International Crisis Group

WORKING TO PREVENT
CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State

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Executive Summary

The question of Sunni Arab participation in Iraq's political order that has plagued the transition since its inception is as acute and explosive as ever. Quickly marginalised by an ethno-sectarian apportionment that confined them to minority status in a system dominated by Shiites and Kurds, most community members first shunned the new dispensation then fought it. Having gradually turned from insurgency to tentative political involvement, their wager produced only nominal representation, while reinforcing feelings of injustice and discrimination. Today, with frustration at a boil, unprecedented Sunni-Shiite polarisation in the region and deadly car bombings surging across the country since the start of Ramadan in July, a revived sectarian civil war is a serious risk. To avoid it, the government should negotiate local ceasefires with Sunni officials, find ways to more fairly integrate Sunni Arabs in the political process and cooperate with local actors to build an effective security regime along the Syrian border.

The origins of the crisis run deep. Throughout his seven-year tenure, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has implemented a divide-and-conquer strategy that has neutered any credible Sunni Arab leadership. The authorities also have taken steps that reinforce perceptions of a sectarian agenda. Prominent officials – predominantly Sunni – have been cast aside pursuant to the Justice and Accountability Law on the basis of alleged senior-level affiliation to the former Baath party. Federal security forces have disproportionately deployed in Baghdad's Sunni neighbourhoods as well as Sunni-populated governorates (Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala). Al-Iraqiya, the political movement to which Sunni Arabs most readily related, slowly came apart due to internal rivalries even as Maliki resorted to both legal and extrajudicial means to consolidate power.

This past year has proved particularly damaging. As events in Syria nurtured their hopes for a political comeback, Sunni Arabs launched an unprecedented, peaceful protest movement in late 2012 in response to the arrest of bodyguards of Rafea al-Issawi, a prominent Iraqiya member. It too failed to provide answers to accumulated grievances. Instead, the demonstrations and the repression to which they gave rise further exacerbated the sense of exclusion and persecution among Sunnis.

The government initially chose a lacklustre, technical response, forming committees to unilaterally address protesters' demands, shunning direct negotiations and tightening security measures in Sunni-populated areas. Half-hearted, belated concessions exacerbated distrust and empowered more radical factions. After a four-month stalemate, the crisis escalated. On 23 April, government forces raided a protest camp in the city of Hawija, in Kirkuk province, killing over 50 and injuring 110. This sparked a wave of violence exceeding anything witnessed for five years. Attacks against security forces and, more ominously, civilians have revived fears of a return to all-out civil strife. The Islamic State of Iraq, al-Qaeda's local expression, is resurgent. Shiite militias have responded against Sunnis. The government's seeming intent to address a chiefly political issue – Sunni Arab representation in Baghdad – through tougher security measures has every chance of worsening the situation.

Belittled, demonised and increasingly subject to a central government crackdown, the popular movement is slowly mutating into an armed struggle. In this respect, the

absence of a unified Sunni leadership – to which Baghdad's policies contributed and which Maliki might have perceived as an asset – has turned out to be a serious liability. In a showdown that is acquiring increasing sectarian undertones, the movement's proponents look westward to Syria as the arena in which the fight against the Iraqi government and its Shiite allies will play out and eastward toward Iran as the source of all their ills.

Under intensifying pressure from government forces and with dwindling faith in a political solution, many Sunni Arabs have concluded their only realistic option is a violent conflict increasingly framed in confessional terms. In turn, the government conveniently dismisses all opposition as a sectarian insurgency that warrants ever more stringent security measures. In the absence of a dramatic shift in approach, Iraq's fragile polity risks breaking down, a victim of the combustible mix of its long-standing flaws and growing regional tensions.

Recommendations

To de-escalate violence in the short term

To the government of Iraq and provincial councils of Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Diyala:

1. Negotiate local ceasefires entailing restraint on the part of government forces and cooperation by local authorities.

2. Seek to establish joint command and coordination structures involving the federal army and local forces (police and *sahwa* – awakening – units), with a view to prioritising the struggle against al-Qaeda's Islamic State of Iraq, and ensure that no Iraqi fighters, whether Sunni or Shiite, cross into Syria.

3. Investigate jointly the killings in Falluja, Mosul and Hawija.

To address longer-term issues contributing to the country's instability

To the government of Iraq:

4. Lower sectarian tensions by, inter alia:

   a) easing, unilaterally or in the context of locally negotiated ceasefires, security measures such as SWAT team deployments and intrusive security checks; as well as restrictions on mobility and on access to religious sites wherever possible;

   b) providing equal benefits and opportunities to northern and southern tribes;

   c) launching a national dialogue to agree on both reforming the Justice and Accountability Law and establishing an oversight and appeals mechanism for the Justice and Accountability Commission, while setting a time limit for its activities;

   d) clarifying the role and responsibilities of the defence, interior and justice ministries in procedures related to the arrest, detention and trial of individuals taken into custody pursuant to the Counter-Terrorism Law; and

   e) refraining from inflammatory sectarian statements while implementing gestures aimed at national reconciliation (eg, placing the Samarra shrines under the joint management of Sunni and Shiite endowments).

5. Seek to insulate Iraq from the Syrian conflict by, inter alia:

   a) refraining from any statement suggesting Iraqi support to a party in the conflict; and

   b) preventing fighters, whether Sunni or Shiite, from crossing into Syria, notably through cooperation with Anbar and Ninewa local actors (tribes and provincial officials); locally-recruited security forces (eg, police and *sahwa*); and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

To Sunni local and national leaders:

6. Refrain from incitement to armed struggle or calls for establishment of a Sunni federal region.

To *Sahwa* (Awakening) leaders:

7. Reestablish a single *sahwa* corps under a unified leadership in a position to present the government with a clear set of demands.

8. Cooperate with federal government forces in both securing the provinces against the Islamic State of Iraq and policing the Syrian border.

To the Sunni Endowment, clerics associations and prominent clerics:

9. Negotiate with the central government over specific demands (presence of security forces; salaries to clerics; funding to religious schools), publicly denounce violence and refrain from calls to form a Sunni region.

Baghdad/Brussels, 14 August 2013

Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State

I.   **Introduction**

A new wave of violence is engulfing Iraq. May 2013 saw the highest number of politically-related violent attacks in the past five years. Violence intensified with the beginning of Ramadan on 10 July; on 29 July, a series of car bombings killed at least 50 people across the country (34 in Baghdad alone) and wounded more than 100; On 10 August, as the end of the holy month was being celebrated, another wave of bombings killed more than 60 across the country, primarily in Shiite neighbourhoods.[1] Citizens and politicians alike express fears of a return to sectarian strife. The Islamic State of Iraq, al-Qaeda's local emanation, gives worrying signs of resurgence. Sunni insurgent groups slowly are reorganising. Government armed forces progressively are caught up in a vicious cycle of repression and reprisals. Shiite militias also are re-mobilising. Violence has different targets and origins but, at bottom, it reflects the growing alienation of the embattled Sunni Arab population in the context of intensifying regional sectarian polarisation.

