

THE PARADOX AND IRONY OF IRAQ

Peter Adamis 19 June 2014

For the past 35 years or so the West taking its cue from the USA have been viewing Iran as an evil and uncooperative sovereign country that was bent of the spreading of terrorism and destruction on the world. Now it's being revealed that there have been negotiations going on in the background so to speak on many levels.

Australian not to be left behind also appears to be making overtures to the government of Iran through the re-introduction of live animal exports amongst other trade ventures. The British Government is also taking matters into their own hand and responding up their embassy which was once closed to them as a result of the USA and Iran diplomatic conflicts.

The terrorist organisation ISIS or ISIL (there appears to be some confusion over their acronym) have their own problems of logistics now that they have taken some territory and it appears that they have learnt the lesson of the past regarding the seduction and power of online media. they are successfully using social media to widen their recruiting campaign and swell their ranks.

The west has come to terms with the fact that Iran is here to stay as a nuclear power after having called the bluff of its neighbours and that of the other major powers and as such will soon if not already part of the nuclear family. Iran is concerned that the ISIS influence will become a thorn in their side and are concerned at its re-emergence in Iraq. The Kurds in the north are quick to take advantage of the hostilities and have taken up defensive positions to safe guard their interests which in this case are the lucrative oil fields. Turkey and Syria have their own agendas, The USA cannot control a demon of their own making. A demon that that is becoming more feared than that of the Al Qaeda network.

Is this the beginning of a new power agreement in the region? A question that only time and history will tell. My guess is that when it all said and done, much bloodshed would have been shed not for Islam but for the rich resources that lie beneath the soils of Iraq. I pity the Iraq people and have no pity for the scavengers bent on its destruction. One hope that the lives of the US, Australian and other coalition partners defence force personal who paid the ultimate sacrifice were not lost in vain. It is not difficult to read between the lines that the turmoil within the Islamic world is changing world opinion towards the negative.

The following articles have been compiled from a variety of online resources each with their own opinion based on the known facts at the time.



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US AND IRAN FROM SWORN ENEMIES TO PARTNERS ON IRAQ?

Tom Cohen and Holly Yan, CNN June 18, 2014

Kerry: U.S. could partner with Iran

Both Iran, United States want to quell the ISIS militant surge in Iraq. Secretary of State Kerry suggests possible collaboration with Iran. The issue raises questions in Congress.

Working with Iran might be a necessary evil, retired U.S. general says. How can it be? The United States and Iran, sworn enemies for 35 years, are talking about working together to quell the al Qaeda-inspired insurgency sweeping northern Iraq. Such cooperation sounds unthinkable. They are fierce adversaries on issues such as terrorism, Iran's nuclear ambitions and Syria's civil war. Iranian leaders call the United States the "Great Satan," while former President George W. Bush labeled Iran as part of an "Axis of Evil."

It was headline news last year when their leaders spoke briefly by phone, the first contact at that level since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 drove the U.S.-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from power. But should we be too surprised by this latest version of strange bedfellows, now known as "frenemies" in the modern vernacular? There's even an old saying of uncertain origin to define it -- the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

What's going on? This time, the common enemy is the threat of a regional war based on sectarian battle lines, pitting Sunni and Shia Muslim governments and peoples against each other across the Middle East. Only the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its al Qaeda backers would want that, it seems. They seek to establish a Sunni-dominated Islamic state stretching from Iraq to northern Syria.

"We are now closer than ever to a regional war in the Middle East," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, who heads the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. "Events in neighboring Iraq will have grave and violent repercussions for Syria. The most dangerous aspect of these developments has been the rise of the sectarian threat, a direct consequence of the dominance of extremist groups like ISIS."

Shiite majority Iran seeks to protect Shia interests and power in Iraq, while the United States wants to see a stable Iraq after pulling its troops out of the country in 2011 to end its eight-year campaign that began by toppling Saddam Hussein from power. Also, Iran has sounded a more positive tone toward the West since last year's election of President Hassan Rouhani to succeed the more volatile Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. On Wednesday, Rouhani pledged that Iran would do whatever was necessary to protect Shia holy sites in Iraq.

Where do things stand? U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry suggested possible collaboration with Iran, telling Yahoo News on Monday that "we are open to discussions if there's something constructive that can be contributed by Iran -- if Iran is prepared to do something that is going to respect the integrity and sovereignty of Iraq." Then, the United States and Iran held "very brief discussions" about Iraq and the threat posed by ISIS on the sidelines of nuclear negotiations in Vienna, State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said.

A senior State Department official said while Washington was open to engaging the Iranians, "these engagements will not include military coordination or strategic determinations about Iraq's future over the heads of the Iraqi people." The official said on condition of not being identified that the discussion concerns the ISIS threat to "many countries in the region, including Iran," as well as the need to support a more inclusive approach by the Iraqi government than the sectarian efforts by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

What's in it for the United States? Defense Minister Chuck Hagel noted Wednesday that the United States and Iran cooperated early in the Afghanistan war. He told a congressional panel that "we had worked with the Iranians on that western border of Afghanistan." "So there's some history here of sharing common interests," Hagel said, citing "significant differences" with Iran, but adding that "I don't think these issues come neatly wrapped in geopolitical graduate school papers."

Even a conservative member of Congress who once advocated military strikes on Iran said Washington may need Tehran's help. "I'll talk to anybody to help our people from being captured or killed," Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said. "And this is a time where the Iranians in a small way might help." Graham made clear he disapproved of Iran, calling authorities "thugs and killers," then summed up the situation by saying: "But we are where we are." A host of experts agree, including Meghan O'Sullivan, a former deputy national security adviser during the Iraq war.

"There is a political solution here that I think could be both in Iran's interest and the U.S. interest," O'Sullivan said. Whether the United States likes it or not, working with Iran on the Iraq crisis might be a necessary evil, retired Maj. Gen. James "Spider" Marks said. "There are necessary steps that we have to take with Tehran that we've probably never taken before, and would prefer not to take," Marks said.

What's the downside? Teaming up with Iran could certainly have its pitfalls. The United States is wary of furthering Iran's already considerable influence in Iraq. The Shiite Iranian regime is Maliki's closest ally in the region, and a U.S.-Iranian partnership could alienate Iraq's Sunni population as well as Sunni nations in the region such as Saudi Arabia that are U.S. allies.

Meanwhile, the United States doesn't want to jeopardize international talks on Iran's nuclear program that resumed this week. The talks are intended to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, and the United States and Israel have repeatedly said they would use military means against Iran if necessary to achieve that outcome.

House Speaker John Boehner said Wednesday that the United States should "absolutely not" talk to Iranians about the Iraq crisis. "I can just imagine what our friends in the region, our allies will be thinking by reaching out to Iran at a time when they continue to pay for terrorists and foster terrorism not only in Syria, in Lebanon but in Israel as well," the Ohio Republican told reporters. Will Iran and the U.S. work together on the ground? A senior security official in Baghdad said Iran has already sent about 500 Revolutionary Guard troops to help fight the ISIS militants.

Rouhani then denied that happened, but said he would be open to helping if asked, according to Iranian state TV. A Pentagon spokesman said Monday that military coordination with Iran was not in the cards, similar to what the senior State Department official told CNN. At the White House, spokesman Jay Carney said Obama has ruled out sending any U.S. combat troops to Iraq. However, Graham noted the need to coordinate in other ways, such as coordinating possible U.S. air strikes on ISIS fighters if Obama orders them. "If we start flying airplanes, it makes some sense to talk to the Iranians about what we're doing so they don't shoot us down and we don't bomb them," he said.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/18/politics/us-iran-iraq/>



HOW STRUGGLE IN THE HEARTLAND OF ISLAM MAY REDRAW BORDERS

Tim Lister, CNN June 18, 2014
Newly recruited Iraqi volunteer fighters take part in a training session in Karbala, Iraq, on Tuesday, June 17.

Vast swaths of northern Iraq, including the cities of Mosul and Tal Afar, have fallen as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, advances toward Baghdad. Lister: ISIS, a Sunni movement, seems determined to enrage Shiites and start a religious war. Sunni-Shiite divide began in seventh century with death of Prophet Mohammed's grandson. Operation Iraqi Freedom brought a sense of liberation to Iraq's Shiites but threatened to Sunnis.

ISIS benefited from infiltrating northern Syria early in 2013. They came in their thousands. Old women in chador, zealous young men, in battered minibuses and family cars: Shia from Iran on a pilgrimage to the Askari mosque in Samarra, a city some 80 miles north of Baghdad.

It was January 2004. The golden dome of the Askari mosque, one of the most important shrines to Shiite Muslims, gleamed above the crowded streets of Samarra. On the city's outskirts, Iranian families stopped for picnics. Nearly a year after Saddam Hussein was ousted, Iranian pilgrims were flocking to cities in Iraq, able at last to visit their faith's holiest places. The scene in Samarra was a dramatic symbol of the new order in Iraq, and a further sign of the Shiite resurgence that had begun with the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon in the early 1980s.

