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# **Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy**

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## Summary

Iraq's sectarian and ethnic divisions reemerged after the 2011 U.S. military withdrawal to fuel a major challenge to Iraq's stability. Many of Iraq's Sunni Arabs appear willing to support even radical Sunni Islamist insurgents if doing so will reduce Shiite political domination. Iraq's Kurds have been separately embroiled in political and territorial disputes with Baghdad, although those differences have been muted as the Kurds and the central government address the threat from the Sunni Islamist extremist group called the Islamic State. Building on successes in Syria and the political rifts in Iraq, Islamic State fighters took control of several cities in Anbar Province in early 2014 and captured Mosul and several other mostly Sunni cities in June 2014.

The Islamic State's gains in Iraq have prompted a U.S. response that includes direct U.S. military action as well as efforts to promote political inclusiveness in Iraq. The political component of U.S. strategy has shown some success in the replacement of former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki with another Prime Minister, Haydar al-Abadi. Although both men are from the Shiite Islamist Da'wa Party, Abadi appears more willing than was Maliki to compromise with Sunni interests, as well as with Iraq's Kurdish minority that runs an autonomous region in northern Iraq.

The military component of U.S. strategy has begun to show some success in slowing Islamic State momentum and reversing a few of its 2014 gains in Iraq. President Obama states that he has ruled out reintroducing U.S. combat troops to Iraq (or Syria), but the Administration is deploying up to 3,100 military personnel to assess, advise, and train the ISF and protect American personnel and facilities. These personnel are being joined by about 1,500 coalition partner advisers and trainers for the ISF. The United States and several NATO partners are striking Islamic State positions in Iraq to facilitate combat efforts by the ISF and the KRG's *peshmerga* forces. The United States is also proceeding with pre-existing Foreign Military Sales of combat aircraft, as well as with new sales of tanks and armored vehicles to replenish the equipment lost in the course of the ISF partial collapse.

Yet, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) remains weak after nearly a third of its divisions collapsed in the face of the Islamic State offensive in June 2014. The collapse enabled the Kurds, who run an autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), to seize control of the long-coveted city of Kirkuk and its crucial oil fields. And, the crisis has caused Shiite militia forces to revive; they are politically aligned not only with dominant Shiite factions in Iraq but also with Iran. These forces have helped the ISF defend Baghdad and recapture some areas from the Islamic State, but the militias have also reportedly committed human rights abuses against many Sunnis and reinforced Sunni resentment of the Iraqi government. The Shiite militias, as well as the Iraqi government, are receiving substantial military assistance from Iran, which has aggravated Sunni resentment. The United States has repeatedly ruled out any direct military cooperation with Tehran in Iraq. Abadi has acknowledged publicly that Sunni security forces will need to be empowered to secure Sunni areas that might be freed from Islamic State control. Please see also CRS Report R43612, *The "Islamic State" Crisis and U.S. Policy*.

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## Overview of the Post-Saddam Political Transition

A U.S.-led military coalition, in which about 250,000 U.S. troops participated, crossed the border from Kuwait into Iraq on March 19, 2003, to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein and eliminate suspected programs to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD). After several weeks of combat, the regime of Saddam Hussein fell on April 9, 2003. During the 2003-2011 presence of U.S. forces, Iraq completed a transition from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein to a plural political system in which varying sects and ideological and political factions compete in elections. A series of elections began in 2005, after a one-year occupation period and a subsequent seven-month interim period of Iraqi self-governance that gave each community a share of power and prestige to promote cooperation and unity. Still, disputes over the relative claim of each community on power and economic resources permeated almost every issue in Iraq and were never fully resolved. These unresolved differences—muted during the last years of the U.S. military presence—reemerged in mid-2012 and have returned Iraq to sectarian conflict.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, all U.S. economic sanctions against Iraq were lifted, removing impediments to U.S. business dealings with Iraq. During 2003-2004, Iraq was removed from the “terrorism list,” and the Iraq Sanctions Act (Sections 586-586J of P.L. 101-513), which codified a U.S. trade embargo imposed after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, was terminated. In subsequent years, a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions removed most remaining “Chapter VII” U.N. sanctions against Iraq that stemmed from the 1990 invasion of Kuwait—opening Iraq to receiving arms from any country. Iraq still is required to comply with international proliferation regimes that bar it from reconstituting Saddam-era weapons of mass destruction programs, and still pays into a U.N.-run fund to compensate victims of the 1990 Kuwait invasion. On October 24, 2012, Iraq demonstrated its commitment to compliance with remaining proliferation restrictions by signing the “Additional Protocol” of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

### Initial Transition and Construction of the Political System

After the fall of Saddam’s regime, the United States set up an occupation structure based on concerns that immediate sovereignty would favor established Islamist and pro-Iranian factions over nascent pro-Western secular parties. In May 2003, President Bush named Ambassador L. Paul Bremer to head a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which was recognized by the United Nations as an occupation authority. In July 2003, Bremer ended Iraqi transition negotiations and appointed a non-sovereign Iraqi advisory body, the 25-member Iraq Governing Council (IGC). U.S. and Iraqi negotiators, advised by a wide range of international officials and experts, drafted a Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, interim constitution), which became effective on March 4, 2004.<sup>1</sup>

On June 28, 2004, Bremer appointed an Iraqi interim government, ending the occupation period. The TAL also laid out a 2005 elections roadmap, based on agreement among all Iraqi factions that elections should determine future political outcomes. The interim government was headed by a prime minister (Iyad al-Allawi) and a president (Sunni tribalist Ghazi al-Yawar). It was heavily populated by parties and factions that had long campaigned to oust Saddam.

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<sup>1</sup> Text, in English, is at <http://www.constitution.org/cons/iraq/TAL.html>.

In accordance with the dates specified in the TAL, the first elections process, on January 30, 2005, produced a 275-seat transitional parliament and government that supervised writing a new constitution, held a public referendum on a new constitution, and then held elections for a full-term government. Elections for four-year-term provincial councils in all 18 provinces (“provincial elections”) and a Kurdistan regional assembly (111 seats) were held concurrently. The election was conducted according to the “proportional representation/closed list” election system, in which voters chose among “political entities” (a party, a coalition of parties, or people). The ballot included 111 entities, 9 of which were multi-party coalitions. Sunni Arabs (20% of the overall population) boycotted and won only 17 seats in the transitional parliament. The government included PUK leader Jalal Talabani as president and Da’wa party leader Ibrahim al-Jafari as prime minister. Sunni Arabs held the posts of parliament speaker, deputy president, one of the deputy prime ministers, and six ministers, including defense.

**Table I. Major Political Factions in Post-Saddam Iraq**

Faction	Leadership/Description
Da’wa Party/State of Law Coalition	The largest faction of the Da’wa Party has been led since 2006 by Nuri al-Maliki, who displaced former Da’wa leader (and former Prime Minister) Ibrahim al-Jaafari. Da’wa was active against Saddam but also had operatives in some Persian Gulf states, including Kuwait, where they committed attacks against the ruling family during the 1980s. Da’wa is the core of the “State of Law” political coalition. Iraq’s current Prime Minister, Haydar al-Abadi, is a Da’wa member.
Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)	Current leader is Ammar al-Hakim, who succeeded his father Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim upon his death in 2009. The Hakims descend from the revered late Grand Ayatollah Muhsin Al Hakim, who hosted Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini when he was in exile in Iraq during 1964-1978. Abd al-Aziz’s elder brother, Mohammad Baqr al-Hakim, headed the movement when it was an underground armed opposition group against Saddam, but he was killed outside a Najaf mosque shortly after returning to Iraq following Saddam’s overthrow.
Sadrists	Thirty-two year old Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr leads a sizeable Shiite political faction. Sadr is the son of revered Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq Al Sadr, who was killed by Saddam’s security forces in 1999, and a relative of Mohammad Baqr Al Sadr, a Shiite theoretician and contemporary and colleague of Ayatollah Khomeini. Moqtada formed a Shiite militia called the Mahdi Army during the U.S. military presence, which was formally disbanded in 2009 but has regrouped under an alternate name to combat the Islamic State organization. The Sadrists have competed in all Iraqi elections since 2006. In 2014, the group competed under the “Al Ahrar” (Liberal) banner.
Kurdish Factions: Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and Gorran	Masoud Barzani heads the KDP and is the elected President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The PUK is led by Jalal Talabani, who was President of Iraq until the 2014 government section process. Iraq’s current president, Fouad Masoum, is a senior PUK leader as well. Gorran (“Change”) is an offshoot of the PUK.
Iraqi National Alliance/“Iraqiyya”	Led by Iyad al-Allawi, a longtime anti-Saddam activist who was transitional Prime Minister during June 2004-February 2005. Allawi is a Shiite Muslim but most of his bloc’s supporters are Sunnis, of which many are ex-Baath Party members. Iraqiyya bloc fractured after the 2010 national election into blocs loyal to Allawi and to various Sunni leaders including ex-COR peaker Osama al-Nujaifi and deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq. Allawi and Nujaifi are both vice presidents in the government formed in September 2014, and Mutlaq has retained his deputy prime ministerial post.
Iraqi Islamic Party	Sunni faction loyal to ousted Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi. Hashimi was part of the Iraqiyya alliance in the 2010 election. He fled a Maliki-ordered arrest warrant in late 2011 and has remained mostly in Turkey since.

**Sources:** Various press reports and author conversations with Iraq experts.

## **Permanent Constitution<sup>2</sup>**

A 55-member drafting committee—in which Sunnis were underrepresented—produced a draft constitution, which was adopted in a public referendum of October 15, 2005. Its major provisions are as follows:

- The constitution did not stipulate any ethnic or sectarian-based distribution of positions. However, by informal agreement developed in the process of forming successive governments, the Prime Minister is a Shiite Muslim, a Kurd is President, and a Sunni is Speaker of the Council of Representatives (COR, parliament).
- The three Kurdish-controlled provinces of Dohuk, Irbil, and Sulaymaniyah to constitute a legal “region” administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which has its own elected president and parliament (Article 113). Legal “regions” are able to organize internal security forces, legitimizing the Kurds’ fielding of their *peshmerga* militia (Article 117). This continued a TAL provision.
- There would be a December 31, 2007, deadline to hold a referendum on whether Kirkuk (Tamim Province) would join the Kurdish region (Article 140).
- Islam was designated as “a main source” of legislation.
- All orders of the CPA are to be applicable until amended (Article 126), and a “Federation Council” (Article 62), a second chamber with size and powers would be determined in future law (not adopted to date).
- A 25% electoral goal was set for women (Article 47).
- Families would choose which courts to use for family issues (Article 41), and only primary education is mandatory (Article 34).
- Islamic law experts and civil law judges would serve on the federal supreme court (Article 89).
- Two or more provinces may join together to form a new “region.” This provision was implemented by an October 2006 law on formation of regions.
- The central government distributes oil and gas revenues from “current fields” in proportion to population, and regions will have a role in allocating revenues from new energy discoveries (Article 109).

These provisions left many disputes unresolved, particularly the balance between central government and regional and local authority and the amount of discretion given to males in family legal matters. The TAL made approval of the constitution subject to a veto if a two-thirds majority of voters in any three provinces voted it down. Sunnis registered in large numbers (70%-85%) to try to defeat the constitution, despite a U.S.-mediated agreement of October 11, 2005, to have a future vote on amendments to the constitution. The Sunni provinces of Anbar and Salahuddin had a 97% and 82% “no” vote, respectively, but the constitution was adopted because Nineveh Province voted 55% “no”—short of the two-thirds “no” majority needed to vote the constitution down.

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<sup>2</sup> Text of the Iraqi constitution is at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html>.

## **December 15, 2005, Elections Establish the First Full-Term Government**

The December 15, 2005, elections were for a full-term (four-year) national government (also in line with the schedule laid out in the TAL). Each province contributed a set number of seats to a “Council of Representatives” (COR), a formula adopted to attract Sunni participation. There were 361 political “entities,” including 19 multi-party coalitions, competing in a “closed list” voting system (in which votes are cast only for parties and coalitions, not individual candidates). The Shiites and Kurds again emerged dominant. The COR was inaugurated on March 16, 2006, and Jafari was replaced with a then-obscure Da’wa figure, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, as Prime Minister. Talabani was selected to continue as president, with deputies Adel Abd al-Mahdi (incumbent) of ISCI and Tariq al-Hashimi, leader of the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Of the 37 Cabinet posts, there were 19 Shiites; 9 Sunnis; 8 Kurds; and 1 Christian. Four were women.

## **2006-2011: Sectarian Conflict and U.S. “Surge”**

The election did not resolve the Sunnis’ grievances over their diminished positions in the power structure, and subsequent events reinforced their political weakness and sense of resentment. The bombing of a major Shiite shrine (Al Askari Mosque) in the Sunni-dominated city of Samarra (Salahuddin Province) in February 2006 set off major Sunni-Shiite violence that became so serious that many experts, by the end of 2006, were considering the U.S. mission as failing. The “Iraq Study Group” concluded that U.S. policy required major change.<sup>3</sup>

In August 2006, the United States and Iraq agreed on “benchmarks” that, if implemented, might achieve political reconciliation. Under Section 1314 of a FY2007 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 110-28), “progress” on 18 political and security benchmarks—as assessed in Administration reports due by July 15, 2007, and September 15, 2007—was required for the United States to provide \$1.5 billion in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Iraq.<sup>4</sup> In early 2007, the United States began a “surge” of about 30,000 additional U.S. forces—bringing U.S. troop levels from their 2004-2006 levels of 138,000 to a high of about 170,000—intended to blunt insurgent momentum and take advantage of growing Sunni Arab rejection of Islamist extremist groups. The Administration cited as partial justification for the surge the Iraq Study Group’s recommendation of such a step. As 2008 progressed, citing the achievement of many of the agreed benchmarks and a dramatic drop in sectarian violence, the Bush Administration asserted that political reconciliation was advancing. However, U.S. officials maintained that the extent and durability of the reconciliation would depend on further compromises among ethnic groups and on reductions of violence.

### **United Nations Assistance Mission—Iraq (UNAMI)**

<sup>3</sup> “The Iraq Study Group Report.” Vintage Books, 2006. The Iraq Study Group was funded by the conference report on P.L. 109-234, FY2006 supplemental, which provided \$1 million to the U.S. Institute of Peace for operations of an Iraq Study Group. The legislation did not specify the Group’s exact mandate or its composition.

<sup>4</sup> President Bush exercised the waiver provision of that law in order to provide that aid. The law also mandated an assessment by the Government Accountability Office, by September 1, 2007, of Iraqi performance on the benchmarks, as well as an outside assessment of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).



The United Nations contributed to political reconciliation through its U.N. Assistance Mission—Iraq (UNAMI). The head of UNAMI is also the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq. The mandate of UNAMI was established in 2003 and U.N. Security Council Resolution 2110 of July 24, 2013, provided the latest yearly renewal (until July 31, 2014). UNAMI's primary activities have been to help build civil society, assist vulnerable populations, consult on possible solutions to the Arab-Kurd dispute over Kirkuk Province (see below), and resolve the status of the Iranian opposition group People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran that remains in Iraq (see below). The first head of the office was killed in a car bombing on his headquarters in August 2003. In late February 2015, the U.N. Secretary General announced that Jan Kubis, the former head of UNAMA in Afghanistan, would replace Bulgarian diplomat Nickolay Mladenov as head of UNAMI.