Since late 2012, Iraq's Sunni Arabs have staged peaceful protests to express an array of grievances, most prominently their sense of marginalisation under the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. This popular movement challenges both the precarious communal balance of forces and the controversial leadership style that have shaped post-civil war politics. A four-month stalemate during which the government eschewed any serious negotiations climaxed in a bloody crackdown against the protesters. This in turn triggered a violent response, transforming a domestic crisis into an armed conflict.

On the evening of 20 December 2012, security forces stormed the residence of Rafea al-Issawi, Iraq's (Sunni) finance minister, arresting several security guards and staff members on charges of participating in terrorist attacks. Protests swiftly broke out in Issawi's hometown of Falluja, in Anbar province.[2]

Within days, they had spread to Ramadi, where thousands reportedly poured into the streets, blocking the highway linking Baghdad to Syria and Jordan, then to adjacent, predominantly Sunni provinces of Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala, as well as Baghdad's Sunni's neighbourhoods.[3] Demonstrations remained mostly con-

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[1] Duraid Adnan, "Wave of car bombs kills dozens in Iraq", *The New York Times*, 30 July 2013; Tim Arango, "Car combings kill scores across Iraq", *The New York Times*, 11 August 2013.

[2] A local resident said, "the arrest of Rafea al-Issawi's bodyguards was just another way for the government to target our leaders. It was similar to the arrest of [bodyguards] and attempted arrest of Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi", a Sunni leader who fled Baghdad in December 2011 following murder charges. In September 2012, he was sentenced to death in absentia for terrorist activities. Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 6 March 2013.

[3] Crisis Group could not independently verify the size of the protests. Reuters asserted that tens of thousands had come out to block the highway. "Iraqi Sunnis stage big anti-government rallies", 28 December 2012. The Institute for the Study of War, specialising in military affairs, published a timeline of demonstrations and government responses. "Mapping Iraq's Protests", 11 January 2013. The first week (21-27 December) saw protests in Falluja, Ramadi, Mosul, Samarra, Tikrit and Bagh-

fined to Sunni areas; in the Shiite-populated central and southern provinces, small gatherings were organised in support of the prime minister.[4] As protests grew in size, the government dispatched security forces in an attempt to cut off Anbar province and ensure Baghdad remained immune.[5]

The movement remained peaceful for some time. However, on 25 January and 8 March clashes erupted first in Falluja then in Mosul, leading to the deaths of nine protesters in the former instance, one in the second.[6] Demands also escalated, from the release of Issawi's guards and female prisoners to a total of thirteen points, including cancellation of the Counter-Terrorism Law (Article IV), passage of the General Amnesty Law and reform of the Justice and Accountability Law, as well as respect for ethnic and sectarian balance in all state institutions.[7] After the deaths in Falluja and Mosul, they increased yet again, this time to comprise investigating, judging and punishing soldiers responsible for the operations.[8] Expressing newfound determination, a resident of Baghdad's Adhamiya neighbourhood said, "the U.S. occupier left and enabled a new authority, Maliki, to kill, imprison our people and take our women away. We are going to fight until the end. We are not going back this time".[9]

In a sense, the movement was highly localised, both organised and kept alive by local tribal and religious personalities; where national politicians participated, they did so in regions from which they hailed.[10] An eclectic group – local organisations and personalities, tribes, clerics, political figures, civil society members and even elements of the former armed resistance – helped in the effort, bringing people together and articulating their demands.[11] Gatherings typically occurred during or immediately after Friday prayers. An Anbar resident who participated in the protests said:

dad's Adhamiya district; in the second week they spread to Salah al-din, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces and in the third week to Baghdad's Ghazaliya district.

[4] A student from Anbar dismissed the sectarian explanation: "[It] is not a matter of Shiites and Sunnis. Rather, people in the south do not experience the same injustice we do". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 29 January 2013. Throughout January, Sadrists and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), both Shiite movements, threatened similar mobilisation in the southern provinces, but this never occurred. Instead, pro-Maliki demonstrations were organised in Baghdad, Najaf, Basra, Karbala, Kut and Diwaniya.

[5] See "Mapping Iraq's Protests", op. cit. Crisis Group observations through January 2013 confirmed the security lockdown in Sunni-populated districts of the capital. On 25 January, security forces prevented a Crisis Group analyst from entering Adhamiya. Access was restricted exclusively to residents.

[6] According to a Human Rights Watch investigation on the Falluja killings: "Based on media and witnessed accounts, demonstrators and army troops clashed when protesters threw stones at soldiers as they made their way to the sit-in. The army's response culminated in soldiers firing live rounds, killing seven people according to accounts. Another two people who were wounded in the shootings died later from their injuries". "Iraq: Investigate Deadly Army Shooting in Fallujah", 14 February 2013. On events in Mosul, see Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Investigate Fatal Police Shootings in Mosul", 16 March 2013.

[7] Document listing the thirteen demands, reviewed by Crisis Group in Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

[8] Crisis Group interview, Qusay al-Zein, protest leader, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

[9] Crisis Group interview, protester, Adhamiya, February 2013.

[10] On 28 December, both Rafea al-Issawi and Ahmed al-Alwani participated in the protests in their capacity as parliamentarians from Anbar and members of prominent tribes rather than as members of the Iraqiya electoral list.

[11] Ibrahim al-Sumaydaie, a political analyst with close ties to key Sunni figures and the government, said, "we can identify several main actors within the demonstrations. Among those in charge of logistics are two main sub-categories: religious personalities and tribal leaders. Individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood shape the demonstrators' hearts and minds. Then you have former Baathists – both civilians and army officers who have been victims of de-Baathification. Lastly,

Nobody controls the demonstrations but each one of their individual components make them happen. Tribal members bring their sons, who set up tents and distribute food, both of which are donated by the tribes themselves. Clerics provide protests with religious legitimacy whereas political leaders help with organisation.[12]

Even at the local level, and despite common demands, each group engaged in the protests furthered its own agenda in the tug of war with Baghdad. Tribes sought a larger share of power, typically at the expense of rival tribes that sided with Baghdad when Maliki began his second mandate in 2011; clerics did likewise vis-à-vis religious figures they viewed as co-opted by Maliki; the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) wished to draw Sunnis away from the more secular current; victims of de-Baathification saw an opportunity to reclaim their rights; and, finally, former armed resistance members considered the struggle a continuation of their fight against the post-Saddam political establishment.