And shrines matter. The scholar Vali Nasr later wrote that "hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, coming from countries ranging from Lebanon to Pakistan, have visited Najaf and other holy Shiite cities in Iraq, creating transnational networks of seminaries, mosques, and clerics that tie Iraq to every other Shiite community, including, most important, that of Iran."

Nasr added this cautionary note: "Stemming adversarial sectarian politics will require satisfying Shiite demands while placating Sunni anger and alleviating Sunni anxiety, in Iraq and throughout the region." The opposite has happened, providing fertile ground for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) -- a fundamentalist Sunni group with a visceral hatred for the Shiite majority. Its offensive is a defining moment in the age-old enmity of Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq -- and will have consequences far beyond Iraq -- in Syria, Iran and the Gulf states. Ian Bremmer, President of Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy, says: "Borders are likely to be redrawn through the bloodshed. Those borders may ultimately prove more durable, yes, but they could also provoke interstate war across the region. And it's the latter outcome that makes Iraq so important."

Symbols and shrines In images posted Sunday and purportedly showing captured Iraqi soldiers being marched to their execution, ISIS described the prisoners as "apostates heading to their hole of doom." Another video showed a brutal inquisition of several captured soldiers, with one man saying: "These are Maliki's dogs. These are Maliki's soldiers and we are the soldiers of God." ISIS seems determined to enrage Shiites and bring on a religious war, which makes Samarra a likely target.

(The city was also the birthplace of ISIS' leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.) The Askari mosque was bombed by ISIS' precursor, al Qaeda in Iraq, in February 2006: it was believed to be a calculated attempt by the group's leader at the time, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, to ignite a regional sectarian conflict. The bombing sparked retaliatory attacks in which thousands of Sunnis were killed. "With every passing day, the rhetoric in Iraq -- on both sides -- takes on a sharper sectarian tone" Tim Lister

Acknowledging its importance, Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, went to Samarra last week to inspect its defenses, and said on Saturday: "Samarra will be the starting point, the gathering station of our troops to cleanse every inch that was desecrated by footsteps of those traitors."

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's foremost Shiite religious leader, called for shrines to be defended. "Citizens who are able to bear arms and fight terrorists... should volunteer and join the security forces to achieve this holy purpose," Sistani said through a representative. Iraqi Shiites - young men and old -- responded in the thousands. With every passing day, the rhetoric in Iraq -- on both sides -- takes on a sharper sectarian tone. The Institute for the Study of War, which closely follows the Iraqi conflict, says that so far Shiites have shown limited appetite for revenge killings. "However, the ISIS threat to the [Askari] shrine will unravel that restraint and trigger retaliatory attacks against the Iraqi Sunnis," the Institute says.

"Destruction of any of these shrines would bring on full scale ethno-sectarian civil war with violence meeting or surpassing 2006 levels." Opinion: Will ISIS brutality backfire? : This challenge is complex. The Sunni-Shiite divide began in the seventh century, essentially over the legitimacy of the successors of the Prophet Mohammed. One of its most fateful battles took place in Karbala (now an Iraqi city) in 680 AD, when the army of Hussein, Mohammed's grandson, was defeated and massacred by the Sunni Caliph, and he was beheaded. Shiites still mark Hussein's death every year in the ritual of Ashura.

The sectarian fault-line has since caused many more massacres and institutionalized repression, in contemporary Iraq and beyond. The Shiites have seen themselves as an oppressed majority or minority in places such as Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan -- and Iraq. In the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991, and the eviction of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, Shiites in southern Iraq revolted against Saddam Hussein. Clinging to power and with his army in disarray, Saddam ordered the brutal suppression of the uprising.

The Republican Guard carried out mass executions, even tying civilians to the front of their armored vehicles. Tens of thousands of Shiites fled into the marshes around Basra, and were hunted down over the following months. Their nemesis would finally be routed 12 years later. The U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom brought a sense of liberation to the Shiites, but the new order was a threat to Sunnis. Newly-formed political parties largely followed sectarian lines.

Maliki's moves Over the past three years, the Maliki government has played to its Shiite base and deepened the resentment of Sunni tribes, who believe they have been victimized and starved of resources. Rep. Adam Schiff, a senior member of the U.S. House Intelligence Committee, puts it this way: "[Maliki] has created a government of the Shiite, for the Shiite and by the Shiite -- and until that changes, he will increasingly push the Sunni population into the arms of extremist groups" like ISIS.

"There are already signs of new co-operation between Maliki's government and the Assad regime in Syria" Tim Lister. To many observers the turning point was the arrest last December of a prominent politician in Ramadi, the Sunni heartland, and a military operation against an anti-government protest camp in the city. Maliki had described it as an al Qaeda base, infuriating local sheikhs. After ISIS took control of much of the Sunni city of Fallujah in January, Iraqi airstrikes further alienated local people.

It is difficult to see how ISIS could have made such stunning advances without at least tacit support from the Sunni tribes. Zarqawi's AQI over-reached with its arbitrary and vicious punishment of Sunnis who failed to accept its militant Salafism. But ISIS, despite quickly declaring Sharia law in towns and cities it has taken, does not appear to have alienated mainstream Sunnis -- yet -- and has instead focused its brutality on Shiites.

A common enemy brings Iraq and Syria closer. In a clever strategic move, ISIS began infiltrating northern Syria early in 2013. The benefits were many. It bought strategic depth for the group and allowed it to set up hubs in places like Raqqa while the attention of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime was elsewhere. ISIS was also able to sharpen the sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict, attracting foreign fighters by the hundreds who could easily cross the border from Turkey.

The group's exponential growth in both Syria and Iraq has set the stage for an upheaval that could erase colonial-era borders and divide the region along sectarian lines. Faced with this threat, there are already signs of new co-operation between Maliki's government and the Assad regime in Syria, itself largely made up of Alawites, a Shiite sect. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Sunday that the Syrian air force had begun pounding ISIS bases "including those in the northern province of Raqqa and Hasakeh in the northeast."

The Observatory said the "intense" attacks were being carried out "in coordination with the Iraqi authorities." The Iraqi government would clearly welcome any disruption of ISIS' supply lines or communications. The Syrian attacks are not altruistic; the Assad regime is likely responding to reports that ISIS is bringing some of the heavy weaponry it has captured in Iraq back across the border.

Makes Iran more powerful . "A decisive shift in Iraq's place in the Middle East... is sending shivers through the largely Sunni Gulf states" Tim Lister. The Iraqi Prime Minister is also more reliant than ever on support from Iran, given the way that the Iraqi Security Forces have crumbled. U.S. officials say the powerful head of Iran's elite Quds Force, General Qassim Suleimani, was in Iraq last week, amid reports that Iranian militia were fighting alongside the remnants of the Iraqi army.

Iran has also sent roughly 500 Revolutionary Guard troops to fight alongside Iraqi forces in Diyala province, a senior security official in Baghdad told CNN. The Institute for the Study of War concludes "it is likelier now ... that a Shiite unity government more dependent on Iran will emerge in Baghdad if the ISIS crisis is averted." The Obama Administration suddenly finds itself on the same side as Iran in trying to prevent a terror group more extreme and more effective than al Qaeda from overrunning half of Iraq.

And U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has not closed the door to co-operation with the Islamic Republic. "Let's see what Iran might or might not be willing to do before we start making any pronouncements," he told Yahoo News on Monday. "I think we are open to any constructive process here that could minimize the violence, hold Iraq together

To eliminate the presence of outside terrorist forces that are ripping it apart." Syria's government has also sought reinforcements from Iran and the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah to try to reverse rebel gains (most of them made by Sunni Islamist groups.) Senior advisers from the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard have been working with the Syrians, according to multiple reports from the past year, and Iranian weapons have been flown into Damascus.

Threats to drag in the Gulf states A decisive shift in Iraq's place in the Middle East, either by its division or a much closer reliance on Tehran, is sending shivers through the largely Sunni Gulf states. Saudi Arabia lambasted Iraq's Maliki on Monday, with Information Minister Abdulaziz Khoja saying the crisis would have been averted "if it wasn't for the sectarian and exclusionary policies that were practiced in Iraq in recent years." Qatar has expressed a similar view.

Maliki's office shot back, blaming Saudi Arabia for supporting extremist groups and adding: "The Saudi government must bear responsibility of the serious crimes committed by these groups." As the struggle unfolds, there is probably one thing on which all parties in the region would agree, from Bashar al-Assad in Syria to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi to Grand Ayatollah Sistani: they are all now part of an existential struggle in the heartland of Islam.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/18/world/meast/lister-iraq-religion/>

IRAQ IS A TANGLED WEB OF RELIGIOUS, RACIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT. HERE'S WHERE THE KEY

JAMIE SEIDEL NEWS CORP AUSTRALIA NETWORK JUNE 16, 2014



Ominous times A file photo of Iraqi soldier walks past graffiti of a skull and crossbones left behind by US troops in the city of in Mosul, northwest of Baghdad. That city, and several more, have since capitulated to advancing jihadist insurgents. *Source: AP.* IRAQ is imploding as a brutal force of jihadist extremists — almost medieval in their beliefs — storms over dispirited defenders.