## **Iraqi Governance Strengthens As Sectarian Conflict Abates**

The passage of Iraqi laws in 2008 that were considered crucial to reconciliation, continued reductions in violence accomplished by the U.S. surge, and the Sunni militant turn away from violence facilitated political stabilization. A March 2008 offensive ordered by Maliki against the Sadr faction and other militants in Basra and environs (Operation Charge of the Knights) pacified the city and caused many Sunnis and Kurds to see Maliki as willing to take on armed groups even if they were Shiite. This contributed to a decision in July 2008 by several Sunni ministers to end a one-year boycott of the Cabinet.

## **Debates Over Centralized Versus Decentralized Power**

U.S. officials also pressed Maliki to devolve power from Baghdad, in large part to give Iraq's Sunnis more ownership of their own affairs and regions. Such devolution could take the form of establishment of new "regions," modeled along the lines of the KRG, or allowing provinces or groups of provinces more autonomy and powers. Opponents of that proposal asserted that devolving power from the central government would lead to the de facto or actual breakup of Iraq as a nation-state.

In part to address U.S. advice, in 2008, a "provincial powers law" (Law Number 21) was adopted to decentralize governance by delineating substantial powers for provincial (governorate) councils, such as enacting provincial legislation, regulations, and procedures, and choosing the province's governor and two deputy governors. The provincial administrations, which serve four-year terms, draft provincial budgets and implement federal policies. Some central government funds are given as grants directly to provincial administrations for their use. Provinces have a greater claim on Iraqi financial resources than do districts, and many communities support converting their areas into provinces. The 2008 law replaced a 1969 Provinces Law (Number 159).

Since enactment, Law 21 has been amended on several occasions to try to accommodate restive areas of Iraq. A June 2013 amendment gave provincial governments substantially more power, a move intended to satisfy Sunnis. In December 2013, the central government announced it would convert the district of Halabja into a separate province—Halabja is symbolic to the Kurds because of Saddam's use of chemical weapons there in 1988. In January 2014, the government announced other districts that would undergo similar conversions: Fallujah (in Anbar Province), a hotbed of Sunni restiveness; Tuz Khurmato (in Salahuddin Province) and Tal Affar (in Nineveh Province), both of which have Turkmen majorities; and the Nineveh Plains (also in Nineveh), which has a mostly Assyrian Christian population. These announcements came amid a major Sunni uprising in Anbar Province, discussed below, and appeared intended to keep minorities and Sunnis on the side of the government. The Cabinet decisions have not been implemented to date.

### ***Second Provincial Elections in 2009***

The second set of provincial elections were planned for October 1, 2008, but were postponed when Kurdish opposition caused a presidential veto of a July 22, 2008, draft election law that provided for equal division of power in Kirkuk (among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans). The proposal would have diluted Kurdish dominance there. On September 24, 2008, the COR passed another election law, providing for the provincial elections by January 31, 2009, but putting off provincial elections in Kirkuk and the three KRG provinces. About 14,500 candidates (including 4,000 women) vied for the 440 provincial council seats in the 14 Arab-dominated provinces of Iraq. About 17 million Iraqis (any Iraqi 18 years of age or older) were eligible for the vote, which was run by the Iraqi Higher Election Commission (IHEC). Pre-election violence was minimal but turnout was lower than expected at about 51%.

The certified vote totals (March 29, 2009) gave Maliki's State of Law Coalition a very strong 126 out of the 440 seats available (28%). Its main Shiite rival, ISCI, went from 200 council seats to only 50, a result observers attributed to its perceived close ties to Iran. Iyad al-Allawi's faction won 26 seats, a gain of 8 seats, and a Sunni faction loyal to Tariq al-Hashimi won 32 seats, a loss of 15. Sunni tribal leaders who boycotted the 2005 elections participated in the 2009 elections. Their slate came in first in Anbar Province. Although Maliki's State of Law coalition fared well, his party still needed to bargain with rival factions to form provincial administrations.

### ***The March 7, 2010, National Elections: Sunnis Cohere***

With the strong showing of the State of Law list in the provincial elections, Maliki was favored to retain his position in the March 7, 2010, COR elections that would choose the next government. Yet, as 2009 progressed, Maliki's image as protector of law and order was tarnished by several high-profile attacks, including major bombings in Baghdad on August 20, 2009, in which the buildings housing the Ministry of Finance and of Foreign Affairs were heavily damaged. As Maliki's image faded, Shiite unity broke down and a strong rival Shiite slate took shape—the "Iraqi National Alliance (INA)" consisting of ISCI, the Sadrists, and other Shiite figures. Sunni Arabs rallied around the nominally cross-sectarian Iraq National Movement (Iraqiyya) of former transitional Prime Minister Iyad al-Allawi. There was also a predominantly Sunni slate, leaning Islamist, called the Accordance.

The 2010 election was clouded by several disputes over election rules and procedures. Under the Iraqi constitution, the elections were to be held by January 31, 2010, in order to allow 45 days before the March 15, 2010, expiry of the COR's term. The election laws that run the election and can shape the election outcome were the subject of disputes, and the COR repeatedly missed self-imposed deadlines to pass them. Many COR members leaned toward a closed list system, but those who wanted an open list vote (allowing voters to vote for candidates as well as coalition slates) prevailed. Each province served as a single constituency.

The version of the election law passed by the COR on November 8, 2009 (141 out of 195 COR deputies voting), expanded the size of the COR to 325 total seats. Of these, 310 were allocated by province, with the constituency sizes ranging from Baghdad's 68 seats to Muthanna's seven. The remaining 15 seats were to be minority reserved seats and "compensatory seats"—seats allocated from "leftover" votes for parties and slates that did not meet a minimum threshold to win a seat.

The goal of bringing Sunni Arabs further into the political structure was jeopardized by a dispute over candidate eligibility. In January 2010, the Justice and Accountability Commission (JAC, the

successor to the De-Baathification Commission that worked since the fall of Saddam to purge former Baathists from government) invalidated the candidacies of 499 individuals (out of 6,500 candidates running) on various slates. Appeals reinstated many of them. Maliki later named the Minister for Human Rights to also serve as JAC chairman. The JAC continues to vet candidates.

The final candidate list contained about 6,170 total candidates spanning 85 coalitions (depicted in **Table 2**). Total turnout was about 62%, and certified results were announced on June 1, 2010, showing Iraqiyya winning two seats more than did Maliki's State of Law slate. The Iraqi constitution (Article 73) mandates that the COR "bloc with the largest number" of members should be afforded the first opportunity to form a government. However, on March 28, 2010, Iraq's Supreme Court ruled that a coalition that forms *after* the election could be deemed to meet that requirement. On October 1, 2010, a six-month deadlock among major blocs over major positions broke when Maliki received the backing of most of the 40 COR Sadrist deputies, possibly orchestrated by Iran. The Obama Administration backed a second Maliki term while demanding that he include Sunni leaders.

On November 10, 2010, an "Irbil Agreement" was reached in which (1) Maliki and Talabani would serve another term; (2) Iraqiyya would be extensively represented in government—one of its figures would become COR Speaker, another would be defense minister, and another (presumably Allawi himself) would chair an oversight body called the "National Council for Strategic Policies";<sup>5</sup> and (3) de-Baathification laws would be eased. At the November 11, 2010, COR session to implement the agreement, Iraqiyya figure Usama al-Nujaifi (brother of Nineveh Governor Atheel Nujaifi) was elected COR speaker. Several days later, Talabani was reelected president and Talabani tapped Maliki as prime minister-designate, giving him until December 25, 2010, to achieve COR confirmation of a Cabinet. That requirement was met on December 21, 2010. The cabinet divided the positions among the major factions, but Maliki, who retained the prime ministership, also held the positions of Defense Minister, Interior Minister, and Minister of State for National Security. Other officials headed these ministries on an "acting" basis, without the full authority they would normally have as COR-approved ministers.

## Ethnic and Sectarian Grievances Unresolved as the United States Withdraws

The 2010 election in Iraq occurred near the end of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, which, under the 2008 U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA) had begun to wind down in 2009 and concluded at the end of 2011. Although violence had greatly reduced from the 2006-2010 timeframe, armed groups remained active even as the U.S. wound down its military involvement in Iraq.

### Armed Sunni Groups

At the time of the completion of the U.S. withdrawal, some Sunni antigovernment armed groups were still operating, although at low levels of activity. Such groups included Baath Party and Saddam Hussein supporters as well as hardline Islamists, some of whom were linked to Al Qaeda.

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<sup>5</sup> Fadel, Leila and Karen DeYoung. "Iraqi Leaders Crack Political Deadlock." *Washington Post*, November 11, 2010.

After the U.S. military departure in 2011, these groups increased their armed opposition to the Maliki government, drawing on increasing Sunni resentment of Shiite political domination.

### **Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Islamic State**

Iraq's one-time Al Qaeda affiliate constitutes the most violent component of the Sunni rebellion that has become a major threat to Iraqi stability in 2014. Its antecedent called itself Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I), which was led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until his death by U.S. airstrike in 2006.<sup>6</sup> In 2013 it adopted the name Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or, alternately, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In June 2014, the group changed its name to the Islamic State (IS), and declared its leader, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, as the "Commander of the Faithful"—a term essentially declaring him leader of all Muslims. It also declared a caliphate in the territory it controls in Iraq and Syria. AQ-I was an Al Qaeda affiliate, but its successor, now called the Islamic State, has publicly broken with Al Qaeda leaders based in Pakistan.

Baghdadi asserts a vision of an Islamic caliphate spanning the Islamic world. A major question is whether it has ambitions to attack the U.S. homeland, U.S. facilities or personnel in or outside the Middle East, or other non-Muslim countries. The Central Intelligence Agency estimates that the Islamic State can "muster" between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters in both Iraq and Syria.<sup>7</sup> In October 2012, Jordanian authorities disrupted an alleged plot by AQ-I to bomb multiple targets in Amman, Jordan, possibly including the U.S. Embassy there.

Largely dormant during the latter years of the U.S. presence in Iraq and for a few years after the 2011 U.S. withdrawal, ISIL-initiated attacks escalated significantly after an assault on Sunni protesters in the town of Hawija on April 23, 2013. The group increased its violent activity to about 40 mass casualty attacks per month, far more than the 10 per month of 2010, and including attacks spanning multiple cities.<sup>8</sup> In 2013, the group began asserting control of territory and operating training camps close to the Syria border.<sup>9</sup> The head of the National Counterterrorism Center, Matt Olsen, told Congress on November 14, 2013, that ISIL was the strongest it had been since its peak in 2006.<sup>10</sup>

### **Naqshabandi Order (JRTN) and Ex-Saddam Military Commanders**

Some insurgent groups are composed of members of the Saddam-era regime or Iraqi military. These groups, which allied with the Islamic State or remained independent, include the 1920 Revolution Brigades, the Islamic Army of Iraq, and, most prominently, the Naqshabandi Order—known by its Arabic acronym "JRTN."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> An antecedent of AQ-I was named by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in March 2004 and the designation applies to AQ-I and now the Islamic State.

<sup>7</sup> "ISIS Can 'Muster' Between 20,000 and 31,500 Fighters, CIA Says." CNN, September 12, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Knights. "Rebuilding Iraq's Counterterrorism Capabilities." *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 31, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Van Heuvelen. "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Gaining Ground in Iraq." *Washington Post*, December 8, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Eileen Sullivan. "Official: Al-Qaida in Iraq Strongest Since 2006." Associated Press, November 14, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The acronym stands for Jaysh al-Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi, which translated means Army of the Men of the Naqshabandi Order.

The JRTN is based primarily in Nineveh Province and has been designated by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In mid-2012, JRTN attacks on U.S. facilities in northern Iraq apparently contributed to the State Department decision to close the Kirkuk consulate. The faction has supported Sunni demonstrators and, to some extent, the Islamic State offensive in 2014. In February 2013 Sunnis linked to the JRTN circulated praise for the protests from the highest-ranking Saddam regime figure still at large, Izzat Ibrahim al Duri. He reportedly issued anti-Iraq government statements during the course of the 2014 Islamic State offensive.

Some JRTN ex-Saddam military officers operate under a separate structure called the “General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries,” which includes Sunni tribal fighters and other ex-insurgent figures. Some press reports assert that some of these ex-military officers might be helping the Islamic State with tactical and strategic military planning.

### **Sunni Tribal Leaders/Sons of Iraq Fighters**

Approximately 100,000 Iraqi Sunnis are known as “Sons of Iraq,” also called Awakening, or “Sahwa” fighters—gunmen who fought the U.S. military during 2003-2006 but then cooperated with U.S. forces against AQ-I. The Iraqi government had promised all of the Sons of Iraq integration into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or government jobs but, by the time of the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, only about two-thirds of the Sons had received these benefits. The remainder continued to man checkpoints in Sunni areas and were paid about \$500 per month by the government but were not formally added to security ministry rolls. As a result, some of these fighters became disillusioned with the Maliki government and reportedly joined the Islamic State offensives in 2014.

Many of the Sons of Iraq belong to the tribes of Anbar Province. The tribal leaders, such as Ahmad Abu Risha and Hatem al-Dulaymi, oppose the Islamic State organization, but seek a more representative central government in Baghdad as well as the stability to facilitate commerce. Abu Risha is the brother of the slain tribal leader Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, who was a key figure in starting the Awakening movement that aligned Sunni insurgents with the U.S. military.

Some of the Sons of Iraq and their tribal recruiters support Sunni Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Scholars Association (MSA). The MSA is led by Harith al-Dari, who in 2006 fled U.S. counter-insurgency operations to live in Jordan. Harith al-Dari’s son, Muthana, reportedly is active against the government. The degree to which supporters of the MSA and the Dari clan are supporting the Islamic State offensive, if at all, is unclear.

### **The Sadr Faction and Shiite Militias**

The 2006-2008 period of sectarian conflict was fueled in part by retaliatory attacks by Shiite militias, such as those linked to Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Sadr is considered an Iraqi “nationalist,” who did not go into exile during Saddam’s rule, and his following is particularly strong among lower class Shiites. The Sadrists opposed Maliki in the March 2010 elections but acquiesced to a second Maliki term, and still later joined an unsuccessful 2012 effort to vote no-confidence against Maliki. Sadr publicly opposed Maliki serving a third term (after 2014 election). In February 2014, Sadr publicly announced his formal withdrawal from Iraqi politics, but Sadrist representatives remain in their cabinet and National Assembly posts and continue to compete in elections.



Sadr was an adversary of the United States for most of the 2003-2011 period of the large U.S. military intervention in Iraq. Sadr formed his large Mahdi Army militia in 2004 to combat the U.S. military presence in Iraq, and U.S. troops fought several major battles with the Mahdi Army and an offshoot, called the “special groups,” from 2004 to 2008. Sadr, through demonstrations and threats of armed action by militias under his control, pressed for the full U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011.

Sadr’s campaign meshed with Iran’s policy to ensure that the United States completely withdrew from Iraq. U.S. officials accused Shiite militias—both those loyal to Sadr and others answerable to other Shiite figures—of causing an elevated level of U.S. troop deaths in June 2011 (14 killed, the highest in any month in over one year). U.S. officials accused Iran of arming these militias with upgraded rocket-propelled munitions, such as Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions (IRAMs), and pressed the Iraqi government to insist that Iran to stop aiding the militias. However, until the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, some rocket attacks continued against the U.S. consulate in Basra.

The Sadrist pressure on the United States was amplified by the activities of several other Shiite militias, some of which had drifted out of Sadr’s control. These include Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH, League of the Family of the Righteous), Khata’ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Battalions), and the Promised Day Brigade, the latter organization of which still answers to Sadr. In June 2009, Khata’ib Hezbollah was designated by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). On November 8, 2012, the Treasury Department designated several Khata’ib Hezbollah operatives, and their Iranian Revolutionary Guard—Qods Force mentors as terrorism supporting entities under Executive Order 13224. AAH’s leader, Qais al-Khazali, took refuge in Iran in 2010 after three years in U.S. custody for his alleged role in a 2005 raid that killed five American soldiers.