These parochial interests aside, people who took to the streets expressed through demonstrations broader and deeper resentment toward what they view as an unjust political system they have endured for over a decade, even as they saw an opportunity to shift the balance of power. Within this novel environment, Sunni politicians, tribal leaders and clerics – many of whom for years had alternated between support for and defiance of the government depending on circumstance – no longer could equivocate. The events brought to the fore long-festering frustrations among community members. Simply put, playing both sides became socially unacceptable.

there are extremists – those who participated in the Sunni armed resistance after the fall of the former regime. Without these various levels, the demonstrations would not have taken place". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 January 2013.
[12] Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

II.   The (Re-)Making of the Sunni Community

Iraq's Sunni Arabs are a heterogeneous, plural community, spread over provinces that – with the exception of Anbar – encompass several confessional and ethnic groups.[13] Sunni-populated areas of Baghdad and Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala provinces comprise urban and tribal components that differ sharply from one another. The mostly secular urban class forged its identity during the birth of the state, leading nascent institutions during the Hashemite monarchy (1921-1958) and playing a key role in founding the Republic of Iraq in 1958. It typically held an elitist, not a sectarian, view on politics, defending class prerogatives rather than self-consciously promoting their community as a whole. Tribes, whether Sunni or Shiite, cooperated with or opposed the new state depending on how much it impinged on their territory and redistributed resources.

After the Baath party assumed power in 1968, Sunni Arabs retained an important – although far from exclusive – share within the power structure. Saddam Hussein, himself a Sunni Arab but above all a provincial outsider, invested in tribal and sectarian loyalties to entrench his power in the capital, especially in the sensitive security arena.[14] That said, his regime victimised people from all backgrounds, members of the Sunni community included – whether ordinary citizens, clerics, businessmen or tribesmen.[15] Saddam's politics took a more avowedly sectarian turn only after the 1991 uprisings in southern and northern Iraq.

Yet, notwithstanding such important nuances, U.S. policies following the occupation and during the establishment of an ethnic and sectarian-based political system tended to treat Sunni Arabs as belonging to a uniform, homogeneous entity, inhabiting a relatively defined territory dubbed the Sunni triangle, enjoying a privileged status under the deposed president and bound together by common hostility toward as well as resistance to the new order.[16]

In turn, this gave rise among Sunnis to shared feelings of marginalisation and unjust treatment at the hands first of the occupier and then of Prime Minister Maliki. As a result, they constructed a new, albeit far from cohesive, political identity. Emphasising the point, a parliamentarian from the Iraqiya list – a self-proclaimed secular, non-sectarian coalition although widely perceived as more representative of

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[13] There has been no census reflecting Iraq's sectarian and ethnic composition. However, in the early stages of its occupation, the U.S. based its policies on rough percentages according to which Arab Shiites were around 60 per cent, Sunni Kurds around 17 per cent and Sunni Arabs around 20 per cent. The exact source of such percentages is unclear. A map of Iraq including them circulated among U.S. officials in early 2003. "Map of Iraq", General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin. Crisis Group observations, March 2003.

[14] On the intricate nature of the Baathist regime under Saddam Hussein, see David Baran, *Vivre la tyrannie et lui survivre, l'Irak en transition* (Paris, 2004). For Saddam Hussein's reliance on tribal and sectarian affiliations, see Amatzia Baram, "Saddam's Power Structure: The Tikritis Before, During and After the War", *Adelphi Papers* (2003), pp. 93-114.

[15] Falluja, a Sunni Arab town often perceived as a stronghold of Saddam loyalists, in fact endured several waves of repression under Saddam's rule. Peter Harling, "The Falluja Syndrome: Taking the Fight to the Enemy that Wasn't", Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Fall 2006, pp. 26-31.

[16] See Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°119, *Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry*, 26 September 2005.

Sunni Arabs – said, "we awoke one day in [the Baghdad neighbourhood of] Adhamiya and suddenly discovered that we are all Sunnis".[17]

In ensuing years, the community remained trapped in a cyclical pattern of participation in/withdrawal from state politics, struggling to define the terms of their involvement as well as their role and identity in today's Iraq. The post-2003 political system was designed in ways that automatically confined Sunni Arabs to a minority status they were hard-pressed to accept, particularly after having invested in national and pan-Arab frames of reference for decades. Feeling deprived of a state they never fully owned but to which they at least could relate, they were asked to embrace an alien communal agenda.

Two rough tendencies emerged within the Sunni Arab community both with a view to reversing its marginalisation albeit through radically different means. One, heir to the secular, nationalist trend, rejected the sectarian prism and prioritised broad political participation as a means of re-conquering power. The other, born of the Islamist current, focused on bolstering the community's identity. In other words, while the former sought to de-confessionalise the political system through participation, the latter sought to confessionalise the community itself through the assertion of its identity.

Over time, Sunni Arab feelings of political exclusion were exacerbated by the absence of a clear, unifying project or form of representation. In more recent years, this was reflected in Iraqiya's inability to effectively articulate their grievances or put forward concrete aspirations, let alone act upon either.[18] Amid uncertainty and given the lack of a cohesive leadership, traditional local actors – notably tribes and clerics – re-emerged, often dealing with the central state as separate, autonomous players.

A.   *Simmering Resentment Comes to a Boil*

Political ferment among Sunni Arabs has its roots in sentiments forged during the U.S. occupation and hardened throughout Maliki's years in office. In the wake of Saddam Hussein's ouster, they felt targeted by policies that stigmatised and persecuted them by painting them as Baathists or terrorists. As time went on, they believed they were at the receiving end of institutionalised prejudice. A tribal chief compared Adhamiya, Baghdad's overwhelmingly Sunni neighbourhood, to the neighbouring (and predominantly Shiite) Kadhimiya district:

> The municipalities of Adhamiya and Kadhimiya both receive an annual budget for projects. But Kadhimiya has everything: electricity, investments and projects. In Adhamiya, all projects are blocked. We need a new hospital; we need a school. We have nothing.[19]

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[17] Crisis Group interview, Nada al-Jibouri, Baghdad, 8 March 2013. Myriam Benraad writes: "The ethno-religious prism is not enough to justify the existence of an identity or a structured Arab Sunni community. The expression 'Arab Sunnis' refers to a diverse sociological reality in which, in modern times in particular, political, economic, regional or local cleavages prove to be more decisive than the single sectarian affiliation". "Du phénomène arabe Sunnite irakien: recompositions sociales, paradoxes identitaires et bouleversement géopolitique sous occupation (2003-2008)", *La Découverte, Hérodote* (2008), p. 60.

