

Iraq Threat Assessment June 29, 2014

During my tenure as the senior Antiterrorism/Force Protection Officer for all Coalition Forces in Iraq, I had identified six basic threat groups against us: national terrorists, international terrorists (Al Qaeda and others), former regime elements (Saddamists), religious extremists, criminals, and tribes. It was recognized that some individuals and organizations would fall under more than one threat group. How each was operating determined its threat group classification. The tactics and objectives of each group differ from varying degrees. Even within the groups, differences were identified. Sunni and Shia national terrorist courses of action differ. As a result of these understandings, threat expectations for current and upcoming coalition missions could be developed. In turn, defensive measures could be constructed. There was one additional caveat. During Operations Iraqi Freedom 1 and 2, any defensive measure taken was allowed to remain in effect for only ninety days. A year later, that window had closed to fourteen days. During those periods, it was found that our adversaries had adapted with new ways to attack. We needed to continually identify and characterize evolving weaknesses and push effective defensive windows to increased periods of validity.

By the time General Petraeus wrapped up his mission in 2010, the impacts of all groups had been minimalized. This was not just because of the surge in forces and how General Petraeus used those forces, but equally important was his building upon the American military strategy of community and information engagement. In the north and west, successes with the Sunni tribes resulted in locals ridding themselves of terrorist elements.

Unfortunately, the work of all coalition forces and dedicated Iraqis of all faiths has been undermined. The antics of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have resulted in every one of those threat groups being reinvigorated. Of the six threat groups previously identified, al-Maliki has been the most aggressive and powerful operative in the criminal element. Little of the hundreds of billions of dollars pumped into Iraq by the United States had a positive impact on the Iraqi population. Not happy with his share of the skim, Nouri al-Maliki has established a criminal organization far more greedy, corrupt, and brutal than Al Capone could ever have hoped to achieve. For Capone, the "Saint Valentine's Day" massacre was the show-piece of his brutality. For Nouri al-Maliki, mass murder, unjustified warrants and arrests, torture, and overcrowded, disease-ridden, prisons have become a routine attribute of his rule.

For years, al-Maliki has been conducting genocide on Sunni populations. Anyone opposing him is subject to being assassinated, being declared a terrorist, or wrongly accused of crimes and arrested. Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi is the most classic example. During my tour as Senior Operations Officer for Task Force 134 (Detention Operations) I personally worked with Vice President al-Hashemi and we shared equal dedication in stopping death squads from capturing and killing Iraqis just released from American operated detention facilities. Vice-President al-Hashemi did not care if potential victims were Shia or Sunni. He was determined to do everything possible to stop all the killing. Independent of American operations, he was also working to expose

al-Maliki's illegal and secret prisons. Yet, immediately after American forces left Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki declared Tariq was organizing death squads and called for the Vice-President's arrest. Al-Hashemi avoided the mockery of a trial and is now living in exile in Turkey.

Whether on an individual or community basis, al-Maliki's method of operation is always the same. Every time he is met with resistance or fears exposure for his crimes, Nouri al-Maliki identifies those who oppose him as terrorists and threats against Iraq. I was in the auditorium last year during his presentation in Washington D.C. At every turn he blamed the ills of Iraq on Al-Qaeda. It was not Al-Qaeda inside the Fallujah hospital that his forces recently dropped barrel bombs onto, killing children and one doctor.

No matter what Nouri al-Maliki has done to his fellow countrymen, he has had the unflinching support of two governments: the United States and Iran. While U.S. mainstream media was asleep at the switch and all this was going on, the U.S. State Department was operating an information deception campaign in support of al-Maliki. The most blatant case was the murder of 52 Iranian dissidents trapped at Camp Ashraf. Fully covered by video footage taken by survivors of the massacre, and even on recording devices undiscovered by the assault forces, Maliki's elite "Golden Division" passed through two lines of Iraqi security forces and, in full view of guard towers manned by Iraqi soldiers, systematically moved through the camp killing people. Immediately following the massacre, and later during Congressional testimony, State Department employees claimed "There is no evidence the Iraqi government was involved in the Ashraf massacre."

The 2010 national elections resulted in supporters of former interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi winning the most seats in parliament. Per the Iraqi Constitution, it was his responsibility to form the government. U.S. State Department supported al-Maliki in blocking this from happening even though Allawi supported a unified Iraq and opposed discrimination. Al-Maliki remained in power. Corruption and genocide continued. In 2014, both the American and Iranian governments backed al-Maliki's third term as Prime Minister, even though it is strictly forbidden by the Iraqi Constitution.

To ensure the election went in his favor, just prior to polling, al-Maliki ordered the release of waters from the Fallujah Dam, causing massive evacuations of Sunni communities. His several military assaults on Sunni communities resulted in many potential voters fleeing to Kurdistan. Many of those who did return were informed they had no place to vote. Military personnel were required to vote a day early under direct observation of their commanders. Ballot boxes for other communities suddenly disappeared. Even before the completion of ballot counting, President Obama telephoned and congratulated Prime Minister al-Maliki for his win.