Ominous times A file photo of Iraqi. _No surrender, no retreat? An Iraqi man holds up a weapon in the Iraqi town of Jdaideh in the Diyala province after volunteering to join the fight against jihadists. *Source: AFP.* The world has been forced to take notice as the insurgents brutally massacre government soldiers, even posting pictures of the mass slayings on social media. Meanwhile confused reports emerge of the blood-soaked fanatics closing in on the capital Baghdad as Westerners prepare to flee.

Who are these insurgents? How did the oil-rich state get in this mess? And can it be stopped? The dust was still settling from the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 — and the West's retaliation against Afghanistan — when President George W. Bush began to assemble a new "Coalition of the Willing" against Saddam Hussein's ruthless rule of Iraq. He was said to be a murderous dictator determined to obtain nuclear weapons and support terrorists.

In March 2003, Iraq was invaded for a second time and capitulated within weeks. Saddam was eventually captured and executed, and a long and expensive both in cash and lives military occupation imposed. No weapons of mass destruction were found or terrorist links determined. Fast-forward 11 years and the highly unpopular occupation is over but the new nation has degenerated into violence, sectarianism and anarchy.



According to the United Nations, 8000 civilians were killed in sectarian violence within Iraq last year alone. Now an organisation regarded as extreme even by al Qaeda is steamrolling over Iraq — called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Horrific brutality captured Iraqi defence personnel are bounded and forced to lie on the ground by insurgents, shortly before being executed in mass shootings. *Source: AFP.*

Western-trained police and troops are abandoning their Western-supplied weapons even before the rebel tribesmen come into sight. The US and NATO do not yet have a response strategy, although air strikes seem likely and the situation is fluid and moving fast. These are the key players and their roles in the unfolding horror.



'Homecoming' parade ... jihadists parade down a main road in Mosul, Iraq. The predominantly Sunni north of Iraq has put up little resistance in the face of the mostly Sunni ISIS-led insurgency. *Source: AP.*

Sunni Muslims. At the core of Iraq's turmoil is a religious divide that reaches back almost 1500 years — the Sunni and Shiite factions who, essentially, disagreed over who the Prophet Muhammad's true successor was.

Like most religious movements, the Sunnis are made up of hundreds of different factions and groups — all with their own interpretation of how to enact God's will. Once the faction of dictator Saddam Hussein, the overthrow of the old power structure by the Coalition of the Willing in 2003 opened up the opportunity for the opposing Shiite Muslims to take control — and revenge.

Shiite Muslims Islamic faction with its powerbase in Iran has seen the recent Western occupation as a golden opportunity to entrench itself as the new power base in Iraq. Controversially, the US-backed Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has been one of the prime movers behind this push — though the US has turned a blind eye. The result is a divided nation that saw its people come to regard the government as an instrument of religious oppression, not an impartial mediator and source of justice.



Controversial character ... Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki meets with military commanders in Samarra, Iraq, to discuss the defence of the strategic city. Horror ahead ... soldiers in plain clothes are brutally herded out of a captured military base by militants. It is believed they were among the many slaughtered in mass shootings. *Source: AP.*

The leader of a prominent Shiite political-religious group, he rose to the top job in 2006 and has since set about strengthening his own religious faction's position at the cost of others. He ousted Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, the top Sunni religious faction politician, as soon as the US withdrew its last troops in 2012. Sentenced to death in absentia for crimes of terrorism, the whereabouts of Hashemi is unknown.



Baghdad Government under the figurehead of President Jalal Talabani, a Kurdish politician who helped establish his people's semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, the true power behind the Iraqi flag is Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Iraqi leader is trying to repair his shattered image after the disastrous loss of the north to Islamic militants. *Source: AP* There are believed to be almost twice as many Shiites as Sunnis in Iraq. However with the well-organised insurgency mainly led by radical Sunnis, the balance is swinging once more.



ISIS: The well-armed, well organised and highly motivated alliance of jihadist groups that is sweeping aside all signs of resistance in Iraq has ties to militant Islamic organisations throughout the Middle East. At the head of the predominantly Sunni Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (also known as ISIL — Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi-born militant some hail as “the new bin Laden”.

Baghdadi — who regards himself to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad — wants to erase “Western imposed borders” and create a “new Caliphate”. With a \$10 million bounty on his head, he is known for extreme views that even al Qaeda’s hierarchy find uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he has assembled a coalition of some 10,000 warriors — mostly from US-backed Islamic militant groups fighting against President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. This number is swelling as disaffected Sunni Iraqis, including out-of-work military commanders from the era of Saddam Hussein, jump aboard to oust the last evidence of the United States’ occupation, the government in Baghdad.



On the run ... Iraqi government military vehicles and fatigues abandoned ahead of the advancing jihadists in a northern town. *Source: AFP.* Saddam Hussein’s finely drilled and disciplined army was abolished in 2003. In its place, \$15 billion in equipment and training was sunk into a completely new force of 430,000 volunteers.



Volunteer reserve ... Militia recruits are forming an increasingly large portion of Iraqi government forces. *Source: AFP* IRAQ ARMY: It all appears to have amounted to nothing. Wracked with no experience, poor organisation and low morale, two divisions totalling 30,000 troops near Mosul last week simply upped and ran from the initial ISIS offensive. Some say the attacking jihadists were only 800 strong. But these ISIS insurgents were well led, well equipped and disciplined .

In no small part thanks to the former Saddam Hussein-era military commanders among them. Iraq’s Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has ordered his troops to regroup and “make a stand” at the city of Samarra, some 130 kilometres north of the capital Baghdad. This may prove to be the deciding battle that determines Iraq’s future.



For the defence ... Iraqi Shiite tribal fighters deploy with their weapons to help the military in Baghdad. *Source: AP.* AL QAEDA: The hated enemy of the United States, al Qaeda never seems to have had a strong presence in Iraq. It grew in numbers after the allied occupation after 2003, but soon began to lose popularity among the broader populace for indiscriminate attacks on those it purported to be assisting Muslims.

The Iraqi al Qaeda division leader Abu Musab al Zarkawi rejected calls from Osama bin Laden to tone down his attacks and formed his own splinter group named al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Zarkawi was killed by a US air strike in 2006. Since his death, AQI retreated to Syria where it evolved, grew and rebranded itself as ISIS. al-Qaeda's traditional leadership has officially cut ties to its old Iraq branch, declaring them to be takfiri — religious zealots.



Growing support ... Iraqi soldiers and volunteers chant slogans against ISIS inside the main army recruiting centre in Baghdad. Iran has reportedly sent troops to assist in the defence of the capital. *Source: AP.*

IRAN: It will be hard to pin blame for this uprising on Iraq's ancient enemy, Iran, as has often been the case in the past. The Shiite state considers ISIS as a threat to its own authority and has repeatedly expressed concern over its growing power in both Iraq and Syria.



In fact, Iran last week took the unusual action of offering military support to Baghdad — an offer seemingly accepted as Iranian units have reportedly been seen in action around the Iraqi city of Tikrit. Unlikely ally ... Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. *Source: AFP* The United States is facing increasing pressure from within its own ranks to open up a dialogue with Iran, a state it has repeatedly labelled a "rogue" over its nuclear program and support of terrorist-linked organisations.



Enemies on all sides ... a masked Peshmerga fighter from Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region guards a temporary camp set up to shelter Iraqis fleeing violence in the northern Nineveh province. The minority Kurds have in the past been targeted by Iraq, Iran and Turkey. *Source: AFP* **TURKEY:** One of the few players with the military ability to make a difference, any military intervention by Turkey will likely be met with suspicion by Iran.

Then there are the Kurdish minority people living in Iraq's north who have a long history of repression and conflict under Turkish governments. Defending their cause was part of the rallying cry used by the West in both 1990 and 2003. They are not likely to step aside and let their long-term enemy simply drive past, and the cry of hypocrisy will be hard to avoid if the West allows it.



Growing reach ... Shakir Waheib, a senior member of the al Qaeda breakaway group ISIS, left, is shown next to a burning police vehicle in Iraq's Anbar Province. Syria has stepped up attacks on the jihadist organisation's command and support facilities in that country. *Source: AP* SYRIA: With its reviled president declared an international criminal, Syria's delicate balance between Sunni, Shiite and Christian cultures is in similar turmoil to that of Iraq.

The irony is that the Islamic jihadists supported by the US in their campaign against President Bashar al Assad are among those now steamrolling towards Baghdad. Syria has declared it has upped air strikes against ISIS bases and facilities in the east of the country, citing concerns that looted tanks and heavy vehicles are being brought over the border from Iraq.

UNITED STATES: There are still a few US military personnel in Iraq. Out of the 166,000 troops which once were stationed in the country, only a detachment of Marines guarding the US embassy in Baghdad and a few other key sites remain. But these few cannot make any difference in the face of the onrushing ISIS forces.