[18] See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°127, *Iraq's Secular Opposition: The Rise and the Decline of Al-Iraqiya*, 31 July 2012.

[19] Crisis Group interview, Adhamiya tribal committee member, Adhamiya, 15 February 2013.

The effect appears most pronounced among the younger generation. A prominent Iraqi human rights activist said:

> Young Sunnis share the concerns of all young Iraqis, as they see the government operating in slow motion only. But, beyond that, they also feel that they do not enjoy the same opportunities as others. They have yet to feel accepted by society and resent being suspected of affiliation with al-Qaeda.[20]

Added to this is the perception among Sunni Arabs that security forces and notably the army are Shiite-dominated instruments of sectarian domination rather than national protection. A young Sunni said:

> As you enter [the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood of] Adhamiya, they [government security forces] will treat you differently. They use checkpoints to pressure us. They can arrest you at any time. And they always have a ready accusation: "Are you are a terrorist or are you a Baathist?" Once upon a time we had a government. Now, a group of criminals governs us.[21]

At an even broader level, for many Sunni Arabs the sense of an alien occupation never ended; rather, a Shiite occupation was substituted for a U.S. one. As they see it, they lost their capital to their confessional foes, who blanket the city with Shiite symbols (such as the flag of Imam Hussein) and simultaneously warn of and brag about their newly-achieved domination. A Sunni Arab resident of Kirkuk, working as a civil servant, said, "the last time I went to Baghdad was in February 2003, just a few months before the U.S. invasion. If I were transferred to work there, I would not go. Baghdad is occupied".[22] Echoing this view, a former Baghdad resident who presently lives in Falluja asserted: "I don't want to live in Baghdad. It is dangerous because they [government security forces] can arrest or imprison us [Sunni Arabs] at any time".[23]

The result has been growing Sunni Arab alienation from the political process and politics as a whole. As a Sunni Arab tribal chief from Adhamiya put it:

> Before the [March 2010 parliamentary] elections, I told Iyad Allawi [head of the Iraqiya list] that I would support him. We elected Iraqiya, and we got nothing.

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[20] Crisis Group interview, Hanaa Edwar, secretary general, Iraqi Al-Amal Association, a prominent Baghdad-based civil society organisation, 16 February 2013. Sadik al-Rikabi, member of the ruling Shiite Daawa party, disagreed: "They [Sunnis] have the right to feel there is discrimination. But people in the West should visit the south of the country, and they will see that people living there have the same problems. They will understand that their leaders who spread these views have a political agenda. Problems exist everywhere, from north to south". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 April 2013. Shiites tend to flatly reject the discrimination accusation, though their standard response often reflects the very sectarian outlook they dispute. A Baghdad resident and security guard manager unwittingly illustrated this internal contradiction: "I have 30 guards – fifteen Sunnis and fifteen Shiites. A week ago I fired one of them because he was not working well. He started telling everybody that I fired him because he is a Sunni. In fact, there is no discrimination. The issue is that they [the Sunnis] cannot accept the fact that they no longer are in power". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, February 2013. Saad al-Mutlabi, lawmaker, Maliki's State of Law, said, "they [Sunni Arabs] want us [Shiites] to rewind the clock and become their servants". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 January 2012.
[21] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, January 2013.
[22] Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, March 2013.
[23] Crisis Group interview, Falluja, 4 March 2013.

> We have no real representative in parliament at the moment. Adhamiya [home
> to the tomb of Abu Hanifa al-Numan, founder of one of the foremost schools of
> Islamic jurisprudence] is an important place for the entire Islamic world, yet
> nobody represents us.[24]

A tribal member from Falluja added: "We fought for several years. Then we tried to
invest in parliament. But Maliki controls everything, leaving us with nothing. Now
we must find another way to achieve our rights".[25]

B.   *A Decade Out of Baghdad*

To a significant extent, U.S. policy in the post-Saddam era was guided by a percep-
tion that under the former regime Sunni Arabs ruled over Shiites and Kurds. The
corollary – that a democratic transition by necessity entailed transferring power
away from the minority group – followed naturally. The first U.S.-established ruling
body – the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) – implemented de-Baathification
policies that essentially treated Sunni Arabs as representatives of an oppressive state
structure in need of dismantling.[26] Likewise, U.S. forces enforced stringent security
measures in Sunni-populated areas, even those traditionally hostile to the former
regime.[27] Finally, the nascent political system was explicitly built along ethnic and
sectarian lines, making clear that Sunni Arabs would be relegated to a minor role by
dint of demography. Overall, this sent the message that de-Baathification was tan-
tamount to de-Sunnification.[28]

As a result, Sunni Arabs increasingly withdrew from politics. Participation was
perceived as legitimising the occupation and its policies; participants, as collabora-
tors. In Sunni-dominated Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninewa provinces, voters largely
boycotted the January 2005 provincial elections, a reflection of both pressure from
insurgent groups and communal estrangement from the political process.[29] The
2005 constitution-writing process intensified this trend, as Sunni Arab representa-
tives largely felt excluded from it and alienated by the principles enshrined in the

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[24] Crisis Group interview, Adhamiya tribal committee member, Adhamiya, 15 February 2013.

[25] Crisis Group interview, Khaled Wassim al-Falluji, Baghdad, 5 February 2013.

[26] In its Order Number 1 (15 May 2003), the CPA dismissed all individuals in the highest-level
management positions (director general and above) regardless of party membership, as well as
those who belonged to the Baath party's top four ranks regardless of civil service rank. As Crisis
Group stated at the time, "[t]he sweeping de-Baathification decree further alienated Sunnis, who
were disproportionately represented at the senior levels in both party [the Baath party] and army".
Crisis Group Middle East Report N°20, *Iraq: Building a New Security Structure*, 23 December
2003.

[27] On the identity of the Sunni community and U.S. army measures in the "Sunni triangle", see Pe-
ter Harling, op. cit., pp. 26-31.

[28] According to the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), "Sunnis repeatedly por-
trayed de-Baathification as 'de-Sunnification' complaining that the de-Baathification had become a
sectarian instrument wielded to prevent Sunnis from participating in public life. The presumption
of guilt inherent in de-Baathification processes – and the collective nature of that guilt – made the
claim hard to rebut". "A Bitter Legacy: Lesson of De-baathification in Iraq", March 2013, p. 17.

