenced by President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan; the 7th IA division in Anbar is influenced by the Iraqi Awakening Party, and the 5th IA division in Diyala is heavily influenced by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. The political parties are able to maintain influence over the divisions because the commanders and many of the soldiers were hired by the party. Moving battalions from one division to another would weaken sectarian and ethnic susceptibilities and strengthen the loyalty of the army to the state. Some divisions, especially those in the areas disputed by the Kurds, have begun to be mixed because the government recognized that mixing the IA divisions as much as possible in the Kurdish areas would weaken the Kurdish parties' bargaining power with the government over highly sensitive issues such as Kirkuk. Prime Minister al-Maliki—the instigator for mixing the IA divisions in areas under Kurdish influence—has gained rare Arab Sunni and Shia support for mixing these divisions and decreasing the Kurdish parties' influence over the ISF in these areas. The government needs to apply the same principle to other areas where the political parties have influence over the ISF, although doing so would weaken those same parties' ties to the ISF in their areas of interest. Many middle-ranking officers confess that they must be loyal to the incumbent political parties' agenda because not showing that loyalty will cost them not only their jobs, but also their personal security guards. This is a significant disincentive for the military officers to expose the political party meddling in ISF affairs.

Similarly, the Ministry of Interior should make regulations that prohibit the Iraqi police from working near their places of residence. It is generally accepted that the closer a member of the ISF works to his home, the more likely he will violate ISF regulations against corruption, unduly influence local

political interests, and commit sectarian violence.⁶ It is difficult to find police officials able to implement such transfers because of political sensitivities and entrenched interests from those who would lose from such transfers. While I was mayor of Tel Afar in northern Iraq, a unique municipality of Kurds, Turks, Yazidis, Sunni, and Shia Arabs, the majority of the police were Shia Turks. There were mainly Shia Turks in the police because al Qaeda intimidated the Sunni from joining. During one high-profile attack in the Shia area of the town, the majority of the casualties were either relatives of the police or Shia Turks. At this time of high emotions, local troublemakers influenced a portion of the police to seek revenge using their vehicles for sectarian violence. The police succumbed and used their vehicles to attack a Sunni area of the town, killing over 60 people. This tit-for-tat violence deepened the distrust among the different ethnic and sectarian groups in the municipality. Obviously, it would have been far more difficult for the police to commit this criminal act of revenge if they had been

the government of Iraq needs to have a plan to remove corrupt leaders in the ISF and enforce term limits

more mixed with other sects and ethnicities, and if the Iraqi police were not deployed near their homes.

5. Conscription would be an important step toward mixing the IA and making them more professional and nationalist. While it may be difficult to fairly implement conscription when the ISF, in particular the Iraqi police from the Ministry of Interior, should be decreasing its numbers, efforts to reform the ISF in this direction would be helpful. There should be a limited time period, not more than a year, wherein conscripted soldiers should be given the same salary as a first-year enlisted soldier and be assigned to areas not near their places of residence. Many military officers currently in the IA suggest this as a means of nationalizing

the security forces, but the ethno-sectarian parties are strongly against such plans.

6. The government should reduce the size of the Ministry of Interior, whose forces have become oversized, cumbersome, and unmanageable. Many of these forces are actually beyond the ministry's authority, answering to political parties but operating as official forces. An unmanageable ministry facilitates corruption and political party meddling in the local dynamics of the ISF.

Three Ways to Support Reform

There are three principal ways in which the U.S. Government might support a capable and cohesive Iraqi security force in the future: strong and persuasive pressure, transparency, and support.

First, the United States might use its leverage to directly pressure the Iraqi government to implement the reforms mentioned above. This will require a change in tone. Nuanced approaches may not be understood in Iraq. When talking with Iraqi leaders about important reforms, the United States uses a soft rhetoric of "we advise you to" or "we hope you would." Although there is a place for approaches that are sensitive to the concerns of Iraqis, avoiding a direct approach about the importance of reforms may not be one of them. A soft approach simply will be lost on many Iraqi politicians. An example of strong language occurred in late 2006 when Congress announced that it would withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq because the Iraqi government was not making political progress. Because this decision threatened the survival of the Iraqi government, it moved closer to the U.S. position. The United States needs to use its leverage while it still has it. Iraqis believe that Washington still calls the shots in Iraq. If they see the government of Iraq and the ISF working for the ethno-sectarian agenda, then Iraqis understand that this agenda is working for U.S. interests. Improvements in U.S. strategic communication would help the United States both pressure the Iraqi government and communicate effectively to Iraqis.