A nuclear-powered aircraft carrier is scrambling its way towards the Persian Gulf to bring the war-torn nation within reach of its bombers — but, as yet, there is no commitment to deploy them. Many warned the power vacuum caused by the 2011-12 withdrawal would eventually lead to the Iraqi government's implosion. The cash-strapped Obama Presidency, however, had to do something about its almost impossibly high debt. Ending expensive overseas wars was an obvious source of savings. Now, however, it seems, the price of the 2003 Iraq invasion must be paid again.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/world/iraq-is-a-tangled-web-of-religious-racial-and-political-conflict-heres-where-the-key-players-fit/story-fni0xs63-1226955671616>



WHO IS ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI?

Joshua Keating | 19 June, 2014

AN APTITUDE FOR TERROR: Undated pictures of Isil leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi provided by the Rewards for Justice Programme of the US Department of State. Isil controls a swathe of northeastern Syria and parts of Iraq

It's not surprising that Isil leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi keeps a low profile, considering the fate of his predecessors. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the original leader of what was then called al-Qaeda in Iraq, was killed by a US bomb in 2006. His successors, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, met their end in an attack by US and Iraqi forces west of Baghdad in 2010. But the dearth of information about Baghdadi is as remarkable as the speed of his rise to prominence.

In only five years he has gone from being a low-level fighter considered such a minor threat that he was released by US forces to now being called the "world's most influential militant" and the "true heir to Osama bin Laden". There are only two known photos of the 43-year-old Baghdadi, whom Iraqi military officials believe is hiding somewhere in Iraq's eastern Diyala province. An "official" biography of Baghdadi - whose real name is Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai - that has circulated on jihadist forums says he earned a doctorate in Islamic studies and lectured on sharia (morality and religious law) before becoming a militant.

Some other accounts say he was a peasant who was trained by members of al-Qaeda when he was in prison. Baghdadi fought in some capacity with Sunni militant groups after the US-led invasion of Iraq but was arrested in 2005 and interned at Camp Bucca, the main US detention facility after the closing of Abu Ghraib. He wasn't considered much of a threat and was released in 2009. The former commanding officer of Camp Bucca recently told the Daily Beast that when Baghdadi was released, he told his captors, "I'll see you guys in New York" (the guards at the prison were from a Long Island-based military police unit).

The commander said Baghdadi "was a bad dude but he wasn't the worst of the worst" and is surprised that he has risen to such prominence. It seems that Baghdadi became far more involved with al-Qaeda in Iraq while imprisoned than he had been before, to the point that he took over the group after the deaths of Masri and the other Baghdadi a year later. In 2011 he was designated a global terrorist by the US State Department with a \$10-million bounty.

Things really picked up in 2012, when, sensing an opportunity, Baghdadi dispatched some foot soldiers to join the fighting against Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria. In 2013 he announced that his group was merging with Jabhat al-Nusra, the other al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, to form a new group called the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham. (al-Sham refers to "Greater Syria" and has been translated as either Syria or the Levant in the English-language press).

This was a fairly audacious move considering that he doesn't seem to have cleared it with either the leader of Nusra or al-Qaeda's global leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Nusra, predominantly Syrian in membership, is more focused on overthrowing Assad, whereas Isil is more international and interested in expanding its territory and enforcing sharia. Zawahiri formally disavowed Isil earlier this year, but it has clearly become the more dominant group in Syria, eclipsing Nusra.

Under Baghdadi, Isil's approach to governance is an odd mix of terror and a charm offensive: it has provided food aid and below-market-value fuel - branded with the group's black flag - and sponsored fairs for local children. At the same time it has boasted of the summary execution of hundreds and enforced its extremely narrow interpretation of sharia with floggings and amputations.

Baghdadi clearly was shrewd in taking advantage of Syria's chaos to grow his organisation, but it seems pretty obvious that the group's new prominence didn't just emerge out of nowhere. In addition to gathering weaponry and money from areas captured, it seems likely that Isil has been tapping into al-Qaeda central's revenue stream for some time.- The Slate

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2014/06/19/who-is-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi>



IRAQI ISLAMISTS' GAINS POSE CHALLENGE TO AL QAEDA LEADER

BY MARIAM KAROUNY AND PAUL TAYLOR Tue Jun 17, 2014. Armed Iraqi security forces personnel take their positions during clashes with the al Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the city of Ramadi, May 17, 2014. CREDIT: REUTERS/STRINGER (Reuters)

If the battle in Iraq and Syria were being fought by tycoons rather than jihadis, it might be called a hostile takeover in defiance of the main shareholder that has created a powerful multinational brand with an uncertain future. The price is being paid in blood as fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a scion of the al Qaeda militant jihadist franchise, carve out a cross-border empire by killing government troops and former Islamist allies alike.

With stunning speed, ISIL has captured swathes of territory in northwest and central Iraq, including the second city of Mosul, seizing large amounts of U.S.-supplied modern weaponry from the fleeing Iraqi army and looting banks. The story begins more than a year ago when the leader of a group then called the Islamic State in Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had led radical Sunni resistance to the Shia-dominated Iraqi government, decided to move into Syria.

He declared a merger in April 2013 with the Nusra Front, then the main al Qaeda affiliate battling President Bashar al-Assad, without consulting either its leader, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, or global al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahri. Ironically, it was Baghdadi who sent his lieutenant Golani into Syria in 2011 to build up al Qaeda's presence, taking advantage of a popular uprising against Assad to found Nusra.

Zawahri, the successor to Osama bin Laden, who lives in hiding, urged the two groups to work together in a sort of joint venture. Baghdadi defied him and ISIL turned its guns on Nusra, quickly gaining the upper hand over its rival, which until then had been the most feared and effective anti-Assad rebel group. In disrespectful language, ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani posted an audio statement on Twitter in May rejecting the al Qaeda leader's call for ISIL to disengage from Syria and go back to Iraq. "You made yourself and your al Qaeda a joke and a toy in the hands of an arrogant traitor-boy (Golani) who broke the pledge of allegiance that you did not see," Adnani said.

Despite an ultimatum from Golani to pull out of Syria or face eradication, Baghdadi's men proved more ruthless. They slaughtered Nusra prisoners, posting grisly videos of the decapitations online as a deterrent and recruiting tool. Enforcing their rule with public executions, they now control the eastern Syrian city of Raqqa, the only major urban area entirely in rebel hands, and hold territory from the Turkish border to the oil producing eastern deserts of Syria. Many Arab and foreign fighters defected from Nusra to ISIL, but the struggle among Assad's enemies helped government forces regain ground and alarmed foreign backers of the rebels in the West, Turkey and Gulf states.

TURF AND TACTICS. The differences between ISIL and Nusra were not so much over ideology - both advocate strict enforcement of a mediaeval-style Islamist rule - as over turf, tactics and personal allegiances. ISIL includes thousands of foreign fighters and has become the main recruiting magnet for jihadi volunteers from Europe and North Africa, Western intelligence agencies say.

"ISIL is fast eclipsing al Qaeda as the *bête noire* of international politics," said Charlie Cooper of the Quilliam Foundation, a London-based think-tank devoted to combating jihadi radicalisation. "While al-Zawahri is sitting stagnant in a safe house, ISIL's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has taken control of nearly a third of Iraq and much of Syria, amassed a fortune that rivals the economy of some small states, and commandeered millions of dollars' worth of state-of-the-art American-made weaponry."

He cited Iraqi intelligence information that ISIL, estimated to have up to 10,000 fighters, has amassed assets of about \$2 billion, some by selling oil from eastern Syria to Assad's government. The Iraqi guerrilla chief has not only sidelined Nusra but challenged the authority of the al Qaeda leader himself. ISIL has many attributes of a state - territory, armed forces, guns, oil and money.

But it has moved faster than Zawahri advocates to create an Islamic caliphate at the risk of concentrating fighters in areas where they may be vulnerable to superior Western firepower. The United States may be reluctant to take any action that could strengthen Assad in Syria, but is under pressure to attack ISIL forces in Iraq and prevent them destabilising the Baghdad government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

OVERREACH? Critics say Baghdadi may have overreached. He has alienated many Syrian rebels, who see him as a brutal figure focused less on toppling Assad than on imposing a radical Islamist rule including religious courts and public executions, publicised in gruesome videos. Many accused him privately of hijacking their revolution. "We reject his presence here on the ground. He should take his fighters and go back to Iraq," a Nusra source close to Golani said last year. "We are not happy with the way he operates nor with his methods." The source, and other Syrian Nusra fighters who spoke to Reuters at the time, said they feared Baghdadi's supporters would alienate Syrians in the same way that the jihadis had turned Iraqis against them.

That enabled U.S.-backed Sahwa militias to turn the tide against al Qaeda in western Iraq in 2007. One Nusra fighter said he believed Baghdadi held a personal grudge against Golani, his former aide, because of his standing in Syria. Golani, a radical Sunni Muslim, won popularity even among some Christians, according to the Nusra fighter. "Baghdadi did not like this," the fighter said. "Baghdadi and the (al Qaeda) leadership consider the Muslim Brotherhood, the Free Syrian Army and other factions including Christians as infidels and when they saw Golani was on good terms with them they were not happy."

