

Global Security Briefing

The Iraq Crisis (Part II)

ISIL: Catalyst for Anti-Regime Revolt and Paramilitary Coalition

Paul Rogers

23 June, 2014

Following the capture of the northern Iraqi province of Nineveh and its capital Mosul on 10 June by Sunni jihadist group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Iraq continues to slide into crisis as the group advances throughout the country. As the international community weighs in, this update from Paul Rogers provides insight into the current crisis and assesses the feasibility and impact of potential responses.

Paul's first note 'On ISIL Advances and Potential Military Intervention' is available [here](#).

1. In the note of 14 June 2014, the following points were made:
 - a. There was some popular support for ISIL, not least in Mosul, and it had also successfully acquired considerable resources. Control of Baiji would be a priority, and possibly Balad Air Base, but Baghdad was not threatened.
 - b. ISIL paramilitaries probably numbered under 10,000, had support from other groups and would seek to consolidate the unexpectedly rapid gains. Its longer term aim was still one of creating a radical Caliphate and this would be helped if external support could be increased.
 - c. This in turn would be greatly aided by any direct western military intervention by enabling it to propagandise "Islam under attack".
2. In the past nine days, ISIL has indeed consolidated its position, while also making some further territorial gains directed primarily at improving communications.
3. **Paramilitary ISIL operations in Iraq have been hugely aided by Ba'athist, clan and other paramilitary groups.** Towns and cities, once "liberated", are being organised and made to function not by ISIL personnel but largely by secular Ba-athists.
4. **ISIL has thus been a catalyst for a more general anti-regime revolt and may not be fully in charge of captured territory.** In Mosul, it is in a minority, with *JRTN* (aka the *Naqshbandia Army* and possibly still under the command of Izzar Ibrahim al-Douri) particularly significant, and with a Ba'athist as the new mayor.
5. There is a major difference between ISIL and the others in coalition in that few of these espouse ISIL's radical Islamist orientation - there have already been significant clashes in the Mosul area.
6. ISIL may be expected to moderate its extreme Islamist policies when in uneasy coalition with the non-Islamist and secular paramilitaries. There is already evidence of this, but it is a temporary measure and **merely a short-term expedient**.
7. This makes it even more important for ISIL to develop a larger support base in the coming months, especially as it will probably come under increased pressure from Assad in its most secure territory across the border.
8. Gaining more support is actually aided by stronger opposition from Iran, Israel and especially western states. The group's ideal recruiting scenario is being under attack by

- a *Crusader-Zionist-Shi'a* axis. Israel's recent substantial air strikes on nine targets in Syria are a useful first step, even if they were not responding to ISIL provocation.
9. ISIL plans and thinks long-term and seeks to develop a rigid Caliphate over years and decades, accepting short-term reversals as well as unexpected advances. **It will therefore consolidate while seeking to provoke, an apparently contradictory approach that actually makes sense from its perspective.**
 10. Thus, we should expect more in the way of recruitment videos in western languages, and also attempts to provoke direct military intervention, including mass casualty attacks. Such provocation should be resisted but this may prove difficult

Paul Rogers is Global Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group (ORG) and Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford. His 'Monthly Global Security Briefings' are available from our website at www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk, where visitors can sign -up to receive them via our newsletter each month.