Another great U.S. asset for leverage is regional allies. For example, the United States

can exert leverage through its strong relations with Arab Gulf countries, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, all of whom finance and support Arab Sunni parties in Iraq. These allies are reluctant to support an Iraqi government that has a strong ethno-sectarian agenda because they fear that they might indirectly support Iranian and Kurdish ambitions. At the same time, the United States has leverage with individual Iraqi politicians who represent these ethno-sectarian groups, such as its relationships with the key Kurdish leader Masoud Barazani, Iranian-backed Shia leader Abdul Azziz Al-Hakim, and many important leaders of Iraqi tribes. The United States needs a strategy that plays to the interests of its regional allies and key Iraqi leaders to put pressure on the Iraqi government to ensure that there is no ethno-sectarian party meddling in the ISF.

Second, the United States should make better use of the media, particularly the U.S.-sponsored al-Hurra, to enhance transparency. Television can be an especially effective way to influence Iraq's political parties. There is ample evidence to suggest that the United States can use the media to help shape Iraqi public opinion and political behavior. For example, a recent report on al-Hurra about how Iraqi politicians failed to turn in their financial reports to the government convinced one high-ranking government official to summon his staff and tell them to turn in the financial statement the following day.⁷ Unfortunately, al-Hurra devotes the majority of its airtime to programs not related to issues important to Iraqis and that have little value in shaping public opinion or political party behavior. Instead of giving more airtime to effective programs on corruption or government mismanagement, al-Hurra often airs programs about Arab and Iraqi artists or soccer teams. These programs might be interesting during a time of stability, but are not as important as the pressing issues concerning Iraq's future.

Finally, the new Iraqi state needs to look beyond the current focus on internal threats and security to include foreign threats and external security. Of course, there is a matter of sequencing and priorities, and the immediate priorities of the ISF are properly centered on internal security. But to maintain internal

security and protect it from external threats, the ISF will need support in logistics, arms, and training for at least the next 5 years. For the ISF to defend itself from foreign threats, it will have to develop a modern and professional air force. The Iraqi air force is currently limited to only a few aircraft for domestic uses. Iraq will need continued U.S. air support and coordination with its air force.

Current budget constraints and domestic security needs keep the government of Iraq from giving external threats more attention. It might take years of training and

Iraqis believe that Washington still calls the shots in Iraq

purchases to develop this vital aspect of national defense. The ISF still lacks a clear military doctrine defining the national enemy or potential enemy. Military doctrine is fundamental to building a national military because it coordinates training and acquisitions. The United States could support Iraq with conferences that discuss and shape the future military culture of the ISF. While this will mainly be an Iraqi affair and will not need a large U.S. footprint, America can help as a coordinator, since it still plays a role of arbiter and maintains effective modes of transportation in Iraq.

The Next 2 Years

Upon withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraqi cities, the ISF will be at a crossroads. In the next 2 years, the ISF can continue either in the direction of divisive ethno-sectarianism or more in the direction of unifying nationalism. There are tradeoffs for both directions, and the Iraqi army and police will develop at different paces because of the different nature of their missions and proximity to political parties.⁸ The direction of ethno-sectarianism provides a temporary balance of power among the disparate incumbent political parties, who will attempt to strengthen their ties to the ISF to continue pursuing their interests. Iran will retain influence over the Shia parties, which will

in turn try to gain more influence over the ISF in their areas;⁹ Kurdish aspirations will retain influence over the Kurdish parties, but the Kurdish parties' influence over the ISF will decrease as the government of Iraq integrates the IA in their areas; and Arab states and Turkey will retain their influence over the Sunni parties. On the other hand, the direction of nationalism provides a long-term balance of power between the competing countries in the Middle East, but will include short-term political risks, as it will be difficult to separate the incumbent ethno-sectarian political parties from their entrenched ties to the ISF.

after all the sacrifices made in Iraq, the United States cannot afford to allow the ISF to go in the direction of ethno-sectarianism

Over the next few months, Iraq will witness an increasing number of attacks. Terrorist organizations, militias, and even military factions of ethno-sectarian political parties will be behind these attacks. The attacks will be conducted in different ways, but each will be gauging ISF fault lines, strengths, and vulnerabilities. The incumbent ethno-sectarian political parties, which do not gain political power from the growing nationalist movement, will benefit the most from these attacks. They will use the attacks to prove to their constituencies that the nationalist movement will not bring security and that the al-Maliki administration has failed. As security again becomes the main priority for Iraqi voters, the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties will delay the politically difficult and sensitive short-term reforms needed to achieve national reconciliation and fight corruption and government mismanagement.