After the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, most Shiite militia activity declined. Much of the Mahdi Army had already been slowly integrating into the political process as a charity and employment network called *Mumahidoon*, or “those who pave the way.” Other Shiite militias followed suit, including In 2011, AAH’s leaders, including Khazali, returned from Iran and opened political offices, trying to recruit loyalists, and setting up social service programs. The group did not compete in the April 20, 2013, provincial elections, but competed as an informal Maliki ally in the 2014 national elections (Al Sadiqun, “the Friends,” slate 218).<sup>12</sup>

However, all of the militias have reactivated to combat the Islamic States gains. As unrest in the Sunni areas escalated during 2012-2014, the Shiite militias began to reactivate armed operations, including conducting retaliatory attacks on Sunnis. Like the former Mahdi Army personnel, AAH and Khata’ib fighters mobilized in large numbers (estimates center around 100,000 total Shiite militias mobilized) to assist the ISF in the defense of Baghdad and other operations in the face of the Islamic State offensive of June 2014. Some of the Iraqi Shiite militiamen returned from Syria, where they were protecting Shiite shrines and conducting other combat in support of the government of Bashar Al Assad.<sup>13</sup> Mahdi Army militiamen reorganized as the “Salaam Brigade.” In February 2015, following a killing of a prominent Sunni cleric in Baghdad, Sadr ordered Salaam and other militias still loyal to him to suspend their operations. Sadr warned of increasing

<sup>12</sup> Liz Sly. “Iran-Tied Group Is On Rise in Iraq.” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Abigail Hauslohner. “Iraqi Shiites Take Up the Cudgels for Syrian Government.” *Washington Post*, May 27, 2013.

sectarianism and, in late February 2015, he forged an alliance with Iyad al-Allawi (see above) to try to form a non-sectarian bloc in the COR.

*Badr Organization.* Another major Shiite militia is not a Sadrist offshoot. The Badr Organization was the armed wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, headed now by Ammar al-Hakim. The Badr Organization largely disarmed after Saddam's fall and integrated into the political process. It did not conduct attacks against U.S. military forces in Iraq during 2003-2011. However, in 2014, the militia mobilized and rearmed to help the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) combat the Islamic State. Its leader is Hadi al-Amiri, an elected member of the National Assembly. Its approximately 30,000 militia fighters are included in the total 100,000 Shiite militia estimate cited above.

*Lebanese Hezbollah.* Hezbollah has long been involved in assisting Iraq's Shiite militias, in part because Hezbollah members speak Arabic, whereas Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard personnel speak mostly Persian (although many speak Arabic as well). In February 2015, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah publicly acknowledged that Hezbollah had sent personnel to Iraq to help the ISF and the Shiite militias to combat the Islamic State.

## **The Kurds and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)<sup>14</sup>**

Since the end of the U.S.-led war to end Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in early 1991, the United States has helped ensure Iraqi Kurdish autonomy, while insisting that Iraq's territorial integrity not be compromised by an Iraqi Kurdish move toward independence. Iraq's Kurds have tried to preserve the "special relationship" with the United States and use it to their advantage. The collapse of the ISF in northern Iraq enabled the Kurds to seize long-coveted Kirkuk and many of its oilfields. However, the collapse of Baghdad's forces also contributed to the advance of the heavily armed Islamic State force close to the KRG capital Irbil before U.S. airstrikes beginning on August 8, 2014, drove Islamic State fighters back.

KRG threats to seek outright independence had been increasing in recent years as the issues dividing the KRG and Baghdad have expanded. A key issue dividing the KRG and the central government has been the KRG's assertion of the right to export oil produced in the KRG region—which Baghdad strongly opposes. The seizure of Kirkuk gives the Kurds even more control over economic resources, so much so that in June 2014, Kurdish leaders indicated the region might hold a referendum on independence within a few months. However, the subsequent Islamic State threat to KRG-controlled territory muted further public discussion of Iraqi Kurdish independence.

As permitted in the Iraqi constitution, the KRG fields its own force of *peshmerga* and Zeravani ground forces, which together number about 150,000 active duty fighters. They have about 350 tanks and 40 helicopter gunships, but have not been eligible to separately purchase additional U.S. weaponry. All U.S. foreign military sales (FMS) go through central governments, and Baghdad has generally refused to provide a portion of its U.S. weaponry to the KRG. A provision of the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 3979, P.L. 113-291) permits direct U.S. provision of U.S. arms to the *peshmerga*. The Kurdish militias are under the KRG's Ministry of *Peshmerga* Affairs and are paid out of the KRG budget. Prior to the June 2014 Islamic State offensive, the KRG had made some headway in its plans to transform the *peshmerga* into a

<sup>14</sup> For more information on Kurd-Baghdad disputes, see CRS Report RS22079, *The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq*, by Kenneth Katzman.

smaller but more professional and well trained force, and the *peshmerga* is expected to benefit significantly from the U.S. training discussed below.

### **KRG Structure/Intra-Kurdish Divisions**

The Iraqi Kurds' two main factions—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)—are the dominant factions in the KRG. The head of the KDP is Masoud Barzani, son of the revered Kurdish resistance fighter Mullah Mustafa Barzani. The PUK is led by Jalal Talabani, who served two terms as Iraq's President and is ailing following a 2012 stroke. Masoud Barzani is President of the KRG, directly elected in July 2009. The KRG has an elected Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA, sometimes called the Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq, or KPI), and an appointed Prime Minister. Since January 2012, the KRG Prime Minister has been Nechirvan Barzani (Masoud's nephew), who replaced PUK senior figure Barham Salih. Masoud Barzani's son, Suroor, heads KRG security issues. On July 1, 2013, the KNA voted to extend Barzani's term two years, until August 19, 2015. In July 2014, another senior PUK figure, Fouad Masoum, succeeded Talabani as Iraq's President—continuing the informal understanding that has existed since 2006 that a PUK figure will be Iraq's President.

The KDP and PUK have sometimes clashed over territorial control and resources, and a serious armed conflict between them flared in 1996. Since the fall of Saddam, the two parties have generally abided by a power-sharing arrangement. However, a new faction emerged in 2005 and has become a significant factor in Kurdish politics—Gorran (Change), a PUK breakaway. It is headed by Neshirvan Mustafa, a longtime critic of the PUK. Aram al-Sheikh Mohammad, a Gorran leader, became second deputy COR speaker, becoming the first Gorran leader to obtain a senior leadership post in the central government.

The latest KNA elections were held on September 21, 2013, and further complicated the political landscape in the KRG. About 1,130 candidates registered to run for the 111 available seats, 11 of which are reserved for minority communities that live in the north, such as Yazidis, Shabaks, Assyrians, and others. As a result of those elections, Gorran continued to increase its political strength, winning 24 seats, second to the KDP's 38 (which was up from 30 in 2010). The PUK came in third with only 18 seats, down from 29 in the 2010 election. In part because of Gorran's increased representation, the Kurds could not agree on a new government for the KRG region until June 2014. Nechirvan Barzani remained KRG prime minister. Jalal Talabani's son, Qubad, who headed the KRG representative office in Washington, DC, until 2012, became deputy prime minister of the KRG. Provincial elections in the KRG-controlled provinces were held concurrent with the Iraq-wide parliamentary elections on April 30, 2014.

### **KRG-Baghdad Disputes**

There has been little progress in resolving the various territorial disputes between the Kurds and the central government dominated by Iraq's Arabs. The most emotional of these is the Kurdish insistence that Tamim/Kirkuk Province (which includes oil-rich Kirkuk city) is "Kurdish land" and must be formally affiliated to the KRG. Most of the oil in northern Iraq is in Kirkuk, and legal KRG control over the province would give the KRG substantial economic leverage. However, the Kirkuk dispute may have been mooted by the Kurds' seizure of Kirkuk in the face of the ISF collapse in the Islamic State offensive of June 2014. Many experts assess that the Kurds will be hesitant to yield back their positions to the central government.



Under the Iraqi constitution, there was to be a census and referendum on the affiliation of the province by December 31, 2007 (Article 140), but the Kurds agreed to repeated delays in order to avoid antagonizing Iraq's Arabs. Nor has the national census that is pivotal to any such referendum been conducted; it was scheduled for October 24, 2010, but then repeatedly postponed by the broader political crises. On the other hand, a Property Claims Commission that is adjudicating claims from the Saddam regime's forced resettlement of Arabs into the KRG region is functioning.

### ***KRG Oil Exports***

The KRG and Baghdad have been at odds over the Kurds' insistence on being able to export oil that is discovered and extracted in the KRG region. Baghdad terms the KRG's separate oil exports and energy development deals with international firms "illegal," insisting that all KRG oil exports go through the national oil export pipeline grid and that revenues earned under that arrangement go to the central government. Under an agreement forged shortly after the fall of Saddam, a fixed 17% share of those revenues goes to the KRG. The Obama Administration has generally sided with Baghdad's position that all Iraqi energy projects and exports be implemented through a unified central government.

In recent years, KRG oil exports through this system have been repeatedly suspended over KRG-central government disputes on related issues, such as Baghdad's arrears due to the international firms operating Kurdish-controlled oil fields. In January 2014, the Iraqi government suspended almost all of its payments to the KRG of about \$1 billion per month on the grounds that the KRG was not contributing oil revenue to the national coffers. In what it described as an effort to compensate for that loss of revenue, the KRG began exporting oil through a newly constructed pipeline to Turkey that bypasses the Iraqi national grid. The pipeline is capable of carrying 300,000 barrels per day of oil.<sup>15</sup> Some shipments were initially not offloaded as a result of an Iraqi government legal challenge to the KRG right to sell that oil, but eventually international buyers bought all the exports.<sup>16</sup>

The need to cooperate against the Islamic State organization apparently paved the way for a resolution of the oil export dispute. In November 2014, the KRG provided 150,000 barrels of oil to Iraq's state marketing organization (SOMO) in exchange for a one-time payment from Baghdad to the KRG of \$500 million. On December 2, the KRG and Baghdad signed a broader deal under which the KRG would provide to SOMO 550,000 barrels per day of oil (300,000 from the Kirkuk fields now controlled by the KRG and 250,000 barrels from fields in the KRG itself) in exchange for a restoration of the 17% share of national revenues (which will amount to about \$600 million per month at current oil prices.)<sup>17</sup> In addition, Baghdad will provide the KRG with approximately \$100 million per month to pay for *peshmerga* salaries and weapons purchases. Baghdad also agreed to facilitate the transfer of some U.S. weapons to the *peshmerga*.<sup>18</sup> The agreement is incorporated into the 2015 Iraqi budget, adopted by the COR on January 29, 2015.

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<sup>15</sup> Much of the dispute centers on differing interpretations of a 1976 Iraq-Turkey treaty, which was extended in 2010, and which defines "Iraq" (for purposes of oil issues) as the "Ministry of Oil of the Republic of Iraq." See "Analysis: Iraq-Turkey Treaty Restricts Kurdistan Exports." Iraq Oil Report, April 18, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Knights, "Making the Iraqi Revenue-Generating Deal Work," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 3, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Arango, "Iraq Government Reaches Accord with the Kurds." *New York Times*, December 3, 2014.

KRG fields, excluding those in Kirkuk, have the potential to export 500,000 barrels per day and are expected to eventually be able to increase exports to 1 million barrels per day.<sup>19</sup> It appears that the KRG would be able to separately export any amounts over the 250,000 barrels per day that the December deal requires the KRG to transfer to Baghdad's control. Left unresolved was the disagreement over separate foreign firm investment deals with the KRG. Baghdad has sought to deny energy deals with the central government to any company that signs a separate development deal with the KRG. This dispute has affected such firms as Exxon-Mobil and Total SA of France.

### **Tier Three Designations of the KDP and PUK**

Since 2001, U.S. immigration officials have placed the KDP and PUK in a Tier Three category that makes it difficult for members of the parties to obtain visas to enter the United States. The categorization is a determination that the two parties are “groups of concern”—meaning some of their members have committed acts of political violence. The designation was based on the fact that the Kurdish parties, particularly their *peshmerga*, had used violence to try to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein. The designation was made before the United States militarily overthrew Saddam in 2003, and has not been revoked.

The characterization seems to many in Congress and the Administration to be inconsistent with the close political relations between the United States and the KDP and PUK. KRG President Barzani has said he will not visit the United States until the designation is removed. Two bills, H.R. 4474 and S. 2255, would legislatively remove the PUK and KDP from Tier 3 categorization. A provision of the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 3979, P.L. 113-291) gives the Administration authority, without judicial review, to revoke the Tier 3 designation. On April 14, 2014, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the Administration supports legislation to end the Tier 3-related visa restrictions.

## **Post-U.S. Withdrawal Political Unraveling**

With the grievances discussed above unresolved and U.S. forces not present, the 2010 power-sharing arrangement unraveled after 2011, casting doubt on President Obama's assertion, marking the U.S. withdrawal, that Iraq is now “sovereign, stable, and self-reliant.” Maliki's opponents accused him of concentrating power—in particular his retaining the three main security portfolios for himself.<sup>20</sup> Through an “Office of the Commander-in-Chief” he established, Maliki exercised direct command of a 10,000 person, mostly Shiite-manned Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), of which about 4,100 are Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF). These forces were tasked with countering militant groups, although Maliki's critics asserted that he was using them to intimidate his Sunni opponents.

On December 19, 2011, the day after the final U.S. withdrawal (December 18, 2011)—and one week after Maliki met with President Obama in Washington, DC, on December 12, 2011—the government announced an arrest warrant against Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a major Sunni

<sup>19</sup> Jane Arraf, “Iraq's Unity Tested by Rising Tensions Over Oil-Rich Kurdish Region.” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Sadun Dulaymi, a Sunni Arab, is acting Defense Minister; Falih al-Fayad, a Shiite, is acting Minister of State for National Security; and Adnan al-Asadi, another Shiite, is acting Interior Minister.

figure, for allegedly ordering his security staff to commit acts of assassination. Hashimi fled to the KRG region and refused to return to face trial in Baghdad unless his conditions for a fair trial there were met. A trial in absentia in Baghdad convicted him and sentenced him to death on September 9, 2012, for the alleged killing of two Iraqis. Hashimi remains in Turkey.

U.S. officials intervened with various political factions and obtained Maliki's agreement to release some Baathists prisoners and to give provinces more autonomy (discussed above). The concessions prompted Sunni COR members and ministers to resume their duties.<sup>21</sup> In March 2012, the factions tentatively agreed to hold a "national conference," to be chaired by then President Talabani, respected as an even-handed mediator, to try to reach a durable political solution. However, late that month KRG President Barzani accused Maliki of a "power grab" and the conference was not held. Maliki critics subsequently collected signatures from 176 COR deputies to request a no-confidence vote against Maliki. Under Article 61 of the constitution, signatures of 20% of the 325 COR deputies (65 signatures) are needed to trigger a vote, but then President Talabani (who was required to present a valid request to the COR to hold the vote) stated on June 10, 2012, that there were an insufficient number of valid signatures to proceed.<sup>22</sup>

The disputes flared again after Talabani suffered a stroke on December 18, 2012, and left Iraq for treatment in Germany. On December 20, 2012, Maliki moved against another major Sunni figure, Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, by arresting 10 of his bodyguards. Al Issawi took refuge in Anbar Province with Sunni tribal leaders, sparking anti-Maliki demonstrations in the Sunni cities in several provinces and in Sunni districts of Baghdad. Demonstrators demanded the release of prisoners; repeal of Article 4 antiterrorism laws under which many Sunnis are incarcerated; reform or end to the de-Baathification laws that has been used against Sunnis; and improved government services in Sunni areas.<sup>23</sup>

During January-March 2013, the use of small amounts of force against demonstrators caused the unrest to worsen. On January 25, 2013, the ISF killed nine protesters on a day when oppositionists killed two ISF police officers. Sunni demonstrators, possibly emboldened by the Sunni-led rebellion in neighboring Syria, set up encampments in some cities. The unrest, coupled with the U.S. departure, provided "political space" for extremist Sunni elements such as ISIL (now called the Islamic State) to step up attacks on the ISF in support of Sunni protesters.