Attempts to mediate collapsed in February after senior al Qaeda member Abu Khaled al-Soury, a friend of bin Laden sent by Zawahri, was killed in a suicide attack in Syria. Nusra accused ISIL of killing him, a charge sources close to the Iraqi-based group have denied. Since then, the al Qaeda leader has repeatedly tried to assert his authority over Baghdadi's movement and end the infighting between ISIL and Nusra, to no avail. In an video message released in early May, Zawahri said ISIL's entry into Syria had caused "a political disaster" for Islamist militants there and a "waterfall of blood". He urged the group to go back to fighting in Iraq.

FROM PAKISTAN TO SINAI The Quilliam Foundation's Cooper said Baghdadi had clearly decided to go it alone in defiance of Zawahri, taking much of the international jihadist community along with him in the battle for territory that corresponds to ancient Mesopotamia. "ISIL has repeatedly broken with the al Qaeda norm and a new monster has emerged. We are closer than ever before to seeing a jihadist state in Mesopotamia," he said. "This is one of ISIL's greatest selling points and one that draws jihadists from around the world – to go to Iraq or Syria and fight with it is to go and fight for the utopian caliphate."

Before the latest fighting, security experts estimated ISIL had about 6,000 fighters in Sunni areas of northern Iraq and 4,000 in Syria, but the numbers in Iraq may have risen since. By realising bin Laden's vision of a Sunni purist state, Baghdadi, 43, is eclipsing al Qaeda's nominal but remote leader, Zawahri, a 62-year-old exiled Egyptian, in a universe where personal allegiance counts most. "He (Baghdadi) has almost taken his (Zawahri's) place," said a jihadi fighter interviewed by Reuters in recent weeks inside Syria. "We can say he is now (the leader)."

"What many people do not know or try to ignore is that the real project or goal of the Islamic state is the Caliphate and Zawahri is hesitant," another fighter said. "That is why now his word is becoming less heard and most pledges of allegiance are sent to Emir al-Baghdadi, God save him." Success on the ground breeds allegiance. Security sources in Egypt's turbulent Sinai peninsula say an al Qaeda-affiliated group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which is fighting the army-backed Egyptian authorities that toppled Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi last July, has turned to ISIL for support. One Egyptian security official said the Sinai group, estimated to have about 1,000 militants, had no recognised leader who could formally pledge allegiance to Baghdadi. But the prospect has alarmed Egypt's pro-military media.

"Two or three members from Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis were in contact with the ISIL in the months that followed Mursi's ouster on July 3 to learn from their experience in Syria," said another security source in the lawless peninsula that borders Israel. Even some al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Zawahri's stronghold, have written to the ISIL leader, pledging their allegiance, according to a Nusra fighter in the Syrian city of Aleppo. To his followers, Baghdadi represents a new generation of fighters working to fulfil the next stage of bin Laden's dream, moving from al Qaeda - which can mean "the base" in Arabic - towards the fully fledged radical state. The falling-out between Zawahri and Baghdadi has caused uproar in password-protected jihadi Internet forums, according to the U.S. intelligence company SITE which monitors them.

Some jihadis have called for Zawahri to hand over the leadership to his de facto number two, Nasser al-Wuhayshi. Others go further, saying Baghdadi's creation of ISIL makes Zawahri's part of al Qaeda's operation redundant. "The group al Qaeda does not exist anymore. It was formed as a qaeda (base) for the Islamic State and now we have it, Zawahri should pledge allegiance to Sheikh Baghdadi," said a non-Syrian ISIL fighter. (Additional reporting by Samia Nakhoul in Beirut, Yasmine Saleh and Dominic Evans in Cairo and William Maclean in Dubai; Writing by Paul Taylor; Editing by David Stamp)

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/06/17/uk-syria-iraq-alqaeda-idINKBN0ES1O720140617>

SAUDIS GIVE APPARENT WARNING TO IRAN: DON'T MEDDLE IN IRAQ

Wed Jun 18, 2014 Noah Browning and Rania El Gamal

Iran: won't hesitate to defend Iraq's Shi'ite holy sites (Adds UAE recalling envoy, quotes)
DUBAI, June 18 (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia gave an apparent warning to regional rival Iran on Wednesday not to intervene in the conflict in Iraq which it said could escalate to full civil war with implications beyond Iraqi frontiers. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a fellow Sunni Muslim Gulf dynasty, announced it was recalling its envoy to Baghdad for consultations, and criticised what it called the sectarian policies of Iraq's government, an ally of Shi'ite power Iran.

Their statements coincided with an Iranian warning that Tehran would not hesitate to defend Shi'ite Muslim holy sites in Iraq against "killers and terrorists", following advances by Sunni militants there. The toughening rhetoric about Iraq from Gulf powers on both sides of the region's Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian divide suggested that Tehran and Riyadh have put on hold recent plans to discuss curbing their long rivalry. The sectarian edge to the Saudi-Iran struggle has sharpened in the last few years.

The two see themselves as representatives of opposing visions of Islam: the Saudis as guardians of Mecca and conservative Sunni hierarchy, and Shi'ite Iran as the vanguard of an Islamic revolution in support of the downtrodden. Speaking at a gathering of Arab and Muslim leaders in Jeddah, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said Iraq was facing a civil war with grave consequences for the wider region.

VIOLENCE Prince Saud urged nations racked by violence to meet the "legitimate demands of the people and to achieve national reconciliation (without) foreign interference or outside agendas". "This grave situation that is storming Iraq carries with it the signs of civil war whose implications for the region we cannot fathom," he said. He did not elaborate but the remarks appeared aimed at Shi'ite Iran, which is also an ally of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The prince said the three-year-old civil war in Syria, where a largely Sunni Muslim uprising has failed to unseat Assad, had "helped to deepen the internal disturbance in Iraq".

Announcing the recall of its envoy, the UAE said it was worried that the Iraqi government's "sectarian" policies could heighten political tensions and worsen security there. In a statement on the official WAM news agency, the foreign ministry added that the UAE opposed any interference in Iraq's affairs and sought the creation of a national unity government.

"The ministry expressed its deep concern at the policy of exclusion, sectarianism and marginalisation of basic components of the Iraqi people," the statement said. The UAE reaffirmed its condemnation of the "terrorism" of the Sunni Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which it said had led to the killing of many innocent Iraqis.

OFFENSIVE Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, an ally of Iran, has appealed for national unity with Sunni critics of his Shi'ite-led government after a stunning offensive through the north of the country by ISIL over the past week. Maliki has accused Saudi Arabia of backing ISIL, who want to carve out a Sunni caliphate in the heart of the Middle East. On Monday, Saudi Arabia blamed the Iraqi crisis on Maliki, citing what it called years of "sectarian and exclusionary policies" by his government against Iraq's Sunni minority. Maliki and several Iranian officials have for months alleged that several Gulf Arab governments support ISIL.

And on Saturday, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said that "terrorist groups" were getting backing and weaponry from countries in the region and powerful Western states. He named no countries, but was alluding in part to Sunni Gulf Arabs. Western diplomats say it is private Gulf Arab donors who follow an ultraconservative brand of Sunni Islam who appear the more likely source of ISIL's funding from the Gulf. While the Saudi government has yet to specifically condemn ISIL by name, the group is no friend of Riyadh's, having battled the kingdom's allies in infighting among Sunni rebels in Syria.

Not only do Tehran and Riyadh share the fear that Iraq may disintegrate into a sectarian bloodbath, in the short term ISIL's advance is likely to raise suspicions between them. While Tehran sees Gulf Arab hands behind ISIL, Riyadh fears not only that Iran will intervene in Iraq but that it will do so in coordination with Iran's traditional adversary Washington, which is equally keen to roll back ISIL's territorial gains. (Additional reporting by Michelle Moghtader and Amena Bakr; Editing by William Maclean and Louise Ireland)

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/06/18/saudi-iraq-security-idINL5N0OZ28320140618>



TERRORISTS USING TWITTER, FACEBOOK TO SPREAD PROPAGANDA, RECRUIT WOULD-BE JIHADISTS

Sarah Millar News Corp Australia Network June 18, 2014. Islam vs. Islamism: Defining the Militants Tearing Through Iraq 1:13

Terrorist propaganda ... an image from the jihadist Twitter account Al-Baraka news allegedly shows Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants clashing with Iraqi soldiers. Picture: Al-Baraka News/HO/AFP Source: AFP. The militants known as ISIS wreaking havoc in Iraq are an 'Islamist' group. The terms 'Islamism' and 'Islam' are often used interchangeably, but there are very distinct differences between them.



THEY shoot video as they shoot people, teach people how to make bombs and recruit those willing to die for their cause. For terrorists, social media is fast becoming one of their biggest weapons. As the jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) rampages through Iraq, posting graphic images on Twitter of what appear to be mass executions, Twitter is scrambling to block their posts.



The micro-blogging site has already shut down a number of the social media-savvy group's accounts, but this hasn't stopped them publishing numerous images of dead or captured Iraqis.

Picture: Al-Baraka News/HO/AFP
Source: AFP.