[29] See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°82, *Iraq's Provincial Elections: The Stakes*, 27 January
2009. In Anbar province, less than 1 per cent of those eligible voted (3,800 of 574,000); in Ninewa,
14 per cent; and in Diyala, about one third. On the attitude of insurgent groups towards these elec-
tions, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°50, *In Their Own Words, Reading the Iraqi Insur-
gency*, 15 February 2006.

text.[30] In the October 2005 referendum, two thirds of voters in Anbar and Salah al-Din rejected the constitution.[31] Meanwhile, an insurgency was growing along sectarian lines.[32] By 2006, Baghdad was the arena for a violent confessional fight, as communities fled neighbourhoods in which they were not a majority. For Sunni insurgents, the capital was a focal point of their struggle against the occupation, the headquarters of both U.S. troops and the Shiite-dominated new order they had empowered.

By 2008, the sectarian civil war was dying down, as militias progressively integrated the national security forces, and a U.S. military surge turned the tide against remaining insurgents. Still, Sunni Arabs largely remained on the outskirts of national politics. In their eyes, Baghdad, the embodiment of their past glory, had become the symbol of their lost struggle and ignominious decline. Although parliament abrogated the de-Baathification law in January 2008, the Justice and Accountability Law that replaced it raised fresh concerns. It enabled reinstatement of some previously excluded personnel, but also granted the newly established Justice and Accountability Commission sweeping implementation powers.[33] In effect, the law became a tool in Maliki's hands to ensure loyalty among officials, notably those serving in the security forces; trustworthy mid-level officers from the former army were allowed to resume service and maintain their previous rank. Decisions were made on the basis of allegiance to Maliki, as opposed to sectarian affiliation; there is little doubt that in practice this favoured Shiites, who were more likely to be in the prime minister's good graces.[34]

The March 2010 parliamentary elections presented Sunni Arabs with an apparent opportunity to return to politics. Iraqiya, the large umbrella bloc led by former interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi (himself a secular Shiite), won a plurality of votes and

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[30] Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°19, *Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry*, 26 September 2005.

[31] In response to criticism, the Constitutional Committee agreed to add fifteen Sunni Arab representatives to its 55 members. Nevertheless, community members felt marginalised from the drafting process and objected to constitutional provisions that turned Iraq into a far more decentralised state, sanctioned individuals on the basis of Baath party membership and, as they saw it, blurred the nation's Arab identity. Ibid.

[32] See Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°52, *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, 27 February 2006; and N°74, *Iraq After the Surge I: The New Sunni Political Landscape*, 30 April 2008.

[33] The Justice and Accountability Law amended previous de-Baathification legislation, enabling most mid-ranking party members (division, *firqa*, level) to rejoin government service. It ordered dissolution of the Higher National De-Baathification Commission, established by the U.S. in 2003, and creation of the Supreme National Commission for Accountability and Justice (the Justice and Accountability Commission). In reality, the new commission retained many board and staff members and had unprecedented enforcement authority. See "Briefing Paper: Iraq's New Accountability and Justice Law", ICTJ, 22 January 2008. The law is available at ictj.org/sites/default/files/Iraq Govt-Iraq-Translation-Law-2008-English.pdf.

[34] Although Crisis Group is not in a position to assess the ethnic and sectarian balance within the army, most of the defence ministry's leadership was Shiite in 2011 (heads of operations commands and the ground forces; general inspector; operations commanders and division heads). A majority had served as former army officers, been reintegrated via procedures laid out in the Justice and Accountability Law and then been elevated to the highest ranks. That said, the army leadership is not exclusively Shiite, as it includes Sunni personnel who generally serve in Sunni-Arab-populated provinces. In Anbar, for instance, the operation commander and head of division are both Sunni. For a study on security forces under Maliki, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°99, *Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces Between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal*, 26 October 2010; and Marisa Sullivan, "Maliki's Authoritarian Regime"*,* Institute for the Study of War, April 2013.

appeared poised to gain the prime ministership, thereby providing a voice for Sunni Arab grievances and aspirations, notably on three key matters: re-integration of de-Baathified personnel; improved treatment or release of prisoners; and attainment of greater political clout in Baghdad. It took less than two years for voters to be disappointed on all three fronts.

The Sunni Arab return to politics largely was spoiled as a result of Iraqiya's structural and tactical weaknesses, as well as Maliki's steady power grab.[35] As for the former, divisions within the bloc coupled with Allawi's single-minded focus on becoming prime minister substantially weakened Iraqiya, leaving it without significant government power. As for the latter, Maliki skilfully manoeuvred not only to be re-appointed prime minister, but also to control the security portfolio (interior, defence and national security ministries) and progressively take over other institutions.[36] He consolidated power mostly at the expense of Sunni Arabs – both their leaders and the provinces in which they are a majority.

On the eve of the March 2010 elections, the Justice and Accountability Commission had already eliminated 511 candidates on grounds (details were never disclosed) of past Baath affiliation; though the excluded personalities included both Sunnis and Shiites, the targeting of prominent Sunni politicians fuelled perceptions of a sectarian witch-hunt.[37] Throughout 2010 and 2011, the exclusion from office of security officials, local politicians and civil servants on the basis of alleged ties to the Baath party or to terrorist organisations continued apace, notably in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces.[38] Security forces invoked broad powers conferred by counter-terrorism legislation (particularly Article IV of the Counter-Terrorism Law), including the power to arrest and convict individuals by resorting to information provided by a "secret informant".[39] The arrest campaign appeared to peak when, in December 2011, the Supreme Judicial Court issued an arrest warrant on terrorism charges against then-Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, a prominent Sunni Arab political leader.

Throughout 2011, the central government systematically tightened control over the provinces. It deployed federal army brigades; restricted provincial authorities' powers to manage local police; and obstructed implementation of province-level

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[35] See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°126, *Déjà Vu All Over Again: Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis*, 30 July 2012.

[36] See Crisis Group Report, *Iraq's Secular Opposition*, op. cit.

[37] Reidar Visser, "The 511 De-Baathification Cases: Sectarianism or Despotism?", www.gulfanalysis. worldpress.com, 20 January 2010. Among prominent Sunni Arabs were Saleh al-Mutlak and Dhafer al-Ani. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°94, *Iraq's Uncertain Future: Elections and Beyond*, 25 February 2010.

