

A Fallujah Veteran's View of the ISIL/ISIS Advance

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Unthinkable Thoughts in the Debate About ISIS in Iraq

In view of the tragic reality that Americans can no longer trust their CFR controlled, privately owned mass (propaganda) media, opinion and analysis from informed sources is welcome. The piece below is well worth the read as it offers new insights into the 'surprise' events transpiring in Iraq as I write. The more credible information the public has at its disposal the better equipped it is to make correct assessments, judgements and decisions (for itself).

This week Iraq emerged from the recesses of American memory and became a hot topic of conversation. Alarming headlines about ISIS's "takeover" of Mosul and their march towards Baghdad have elicited a number of reactions: The most conservative call for direct US military action against ISIS to ensure that the government of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki remains stable in Baghdad. The most liberal lament the ongoing violence and divisions in Iraqi society caused by the US occupation; though they make no attempt distinguish between the violence of ISIS and the violence of the Maliki government.

This range of ideas and perspectives is fascinating, and it says much about American war culture, but mostly for the ideas and perspectives that are omitted from this debate. Entirely absent is the perspective of Iraqis and the issues that are important to them: accountability, independence, and resistance. Moreover, the real complexities of this issue have been lost in a number of the Western media's favorite binaries: terrorism vs. counterterrorism, good vs. evil, and insurgency vs. stability.

If we dare to take Iraqi voices seriously and think outside of the dominant framework presented to us by the mainstream media, a very different picture of the violence in Iraq emerges and a whole new range of options open up for achieving peace and justice.

The Rise of ISIS

One year ago ISIS was concentrated in Syria, with almost no presence in Iraq. During this time, a nonviolent protest movement, which called itself the [Iraqi Spring](#), was in full swing with widespread support in the Sunni provinces and significant support from the Shia provinces as well. This movement set up nonviolent protest camps in many cities throughout Iraq for nearly the entire year of 2013. They articulated a set of demands calling for an end to the marginalization of Sunnis within the new Iraqi democracy, reform of an anti-terrorism law that was being used label political dissent as terrorism, abolition of the death penalty, an end to corruption, and they positioned themselves against federalism and sectarianism too. <

Instead of making concessions to the protestors and defusing their rage, Prime Minister Maliki mocked their demands chose to use military force to attack them on numerous occasions. Over the course of a year, the protestors were assaulted, murdered, and [their leaders were assassinated](#), but they remained true to their adopted tactic of nonviolence. That is, until Prime Minister Maliki sent security forces to clear the protest camps in Fallujah and Ramadi in December of 2013. At that point the protestors lost hope in the tactic of nonviolence and turned to armed resistance instead.

It is important to note that from the beginning it was the tribal militias who took the lead in the fight against the Iraqi government. [ISIS arrived a day later](#) to aid Fallujans in their fight, but also to piggy-back on the success of the tribal fighters in order to promote their own political goals.

A command structure was set up in Fallujah within the first weeks of fighting. It consisted primarily of tribal leaders and former army officials and went by the name of [the General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries](#). This council was led by Sheikh Abdullah Janabi, who also led the the Shura Council of Mujihadeen in Fallujah in 2004. After the 2nd US-led assault on Fallujah, Janabi fled to Syria, but returned to Iraq in 2011. His calls for cooperation between the various militant factions in Fallujah was a [significant unifying factor](#).

Yet despite the glaring differences between the various militant groups in Fallujah, the Iraqi government insists on treating all fighters as terrorists. [A government official said](#) it clearly to Reuters, “if anyone insists on fighting our forces, he will be considered an [ISIS] militant whether he is or not.” The Iraqi government launched an indiscriminate bombing campaign that to date has [killed 443 civilians and has wounded 1657](#) in Fallujah, and has displaced over [50,922 families](#) from Anbar Province as a whole. The Fallujah hospital has been targeted numerous times, and residential neighborhoods have been bombed and shelled daily for six months. Struan Stevenson, President of European Parliament’s Delegation for Relations with Iraq, wrote an open letter calling the Iraqi government’s operation [“genocidal”](#).

Over the course of the months of fighting with the government, ISIS has grown in strength. Their access to funds and weapons has made them an attractive group to young Sunnis who see no future for themselves in Iraq as long as Maliki remains in power. Many of the recruits who have joined ISIS are the same men who were nonviolent protestors one year earlier. Many of them remain opposed to the ideas of federalism and sectarians—ideas which are central to ISIS’s political platform. [What unites them and the hardcore ideologues within ISIS](#) is their desperation to be rid of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, who has left them with no choice but to operate outside of the political system in order to better their lives in Iraq.

Insurgency or Revolution?

This week the media buzzed with the news that ISIS had captured Mosul, the 2nd largest city in Iraq, and was prepared to march towards Baghdad. Two assumptions in these reports went unexamined: that ISIS had been a lone actor and that Mosul had been “captured” rather than liberated.

While the first assumption is a matter of fact, the latter is a matter of perspective. It was noted in the New York Times that ISIS had [collaborated with several local militias in Mosul](#), including Baathist and Islamist groups; although the significance of such a fact went understated. If one further acknowledges that ISIS has cooperated and continues to cooperate with several militias in several Iraqi cities, it begins to appear that ISIS is not a lone actor in Iraq, attempting to capture territory for a future Islamic state. Rather, it appears that [ISIS is just one faction in a larger popular rebellion against the government](#) of Nouri al Maliki.

When 500,000 residents of Mosul fled their city earlier this week, they did not do so out of fear that ISIS would subject them to sharia courts. They did so out of [fear of their government’s reprisal](#). Many have even expressed gratitude towards the fighters who kicked Maliki’s security forces out of their city.

This loose coalition of militias—from the tribal militias in Fallujah, to Baathist militias like Naqshabandi, and Islamist groups like ISIS—have come to embody the hopes and aspirations of

Sunnis in Iraq to one day be free of Maliki's oppression. For them there is no other option, no other future is imaginable, and there is no turning back.

A Path Forward

President Obama has announced that the [US would not intervene in Iraq](#) until the Iraqi government made concessions to the disenfranchised Sunni community within Iraq. However, the US has already increased its "intelligence and surveillance assistance" and has shown no sign of decreasing its supply of arms to the Iraqi government. While publicly criticizing the Maliki government's sectarian policies, the US has been aiding and facilitating this "genocide" against the Sunni population for months.

The impunity of the Maliki government is never questioned in the debate raging within the US. It is simply unimaginable within the limits of this debate that Maliki might be held accountable for the war crimes his regime has committed against his own people. Equally unimaginable is the notion that his regime should fall and that Iraqis should be able to dismantle the constitution and the institutions that the US-led occupation imposed on them.

We must take seriously the legitimacy of Sunni resistance, while at the same time taking seriously the fear that a group like ISIS elicits in Shia Iraqis. These fractured communities within Iraq must decide their own future, without the interference of Washington or Tehran. Most importantly for us, as Americans, we must make an effort to analyze this issue outside of the paradigm of US political thought and try to see this issue through the eyes of those most affected by it. We must respect their ideas and values, their politics and culture, and [their right to determine their own future](#), unimpeded by foreign interference.

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<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2014/06/15>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1186.html>