ISIS is not the first group to use social media, and Twitter in particular. Terrorists are increasingly using the site for the same reasons most others use the site — for the quick, easy, mass distribution of information and opinions. Jihadist rampage ... an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militant restrains an unidentified man near the Iraqi-Syrian border. "Twitter has recently emerged as terrorists' favorite Internet service, even more popular than self-designed websites or Facebook, to disseminate propaganda and enable internal communication," notes author Gabriel Weimann in his report *New Terrorism and New Media*.



Iraq refugees flee the violence 1:45

Tens of thousands of families flee Iraq's second city, Mosul, now overrun by members of ISIS. Sarah Toms reports. Reuters 17 Jun 2014 News/World. When the militant group al-Shabaab launched an attack on Nairobi's Westgate Mall in September last year, the first the world knew of their involvement was their tweet claiming responsibility.

An account belonging to the Somali-base al-Qaeda offshoot gave a live commentary of their attack, which killed 61 people. It started with a simple post: "The Mujahideen ('holy warriors') entered Westgate mall today at around noon and they are still inside the mall, fighting the Kenyan kuffar ('infidels') inside their own turf." In his report Weimann notes that terror groups have moved their online presence away from traditional websites and towards social media.



Victory lap ... militants parade down a main road in Mosul, Iraq, after it was captured by ISIS. Picture: Twitter
Source: AP. Terrorists have good reasons to use social media," he writes. "First, these channels are by far the most popular with their intended audience, which allows terrorist organisations to be part of the mainstream.

Second, social media channels are user-friendly, reliable, and free. “Finally, social networking allows terrorists to reach out to their target audiences and virtually “knock on their doors” — in contrast to older models of websites in which terrorists had to wait for visitors to come to them.” He notes that several terror organisations have Facebook pages through which they reach out to would-be jihadists and direct them to their teachings. They also post instructional videos on bomb making on YouTube and use the video sharing platform to upload messages from their leaders.



Manhunt ... Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants inspect abandoned Iraqi army vehicles near the Iraqi-Syrian border. Picture: Al-Baraka News/HO/AFP Source: AFP In 2008, Middle East terror organisation Hamas started their own version of YouTube — AqsaTube — to share their propaganda videos.

Some Instagram accounts feature posts glorifying terror masterminds including Osama Bin Laden. Experts also believe social networks are being used to coordinate and plan terror attacks with an explosion of cheap mobile phone giving terrorists access to immediate location information. The 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, where terrorists used GPS tracking, Google Earth satellite imagery and mobile updates from commanders to help track down foreigners and carry out their attacks according to Weimann.

Evan Kohlmann of Flashpoint Global Partners, a New York-based security consultancy firm, noted previously that social media had become a recruiting ground for would-be jihadists. “They are seeking advice, assistance and material support online and many times, they find it,” he said. “The online network for these guys is more important than nationality, tribe or ethnicity. These connections are becoming the glue that ties terrorist networks together.” Earlier this week, Britons fighting for ISIS made a series of threats against the UK and western nations, The Times reported.



The jihadists, who hail from English cities such as Portsmouth and Birmingham, suggested attacks during the UK general elections, ‘killing sprees’ upon their return home, and a wave of 9/11-style attacks. Black flag of jihad ... militants from the al-Qaeda-inspired Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remove part of the soil barrier on the Iraq-Syria borders and move through. Picture: Al-Baraka News Source: AP.

The British recruits have been able to freely travel to the Middle East, usually via a cheap flight to Turkey where they are met by an escort and taken over the border. Charles Lister from the Brookings Institution in Doha told *The Times* Britons were "almost certainly" fighting in Iraq with ISIS. "This latest offensive has included a great deal of co-ordination with forces based in eastern Syria and the exchange of resources makes it nearly inevitable that British nationals will have been involved."

<http://www.dailylegraph.com.au/technology/terrorists-using-twitter-facebook-to-spread-propaganda-recruit-would-be-jihadists/story-fnjwnzan-1226958323936#content>

ISIS MILITANTS ATTACK IRAQ OIL REFINERY AS BAGHDAD RESIDENTS PREPARE FOR SIEGE

KRISTIN SHORTEN, NETWORK WRITERS AND WIRES NEWS CORP AUSTRALIA
JUNE 18, 2014

Security measures in Baghdad intensify as tensions rise, while in Basra there's a surge in the sale of uniforms after a senior Shi'ite cleric calls on followers to take up arms against Sunni militants. Gavino Garay reports. IRAQ'S prime minister said his government has regained the initiative after the "shock" defeat of its army and security forces in a lightning attack by Sunni militants in the country's north. Meanwhile, diplomats said they were investigating claims of some 100 foreign workers being kidnapped in areas under militant control.

Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite who has been in office since 2006, said in a televised address that the loss last week of a large swath of territory has helped Iraq restore its national unity. "We were able to contain the strike and arrest deterioration. We have now started our counteroffensive, regaining the initiative and striking back," al-Maliki said. Al-Maliki's upbeat assessment came as news broke of government forces regaining parts of a strategic city near the Syrian border that was captured Monday by fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. It also came hours after the chief military spokesman, Lt. Gen. Qassim al-Moussawi, said government forces on Wednesday repelled an attack by militants on the country's largest oil refinery at Beiji, north of the capital. He said 40 attackers were killed in fighting there.

FOREIGN WORKERS ABDUCTED Forty Indian construction workers have been abducted in violence-hit northern Iraq, the Indian foreign ministry said. The workers were taken from the region around Mosul, which has been overrun by militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign ministry spokesman said. "We have not received any ransom calls yet," Syed Akbaruddin told reporters in New Delhi.

"We are trying to get as much information as possible from anyone trying to give us information from the ground," he said. "We don't know where they are," he added. The Times of India earlier reported that the workers mostly from Punjab state had been kidnapped by the militants during an evacuation of the Mosul area. Akbaruddin said 46 Indian nurses were also stranded in Iraq waiting for the turmoil to subside.

The Indian foreign ministry has set up a 24-hour control room in New Delhi to provide information on Iraq and was dispatching a former envoy to the country to assist its embassy in Baghdad. Meanwhile, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said its diplomats were investigating claims that militants abducted 60 foreign construction workers, including some 15 Turks, near the oil city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq.

MILITANTS ATTACK OIL REFINERY

Sunni militants have attacked Iraq's largest oil refinery with mortars and machine gun fire, security sources and refinery employees say. The attack by ISIS rebels occurred outside two of the three main entrances to the sprawling Baiji refinery, about 200km north of Baghdad, according to Reuters. One mortar hit a spare-parts warehouse and smoke billowed from the building, the sources said. Foreigners were evacuated from the refinery this week as security forces braced for an attack on the compound.

The refinery has been under siege since Sunni militants began a major military offensive in northern Iraq last week. Baghdad's seven million residents are getting increasingly desperate, stockpiling food and hoarding cash in the face of increasing jihadist attacks. International news agency Bloomberg reports how the 1300-year-old capital has been paralysed by fear. It has long since fallen from a cultural hub of the Arab world to a ghetto "marred by bomb blasts and sectarian killings". "You can see huge lines of people outside banks trying to withdraw cash," a United Nations worker in the city told the news agency. "Otherwise, the streets are mostly empty."

Sinan Al Dulaimi, a Christian, tells of how untrained Iraqi militia are setting up unauthorised checkpoints, checking identification papers and harassing non-Shiia residents. "We've stockpiled food," he said. "We're all worried about food..." He says his main concern now is getting his daughter out of the city. "We saw a lot in our lives and don't want her to see any of that. We have to leave. "We never imagined that one day we'd reach this point. I think this is the end. This country has collapsed."



Town guard ... Iraqi army soldiers stand guard at Tahrir Square in Baghdad, Iraq. Sunni militants captured a key northern Iraqi town along the highway to Syria early on Monday, compounding the woes of Iraq's Shiite-led government a week after it lost a vast swath of territory to the insurgents in the country's north. *Source: AP*

AUSTRALIAN SECURITY PRESENCE

Private Australian security guards are among forces working to protect embassies and international facilities in the beleaguered capital. As the fighting edges closer to Baghdad, Western embassies and facilities continue to evacuate nonessential staff and bolster their defences.

The Lowy Institute's Military Fellow James Brown last night said dozens of former Australian military personnel were employed as private security contractors inside Iraq. Brown said the Australian-founded private security company Unity Resources Group could alone have up to 40 Australians, including former special forces soldiers, protecting Australia's Baghdad embassy. "They might have some from a police background but the majority would be military," he said. "You could expect the security contractors would be the last to leave."



Terror tactics ... A jihadist militant restraining an unidentified man at an undisclosed location inside Iraq. *Source: AFP*

"I think the government would see it as part of their responsibility to get those contractors out as well. They'll be working pretty closely with them." But Brown, who coordinates a project investigating the use of private military security companies in disaster and conflict zones, said a push into Baghdad was unlikely.

"I don't think Australian contractors working over there would be at much greater threat than normal," he said. "I think they'd be pretty well prepared for a gunfight. They've got pretty decent military skills compared to ISIS. They've got weapons that are better or equal to the weapons ISIS has. "They'd be capable of protecting our diplomats. The things they'd struggle with are suicide bombings."