[38] The wave of arrests culminated in October 2011 and affected politicians of all sectarian background but again, those in Sunni-populated provinces most heavily. See Reidar Visser, "The Latest Wave of Arrests: Baathists and Terrorists are Two Different Things", www.gulfanalysis.wordpress. com, 26 October 2011. The most blatant case arguably occurred in December 2011, when 100 professors from the University of Tikrit were excluded due to purported affiliation with the Baath party. Crisis Group Report, *Iraq's Secular Opposition*, op. cit.

[39] The Anti-Terrorism Law (2005) broadly defines terrorism (Art. 1), terrorist acts (Art. 2) and crimes against state security (Art. 3). An Iraqi human rights activist said, "the main problem with this law is the broad definition of terrorism, coupled with the absence of a human rights culture among mid-ranking security force officers who conduct the arrests". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 April 2013.

projects.[40] Raad Dahlaki, a Diyala parliamentarian and former chairman of the Baaquba city council, said:

> According to the law, we should have some input regarding the choice of police chief. But as it stands, we have nothing. In Diyala, as in Mosul, there are some Sunni officers in the security forces, but they are there solely because they made allegiances [to Maliki] and need to feed their families.[41]

The central government's power grab concomitantly highlighted Iraqiya's impotence and inability to defend its constituents; as a result, it lost significant local support. The party, still fixated on its unsuccessful political tug of war in Baghdad, increasingly lost touch with its electorate.[42]

C. *A Policy of Co-optation*

Iraqiya's failed, Baghdad-centric strategy was on stark display in June 2012, when it proved unable to muster sufficient support for a no-confidence vote against the prime minister. The result accelerated what had been a trickle of defections from the party and a rapprochement between some defectors and Maliki.[43] In March 2011, nine of its parliamentarians formed a splinter group, "White Iraqiya", that basically has stood by Maliki's every decision. On January 2012, Iraqiya members from the Allawi-led Wifaq party also announced their defection. Then, in September 2012, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlak, head of a secular trend within Iraqiya (Hiwar), began negotiating with Maliki with the goal of joining a broad-based cabinet backed by Sunni and Kurdish factions, albeit led by the prime minister and his coalition.[44] Two months later, he said:

> We have begun negotiations with Maliki, and we would like to continue them in coming months. But he has to give us something in return: a larger share for

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[40] In 2011, Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Ninewa and Kirkuk witnessed similar patterns: the defence ministry ordered replacement of operation commanders and heads of army division, and the interior ministry replaced local police chiefs, often against the wishes of local authorities. See Maria Fantappie, "Contested Consolidation of Power", Carnegie Paper, February 2013. In reaction, in late 2011 provincial councils in Salah al-din and Diyala sought to convert their provinces into independent regions. Article 115 of the constitution provides: "One or more governorates shall have the right to organise into a region based on a request to be voted on by referendum submitted in one of the following methods: a. A request [to the central government] by one third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region; b. A request by one-tenth of the voters in each governorate intending to form a region". In late 2011, Salah al-Din and Diyala provincial councils submitted referendum requests but received no response.

[41] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 22 January 2013.

[42] In his party's defence, Hamed al-Mutlak, an Iraqiya member and parliamentarian, said, "we have been working on popular demands. But it is impossible to do anything because we lack presence in the security apparatus. The executive power belongs to others. In Diyala, for example, we tried to release prisoners but failed; most – some 60 or 70 per cent of them – are Sunnis. But without a military or police presence on the ground, we cannot change anything". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 January 2013.

[43] On Iraqiya defections, see Crisis Group Report, *Iraq's Secular Opposition*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

[44] Beginning in September 2012, Maliki sought the support of factions within Iraqiya and the Kurdistan Alliance to become prime minister of a government enjoying a solid parliamentary majority. See Haider Najem, "The Future of a Majority Government in Iraq", *Sada Journal,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 November 2012.

Sunnis in state institutions, as well as prisoner releases. The closer I get to Maliki, the more I risk losing legitimacy among my people.[45]

Iraqiya's gradual fragmentation in Baghdad was replicated at the local level. There, leaders started to cooperate with the central government's army, receive officials from the capital and establish personal relations with the prime minister. A growing number of institutions linked to Sunni Arab communities – notably local institutions representing Sunni Arabs in areas disputed by Kurds – came under the prime minister's influence.[46]

In other ways, too, Maliki pursued a divide-and-conquer strategy vis-à-vis Sunni Arabs.[47] He forged alliances with relatively unpopular Sunni clerics whose ascent he helped by undermining their more powerful rivals[48] and gained influence over the Sunni Endowment, a government body in charge of administrative and financial matters affecting Sunni clerics and the community at large.[49] Likewise, he courted elements within the leadership of the *sahwa* (awakening), local vigilantes created during the U.S. surge against insurgent groups and comprising mostly Sunni Arab tribal members.[50] Control of the purse-strings proved critical: as responsibility for their payroll was transferred in late 2008 from the U.S. to the Iraqi government, they became more dependent on Baghdad for money and jobs. *Sahwa* elements

[45] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 December 2013.
[46] This is particularly true for Sunni Arab-populated provinces involved in territorial disputes with the Kurds. For instance, several members of Kirkuk's Arab Political Council expressed support for the prime minister when he deployed additional troops in the province and established in Kirkuk the headquarters of an army operation command – moves seen as pushing back against Kurdish encroachment on disputed territories. Saad al-Mutlabi, a parliamentarian affiliated with Maliki's State of Law party, said, "a change is occurring in the north-western provinces. After the 2013 provincial elections a new political class will emerge that will be more willing to cooperate with the government". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 1 December 2012.
[47] In Sunni-populated provinces at the centre of territorial disputes with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), many local leaders felt let down by Iraqiya and turned to the central government for support. "Should I trust the prime minister? I know there is Iran behind him, but in Kirkuk we have a problem, and this problem is the presence of Kurds. It is not in our [Sunni Arab] interest to oppose Baghdad. If we do so, we will lose Kirkuk". Crisis Group interview, Arab Political Council member, Kirkuk, 6 January 2013.
[48] Khaled al-Mulla, a Sunni cleric who stood as a member of the Shiite National Alliance bloc in 2010, was appointed head of Iraq's Council of Sunni Scholars, an association including the most prominent Sunni clerics. A journalist from Anbar said, "both Abdul Ghafour al-Samarraie [head of the Sunni Endowment] and Khaled al-Mulla are very useful for the government. Khlaled al-Mulla could never have risen to prominence among Sunnis, because he comes from a Shiite province". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 March 2013.
[49] After the fall of the previous regime, the Religious Endowment (*Waqf al-Adian*) split into two branches, the Shiite and Sunni Endowments (Waqf al-Shia and Waqf al-Sunni). The Sunni Endowment administers religious buildings, appoints clerics and pays their salaries. It relies on both state and private funding. An Iraqi political analyst said, "the prime minister's policies encroached on the Sunni Endowment's prerogatives. The current [Sunni Endowment] leadership has refrained from appointing popular clerics to prevent the emergence of influential and competing Sunni religious centres". Crisis Group interview, 18 March 2013.
[50] The Sunni Awakening councils (Majalis al-Sahwa), also known as Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) are tribally-based armed groups organised by the U.S. in 2006 in an attempt to decrease violence in Sunni-populated areas by weakening al-Qaeda and insurgent groups. From then until late 2008, they remained under U.S. supervision and payroll. Afterwards, the Iraqi government took responsibility for paying and their progressive reintegration in the national security forces. Crisis Group Report, *Iraq after the Surge I*, op. cit.