*April 2013 Hawijah Incident.* On April 23, 2013, three days after the first group of provinces voted in provincial elections, the ISF stormed a Sunni protest camp in the town of Hawijah and killed about 40 civilians. In the following days, many Sunni demonstrators and tribal leaders took up arms, and some gunmen took over government buildings in the town of Suleiman Pak. The Iraqiyya bloc pulled out of the COR entirely, and three Sunni ministers resigned. U.S. officials reportedly pressed Maliki not to use the military to suppress Sunni protests but rather to work with Sunni tribal leaders to appeal for calm. Maliki undertook some conciliatory gestures, including amending (in June 2013) the 2008 provincial powers law (No. 21, see above) to give the provinces substantially more authority, such as control over security forces (Article 31-10); to specify a share of revenue to be given to the provinces; and to mandate that province-based operations of central government ministries be transferred to the provincial governments.<sup>24</sup> In

<sup>21</sup> Tim Arango. "Iraq's Prime Minister Gains More Power After Political Crisis." *New York Times*, February 28, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> "Embattled Iraqi PM Holding On To Power for Now." Associated Press, June 12, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Author conversations with Human Rights Watch researchers, March 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Reidar Vissar. "Provincial Powers Revisions, Elections Results for Anbar and Nineveh: Is Iraq Headed for Complete (continued...)"

July 2013, the Cabinet approved a package of reforms easing de-Baathification laws to allow many former Baathists to serve in government.

*April 2013 Provincial Elections Occur Amid the Tensions.* The escalating violence only slightly affected the April 2013 provincial elections. The government postponed the elections in two Sunni provinces, Anbar and Nineveh, until June 20, 2013, but the election in the remaining provinces went forward as planned on April 20, 2013. The COR's law to govern the election for the 447 provincial council seats (including those in Anbar and Nineveh that voted on June 20, 2013), passed in December 2012, provided for an open list vote. A total of 50 coalitions registered, including 261 political entities as part of those coalitions or running separately, and comprising about 8,150 individual candidates.

With the April 20, 2013, vote being held mostly in Shiite areas, the election was largely a test of Maliki's popularity. Maliki's State of Law coalition remained relatively intact, consisting mostly of Shiite parties, including Fadhila (virtue) and the ISCI-offshoot the Badr Organization. ISCI registered its own Citizen Coalition, and Sadr registered a separate Coalition of Liberals. Among the mostly Sunni groupings, Allawi's Iraqiyya and 18 smaller entities ran as the Iraqi National United Coalition. A separate United Coalition consisted of supporters of the Nujayifis (COR speaker and Nineveh governor), Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, and Rafi al-Issawi. A third Sunni coalition was loyal to Saleh al-Mutlaq. The two main Kurdish parties ran under the Co-Existence and Fraternity Alliance.

Turnout on April 20, 2013, was estimated at about 50% of registered voters. Election day violence was minimal. According to results finalized on May 19, 2013, Maliki's State of Law won a total of about 112 seats—about 22%, down from the 29% it won in 2009, but a plurality in 7 of the 12 provinces that voted. The loss of some of its seats cost Maliki's list control of the key provincial councils of Baghdad and Basra. ISCI's Citizen Coalition won back some of the losses it suffered in the 2009 elections, winning about 75 seats. Sadr's slate won 59 seats, including a plurality in Maysan Province. The June 20, 2013, election in Anbar and Nineveh was primarily a contest among the Sunni blocs. In Anbar, the Nujayfi bloc won a slight plurality, but in Nineveh, where the Nujayfis previously held an outright majority of provincial council seats (19 or 37), Kurds won 11 out of the province's 39 seats. The Nujayfi grouping came in second with 8 seats, but Atheel Nujayfi was selected to another term as governor. The results suggested to some experts that many Sunnis want to avoid a return to sectarian conflict.<sup>25</sup>

## **Insurrection Escalates as 2013 Ends**

Unrest in Sunni areas escalated sharply at the end of 2013, after yet another arrest order by Maliki against a prominent Sunni leader—parliamentarian Ahmad al-Alwani. The order, which followed an ISIL attack that killed 17 ISF officers, prompted a gun battle with security forces that killed Alwani's brother and several of his bodyguards. Maliki subsequently ordered security forces to close down a protest tent camp in Ramadi (capital of Anbar Province), prompting ISIL to attack, and to take over, Ramadi, Fallujah, and some smaller Anbar cities. ISIL fighters were joined by some Sunni protesters, defectors from the ISF, and some Sons of Iraq and other tribal fighters.

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(...continued)

Disintegration?" June 27, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Kirk Sowell. "Sunni Voters and Iraq's Provincial Elections." July 12, 2013.

However, most Sons of Iraq fighters appear to have obeyed the urgings of many tribal leaders to back the government and help suppress the insurrection.

Partly at the urging of U.S. officials, Maliki opted primarily to arm and fund loyal Sunni tribal leaders and Sons of Iraq fighters to help them expel the ISIL fighters. By early January 2014, these loyalists had helped the government regain most of Ramadi, but Fallujah remained in insurgent hands. In early April 2014, ISIL-led insurgents also established a presence in Abu Ghraib, only about 10 miles from Baghdad, prompting the government to close the prison. Some ISF officers told journalists that the ISF effort to recapture Fallujah and other opposition-controlled areas suffered from disorganization and ineffectiveness.<sup>26</sup>

## June 2014 Islamic State-Led Offensive and ISF Collapse

By the time the April 30, 2014, national (COR) elections were held, the ISIL-led insurrection in Anbar appeared contained. That stability was upended on June 10, 2014, when Islamic State fighters—apparently assisted by large numbers of its fighters moving into Iraq from the Syria theater—captured the large city of Mosul amid mass surrenders and desertions by the ISF. The group later that month formally changed its name to “The Islamic State.” Apparently supported by many Iraqi Sunni residents, Islamic State-led fighters subsequently advanced down the Tigris River valley as far as Tikrit as well as east into Diyala Province. The offensive captured the Mosul Dam and enabled Islamic State fighters to loot banks, free prisoners, and capture U.S.-supplied military equipment such as Humvees, tanks, and armored personnel carriers. From positions around Abu Ghraib, IS-led forces moved to within striking distance of Baghdad International Airport, which is southwest of the city. The Islamic State, along with its partners, also subsequently expanded previous gains in Anbar Province, including encroaching on the large Haditha Dam.

By the end of June, Shiite militias had mobilized in large numbers to assist the ISF and the remaining ISF regrouped to some extent. These developments, coupled with the fact that Islamic State fighters faced resistance from any location not dominated by Sunni inhabitants, appeared to lessen the threat to Baghdad itself. The defense of Baghdad was aided by U.S. advisers (discussed below), as well as by Iran’s sending of military equipment as well as Islamic Revolutionary Guard-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) units into Iraq. The ISF was able to prevent IS-led forces from capturing the Baiji refinery, which produces about one-third of Iraq’s gasoline supplies.

The KRG came under major threat by August 2014 when IS-led forces advanced into territory controlled by the *peshmerga*. The relatively lightly-armed Kurdish forces withdrew under pressure from numerous towns (Sinjar, Zumar, Wana, and Qaraqosh) inhabited mostly by Christians and other Iraqi minorities, particularly the Yazidis—a Kurdish-speaking people who practice a mix of ancient religions, including Zoroastrianism, which held sway in Iran before the advent of Islam.<sup>27</sup> Fearing IS threats to execute them if they refused its demands that they convert to Islam, about 35,000-50,000 Yazidis fled to Sinjar Mountain, where they were surrounded by Islamic State forces. By August 8, 2014, IS-led fighters had advanced to within about 30 miles of the KRG capital of Irbil, causing substantial panic among Iraq’s Kurds, who had long thought the

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<sup>26</sup> Loveday Morris. “Iraqi Army Struggles in Battles Against Islamist Fighters in Anbar Province.” *Washington Post*, February 27, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Ishaan Tharoor. “Who Are the Yazidis?” *Washington Post*, August 7, 2014.



KRG region fully secure, and causing U.S. concern about the security of U.S. diplomatic and military personnel there. The threat to the KRG and the humanitarian crisis prompted U.S. military action that is discussed in greater detail below.

## **Government Formation Process Amidst Security Collapse**

U.S. officials considered the outcome of the April 30, 2014, national elections as crucial to reversing Islamic State gains. Large scale participation by Sunni voters, some asserted, would signal a rejection of the Sunni extremist groups. An election law to regulate the election, passed on November 4, 2013, expanded the COR to 328 seats (from 325). A total of 39 coalitions, comprising 275 political entities (parties), registered. The campaign period nationwide began on April 1. Turnout on election day was about 62%, about the same level as in the 2010 COR elections, and violence was unexpectedly minimal. Elections for 89 total seats on the provincial councils in the three KRG provinces were held simultaneously.

Maliki appeared positioned to secure a third term because his State of Law bloc had remained relatively intact, whereas rival blocs had fractured. ISCI and the Sadrists—who opposed a third Maliki term—each ran separate slates. The mostly Sunni bloc, Iraqiyya, had fragmented into components led by various Sunni and other leaders for the 2014 election. Previously cohesive, the KDP and PUK ran separately in most provinces where they filed slates, and Gorran represented a stronger challenge to the KDP and PUK than it had previously.

On June 17, 2014, the Independent Higher Election Commission (IHEC) announced certified election results showing Maliki’s State of Law winning 92 seats—3 more than it won in 2010 and far more than those won by ISCI (29) or the Sadrists (32). Major Sunni slates won a combined 53 seats—far fewer than the 91 seats they won in 2010 as part of the Iraqiyya bloc.<sup>28</sup> The Kurdish slates collectively won about 62 seats. Maliki’s individual candidate vote reportedly was exceptionally strong, most notably in Baghdad Province, which sends 69 deputies to the COR—results that had appeared to put Maliki in a commanding position to retain his post.

*New Government Formed.* Maliki’s route to a third term was upended by the June 2014 IS-led offensive. U.S. officials largely blamed the offensive’s success on Maliki’s efforts to marginalize Sunni leaders and citizens. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani appeared to undermine Maliki by calling for quick agreement on an inclusive government that “avoids mistakes of the past.” The COR held several inconclusive sessions in early July because of a lack of consensus on the three most senior posts. The factions ultimately agreed to start filling some key positions before reaching consensus on a Prime Minister. The process unfolded as follows:

- On July 15, the COR named a leadership team. Salim al-Jabburi, a moderate Sunni Islamist (IIP), was named speaker. The two deputy speakers selected were Aram al-Sheikh Mohammad of the Kurdish Gorran party and Haydar al-Abbadi of Maliki’s Shiite Da’wa Party. Jabburi is about 43 years old and worked as a law professor at the University of Mesopotamia.
- On July 24, the COR selected a senior PUK leader, Fouad Masoum, as Iraq’s President. No deputy presidential slots were selected. Masoum is about 76 years

<sup>28</sup> “Iraq: PM’s Group Is Biggest Election Winner.” Associated Press, May 19, 2014.

old and helped draft Iraq's constitution. He was a close cohort of Jalal Talabani in forming the PUK in 1975.

- On August 11, Masoum tapped deputy COR speaker Abbadi as leader of the “largest bloc” in the COR as Prime Minister-designate, giving him a 30-day period specified by the constitution (until September 10) to achieve COR confirmation of a government. Abbadi's designation came after several senior figures in the State of Law bloc abandoned Maliki—apparently bowing to pressure from the United States, Iran, Iraq's Sunnis and Kurds, and others. Maliki initially called the designation “illegal” on the grounds that Masoum was required to tap him first as Prime Minister-designate as leader of the largest bloc elected. Maliki ordered troop deployments around Baghdad, suggesting he would not yield office peacefully. However, in subsequent days, U.S. officials and Iranian officials welcomed the Abbadi designation, causing Maliki's support to collapse and him to step down.

*The Cabinet.* Abbadi obtained COR confirmation of a new government on September 8, two days ahead of the constitutional deadline. The Cabinet appeared to satisfy U.S. and Iraqi factional demands for inclusiveness of the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds. Factional disputes caused Abbadi to avoid naming choices for the key security posts of Defense and Interior ministers, and agreement on the two posts was not achieved until October 23, when the COR confirmed Mohammad Salem al-Ghabban as Interior Minister and Khalid al-Ubaydi as Defense Minister. The selection of Ghabban drew criticism from many Sunni figures because he is a leader of the Badr Organization, the political arm of the Shiite militia of the same name. The faction is headed by Hadi Al-Amiri, who many Shiites were suggesting be named Interior Minister, but who was strongly opposed by Sunnis because of the militia's abuses of Sunnis during the sectarian conflict of 2006-2008. Ubaydi, a Sunni, was an aircraft engineer during the rule of Saddam Hussein, and became a university professor after Saddam's downfall.

A major feature of the Abbadi government is that it incorporates many senior faction leaders, although some posts lack significant authority. Among the major government posts are:

- Maliki, Iyad al-Allawi, and Osama al-Nujaifi, all major faction leaders and all discussed earlier, were made vice presidents. The position lacks authority but the posts ensure that their views will be heard in internal government deliberations. On the other hand, Maliki reportedly has used his vice presidential post to exert authority independently, perhaps to the detriment of Abbadi's authority, by holding meetings of the State of Law political bloc.
- Ex-Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, a KDP leader whom Maliki ousted in mid-2014 over a KRG-Baghdad rift, became deputy prime minister and Finance Minister. The two other deputy prime ministers are Saleh al-Mutlaq (Sunni Arab, discussed above) and Baha al-Araji, who heads the Sadrist bloc in the COR.
- Ibrahim al-Jafari, who served as transitional Prime Minister in 2005 and part of 2006, is Foreign Minister.
- A senior leader of ISCI, Adel Abdul Mahdi, is Minister of Oil.
- Hussein Shahrastani, a senior member of Maliki's State of Law bloc, is Minister of Higher Education.