Under another flag . An image posted on a militant website appears to show militants from the al-Qaeda-inspired Islamic State of Iraq and Syria with captured Iraqi soldiers wearing plain clothes after taking over a base in Tikrit. Line in the sand ... Members of the Shiite Muslim Mehdi Army militia, who had been fighting in neighbouring Syria, have been heading home to battle an offensive that has brought militants to near Baghdad. *Source:AFP*

DISTURBING MASSACRE FOOTAGE.

Meanwhile, disturbing video has emerged allegedly showing heavily armed boys no older than 10 calmly watching Sunni rebel fighters blow away a prisoner with a bullet to the back of the head, the New York Post reports. Reportedly filmed in Mosul, the grisly footage shows a masked man being heckled by a swarm of jihadi fighters — including children brandishing automatic weapons. The doomed man is then blasted in the head and killed as the rebels celebrate in the background.

This morning, there are reports of ongoing explosions at the town of Baquba, only 50km outside of Baghdad. An overnight assault by jihadists on the town's prison had been repulsed by government and militia forces. There are also reports of an 10 people being killed by an explosion in Sadr City, a Shiite suburb of Baghdad itself. The footage comes as extremists from the al-Qaeda splinter group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, yesterday extended their grip on an arc of territory that stretches from the city of Aleppo in northern Syria to within 97km of the Iraqi capital.



BAGHDAD "WILL HOLD"

Swelling ranks ... Iraqi Shiite tribesmen parade with their weapons in central Baghdad's Palestine Street as they show their willingness to join Iraqi security forces in the fight against jihadist militants. *Source: AFP.* "We're seeing indications that Iraqi security forces in and around Baghdad are stiffening that's encouraging."

Pentagon spokesman Rear Admiral John Kirby told Defence One overnight. "It certainly appears that they have the will to defend the capital." A spokesman for Australia's Lowy Institute, James Brown, agreed, saying ISIS had made quick gains — but now needed to catch up with itself.



"ISIS has a whole lot of problems now including how they do their own logistics and how they keep themselves together," he said. "Even though they were able to push into those northern towns I think it's a whole different story when you get to a city of 7 million people. I don't see them overrunning Baghdad." The Australian government has begun withdrawing embassy staff from Baghdad and had contingency plans in place.

"We're working closely together with the United States and the United Kingdom on the ground in Iraq to ensure that our staff will be looked after," Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said. Junked ... an Iraqi army armored vehicle is seen burned on a street of the city of Mosul, Iraq. Iraq's military has been deeply shaken by their humiliating collapse in the face of an onslaught by Islamic militants the past two weeks. *Source: AP*

IRAQ COMMAND PURGE Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has today dismissed four senior security force commanders on for abandoning their "professional and military duty". The high-ranking officers, including a Lieutenant General, were responsible for Nineveh Province and the city of Mosul which fell to Sunni fighters with little resistance last week. The commanders "failed to fulfill their professional and military duties", according to a government statement read out on state television. One commander, Hidayat Abdulraheem, allegedly fled a firefight and would now be referred to a military court, the statement said.



Iran is reported to have sent the commander of one of its elite Revolutionary Guard units to Baghdad. Commander Qasem Suleimani is said to be helping military and Shia leaders co-ordinate their forces and prepare to resist the rebel advance.

Rule of the gun ... ISIS militants leads away captured Iraqi soldiers in plain clothes after taking over a base in Tikrit, Iraq. *Source: AP*

REPRISAL MASSACRES Nearly four dozen Sunni detainees were gunned down at a jail north of Baghdad, a car bomb struck a Shiite neighborhood of the capital and four young Sunnis were found slain, as ominous signs emerged Tuesday that open warfare between the two main Muslim sects has returned to Iraq.



War child ... An Iraqi boy holds a weapon as he takes part in a gathering by Shiite tribesman to show their willingness to join Iraqi security forces in the fight against Jihadist militants. *Source: AFP*

Pro-government Shiite militiamen reportedly detainees after insurgents tried to storm a jail.

A local morgue official said many of the prisoners had bullet wounds to the head and chest, though the Iraqi military insisted the Sunni inmates were killed by mortar shells in the attack on the facility outside the city of Baqouba. In Baghdad, meanwhile, the bullet-riddled bodies of four men in their late 20s or early 30s, presumably Sunnis, were found at different locations in the Shiite neighbourhood of Benouk. A car bomb in Baghdad's Shiite Sadr City district killed 12 people and wounded 30 in a crowded outdoor market, police and hospital officials said. No one claimed responsibility for the bombing, but attacks targeting Shiite districts are routinely the work of Sunni militants.



Defenders assemble ... Iraqi security forces in uniforms and plainclothes head to Baghdad. *Source: AP*

The killings, following the capture by Sunni insurgents of a large swath of the country stretching to Syria, were the first hints of the beginnings of a return to sectarian bloodletting that nearly tore the country apart in 2006 and 2007.

Iraq's ambassador to the US Lukman Faily told CNN overnight that the world should not underestimate the risk of the collapse of his nation. "What you have in Afghanistan, with one Bin Laden you will have a thousand of them," Ambassador Lukman Faily said.

US PLANS ITS MOVES The US has moved the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, along with an escorting cruiser and destroyer, into the Persian Gulf. It has been joined by the amphibious troop landing ship USS Mesa Verde. About 170 troops are "on the ground" inside Baghdad to protect the US embassy.

Another 100 are "staged outside Iraq", ready to be deployed if needed — such to secure the city's international airport, the Pentagon's Rear Admiral Kirby told media last night. "Where we are right now in the process is that the national security team continues to meet and discuss and review options available," Kirby said, including nonmilitary approaches.

"The president hasn't made a final decision right now — we have to preserve that space for him to do that," he said. "This isn't about breathing space, it's about making measured, deliberate decisions that make the most sense. And it's a complicated issue. Believe me, everybody has noticed the speed with which [ISIS] has moved within Iraq." President Obama has said he would not commit the US to military action in Iraq unless the government in Baghdad moves to "set aside sectarian differences, to promote stability, and account for the legitimate interests of all of Iraq's communities." In the absence of that type of political effort, Obama has said any American military action would not succeed.

"The fact that they are not willing to stand and fight and defend their posts against admittedly hardened terrorists, but not terrorists who are overwhelming in numbers, indicates that there is a problem with morale, a problem in terms of commitment, and ultimately that is rooted in the political problems that have plagued the country for a very long time," President Obama said late last week. Vice President Joe Biden has reiterated that sentiment. "The bottom line here is that Iraqis have to put together and pull together in order to defeat this enemy, and then move toward building a better future for Iraqi — all Iraqi people. And we will help them in that effort."



Entrenched defence. A member of Kurdish Peshmerga forces takes position overlooking ISIS militants in Jalawla in the Diyala Province. *Source: AFP*

AUSTRALIAN REACTION

The Lowy Institute's James Brown, a former Army officer, said Australia should make a "carefully defined" contribution.

"I think the best way we could provide support would be to provide imagery analysts from the Australian intelligence and geospatial organisation," he said. "As Iraq goes to try to strike back against this group they will need people who can analyse satellite and aircraft imagery to ensure they target the fighters and not civilian populations in the towns we're looking at. "I think that's a small but highly effective contribution Australia could make to help resolve this."