lacking ties to the government suffered the consequences, either receiving minimal monthly payments or facing discrimination in securing other state employment.[51] A national reconciliation ministry employee said:

> Since the Americans left, only a portion of the *sahwa* was granted jobs in the defence ministry or in other branches of the administration. Some 60 per cent remained with a monthly stipend of around $250. Should they die in the line of duty, their family would be provided a meagre $60 per month. In contrast, those who lined up behind Maliki found government jobs.[52]

If Maliki proved relatively successful in co-opting – and dividing – a number of Sunni Arabs, he did not address the central issue of their political representation; nor did he negate their widespread sense of exclusion. To the contrary, in virtually all Sunni Arab institutions, a power struggle erupted between those close to the prime minister and a majority that felt doubly marginalised, first by Maliki who was intervening in intra-Sunni politics and then by his Sunni allies, whom they viewed as collaborators.[53]

D.   *The Regional Context*

If the waves of protest that have shaken Iraq chiefly were triggered by domestic factors, the Syrian conflict and broader regional setting undoubtedly played a part in sharpening the stakes, polarising the political scene and unifying what – when they began in March 2010 – initially were largely separate, localised protests. The sustained weekly protests, notably in Baghdad, turned public demonstrations into normal, acceptable forms of expression; it would take more to convert them into a nationwide movement.

The Syrian conflict was the catalyst. The more it took on aspects of a sectarian conflict, the more it fortified confessional self-awareness and identities across the region.[54] As Iraq's Sunnis saw it, Maliki at a minimum was offering verbal support to Assad's regime[55] and promoting Iran's strategic designs by serving as a conduit for

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[51] When the Iraqi government took over from the U.S., it agreed to incorporate at least 20 per cent of *sahwa* fighters into the national security forces and the rest into the civil administration. Reintegration proved partial, and salaries decreased. In 2012, the monthly pay of a rank-and-file Sahwa member did not exceed $250, less than the U.S. paid out in 2006 ($300), even as the cost of living rose sharply. Crisis Group interview, Sahwa leader, Baghdad, 31 March 2013.

[52] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 April 2013. He added: "In order to receive his salary, a Sahwa member from Diyala has to travel from there to Baghdad, risk his life and spend nearly a third of what he ultimately will get on travel expenses".

[53] A Sunni Arab from Kirkuk, critical of those who sided with the prime minister, commented: "There are some who want to sell Sunnis out to the prime minister and Iran. They can do whatever they want, but the Sunni street will not go along with them". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013.

[54] Crisis Group Middle East Report N°128, *Syria's Mutating Conflict*, 1 August 2012.

[55] At the outset of the Syrian conflict, and for the first few months, the Iraqi government sought to stake the middle-ground between regime supporters and detractors in public statements. As the conflict intensified, Maliki titled toward a more pro-regime stance, consolidating pre-existing perceptions among Iraqi Sunnis. See, eg, "Iraqi Leader Backs Syria, With a Nudge From Iran", *The New York Times*, 12 August 2011; and "Iraq's Maliki Says Fall of Syrian Regime Unlikely, Assad 'smarter' than Saddam", *al-Arabiya*, 9 February 2013; "Iraq PM Maliki Warns Syria War Could Spread If Opposition Wins", al-Arabiya, 27 February 2013. In private, a senior Maliki adviser expressed unqualified support for the regime: "We need to be pragmatic. If the Syrian regime falls, we are confronted with the real threat posed by Sunni radicals governing Syria. In this sense, we and

material aid shipped to Damascus via Iraqi territory and airspace.[56] In various media accounts, Baghdad has been accused of extending financial help, providing oil and sending Shiite fighters to support the regime.[57] The Syrian uprising also helped spread the notion of Sunni rebellion against alien central governments, whether in Damascus or Baghdad, and, more broadly, against a purported Iranian regional project that both governments allegedly support.

Most importantly perhaps, the war helped erode borders in the Levant, particularly between Syria and Iraq. Trans-national familial and tribal ties – always present yet long dormant due to the drawing of boundaries and consolidation of authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century – have been reactivated across the more than 600km border, affecting Anbar, Ninewa and Dohuk provinces. This is apparent in northern, Kurdish-populated areas, where Kurdish forces have assumed control of the Syrian-Iraqi Kurdistan crossings in Dohuk.[58] Further south, intensified smuggling and solidarity between Syrian and Iraqi members of the same tribes have revitalised the notion of the *Jazeera* (island) – the space between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, whose natural integration was interrupted by the creation of separate, European-style nation states early in the last century.[59]

Simultaneously, the Syrian conflict consolidated a set of regional alliances. While Iran, Hizbollah and – less ostensibly – the Iraqi government sided with the Syrian regime, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies supported the opposition. A logical and expected corollary was for the latter to step up their own backing for the Iraqi protests,

the Syrian regime have a common enemy: Sunni extremists". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, January 2013. Khaled al-Mufarji, a Sunni Arab leading the Kirkuk People Committee in charge of organising demonstrations in that city, commented: "There is a Shiite-Sunni struggle in the region, and Iraq is part of it. Maliki clearly supports the Syrian regime". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013.

[56] The U.S. repeatedly blamed the government for tolerating Iranian over-flights delivering weapons to Damascus. See Michael R. Gordon and Tim Arango, "In 'Spirited' Talks, Kerry Tells Iraq to Help Stop Arms Shipments to Syria", *The New York Times*, 24 March 2013.