**Table 2. Major Coalitions in April 30, 2014, COR Elections**

Coalition	Leaders and Components	Seats Won
State of Law (277)	Maliki and Da'wa Party; deputy P.M. Shahrastani; Badr Organization	92-95
Muwatin (Citizens Coalition) (273)	ISCI list. Includes former Interior Minister Bayan Jabr Solagh; Ahmad Chalabi; many Basra politicians	29
Al Ahrar (Liberals) (214)	Sadrists. Allied with ISCI in 2010 but separate in 2014.	32
Wataniya (Nationalists) (239)	Iyad al-Allawi (ran in Baghdad), Includes Allawi followers from former Iraqiyya bloc	21
Mutahiddun (United Ones) (259)	COR Speaker Nujaifi (ran in Nineveh). No candidates in Shiite-dominated provinces. Was part of Allawi Iraqiyya bloc in 2010.	23
Arabiyya (Arabs) (255)	Deputy P.M. Saleh al-Mutlaq (ran in Baghdad) Also limited to mostly Sunni provinces. Was part of Iraqiyya bloc in 2010.	9
Kurdish parties	KDP, PUK, and Gorran ran separately in most constituencies.	62 (combined)
Fadilah (219)	Shiite faction, was allied with ISCI in 2010 election but ran separately in 2014.	Not available
Da'wa (Jaafari) (205)	Da'wa faction of former P.M. Ibrahim al-Jafari (who ran in Karbala). Was allied with ISCI in 2010.	Not available

**Source:** Reidar Vissar, "Iraq and Gulf Analysis."

### *Abbadi's Policies*

U.S. officials say they have pressed Abbadi, with some success, to adopt policies that can win greater support among Sunnis. He has ordered the ISF to cease shelling Sunni-inhabited areas that are under the control of Islamic State forces and abolished the "Office of the Commander-in-Chief," restoring the regular chain of command. In November 2014, he replaced 36 Iraqi Army commanders and 24 Interior Ministry officials. Abbadi has also sought to publicly disclose significant instances of corruption; he announced in November 2014 that 50,000 ISF personnel on the payrolls were not actually performing military service.

In an attempt to alter Sunni opinion, Abbadi has also announced that a "National Guard" force will be established in which locally recruited fighters, reporting to provincial governments, will protect their home provinces from the Islamic State. The program appears mostly intended to blunt Islamic State influence from Sunni-inhabited areas, and appears intended to revive the concept behind the "Awakening"/Sons of Iraq program, discussed above. The announced program, which received cabinet approval in February 2015 and requires COR approval, appears to reflect a recognition by Abbadi and other Shiite leaders that Sunni Iraqis do not want Shiite-led



security forces policing Sunni areas. However, the program is planned to also apply to Shiite militias who want to secure Shiite areas, sparking opposition from Sunnis.<sup>29</sup> Also in February 2015, the cabinet approved an amendment to the “de-Baathification” laws (see above) to further re-integrate former members of Saddam’s Baath Party into the political process and presumably reduce Sunni resentment of the government. In February 2015, Abbadi lifted the long-standing Baghdad curfew as part of an effort to reduce the sense of Islamic State siege on the government.

The Abbadi government’s attempts to address Sunni demands have also caused agitation among its Shiite base. Activists in Basra Province, through which the majority of Iraq’s oil is exported, are attempting to revive a 2008 effort to convert the province into an autonomous region similar to the KRG. Those supporting forming a region assert that the province does not receive a fair share of national revenues. Holding a referendum on region formation requires obtaining signatures of 10% of the province’s 160,000 voters, or the support of one-third of the members of the Basra provincial council. Neither of these benchmarks has been achieved to date.

On the other hand, abuses committed by Shiite militias, as well as the appointment of Badr Organization figure Mohammad al-Ghabban as Interior Minister, appear to be slowing any broad Sunni shift toward the government and away from supporting the Islamic State. Abbadi’s visit to Iran during October 20-21, 2014, raised questions among experts that Abbadi might still be susceptible to arguments from some Iranian leaders to rally the Shiite base and refuse compromise with Sunni factions. After the killing by the militias of a senior Sunni cleric, Shaykh Qasim al-Janabi, in February 2015, Sunni members boycotted the COR for one week.

### **Prime Minister Haydar al-Abbadi**

Abbadi is about 62 years old and holds a doctorate in engineering from the University of Manchester. He is from a traditional elite family. He is a longtime Da’wa Party member but his exile during the Saddam Hussein regime was spent mostly in London, and not in Iran or Syria. He assisted the party by writing tracts and promoting its message, and he apparently was not involved in planning or executing any of the attacks carried out by the Da’wa Party in Iraq or Kuwait during the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> His familiarity with Western culture and his lack of ties to senior Iranian leaders apparently contributed to Iran’s initial reluctance to support him for the prime ministership. However, Abbadi reportedly attracted strong support from Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and within Da’wa ranks, and Iran acquiesced to his selection.

Many experts question whether Abbadi is sufficiently decisive to implement policies that are opposed by elements in his governing coalition. Some observers report that former Prime Minister Maliki continues to seek to exert his influence by holding meetings of the State of Law parliamentary bloc and by working with harder line Shiite figures to undermine Abbadi. Some observers indicate that Maliki might be plotting to try to return to the prime ministership by undermining Abbadi, but U.S. officials and U.S. allies would almost certainly try to counter any Maliki comeback as an impediment to the joint effort against the Islamic State.

<sup>29</sup> Loveday Morris. “Iraq’s Plans for Force to Fight Islamic State Meet Distrust.” *Washington Post*, September 14, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Adam Taylor. “Meet Haider al-Abadi, the Man Named Iraq’s New Prime Minister.” *Washingtonpost.com*, August 11, 2014.

## U.S. Policy Response to the Islamic State in Iraq<sup>31</sup>

The gains by the Islamic State in Iraq since June 2014 caused the Obama Administration to resume an active military role in Iraq, pursuant to a strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State articulated by President Obama on September 10, 2014.

From the late 2013 ISIL offensive in Anbar until its June 2014 capture of Mosul, the United States took the following actions:

- *Delivered and sold additional weaponry.* The Defense Department supplied Iraq with several hundred HELLFIRE air-to-surface missiles for use against ISIL training camps.<sup>32</sup> The Administration also obtained the concurrence of Congress to release for sale and lease 30 Apache attack helicopters to Iraq—a transaction some in Congress were holding up out of stated concerns that the Iraqi government would use them against nonviolent opponents.<sup>33</sup> The Administration had earlier agreed to sell 36 F-16 combat aircraft, although the production schedule did not permit accelerated delivery. On May 13, 2014, DSCA notified Congress of potential sales to Iraq of up to 200 Humvee armored vehicles, up to 24 propeller-driven AT-6C Texan II military aircraft, and related equipment with a total estimated value of about \$1 billion.<sup>34</sup>
- *Sales of Drones.* The United States sold Iraq several unmanned aerial vehicles to perform surveillance of Islamic State camps in western Anbar Province. In early 2014, the United States provided 10 Scaneagle aerial vehicles.<sup>35</sup>
- *Additional Training.* The Department of Defense increased bilateral and regional training opportunities for Iraqi counterterrorism (CTS) units to help burnish ISF counter-insurgency skills. By June 2014, U.S. Special Operations Forces had conducted two sessions of training for Iraqi CT forces in Jordan.<sup>36</sup>

## U.S. Military Involvement in Iraq Since June 2014

After the Islamic State's capture of Mosul in June 2014—and particularly after the August 2014 move by the group toward Irbil and its beheadings of two captured U.S. citizens—the U.S. response broadened significantly. President Obama presented a multifaceted strategy to defeat the Islamic State in a speech to the nation on September 10, 2014—after the formation of the relatively inclusive Abadi government met U.S. conditions for additional assistance against the Islamic State. The operation to defeat the Islamic State, termed “Operation Inherent Resolve,” is

<sup>31</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of U.S. policy against the Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria, see CRS Report R43612, *The “Islamic State” Crisis and U.S. Policy*.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140106/DEFREG02/301060019/US-Speeds-Up-Drone-Missile-Deliveries-Aid-Iraq>.

<sup>33</sup> Josh Rogin. “Congress to Iraq’s Maliki: No Arms for a Civil War.” *Daily Beast*, January 8, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> DSCA notifications to Congress: Transmittal Nos. 13-79; 14-04; and 14-03. May 13, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> “US Speeds Up Drone Missile Deliveries to Aid Iraq.” *Defense News*, January 6, 2014.

<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140106/DEFREG02/301060019/US-Speeds-Up-Drone-Missile-Deliveries-Aid-Iraq>.

<sup>36</sup> Missy Ryan. “U.S. Renews Training of Elite Forces in Jordan.” *Reuters*, May 7, 2014.

run by U.S. Central Command. It is commanded by Lieutenant General James Terry, who leads Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, based in the Camp Arijan facility in Kuwait that is used by the U.S. military under a bilateral defense accord with Kuwait.

### ***Advice and Training***

President Obama has authorized up to about 3,100 U.S. military personnel to deploy to Iraq to assess the ISF and to train and advise the ISF, *peshmerga* forces, and Sunni tribal fighters; gather intelligence on the Islamic State; and protect U.S. facilities and personnel. Almost all of those personnel are in Iraq as of the end of February 2015. Of these personnel, 1,500 deployed subsequent to congressional approval of a requested \$1.6 billion in train and equip funds, to “expand our advise and assist mission and initiate a comprehensive training effort for Iraqi forces.”<sup>37</sup> Those funds were authorized and appropriated by P.L. 113-291 and the FY2015 appropriations act (P.L. 113-235). Of the 3,100, about 820 are securing the U.S. Embassy and other U.S. facilities in Baghdad and Irbil, as well as protecting evacuation routes such as the international airport in Baghdad.

The mission of the U.S. force includes advising the ISF and *peshmerga* at the brigade level, working out of two “Joint Operations Centers” (one with the ISF in Baghdad and one with the *peshmerga* in Irbil). About 1,000 personnel of the U.S. force are training nine ISF brigades (about 20,000 troops) and three *peshmerga* brigades (about 5,000 forces). Training sites in Baghdad (two sites), Irbil (for the *peshmerga*), Taji (north of Baghdad), Al Asad (in Anbar Province), and Besmaya, south of Baghdad, reportedly are all established as of the end of February 2015. The site at Al Asad hosts about 300 U.S. military personnel and is under threat from Islamic State positions, including those at the town of Al Baghdadi that the Islamic State captured in early February 2015. Islamic State forces have shelled the site but caused no U.S. deaths to date. The U.S. trainers are being joined by about 1,500 trainers from coalition partner countries including the U.K., Norway, and Australia. Training will continue until mid-2015, depending on assessments of the progress of the forces trained.

Sunni tribal fighters are considered a key component of the effort because Sunni tribal fighters presumably would be supported in their operations by Sunni inhabitants now living under Islamic State rule. As of the end of January 2015, U.S. military personnel have trained a unit of about 250 Sunni tribal fighters now operating in Anbar Province.

### ***Air Operations***

Since August 8, 2014, the U.S. military action in Iraq has included airstrikes on Islamic State positions and infrastructure. U.S. air assets also have dropped humanitarian aid to vulnerable minorities affected by Islamic State gains. Other countries conducting air strikes in Iraq include Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and the U.K. The air operations have contributed significantly to the successes observed on the ground, which are discussed below. As of September 23, 2014, U.S. and partner country strikes have taken place in Syria, as well, to destroy Islamic State equipment and infrastructure it is using to support its offensive in Iraq.

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<sup>37</sup> Statement by Rear Admiral John Kirby on the Authorization to Deploy Additional Forces to Iraq, Release No: NR-562-14, November 7, 2014.

## ***Intelligence sharing***

U.S. unmanned and manned surveillance flights (about 50 flights per day) have been conducted over Iraq since June 2014. The flights are intended primarily to monitor Islamic State movements and identify targets.

## ***Weapons Sales***

The United States reportedly has sold Iraq at least 5,000 HELLFIRE missiles since the capture of Mosul. The F-16s and Apaches previously purchased are in the process of delivery, but the F-16s are being delivered to Iraqi control, and training for the Iraq pilots is being provided, in the United States (Arizona) because the key airbase at Balad is surrounded by the Islamic State. In December 2014, the Defense Department notified to Congress potential sales to Iraq that may be worth nearly \$3 billion for 1,000 M1151AI Up-Armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) and 175 M1A1 tanks with spare parts, communications, and ammunition. The tank sale would more than replace the tanks the ISF lost during the ISF offensive in June 2014; the ISF reportedly lost as much as half of the 140 tanks it had received from the United States as of 2012.

In addition to support for the ISF, the Administration also reportedly has been supplying mostly lighter weaponry and ammunition directly to the security forces (*peshmerga*) of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), through the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>38</sup> The Administration also has, with Iraqi government concurrence, delivered some of the ISF's weaponry stockpiles to the *peshmerga*. A number of European countries, such as the U.K, Germany, and France, also have been supplying weaponry to the *peshmerga*.

The Administration has sought to provide U.S. weaponry directly to the *peshmerga* and potentially to Sunni tribal fighters as well. A provision of the FY2015 NDAA (P.L. 113-291) gives the Administration the authority to do so. Under the provision, the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, is authorized:

to provide assistance, including training, equipment, logistics support, supplies, and services, stipends, facility and infrastructure repair and renovation, and sustainment, to military and other security forces of or associated with the Government of Iraq, including Kurdish and tribal security forces or other local security forces, with a national security mission, through December 31, 2016.

Despite the sales, both Abbadi and KRG and *peshmerga* leaders have complained that they are receiving insufficient quantities of U.S. weaponry in light of the challenge from the Islamic State. Kurdish leaders, in particular, have complained of a lack of heavy weaponry and that U.S. weapons supplies are not commensurate with the leading role of the *peshmerga* in pushing back Islamic State forces in the north.

*Direct U.S. combat deployment?* President Obama has repeatedly ruled out this option, stating that U.S. troops will not fix the underlying political problems that facilitated or caused the IS-led

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<sup>38</sup> That channel is a means of adapting to U.S. law and policy that requires all U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS, run by the Defense Department) to be provided to a country's central government, and not to subnational forces. Craig Whitlock and Greg Jaffe, "U.S. Directly Arms Kurdish Forces," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2014.

insurrection. However, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey acknowledged in November 2014 that as the campaign against the Islamic State progresses and more complex operations are required by Iraqi Security Forces, he could recommend that U.S. personnel accompany Iraqi forces.<sup>39</sup> Others note that the shelling of Al Asad base, where U.S. trainers are working, amounts to the same physical risk as that incurred by ground combat units. In February 2015, President Obama sent to Congress a request for a new Authorization for the Use of Military Force that would, if approved, provide flexibility to conduct ground combat operations in limited circumstances such as rescue operations and raids on Islamic State leadership targets, as well to deploy personnel on missions that would help guide precise air strikes or advise forward Iraqi forces.<sup>40</sup>

*Funding Issues.* The Administration requested authority and \$1.618 billion in FY2015 Overseas Contingency Operation funding for an “Iraq Train and Equip Fund” to support the expanded training mission—part of a broader \$5.6 billion request for the anti-IS mission for FY2015.<sup>41</sup> As noted above, the funds were authorized and appropriated at the end of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Of that \$1.6 billion in train-and-equip funding, the Administration plans to use \$1.23 billion for the ISF; \$354 million for the *peshmerga*; and \$24 million for the Sunni tribal fighters. The Administration funding request stipulated that 40% of the requested U.S. train-and-equip funds would not be eligible to be expended unless foreign contributions equal to 40% of the \$1.618 billion are contributed (of which half that contributed amount would come from the Iraqi government). P.L. 113-291 includes this cost-sharing provision, but would also limit the availability of funds for newly authorized Iraq training program to 25% until the Administration submits required program and strategy reports to Congress. That law also requires 90-day progress reporting. For FY2016, the Administration has requested \$715 million in train and equip funds for Iraq, for the same uses.

## Results of the Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Way Forward

U.S. officials assert that Operation Inherent Resolve has, to date, halted IS fighters’ momentum, severely reduced their weapons arsenal and infrastructure, and placed them in a largely defensive posture.<sup>42</sup> In November 2014, the *peshmerga* recaptured Mosul Dam, the town of Zumar, and a border crossing to Syria. Most recently, intense U.S. and coalition airstrikes have facilitated Kurdish *peshmerga* efforts to retake areas in the northwestern Sinjar region in December and January, and enabled some *peshmerga* units to advance to within 10 miles of Mosul. Lieutenant General Terry, overall commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, stated in mid-December that the ISF had retaken some key towns in Anbar Province including Karma and Haditha.<sup>43</sup> Backed by Shiite militias, the ISF claimed on January 26, 2015, to have also recaptured all major cities and towns of Diyala Province, north of Baghdad.<sup>44</sup> The ISF also has recaptured the town of Jurf al-Sakhar, 40 miles south of Baghdad.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. Dempsey told the House Armed Services Committee on November 13, “I’m not predicting, at this point, that I would recommend that those [Iraqi] forces in Mosul and along the border would need to be accompanied by U.S. forces, but we’re certainly considering it.”