In its oversight capacity, the United States must pay close attention to political party meddling in the ISF and use the leverage discussed above to pressure the government of Iraq to decrease such interference.

Acting passively to counter—or even justifying—ethno-sectarian party meddling in the ISF as a temporary means for a graceful U.S. exit from Iraq risks decreasing the likely success of political nationalism in the upcoming elections. After all the sacrifices made in Iraq, the United States cannot afford to allow the ISF to go in the direction of ethno-sectarianism. The best chance for long-term success in Iraq is steering the ISF toward the direction of loyalty to the state. To do this, the United States will need to prepare a strategy using its political, military, and economic ties with regional allies and Iraqi politicians to keep the incumbent ethno-sectarian parties away from the ISF.

Notes

¹ See Department of Defense (DOD), "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," March 2009, available at <www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf>. The report states, "While making significant gains, the ISF continue to rely on the Coalition for logistics, fire support, close air support, communications, planning assistance, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, particularly in northern Iraq" (v).

² Interview with General Raymond T. Odierno, Fox News, June 28, 2009, as well as his interview the same day on CNN.

³ DOD, iv.

⁴ Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, "Report to Congress," September 2007, 130, available at <www.c-span.org/pdf/jonesreport090607.pdf>.

⁵ It is important to clarify an important distinction that is highly misunderstood by Americans about the Anbar Awakening and the Sons of Iraq program. The Anbar Awakening was not an American counter-insurgency initiative, but the Sons of Iraq program was. The Anbar Awakening was a reaction to the atrocities committed by al Qaeda. Starting in July 2006, U.S. forces in Ramadi, the center of the Anbar

Awakening, facilitated official Iraqi army and police recruitment of men who were encouraged by the Awakening leaders to fight al Qaeda through the ISF. From its beginning, the Anbar Awakening was a political movement that used recruitment into the ISF as a vehicle to counter the destructive insurgent and terrorist elements of the Sunni communities, and then to gain favor with the U.S. forces and Iraqi government as a viable political entity. Success of the Anbar Awakening inspired U.S. forces to attempt expanding its influence in other Sunni areas of Iraq in which al Qaeda was a threat. This U.S. initiative to recruit and pay Sunni fighters became known as the Sons of Iraq program, but was not affiliated with the Anbar Awakening. Many American policymakers and analysts wrongly assume that the Anbar Awakening was an American initiative in which it paid Sunni tribesmen to fight al Qaeda, and then continued as the Sons of Iraq program.

⁶ Letter from Iraqi army brigade commander to author. There are many other officers working on the ground who share this opinion.

⁷ Conversation with a political advisor to Tariq al-Hashimi.

⁸ For example, the Iraqi army has progressed more than the Iraqi police because U.S. forces have focused more on army capacity-building, and more importantly, because U.S. proximity to the army has made it difficult for the political parties to influence the army as much as the police. However, as the United States decreases its proximity to the army, it is expected that the ethno-sectarian parties will try to influence it more than the police because the army constitutes a greater tool for achieving political ends.

⁹ See Gina Chon, "Iran's Hard Line Fuels Iraq Attacks," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2009.

The Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) is a policy research and strategic gaming organization within the National Defense University (NDU) serving the Department of Defense, its components, and interagency partners. The institute provides senior decisionmakers with timely, objective analysis and gaming events and supports NDU educational programs in the areas of international security affairs and defense studies. Through an active outreach program, including conferences and publications, INSS seeks to promote understanding of emerging strategic challenges and policy options.



The Strategic Forum series presents original research by members of NDU as well as other scholars and specialists in national security affairs from this country and abroad. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government. For information on NDU Press, visit the Web site at <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/nduhp>. NDU Press also produces *Joint Force Quarterly* for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the journal can be accessed at www.ndupress.edu.

INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

Eugene B. Rumer
Director of Research

Patrick M. Cronin
Director

David H. Gurney
Director, NDU Press