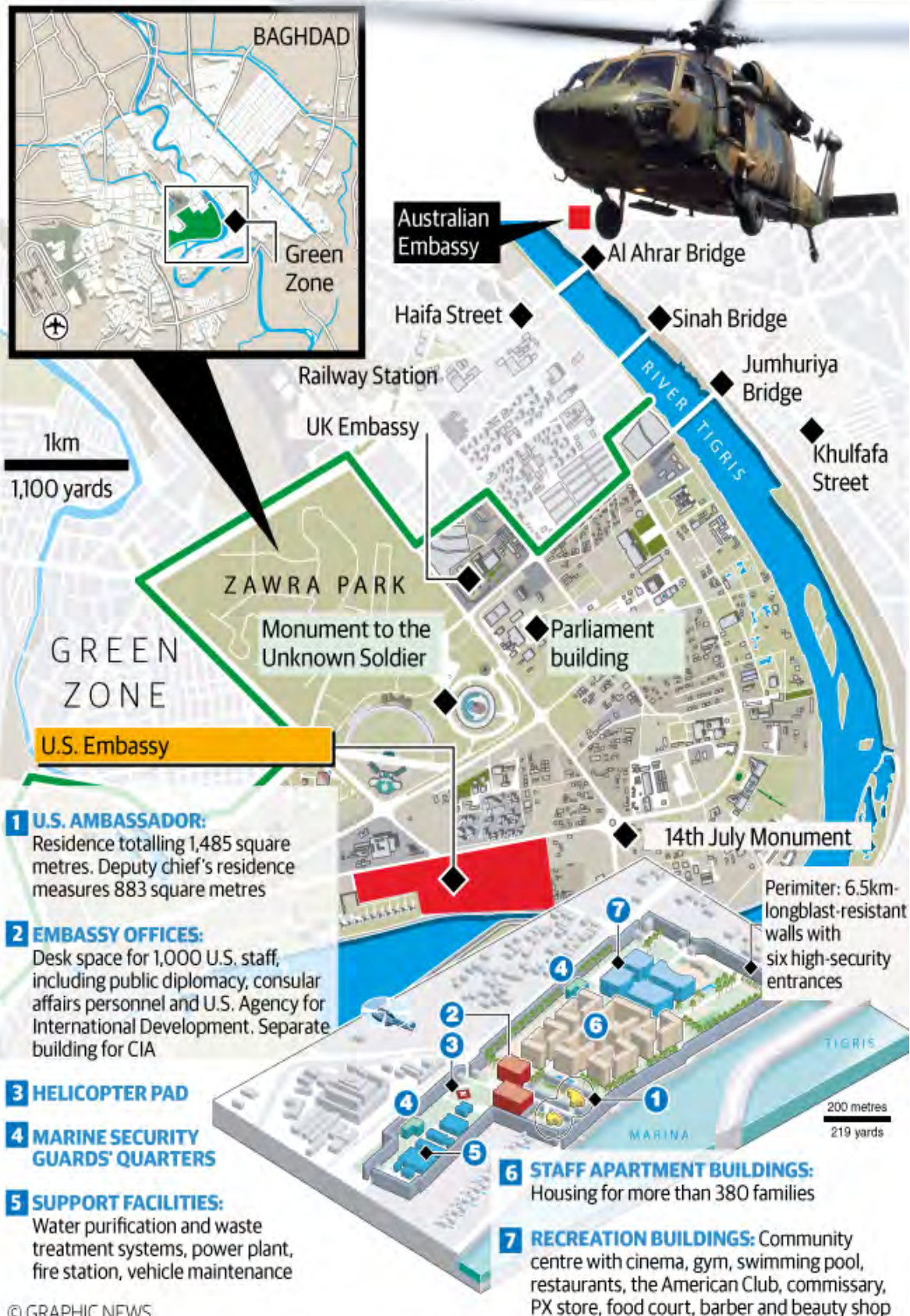
Australian Special Forces are rumoured to be preparing to evacuate diplomats in Baghdad if the fighting in Iraq stretches south to the capital but being on standby for such missions is standard for the elite soldiers from Perth's SAS and Sydney's 2 Commando Regiment. Off target ... Kurdish Peshmerga forces run for cover after an Iraqi army helicopter mistook them for ISIS militants in Jalawla in the Diyala Province. A major offensive by militants, spearheaded by jihadists, is converging upon the capital of Baghdad. *Source: AFP*



BAGHDAD DEFENCE The fighting around the Baqouba jail overnight was the closest to Baghdad since the al-Qaeda breakaway group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant began its lightning advance, seizing several key northern cities in the Sunni heartland last week.

US EMBASSY UNDER THREAT?

The US Embassy in Baghdad is the world's largest, most expensive and most heavily fortified embassy. Costing \$US600 million to build, it has working space for about 1000 people and a budget of \$1.2bn a year. The 42-hectare complex is the size of 80 football fields



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There were conflicting details about the clashes in the al-Kattoun district near Baqouba, the capital of Diyala Province and one of the bloodiest battlefields of the US-led war, and on how the detainees were killed. The city is 60 kilometres northeast of the Iraqi capital. Officers said the local police station, which has a small jail, came under attack Monday night by Sunni militants who arrived in two sedan cars to free the detainees. The militants fired rocket-propelled grenades on the building before opening fire with assault rifles

A SWAT team accompanied by Shiite militiamen rushed to scene and asked the local policemen to leave, according to the officers. When the policemen later returned to the station, they found all those in the detention cells dead. The bodies were taken to the Baqouba morgue, where an official said most had gunshot wounds to the head and chest. One detainee, however, survived and was taken to the hospital. Police later arrived at the hospital and took the wounded man away, said a hospital official.

The police officers, the hospital and morgue officials all spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their own safety. A different account was provided to The Associated Press by Iraq's chief military spokesman, Lieutenant General Qassim al-Moussawi. He said 52 detainees who were held at the station in al-Kattoun died when the attackers from the Islamic State shelled it with mortars. Nine of the attackers were killed, Lt Gen al-Moussawi said. Washington deployed some 275 military personnel to protect its embassy in Baghdad, the first time it has sent troops to Iraq since it withdrew its forces at the end of 2011 after a bloody and costly intervention launched in 2003.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/isis-militants-attack-iraq-oil-refinery-as-baghdad-residents-prepare-for-siege/story-e6freuy9-1226958155082>



IRAQ BLOODSHED: ISIS STRIKE, STORMING OF MOSUL WAS YEARS IN MAKING WITH GROUP'S 2006 MANIFESTO REVEALING FATAL VISION

NETWORK WRITER NEWS CORP AUSTRALIA JUNE 17, 2014. THEY are the band of Islamic militants who seemingly came from nowhere and are now threatening to bring Iraq to its knees.

When the radical Jihadists of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria — the killers dubbed too extreme even for al-Qaeda — stormed the city of Mosul, they appeared to take Iraqi and American officials by surprise. But their blood-soaked rampage, the New York Times reports, has been years in the making. Not only that, their strategy of state-building — which enforces harsh Islamic laws — has been promoted publicly with annual reports and manifestos.

"When you go back and read it, it's all there" ... ISIS set out their blood-soaked vision of Iraq in a manifesto published in 2007. So who are these murderous fiends — who are now closing in on Baghdad — and what exactly is their vision for Iraq? As the New York Times reveals through an examination of the Sunni extremist group's documents and annual reports, ISIS has set clear goals for carving out a caliphate, an Islamic religious state in sections of Iraq and Syria.



Mass executions. Iraq defence personnel are captured and dragged to their deaths. *Source:* News Corp Australia ISIS, which is headed by former US detention centre detainee Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, first laid out its strategy for the war-torn nation in a manifesto published in 2007, The New York Times says. The pamphlet states that under the group's vision, religion is paramount over administering services.

Referring to citizens under its control, the manifesto says, "improving their conditions is less important than the condition of their religion." And one of the most important duties of the group, the pamphlet says, is to free Sunnis from prison. As Brian Fishman, a counterterrorism researcher at the New America Foundation, told the *New York Times* the current bloodshed in Iraq is a culmination of what ISIS has been trying to achieve since its formation in 2006. "When you go back and read it, it's all there," Fishman said. "



They are finally getting their act together." According to Alex Bilger, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, ISIS "is functioning as a military rather than as a terrorist network". Closing in ... radical Islamic group ISIS say they won't give up until they form an Islamic state. *Source:* News Corp Australia. An annual report released at the end of March detailed the group's "successes" through suicide attacks, car bombs and assassinations.

Time bomb ... the current bloodshed in Iraq is a culmination of what ISIS has been trying to achieve since its formation in 2006, expert say. *Source:* AP. In recent hour-long propaganda video — called *The Rattling of the Sabres* — the group hailed their fighters as heroes working for two of their main goal: the creation of an Islamic state and the slaughter of their enemies, mostly the Iraqi security forces and Shiites.



As shocking as their takeover of Mosul was, ISIS has been cementing its control of Raqqa, in Syria, for more than a year, and of Falluja, in western Iraq, for the last six months, the *New York Times* says. Under the leadership of al-Baghdadi, the group has shown itself to be ruthless — violent and purist in pursuing its religious objectives but also pragmatic in forming alliances. In post-war Iraq, the group despite the fact that it got its start battling the Americans was played down by US officials.



In other scenes, the *New York Times* reports, the fighters carry out drive-by shootings against men they accuse of being in the Iraqi army, in some cases chasing them through fields before grabbing and executing them. Bolstering defences ... an Iraqi civilian, who is volunteering to fight a militant offensive, kisses the Koran before boarding a bus to Mosul. *Source: AFP.*



Innocent victims. This little girl's family is just one of the thousands who fled Mosul after it was overrun by Islamic militants. *Source: Getty Images* During the sectarian war that began in 2006, the Sunni jihadists antagonised the public with their attempts to impose Islamic law.



But they suffered defeats at the hands of tribal fighters who joined the American counterinsurgency campaign, forcing them to retreat from western Iraq to areas around Mosul. However, three years ago, ISIS seized a new opportunity for growth with the outbreak of civil war in Syria. ISIS "invaded Syria from Mosul long before it invaded Mosul from Syria," Mr. Fishman told the *New York Times*.

They will prevail ... ISIS seized a new opportunity for growth with the outbreak of civil war in Syria. *Source:* AP. The group has set out different strategies for Syria and Iraq. In Syria, it has focused on seizing territory that has fallen out of government hands. In Iraq, though, it has exploited widespread disenchantment among the country's Sunnis with the existing government, joining with other Sunni militant groups, such as one organisation that is led by former officers of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. "What is very dangerous is that all these forces now have the same goal," Hassan Abu Hanieh, a Jordanian expert on Islamist groups, told the New York Times. "ISIS has been able to take advantage of widespread anger and to base their identity on fighting Shiites."

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/world/iraq-bloodshed-isis-strike-storming-of-mosul-was-years-in-making-with-groups-2006-manifesto-revealing-fatal-vision/story-fni0xs63-1226956433891>