<sup>40</sup> Text of White House’s Formal War Authorization Proposal. February 11, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Office of Management and Budget, memorandum from Shaun Donovan, Director of OMB, November 10, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Admiral John Kirby, January 6, 2014. CENTCOM Background Briefing, February 19, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Paul McLeary. “1,000 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Troops Iraq-Bound in January.” Defense News, December 19, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> [http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/26/Iraq-forces-liberate-Diyala-province-from-ISIS-officer-\(continued...\)](http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/26/Iraq-forces-liberate-Diyala-province-from-ISIS-officer-(continued...))

On the other hand, Islamic State fighters are able to launch local offensives, perhaps to divert Iraqi forces or perhaps to show that the movement is still advancing. The February 2015 Islamic State capture of the town of Al Baghdadi, discussed above, represents one such local setback. And, the ISF has made little progress, if any, in Anbar Province, and about 80% of that province is still held by Islamic State forces. There has not, to date, been a noticeable significant shift of Sunnis away from the Islamic State and in support of the Iraqi government. Recent IS attacks against border security personnel on the Saudi-Iraqi border and mortar attacks on Iraqi facilities hosting U.S. advisors may reflect IS leaders' goals for targeting foreign supporters of the Iraqi government and broadening their campaign to neighboring countries.

*Future Plans.* The reported U.S. and Iraqi intent is to prepare the Iraqi forces to take the offensive against major Islamic State strongholds in Iraq, possibly including Mosul, as early as the spring of 2015. The February 19, 2015, briefing by CENTCOM, referenced above, specified April-May 2015 as a possible timing of an Iraqi offensive to liberate Mosul that would involve about 25,000 ISF and *peshmerga* forces. About half of the force would constitute an assault force, while others would constitute a reserve and still others would secure Mosul after the Islamic State is expelled. The timing apparently will depend on whether U.S. and partner trainers consider the Iraqi forces sufficiently prepared to undertake the battle. Some reports suggest the ISF might first try to recapture Tikrit, while still other accounts suggest the Iraqis and their coalition advisers might first focus on expelling the Islamic State from the towns in the Euphrates Valley such as Fallujah. U.S. and outside experts assess a battle for Mosul as likely to be difficult, given that it is defended by about 2,000 Islamic State fighters who have dug in and might have the support of at least some of the Sunni inhabitants.

## **Governance, Economic Resources, and Human Rights Issues**

Iraq has not developed well-established institutions and rule of law, perhaps in part because of the state of nearly nonstop internal conflict in Iraq since 2003. However, the success of Iraq's energy sector has enabled Iraq's economy to continue to develop despite the setbacks on governance and human rights.

### **Economic Development and the Energy Sector**

The growth of oil exports has fueled rapid expansion of the economy. Iraqi officials estimated that growth was about 9% for 2013, and averaged 5% growth per year during 2004-2014. However, violence slowed Iraq's economy dramatically in 2014 to zero growth or perhaps even slight contraction. The more stable areas of Iraq, such as the Shiite south, have experienced an economic boom as they accommodate increasing numbers of Shiite pilgrims to Najaf and Karbala. GDP reached about \$150 billion by the end of 2013 and Iraq has about \$100 billion in foreign exchange reserves. Iraq implemented a \$150 billion budget for 2014, but, addressing falling oil prices, on January 29, 2015, the COR adopted a much smaller \$105 billion budget for 2015.

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It is falling oil prices that have affected the budget and the energy sector far more than the conflict against the Islamic State. The energy sector provides 90% of Iraq's budget. Iraq possesses a proven 143 billion barrels of oil. After long remaining below the levels achieved prior to the ouster of Saddam Hussein, Iraq's oil exports recovered to Saddam-era levels of about 2.1 million barrels per day by March 2012. Production reached the milestone 3 million barrels per day mark in February 2012, and expanded further to about 3.6 million barrels per day as of mid-2014. The Islamic State offensive interrupted export of Iraqi oil through the northern route (25% of total exports), but exports from the south of the country (75% of Iraq's totals) have been unaffected. The group also has captured some small oil fields from which the Islamic State reportedly produces about 20,000-30,000 barrels per day of crude oil. The loss of revenue from the northern route apparently contributed to the KRG-Baghdad oil sales deal for 2015, discussed above.

Iraqi leaders say they plan to increase production to over 10 million barrels per day by 2017. The International Energy Agency estimates more modest but still significant gains: it sees Iraq reaching 6 mbd of production by 2020 if it attracts \$25 billion in investment per year, and potentially 8 mbd by 2035. What is helping the Iraqi production is the involvement of foreign firms, including BP, Exxon-Mobil, Occidental, and Chinese firms. China now buys about half of Iraq's oil exports. Reaching the production goals is likely predicated on the defeat of the Islamic State organization.

Adopting national oil laws has been considered key to developing and establishing rule of law and transparency in a key sector. Substantial progress appeared near in August 2011 when both the COR and the Cabinet drafted the oil laws long in the works to rationalize the energy sector and clarify the rules for foreign investors. However, there were differences in their individual versions: the version drafted by the Oil and Natural Resources Committee was presented to the full COR on August 17, 2011. The Cabinet adopted its separate version on August 28, 2011—a version that the KRG opposed as favoring too much “centralization” (i.e., Baghdad control) in the energy sector. A 2012 KRG-Baghdad agreement on KRG oil exports included a provision to set up a six-member committee to review the different versions of the oil laws under consideration and decide which version to submit to the COR for formal consideration. There was little subsequent movement on this issue, but the KRG-Baghdad interim deal on oil sales—coupled with an improved working relationship between the KRG and the Abbadi government as compared to the Maliki government—might increase the potential for agreement on the oil law issue.

## **General Human Rights Issues**

The State Department human rights report for 2013, released February 27, 2014, largely repeated the previous years' criticisms of Iraq's human rights record. The report for 2013 states that a “culture of impunity” largely protected members of the security services and others in government from accountability or punishment for abuses.<sup>45</sup> The State Department report cited a wide range of human rights problems committed by Iraqi government security and law enforcement personnel—as well as by KRG security institutions—including unlawful killings; torture and other cruel punishments; poor conditions in prison facilities; denial of fair public trials; arbitrary arrest; arbitrary interference with privacy and home; limits on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association due to sectarianism and extremist threats; lack of protection of stateless

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dclid=220355#wrapper>.

persons; wide scale governmental corruption; human trafficking; and limited exercise of labor rights. Many of these same abuses and deficiencies are alleged in reports by outside groups such as Human Rights Watch.

Additional human rights issues have arisen from the reemergence of the Shiite militias since the June capture of Mosul. Some of these militias reportedly have executed Sunnis for alleged collaboration with the Islamic State. The militias have also, in some cases, allegedly prevented Sunnis from returning to their homes in towns recaptured from the Islamic State. Such actions have been reported in the case of Jurf al-Sakhar, see above, a mostly Sunni town that was recaptured from the Islamic State in November 2014.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

The State Department's Trafficking in Persons report for 2014, released in June 2014, again places Iraq in Tier 2, as did the report for 2013.<sup>46</sup> The Tier 2 placement of 2013 was an upgrade from the Tier 2 Watch List rating for Iraq for four previous years. The upgrade was a product of the U.S. assessment that Iraq is making "significant efforts" to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Previously, Iraq received a waiver from automatic downgrading to Tier 3 (which happens if a country is "watchlisted" for three straight years) because it had developed a plan to make significant efforts to meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and was devoting significant resources to that plan. On April 30, 2012, the COR enacted a law to facilitate elimination of trafficking in persons, both sexual and labor-related.

### **Media and Free Expression**

While State Department and other reports attribute most of Iraq's human rights difficulties to the security situation and factional infighting, apparent curbs on free expression appear independent of such factors. Human rights activists criticized a law, passed by the COR in August 2011, called the Journalist Rights Law. It purported to protect journalists, but left many of the provisions of Saddam-era libel and defamation laws in place, such as imprisonment for publicly insulting the government. The State Department human rights reports have noted continuing instances of harassment and intimidation of journalists who write about corruption and the lack of government services. Much of the private media that operate is controlled by individual factions or powerful personalities. There are no overt government restrictions on access to the Internet. In June 2012, the government ordered the closing of 44 new organizations that it said were operating without licenses. Included in the closure list were the BBC, Voice of America, and the U.S.-funded Radio Sawa.

In early 2013, the COR adopted an Information Crimes Law to regulate the use of information networks, computers, and other electronic devices and systems. Human Rights Watch and other groups criticized that law as "violat[ing] international standards protecting due process, freedom of speech, and freedom of association,"<sup>47</sup> and the COR revoked it February 2013.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226846.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Iraq's Information Crimes Law: Badly Written Provisions and Draconian Punishments Violate due Process and Free Speech." July 12, 2012.



## Corruption

The State Department human rights report for 2013 repeated previous years' reports that political interference and other factors such as tribal and family relationships regularly thwart the efforts of anti-corruption institutions, such as the Commission on Integrity (COI). The report says that corruption among officials across government agencies was widespread. A Joint Anti-Corruption Council, which reports to the Cabinet, is tasked with implementing the government's 2010-2014 Anti-Corruption Strategy. Another body is the Supreme Board of Audits, which monitors the use of government funds. The COR has its own Integrity Committee that oversees the executive branch and the governmental anti-corruption bodies. The KRG has its own separate anti-corruption institutions, including an Office of Governance and Integrity in the KRG Cabinet.

## Religious Freedom/Situation of Religious Minorities

The Iraqi constitution provides for religious freedom and the government generally respected religious freedom, according to the State Department's report on International Religious Freedom for 2013, released July 28, 2014.<sup>48</sup> However, reflecting the conservative Islamic attitudes of many Iraqis, Shiite and Sunni clerics seek to enforce aspects of Islamic law and customs, sometimes coming into conflict with Iraq's generally secular traditions as well as constitutional protections. In February 2014, the Cabinet adopted a Shiite "personal status law" that would permit underage marriages—reportedly an attempt by Maliki to shore up electoral support among Shiite Islamists.

A major concern is the safety and security of Iraq's Christian and other religious minority populations which are concentrated in northern Iraq as well as in Baghdad. These other groups include most notably the Yazidis, which number about 500,000-700,000; the Shabaks, which number about 200,000-500,000 and most of whom are Shiites; the Sabeans, who number about 4,000; the Baha'i's that number about 2,000; and the Kakai's of Kirkuk, which number about 24,000. Conditions for these communities have deteriorated sharply since the Islamic State-led offensives that began in June 2014. See also CRS Report IN10111, *Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Implications for Religious Minorities*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

*Christians.* Even before the 2014 Islamic State-led offensives, recent estimates indicate that the Christian population of Iraq had been reduced to 400,000-850,000, from an estimated 1 million-1.5 million during Saddam's time. About 10,000 Christians in northern Iraq, fearing bombings and intimidation, fled the areas near Kirkuk during October-December 2009. On October 31, 2010, a major attack on Christians occurred when a church in Baghdad (Sayidat al-Najat Church) was besieged by militants and as many as 60 worshippers were killed. Partly as a result, Christian celebrations of Christmas 2010 were said to be subdued—following three years in which Christians had felt confident enough to celebrate that holiday openly. Several other attacks appearing to target Iraqi Christians have taken place since. After the Islamic State capture of Mosul in June 2014, the city's remaining Christians were expelled and some of their churches and other symbolic locations destroyed.

Prior to the Islamic State capture of much of Nineveh Province, Iraqi Assyrian Christian groups advocated a Nineveh Plains Province Solution, in which the Nineveh Plains would be turned into a self-administering region, possibly its own province. Supporters of the idea claimed such a zone would pose no threat to the integrity of Iraq, but others say the plan's inclusion of a separate

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222291#wrapper>.

Christian security force could set the scene for violence and confrontation. The Iraqi government adopted a form of the plan in its January 2014 announcement that the Cabinet had decided to convert the Nineveh Plains into a new province. The Islamic State's takeover of much of the north has probably mooted this concept. One prominent Iraqi human rights NGO, the Hammurabi Organization, is largely run by Iraqi Assyrians.

Even at the height of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, U.S. forces did not specifically protect Christian sites at all times, partly because Christian leaders do not want to appear closely allied with the United States. The State Department religious freedom report for 2011 said that during 2011, U.S. Embassy Baghdad designated a "special coordinator" to oversee U.S. funding, program implementation, and advocacy to address minority concerns.

*Funding Issues.* Appropriations for FY2008 and FY2009 each earmarked \$10 million in ESF to assist the Nineveh Plain Christians. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-117) made a similar provision for FY2010, although focused on Middle East minorities generally and without a specific dollar figure mandated for Iraqi Christians. The State Department International Religious Freedom report for 2012 said that the United States funded more than \$73 million for projects to support minority communities in Iraq from 2003 up to that time.

## **Women's Rights**

Iraq has a tradition of secularism and liberalism, and women's rights issues have not been as large a concern for international observers and rights groups as they have in Afghanistan or the Persian Gulf states, for example. Women serve at many levels of government, as discussed above, and are well integrated into the work force in all types of jobs and professions. By tradition, many Iraqi women wear traditional coverings but many adopt Western dress. In October 2011, the COR passed legislation to lift Iraq's reservation to Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

## **Mass Graves**

As is noted in State Department reports on human rights in Iraq, the Iraqi government continues to uncover mass graves of Iraqi victims of the Saddam regime. This effort is under the authority of the Human Rights Ministry. The largest to date was a mass grave in Mahawil, near Hilla, that contained 3,000 bodies, discovered shortly after the fall of Saddam's regime. In July 2012, a mass grave was discovered near Najaf, containing the bodies of about 500 Iraqi Shiites killed during the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein. Excavations of mass graves in Wasit and Dhi Qar Provinces took place in April and May 2013, respectively.

## **Regional Relationships**

Iraq's neighbors, as well as the United States, have significant interest in Iraq's stability. The Islamic State's gains in 2014 have threatened Iraq's territorial integrity and caused many of the Sunni Arab states to join U.S. efforts to defeat the Islamic State, despite continuing reservations about the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad. Iraq's instability also likely interrupts its efforts to reintegrate into the Arab fold after more than 20 years of ostracism following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. That reintegration took a large step forward with the holding of an Arab League summit in Baghdad during March 27-29, 2012, even though only 9 heads of

state out of the 22 Arab League members attended. Only one of them was a Persian Gulf state leader (Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah of Kuwait). On May 23-24, 2012, Iraq hosted nuclear talks between Iran and six negotiating powers. Iraq has also begun to assist other Arab states, for example by assisting post-Qadhafi authorities in Libya destroy chemical weapons stockpiles from the Qadhafi regime.