Despite what al-Maliki and Obama administrations claim, the majority of the fighters in northern and western Iraq are not religious extremists or, in this case, the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria. Elements are clearly there, but valid statistics do not support the proclamation that all these communities are falling to the ISIS. The communities and

tribes are in revolt against the corruption and genocide performed by Nouri al-Maliki. Western governments and media claimed that the ISIS slogan “We have a score to settle” referred to the execution of Saddam. It did not. It pertained to atrocities against the Sunni population by the government of Nouri al-Maliki.

What is now happening is that the entrance of international terrorists have caught the support of residents of the north and western provinces – the Sunni population base. Meanwhile, the wrath of the ISIS is not just against the Shias, but also Sunnis who cooperated with the Americans in years past, and the Iraqi government. The wrath is also against anyone who does not share Islamic extremist views and will try to minimize ISIS influence in the region and the minds of other Iraqis. The moderate Sunni tribal and community leaders and elders are in a difficult situation and face the threat of their people being annihilated from two sources – the ISIS and the Iraqi government.

General Petraeus, and over the years numerous other commanders at all levels, did an excellent job in developing peace with the Sunni tribal leaders. Now President Obama is talking about dropping bombs on the very same people and communities that accepted peace. If that is done, then the United States will have destroyed whatever remains of legitimacy with the Iraqi people. It will also destroy all credibility throughout the Middle-East. The Obama administration may wish to turn a blind eye to the atrocities of Nouri al-Maliki; however, citizens of the Middle-East know better. American bombs on Iraqi communities and defenders of survival will be a bigger rallying call against the United States than the atrocities of Abu Ghraib could have ever achieved.

Al-Maliki’s regime is a much greater threat than the United States government appears to understand. Currently, al-Maliki is arming civilians and militias to defend Baghdad and the Shia south. That takes us back to the threat groups described at the beginning of this assessment. Al-Maliki is now arming everyone. His own military proved a total lack of discipline when thousands of soldiers fled from a few hundred adversaries in Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tikrit. Now al-Maliki is creating armed mobs. It is only a matter of time before these mobs start a genocide campaign of their own. Civil War in Iraq has already begun. If proper action is not taken immediately, it will not be long before a Reign of Terror commences. Religious extremists and criminals will be raiding communities and mass murder will be the result.

That Reign of Terror will not just be between Shias and Sunnis. The tribes and criminal elements will go against each other. Former regime elements will be back in the fight. One major fact concerning mob violence is it can turn in any direction. For the past year, bodies have been stacking up and Shia parents have grown angry at having their sons serving in the military returning home in coffins. Al-Maliki does not have the support of the Shia population as he once did. Even Moqtada al-Sadr has stated his Mahdi Army will protect only the holy sites and cities. Moqtada has said nothing about protecting the current Iraqi government or his former ally – Nouri al-Maliki. At present, Moqtada is moving elements of the Mahdi Army north to Baghdad. Iraq has always had a very bad retirement program for previous rulers. As with the Monarchy and Republic

before him, al-Maliki is very subject to being dragged out into the street and publicly executed.

If allowed to continue spiraling out of control, this upheaval will not stop in Iraq. Thanks to al-Maliki's military, the ISIS is much better armed and more maneuverable than before. Many of these weapons and vehicles will find their way back to Syria. Under the leadership of Massoud Barzani, Kurdistan will be effectively defended. Even the Kurdish Peshmerga received a windfall of equipment that will be very useful in the future. Unlike al-Maliki's military, the Peshmerga will not run from danger.

There is a potential solution, and peace can still be achieved, but not until Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki agrees to abide by the Iraqi Constitution, accept the mandated limit of two terms, and remove himself from government. That includes giving up his co-positions as Minister of Defense and Minister of the Interior. This will be difficult because al-Maliki knows once he has released control of the Iraqi government, he will be investigated and brought up on charges of crimes against humanity. A warrant against him has been standing for several years in the Spanish Court. Al-Maliki knows if tried in his own country, he will be convicted and face the same fate as Saddam Hussein.

As he either steps down from power, or is dragged out into the streets as in the case of the monarchy, a new ruling coalition needs to be immediately formed. This too will not be easy because the Iranian government wishes to maintain a puppet in Baghdad. The Sunnis are not going to accept anyone of Tehran's choosing, nor should they. If that happens, genocide will just pick up where al-Maliki left off.

The Sunni tribal and community leaders still have the means to throw out the international religious extremists, bring their own national fighters and tribe members under control, and hold criminals accountable. Time and lack of proper action is working against them. Both are also working against the entire Middle-East. What happens or fails to happen over the next few weeks will soon have an impact on Jordan and Israel as well.

Bottom line: Nouri al-Maliki needs to leave power willingly or he will be dragged out. A moderate government needs to be installed. The Sunni tribal chiefs and community leaders need to be supported and their people freed from the threat of genocide – not bombed by United States military as President Obama is suggesting.

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