## **Iran**

Iran is the chief regional supporter and ally of the Baghdad government; its influence in Iraq has increased steadily since the fall of Saddam Hussein and the accession of Shiite Muslim factions in Baghdad. Iran's leverage over Baghdad has increased further since mid-2014 as a result of Tehran's military assistance to the Iraqi government against the Islamic State. Iran has sent as many as 1,000 advisers from the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC-QF) to help organize the defense of Baghdad and ISF counterattacks, in part by reorganizing revived and expanded Iraqi Shiite militia forces. Iran has provided to Baghdad substantial quantities of military equipment including a reported five to seven Su-25 combat aircraft; flown drone surveillance flights over Iraq; and conducted at least one airstrike (December 2014) directly on Islamic State forces near Iran's border. The aircraft Iran has provided to Iraq might have been from among 100+ combat aircraft that Iraq flew to Iran at the beginning of the 1991 war against the United States and which Iran integrated into its own air force.<sup>49</sup> (Iran had not previously returned the jets on the assertion that they were "reparations" for Saddam's invasion of Iran in 1980.) Statements issued during Abbadi's October 20-21, 2014, visit to Iran indicated the two countries were determined to widen and deepen security cooperation against the Islamic State organization. KRG leaders have also praised Tehran's deliveries of military equipment to the *peshmerga* almost immediately after the Islamic State's major offensive in northern Iraq began in mid-2014.

Iran's military assistance to Iraq furthers the overall U.S. objective in Iraq of countering the Islamic State. By many accounts, Iran cooperated with U.S. efforts to achieve a replacement for Maliki as Prime Minister. Senior U.S. officials have discussed Iraq's situation with Iranian officials on the sidelines of several nuclear talks since June 2014, although U.S. officials have said there is no formal U.S. coordination with Iran in Iraq. Iran is not formally part of the 60-nation coalition that is attempting to defeat the Islamic State. U.S. officials also have said that there is no linkage between any Iranian cooperation on Iraq and the substance of the nuclear negotiations.

Iran has viewed Iraq as an avenue for reducing the effects of international sanctions. Some reports say Iraq is enabling Iran's efforts by allowing it to interact with Iraq's energy sector and its banking system. In July 2012, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Elaf Islamic Bank of Iraq for allegedly conducting financial transactions with the Iranian banking system that violated the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA, P.L. 111-195). Those sanctions were lifted in May 2013 when Elaf reduced its involvement in Iran's financial sector.

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<sup>49</sup> Gareth Jennings. "Iraq Receives Additional Su-25 Jets, Purportedly from Iran." *Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 2, 2014.

The Iraqi government treatment of the population of Camp Ashraf and Camp Hurriya, camps in which over 2,700 Iranian oppositionists (People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, PMOI) still reside, is another indicator of the government's close ties to Iran. The residents of the camps accuse the Iraqi government of recent attacks on residents. This issue is discussed in substantial detail in CRS Report RL32048, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman. Iran has periodically acted against other Iranian opposition groups based in Iraq, including the Free Life Party (PJAK) that consists of Iranian Kurds and is allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party that opposes the government of Turkey. Iran has shelled purported camps of the group on several occasions. Iran is also reportedly attempting to pressure the bases and offices in Iraq of such Iranian Kurdish parties as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) and Komaleh.

The close Iran-Iraq relationship suggest that the two countries have overcome lingering distrust of Iran from the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, in which an estimated 300,000 Iraqi military personnel (Shiite and Sunni) died. Still, Iraq's Shiite clerics resist Iranian interference and take pride in Najaf as a more prominent center of Shiite theology than the Iranian holy city of Qom.

## Syria

One of the major disagreements between the United States and the government of Iraq has been on the issue of Syria. U.S. policy is to achieve the ouster of President Bashar Al Assad, whereas Iraq's government apparently sees Assad as an ally that is, like Iraq, governed by Shiite leaders. (Assad's Alawite community practices a religion that is an offshoot of Shiism.) Iraq has generally refrained from criticizing Assad's use of military force against the rebellion, and it abstained on an Arab League vote in November 2011 to suspend Syria's membership. Perhaps to ensure Arab participation at the March 2012 Arab League summit in Baghdad, Iraq voted for a January 22, 2012, Arab League plan for a transition of power in Syria. As an indication of Iraq's policy of simultaneously engaging with the United States on the Syria issue, Iraqi officials have attended U.S.-led meetings of countries that are seeking a political transition in Syria.

An issue that divided Iraq and the United States in 2012-2014 was Iraq's reported permission for Iranian arms supplies to overfly Iraq en route to Syria.<sup>50</sup> Iraq searched a few of these flights, particularly after specific high-level U.S. requests to do so, but routinely allowed the aircraft to proceed after finding no arms aboard, sometimes because the Iranian aircraft had already dropped off their cargo in Syria. Instituting regular inspections of these flights was a major focus of the March 24, 2013, visit of Secretary of State Kerry to Baghdad, but the Iraqi leadership argued that Iraq lacks the air defense and aircraft to interdict the Iranian flights. That visit reportedly resulted in an agreement for the United States to provide Iraq with information on the likely contents of the Iranian flights, and U.S. officials said in late 2013 that the overflights were less frequent.

The unrest in Syria has involved Iraqi factions. As noted above, the Islamic State operates on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border and Iraqi Shiite militiamen from groups discussed above went to Syria to fight on behalf of the Assad regime, although many have returned to Iraq to counter the Islamic State's offensive. The KRG has trained some Syrian Kurdish militia forces to secure an autonomous Kurdish area if Assad loses control and sent about 200 *peshmerga* to assist Syrian Kurdish forces (YPG, a successor to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) in the defense of the

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<sup>50</sup> Kristina Wong, "Iraq Resists U.S. Prod, Lets Iran Fly Arms to Syria." *Washington Times*, March 16, 2012.

town of Kobane. That defense, declared successful in January 2015, was aided by U.S and Arab coalition partner bombing of Islamic State positions in and around the city.

## **Turkey**

Turkey's policy toward Iraq has historically focused almost exclusively on the Iraqi Kurdish insistence on autonomy and possible push for independence—sentiments that Turkey apparently fears could embolden Kurdish oppositionists in Turkey. The anti-Turkey Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has long maintained camps inside Iraq, along the border with Turkey. Turkey has conducted periodic military operations against the PKK encampments in Iraq, but more recently has engaged in peace talks with the group. The PKK issue did not prevent Turkey from building a pragmatic and positive relationship with the KRG, and Turkey has emerged as the largest outside investor in northern Iraq. Turkey did not openly oppose the KRG's seizure of Kirkuk in June 2014, even though that capture bolsters the KRG's potential for independence from Baghdad.

As Turkey's relations with the KRG have deepened, relations between Turkey and the Iraqi government have worsened, although the two countries have sought to limit damage to their relationship. Turkey's provision of refuge for Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi has been a source of tension; Maliki unsuccessfully sought his extradition for trial. On August 2, 2012, then Turkish Foreign Minister (now Prime Minister) Ahmet Davutoglu visited the disputed city of Kirkuk, prompting a rebuke from Iraq's Foreign Ministry that the visit constituted inappropriate interference in Iraqi affairs. In an effort to improve relations with Baghdad, Davutoglu visited Baghdad in mid-November 2013 and, aside from meeting Iraqi leaders, visited Najaf and Karbala—Iraqi cities holy to Shiites. That visit appeared intended to signal Turkish evenhandedness with regard to sectarian disputes in Iraq and to minimize any dispute with Baghdad over KRG oil exports through Turkey. During that visit, Maliki reportedly proposed to develop a “north-south” energy corridor through which Iraqi energy exports could flow to Europe via Turkey, but Davutoglu apparently did not commit to the proposal. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on November 13, 2013, that the United States supports that concept as well as another export pipeline that would carry Iraqi oil to Jordan's Red Sea outlet at Aqaba.

## **Gulf States**

Prior to the Islamic State's major offensive, Iraq had limited success in reducing tensions with the Sunni-led Persian Gulf states, who never fully accommodated themselves to the fact that Iraq is dominated by Shiite factions. Relations worsened during 2012-2014 as the Maliki government marginalized Iraq's Sunni leaders. Amir Sabah of Kuwait was the only Gulf head of state to attend the March 27-29, 2012, Arab League summit in Baghdad; the other Gulf states sent low-level delegations. The Gulf states have joined the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State, but have to date limited their airstrikes to Syria, not Iraq—likely not wanting to appear to be supporting the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad.

Saudi Arabia had been widely criticized by Iraqi leaders because it has not opened an embassy in Baghdad, a move Saudi Arabia pledged in 2008 and which the United States has long urged. This issue faded somewhat after February 2012, when Saudi Arabia announced that it had named its ambassador to Jordan, Fahd al-Zaid, to serve as a nonresident ambassador to Iraq concurrently—although still not opening an embassy in Baghdad. In part to express support for the Abbadi government and for U.S. efforts in Iraq, on September 15, 2014, Saudi Arabia announced that it



would open an embassy in Baghdad. The other Gulf countries have opened embassies and all except the UAE have appointed full ambassadors to Iraq. On July 1, 2014, Saudi Arabia announced a donation of \$500 million to help the United Nations address the crisis caused by the Islamic State offensive.

## **Kuwait**

The relationship with Kuwait has always been considered difficult to resolve because of the legacy of the 1990 Iraqi invasion. However, greater acceptance of the Iraqi government was demonstrated by the visit of Kuwait's then prime minister to Iraq on January 12, 2011. Maliki subsequently visited Kuwait on February 16, 2011, and, as noted above, the Amir of Kuwait attended the Arab League summit in Baghdad in March 2012. The Prime Minister of Kuwait visited in mid-June 2013, which led to an agreement to remove the outstanding issues of Kuwaiti persons and property missing from the Iraqi invasion from U.N. Security Council (Chapter VII) supervision to oversight by UNAMI under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter. This transition was implemented by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2107 of June 27, 2013. The two countries have also resolved the outstanding issues of maintenance of border demarcation. In late October 2013, the Iraqi Cabinet voted to allow Kuwait to open consulates in Basra and Irbil. These issues are discussed in detail in CRS Report RS21513, *Kuwait: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman

## **Iraq at the Time of the U.S. Military Withdrawal**

Some experts assert that the Islamic State gains in Iraq were an inevitable outgrowth of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. Others argue that a continuing U.S. presence in Iraq would not have altered the Iraqi political dysfunction that contributed to the crisis. The withdrawal process began on February 27, 2009, when President Obama announced that U.S. troop levels in Iraq would decline to 50,000 by September 2010 (from 138,000 in early 2009) and the U.S. mission would shift from combat to training the ISF. U.S. troops ceased patrolling Iraqi cities as of June 30, 2009. With the formal end of the U.S. combat mission on August 31, 2010, U.S. force levels were at 47,000 and declined steadily thereafter until the last U.S. troop contingent crossed into Kuwait on December 18, 2011.

A full U.S. withdrawal by the end of 2011 was a stipulation of the November 2008 U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), which took effect on January 1, 2009. With that deadline approaching, fears of expanded Iranian influence, and perceived deficiencies in Iraq's nearly 900,000 member security forces caused U.S. officials to seek to revise the SA to keep some U.S. troops in Iraq after 2011. Some U.S. experts feared the rifts among major ethnic and sectarian communities were still wide enough that Iraq could still become a "failed state" unless some U.S. troops remained. U.S. officials emphasized that the ISF remained unable to defend Iraq's airspace and borders, and Iraqi commanders indicated that the ISF would be unable to execute full external defense until 2020-2024.<sup>51</sup> Renegotiating the SA to allow for a continued U.S. troop presence required discussions with the Iraqi government and a ratification vote of the Iraqi COR; Iraq's constitution requires a COR vote on formal bilateral agreements with foreign countries.

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<sup>51</sup> "Iraq General Says Forces Not Ready 'Until 2020.'" *Agence France Presse*, October 30, 2011.

Several high-level U.S. visits and statements urged the Iraqis to consider extending the U.S. troop presence. Maliki told Speaker of the House John Boehner during his April 16, 2011, visit to Baghdad that Iraq would welcome U.S. training and arms after that time.<sup>52</sup> Subsequently, Maliki stated that a continued U.S. troops presence would require a “consensus” among political blocs (which he later defined as at least 70% concurrence).<sup>53</sup> This appeared to be an effort to isolate the Sadr faction, the most vocal opponent of a continuing U.S. presence. On August 3, 2011, most major factions gave Maliki their backing to negotiate an SA extension, but Sadr threatened to activate his Mahdi Army militia to oppose any extension of the U.S. presence. As U.S.-Iraq negotiations on a post-2011 U.S. presence got underway, a figure of about 15,000 remaining U.S. troops, reflecting recommendations of the U.S. military, was being widely discussed.<sup>54</sup> The *New York Times* reported on September 7, 2011, that the Administration was considering proposing to Iraq to retain only about 3,000-4,000 forces, mostly in a training role.<sup>55</sup> Some experts criticized that figure as too low to carry out intended missions.

With Sadrist opposition unyielding, on October 5, 2011, Iraq stated that it would not extend the legal protections contained in the existing SA. That stipulation failed to meet the Defense Department requirements that U.S. soldiers not be subject to prosecution under Iraq’s constitution and its laws. On October 21, 2011, President Obama announced that the United States and Iraq had agreed that, in accordance with the November 2008 Security Agreement (SA), all U.S. troops would leave Iraq at the end of 2011. Whether the Obama Administration made substantial efforts to overcome the Iraqi resistance remains an issue of debate.

## **Post-Withdrawal Security Relationship**

After the withdrawal announcement, senior U.S. officials stated that the United States would be able to continue to help Iraq secure itself using programs commonly provided for other countries. Administration officials stressed that the U.S. political and residual security-related presence would be sufficient to ensure that Iraq remained stable, allied to the United States, continuing to move toward full democracy, and economically growing. At the time of the withdrawal, there were about 16,000 total U.S. personnel in Iraq, about half of which were contractors. Of the contractors, most were on missions to protect the U.S. Embassy and consulates, and other U.S. personnel and facilities throughout Iraq.

The following sections discuss aspects of the U.S.-Iraq security relationship from the time of the U.S. withdrawal until the crises created by ISIL’s strength and offensives.

### **Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I)**

The Office of Security Cooperation—Iraq (OSC-I), operating under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, was the primary Iraq-based U.S. entity tasked with interacting with the Iraqi military after the 2011 withdrawal. Its primary mission is to administer the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs (U.S. arms sales to Iraq). OSC-I, funded with the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds discussed in the aid table below, is the largest U.S. security cooperation office in the

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<sup>52</sup> Prashant Rao. “Maliki Tells US’ Boehner Iraqi Troops Are Ready.” *Agence France Presse*, April 16, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Aaron Davis. “Maliki Seeking Consensus on Troops.” *Washington Post*, May 12, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Author conversations with Iraq experts in Washington, DC, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers. “Plan Would Keep Military in Iraq Beyond Deadline.” September 7, 2011.

world. Prior to the June 2014 ISIL-led offensive, it worked out of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and five other locations around Iraq (Kirkuk Regional Airport Base, Tikrit, Besmaya, Umm Qasr, and Taji). It left the facility in Tikrit before the Islamic State captured that city in June 2014.

Total OCS-I personnel number over 3,500, but the vast majority are security and support personnel, most of which are contractors. Of the staff, about 175 are U.S. military personnel and an additional 45 are Defense Department civilians. Some of these personnel have been seconded to the anti-Islamic State missions discussed above, but some remain as OSC-I personnel performing the same functions they have since 2012. About 46 members of the staff administer the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program and other security assistance programs such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Since 2005, DOD has administered over 200 U.S.-funded FMS cases totaling \$2.5 billion, and Iraq-funded cases and potential cases that, if all completed, have an estimated value of over \$25 billion.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Major Arms Sales***

The United States sold substantial quantities of arms to Iraq well before the 2014 Islamic State offensive. In August 2012, the United States completed delivery to Iraq of 140 M1A1 Abrams tanks. The tanks cost about \$860 million, of which \$800 million was paid out of Iraq's national funds. In December 2012, the U.S. Navy delivered two support ships to Iraq, which assist Iraq's fast-attack and patrol boats that secure its offshore oil platforms and other coastal and offshore locations. The United States also has sold Iraq equipment that its security forces can use to restrict the ability of insurgent and terrorist groups to move contraband across Iraq's borders and checkpoints (RAPISCAN system vehicles), at a cost of about \$600 million. Some refurbished air defense guns were provided gratis as excess defense articles (EDA).

*F-16s.* The largest FMS case is the sale of 36 U.S.-made F-16 combat aircraft to Iraq, notified to Congress in two equal tranches, the latest of which was made on December 12, 2011 (Transmittal No. 11-46). The total value of the sale of 36 F-16s is up to \$6.5 billion when all parts, training, and weaponry are included. As noted above, deliveries of the aircraft began in July 2014, although the planes are being delivered to Iraqi control at a U.S. air base in Arizona prior to securing from the Islamic State the area around their permanent home at Balad Air Base, north of Baghdad.

*Apache Attack Helicopters and Stingers.* In 2013 Iraq requested to purchase from the United States the Integrated Air Defense System and Apache attack helicopters, with a total sale value of about \$10 billion.<sup>57</sup> The sale of the Air Defense system was notified to Congress on August 5, 2013, with a value of \$2.4 billion, and included 681 Stinger shoulder held units, 3 Hawk anti-aircraft batteries, and other equipment. DSCA simultaneously notified about \$2.3 billion worth of additional sales to Iraq including of Stryker nuclear, chemical, and biological equipment reconnaissance vehicles, 12 Bell helicopters, the Mobile Troposcatter Radio System, and maintenance support.

The provision of Apaches involves the lease of 6 of the helicopters, with an estimated cost of about \$1.37 billion, and the sale of 24 more, with an estimated value of \$4.8 billion. The 6 to be

<sup>56</sup> Iraq Signs Arms Deals Worth \$4.2 Billion. *Washington Post*, October 10, 2012; Tony Capaccio. "Iraq Seeks Up to 30 General Dynamics Stryker Vehicles." Bloomberg News, November 19, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> John Hudson. "Iraqi Ambassador: Give Us Bigger Guns, And Then We'll Help on Syria." July 17, 2013.



leased were to arrive in July 2014 and the 24 to be sold would be delivered by 2017. As noted above, the provision of the Apaches was held up by some in Congress until the December 2013 Islamic State-led offensive in Anbar Province.

The United States is not the only arms supplier Iraq has. In October 2012, Iraq and Russia signed deals for Russian arms worth about \$4.2 billion. In November 2013, Russia delivered four Mi-35 attack helicopters to Iraq. As noted above, Russia quickly delivered several combat aircraft in late June 2014 that Iraq sought to fill a gap in its air attack capabilities. In October 2012, Iraq agreed to buy 28 Czech-made military aircraft, a deal valued at about \$1 billion.<sup>58</sup> On December 12, 2013, South Korea signed a deal to export 24 FA-50 light fighter jets to Iraq at an estimated cost of \$1.1 billion; the aircraft will be delivered between 2015 and 2016.<sup>59</sup> Iran's arms supplies to the Iraqi government are discussed above.

### ***Other Security Assistance and Training Programs Prior to 2014***

OSC-I's mandate includes training and assistance programs for the Iraq military. Because the United States and Iraq did not conclude a longterm Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that granted legal immunities to U.S. military personnel, the 160 OSC-I personnel involved in these programs have been contractors that train Iraq's forces on counterterrorism and naval and air defense. Some are embedded with Iraqi forces as trainers not only tactically, but at the institutional level by advising Iraqi security ministries and its command structure.

As Sunni unrest increased in 2012, Iraq sought additional security cooperation with the United States. On August 19, 2012, en route to a visit to Iraq, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey said that "I think [Iraqi leaders] recognize their capabilities may require yet more additional development and I think they're reaching out to us to see if we can help them with that."<sup>60</sup> Iraq reportedly expressed to Dempsey interest in expanded U.S. training of the ISF and joint exercises. After the Dempsey visit, it was reported that, at the request of Iraq, a unit of Army Special Operations forces had deployed to Iraq to advise on counterterrorism and help with intelligence against AQ-I/ISIL.<sup>61</sup> (These forces presumably operated under a limited SOFA or related understanding crafted for this purpose.) Other reports suggest that Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary forces had, as of late 2012, assumed some of the DOD mission of helping Iraqi counter-terrorism forces (CTS) against ISIL in western Iraq,<sup>62</sup> while also potentially working against ISIL in Syria.

During December 5-6, 2012, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy James Miller and acting Under Secretary of State for International Security Rose Gottemoeller visited Iraq and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with acting Defense Minister Sadoun Dulaymi. The five year MOU provides for

- high level U.S.-Iraq military exchanges,
- professional military education cooperation,

<sup>58</sup> Adam Schreck. "Iraq Presses US For Faster Arms Deliveries." Yahoo.com, October 18, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Defense News. December 12, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> "U.S. Hopes For Stronger Military Ties With Iraq: General." *Agence France-Presse*, August 19, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Tim Arango. "Syrian Civil War Poses New Peril For Fragile Iraq." *New York Times*, September 25, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Adam Entous et al. "CIA Ramps Up Role in Iraq." *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2013.

- counter-terrorism cooperation,
- the development of defense intelligence capabilities, and
- joint exercises.

The MOU appeared to address many of the issues that were hampering OSC-I from performing its mission to its full potential. The MOU also reflects some of the more recent ideas put forward, such as joint exercises.

The concept of enhanced U.S.-Iraq cooperation gained further consideration in mid-2013. In June 2013, General Dempsey said that the United States was looking for ways to improve the military capabilities of Iraq and Lebanon, two countries extensively affected by the Syria conflict. He added that enhanced assistance could involve dispatching training teams and accelerating sales of weapons and equipment. During his August 2013 visit to Washington, DC, conducted primarily to attend meetings of the U.S.-Iraq Political and Diplomatic Joint Coordination Committee (JCC), then Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari indicated that Iraq wants to expand security cooperation with the United States to enhance ISF capability. During his November 1, 2013, meeting with President Obama, Maliki reportedly discussed enhanced security cooperation, including expanded access to U.S. intelligence, with U.S. officials, including President Obama and Secretary of Defense Hagel.<sup>63</sup> The joint statement issued at the conclusion of Maliki's meeting with President Obama did not specify any U.S. commitments to this level of cooperation, but did express a "shared assessment of al Qaida affiliated groups threatening Iraq."

Aside from the U.S. training for the ISF discussed above, the U.S. military sought to integrate the ISF into regional security exercises and structures that can augment the ISF's proficiency. The United States arranged Iraq's participation in the regional Eager Lion military exercise series in Jordan. Iraq also participated in the U.S.-led international mine countermeasures exercise off Bahrain in 2013. In July 2013, the United States convened a strategic dialogue that includes Iraq, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt joined the subsequent session of the dialogue the week of November 18, 2013.

### **Police Development Program**

A separate program, the Police Development Program, was intended to maintain the proficiency of Iraq's police forces. It was the largest program that in 2012 transitioned from DOD to State Department lead, using International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds. However, Iraq's drive to emerge from U.S. tutelage produced apparent Iraqi disinterest in the PDP. By late 2012, it consisted of only 36 advisers, about 10% of what was envisioned as an advisory force of 350, and it is being phased out entirely during 2013. Two facilities built with over \$200 million in U.S. funds (Baghdad Police College Annex and part of the U.S. consulate in Basra) are to be turned over to the Iraqi government by December 2012. Some press reports say there is Administration consideration of discontinuing the program entirely.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt. "As Security Deteriorates at Home, Iraqi Leader Arrives in U.S. Seeking Aid." *New York Times*, November 1, 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Tim Arango. "U.S. May Scrap Costly Efforts to Train Iraqi Police." *New York Times*, May 13, 2012.

## **Regional Reinforcement Capability**

At the time of the U.S. withdrawal, U.S. officials asserted that the United States also would retain a significant capability in the Persian Gulf—with a potential capability to intervene in Iraq if there were a collapse there. The United States has maintained about 35,000 military personnel in the region, including about 10,000 mostly U.S. Army forces in Kuwait, about 40% of which are combat-ready rather than purely support forces. There is also prepositioned armor there and in Qatar. There are about 7,000 mostly Air Force personnel in Qatar; 5,000 mostly Navy personnel in Bahrain; and about 5,000 mostly Air Force and Navy in the UAE, with very small numbers in Saudi Arabia and Oman. The rest are part of at least one aircraft carrier task force in or near the Gulf at any given time. The forces are in the Gulf under bilateral defense cooperation agreements with all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that give the United States access to military facilities to station forces and preposition some heavy armor.

## **The Diplomatic and Economic Relationship**

In his 2011 Iraq withdrawal announcement, President Obama stated that, through U.S. assistance programs, the United States would be able to continue to develop all facets of the bilateral relationship with Iraq and help strengthen its institutions.<sup>65</sup> The bilateral civilian relationship was the focus of a visit to Iraq by Vice President Biden in early December 2011, just prior to the December 12, 2011, Maliki visit to the United States.

The cornerstone of the bilateral relationship is the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). The SFA, signed and entered into effect at the same time as the SA, presents a framework for long-term U.S.-Iraqi relations, and is intended to help orient Iraq's politics and its economy toward the West and the developed nations, and reduce its reliance on Iran or other regional states. The SFA sets up a Higher Coordination Committee (HCC) as an institutional framework for high-level U.S.-Iraq meetings, and subordinate Joint Coordinating Committees. No meeting of the HCC was held in 2012, but Foreign Minister Zebari's August 2013 visit was in conjunction with one of the JCCs. During Maliki's October 29-November 1, 2013, visit, the HCC was convened—the fourth meeting of the HCC since the SFA was signed.

The SFA provides for the following (among other provisions):

- U.S.-Iraq cooperation “based on mutual respect,” and that the United States will not use Iraqi facilities to launch any attacks against third countries, and will not seek permanent bases.
- U.S. support for Iraqi democracy and support for Iraq in regional and international organizations.
- U.S.-Iraqi dialogue to increase Iraq's economic development, including through the Dialogue on Economic Cooperation and a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). The United States and Iraq announced on March 6, 2013, that a bilateral TIFA had been finalized.
- Promotion of Iraq's development of its electricity, oil, and gas sector.

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<sup>65</sup> Remarks by the President on Ending the War in Iraq. <http://www.whitehouse.gov>, October 21, 2011.

- U.S.-Iraq dialogue on agricultural issues and promotion of Iraqi participation in agricultural programs run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and USAID.
- Cultural cooperation through several exchange programs, such as the Youth Exchange and Study Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program. The joint statement following Maliki's meeting with President Obama said that nearly 1,000 Iraqi students were studying in the United States and that the two sides had a "shared commitment" to increase that number and to increase cultural, artistic, and scientific exchanges.

State Department-run aid programs are intended to fulfill the objectives of the SFA, according to State Department budget documents. These programs are implemented mainly through Economic Support Funds. State Department budget justification documents in recent fiscal years have indicated that most U.S. economic aid to Iraq now goes to programs to promote democracy, adherence to international standards of human rights, rule of law, and conflict resolution. Programs funded by the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) focus on rule of law, moving away from previous use of INL funds for police training. Funding continues for counterterrorism operations (NADR funds), and for anti-corruption initiatives. U.S. officials stress that, for programs run by USAID in Iraq, Iraq matches one-for-one the U.S. funding contribution.

The State Department became the lead U.S. agency in Iraq as of October 1, 2011, and closed its "Office of the Iraq Transition Coordinator" in March 2012. The Ambassador in Iraq is Stuart Jones, who was nominated in May 2014 and sworn in on September 17, 2014. In July 2011, as part of the transition to State leadership in Iraq, the United States formally opened consulates in Basra, Irbil, and Kirkuk. An embassy branch office was considered for Mosul but cost and security issues kept the U.S. facility there limited to a diplomatic office. The Kirkuk consulate closed at the end of July 2012 in part to save costs. The State Department has planned to replace the U.S. consulate in Irbil with a New Consulate Compound in Irbil, and the FY2014 Consolidated Appropriation, P.L. 113-76, provided \$250 million for that purpose. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, built at a cost of about \$750 million, controlled over 16,000 personnel at the time of the 2011 U.S. withdrawal, but fell to about 5,500 at the end of 2013.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ernesto Londono. "U.S. Clout Wanes in Iraq." *Washington Post*, March 24, 2013.

**Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Iraq Since FY2003**  
(appropriations/allocations in millions of dollars)

	FY '03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16 (req)
IRRF	2,475	18,389	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
ESF	—	—	—	1,535.4	1,677	429	541.5	382.5	325.7	250	72.3	72.3	22.5	72.5
Democracy Fund	—	—	—	—	250	75	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
IFTA (Treasury Dept. Asst.)	—	—	—	13.0	2.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
NADR	—	—	3.6	—	18.4	20.4	35.5	30.3	29.8	32	31.1	31.1	23.86	—
Refugee Accounts (MRA and ERMA)	39.6	.1	—	—	78.3	278	260	316	280	—	—	—	—	—
IDA	22	—	7.1	.3	45	85	51	42	17	—	—	—	—	—
Other USAID Funds	470	—	—	—	—	23.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
INCLE	—	—	—	91.4	170	85	20	702	114.6	137	13.5	13.5	11	11
FMF	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	850	471.3	471.3	250	250
IMET	—	1.2	—	—	1.1	—	2	2	1.7	2	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.0
DOD—ISFF Funds	—	—	5391	3007	5542	3000	1000	1000	1155	—	—	—	1618	715
DOD—Iraq Army	51.2	—	210	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DOD—CERP	—	140	718	708	750	996	339	263	44.0	—	—	—	—	—
DOD—Oil Repair	802	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DOD—Business Support	—	—	—	—	50.0	50.0	74.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,859</b>	<b>18548</b>	<b>6329</b>	<b>5365</b>	<b>8584</b>	<b>5042</b>	<b>2323</b>	<b>2738</b>	<b>1968</b>	<b>1519</b>	<b>589.4</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>1927</b>	<b>1050</b>

**Sources:** State Department FY2015 budget documents, and CRS calculations. Figures include regular and Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding.

**Notes:** Table prepared by Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Affairs. This table does not contain separate agency operational costs. IMET=International Military Education and Training; IRRF=Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund; INCLE=International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Fund; ISF=Iraq Security Force; NADR=Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related; ESF=Economic Support Fund; IDA=International Disaster Assistance; FMF=Foreign Military Financing; ISF= Iraqi Security Forces. FY2015 and 2016 ISF funding are funds to equip and train the ISF, peshmerga, and Sunni tribal fighters.

**Table 4. Recent Democracy Assistance to Iraq: FY2009-2012**  
(in millions of current dollars)

	<b>FY2009</b>	<b>FY2010 (act.)</b>	<b>FY2011</b>	<b>FY2012</b>
Rule of Law and Human Rights	32.45	33.3	16.5	29.75
Good Governance	143.64	117.40	90.33	100.5
Political Competition/Consensus-Building	41.00	52.60	30.00	16.25
Civil Society	87.53	83.6	32.5	55.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>304.62</b>	<b>286.9</b>	<b>169.33</b>	<b>202.0</b>

**Source:** Congressional Budget Justification, March 2011. Figures for these accounts are included in the overall assistance figures presented in the table above. FY2013 and FY2014 ESF and INCLE-funded programs focus extensively on democracy and governance, rule of law, and anti-corruption.

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