[57] See, eg, "Iraq, siding with Iran, sends essential aid to Syria's Assad", *The Washington Post*, 8 October 2011; "Iraq sends crucial fuel oil to Syria", *The Financial Times*, 8 October 2012; and "Syria's Crisis: 'Iraqi Shia Fighters' Join Regime in Battle", BBC Middle East, 20 May 2013. A resident of Anbar province with close ties to the protest movement alleged: "Shiite fighters from Karbala, Basra and Maysan provinces [in southern Iraq] are going to Syria. The Iraqi army is helping them transit though Karbala, enter Anbar province and reach the al-Walid border [with Syria, in southern Anbar]. We [Sunnis] are not opposing the government only, but an alliance that extends from Teheran to Damascus". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

[58] On KRG policies in neighbouring, Kurdish-populated areas of Syria, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°136, *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle*, 22 January 2013.

[59] "Some go so far as to speak of the possibility of parts of Iraq merging with parts of Syria. Let us say, it is a sentiment that many of us share in the Middle East". Crisis Group interview, former political adviser to ex-Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, Istanbul 22 February 2013. As Crisis Group has explained, "[i]ncreasingly, eastern Syria and western Iraq appear to be forming a single, integrated space. Major distinctions remain, of course, but both are defined (to varying degrees) by a sense of disenfranchisement, weakening central government control and growing assertiveness in challenging the capitals. Just as the Syrian conflict has brought Damascus and Baghdad closer together, bound by sectarian solidarity, so too it is forging bonds between opposition forces in the areas between the two cities. This dual dynamic both builds upon and revives longstanding social ties in a territorial expanse traditionally known as the *Jazeera* [island]". Crisis Group Middle East Report N°147, *Syria's Metastasising Conflicts*, 27 June 2013, pp.11-12.

host Maliki critics, call for reforms and possibly extend financial aid, without which the protest movement may not have been able to drag on for several months.[60]

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[60] Although little evidence is available on the funding of demonstrations, tribes, clerics and political parties could ill afford on their own to cover expenses over months. Asked about such costs, Saadoun al-Findi, a local tribal leader, said, "in Hawija they cost around 5 or 6 million Iraqi dinars per day [$4,000-$5,000] and go up to 12 million dinars [about $10,300] on a Friday". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013.

III. **The Protest Movement**

A. *The Demise of Sunni Politicians*

In the immediate aftermath of the 20 December 2012 storming of Issawi's office, Iraqiya hosted a meeting to discuss ramifications and potential responses.[61] Although some members argued that the party should withdraw entirely from the political process and from all state institutions, a more moderate stance ultimately prevailed, and all remained in their positions.[62] The finance minister and prime minister exchanged harsh words through the media; Issawi accused Maliki of direct responsibility for the events, saying he purposefully had instigated the crisis and calling on him to resign or for parliament to withdraw confidence from his cabinet.[63] Maliki responded that the arrest was in accordance with legal procedures.[64] Within a few hours, the centre of attention moved from Baghdad to Falluja, Issawi's hometown, where protests erupted.

The demonstrations deepened divisions and exacerbated rivalries among Iraqiya leaders. Jamal al-Ghilani, an Iraqiya MP, explained:

> The first Iraqiya meeting after protests erupted was about how to get Issawi's guards released. Some members wanted to join the demonstrations; a second group pushed for negotiations with the government; a third was too fearful of the government to take any position. As a result, as protests spread from Anbar to Tikrit and Bayji [Salah al-Din governorate], we were absent. I knew that if we did not officially join the demonstrations by at least the second Friday, people would not accept us anymore as part of the movement.[65]

Support from individual Iraqiya leaders notwithstanding, the movement's organisational absence intensified mistrust between the party and its base, while reinforcing overall Sunni Arab hostility toward politicians (especially those perceived to be overly close to the government) and Baghdad politics in general. On 30 December, as

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[61] Crisis Group interview, Iraqiya lawmaker Jamal al-Ghilani, Baghdad, 7 March 2013.

[62] Saleh al-Mutlak, the deputy prime minister, urged Iraqiya to withdraw altogether from the political process if independent bodies and lawmakers were not allowed to investigate Issawi's case. On 21 December, *The New York Times* Baghdad bureau received this statement from Mutlak's office: "We call for the participation of a number of members of parliament and political parties to observe the investigation on the number of the finance minister's guards that were arrested. If this is not put into action, we will call for Iraqiya list's full withdrawal from the government, the council of representatives and the political process, and they will submit their resignations".

[63] In a 20 December 2012 press conference, Issawi called on Maliki to resign, referring to him as "a man who does not believe in partnership" and who "is dragging Iraq into the abyss".

[64] As he stated in a public message: "According to the judiciary's arrest warrant, a police force has done its duties by arresting ten people of the finance minister's guards after checking their identification. They are now in custody of the judiciary …. Sunnis and Shiites must know that imposing any warrant against the accused does not mean targeting a certain sect". Available on the prime minister's website, www.pmo.iq/press.htm.

[65] According to Ghilani, Iraqiya's divisions had several explanations. First, the government reportedly prevented some of its parliamentarians from reaching the provinces. Secondly, Iraqiya already was riven by rivalries. He said, "some people would display pictures of Rafea al-Issawi; others, pictures of Tareq al-Hashimi, which fuelled concerns that one leader would become more powerful than the other". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 7 March 2013.

Saleh al-Mutlak spoke at a demonstration in Ramadi, the crowd turned on him.[66] On 4 January, Iyad Allawi, head of the Iraqiya list, issued a renewed call for Maliki' resignation, along with his usual litany about implementation of the Erbil agreement, a power-sharing deal negotiated after the 2010 elections; in so doing, he too was out of step with his rank-and-file.

In the eyes of many Sunni Arabs, the steps taken against Iraqiya members were yet more proof both that they were being targeted and that their national leadership was utterly ineffective in countering the prime minister's moves. Iraqiya's initial unwillingness to join or support the movement further validated this perception.[67] As events unfolded, embracing the protest movement became Iraqiya's only potential hope for political rehabilitation. Its parliamentarians began echoing popular demands, while pushing for amendments to the Justice and Accountability Law and the Amnesty Law, as well as restrictions to the Supreme Court's powers.[68]

B.   *The Movement's Make-up*

1.   Tribes

Tribal groups and kinship affiliations have emerged as the movement's backbone, with family linkages ensuring increased mobilisation over time.[69] What would later become known as the protesters' leadership met for the first time in Issawi's *mudhif* – the reception room where tribal chiefs customarily greet visitors – in Falluja; there, on 21 December 2012, he hosted members of his and other tribes. The following day, Anbari tribal representatives decided to block the highway from Baghdad to Jordan and Syria until the government released Issawi's guards.

In short order, tribal leaders from across Anbar province joined the protests, urging members to participate. They played on themes deeply embedded in tribal culture, including moral pride (*'azza*) and honour or dignity (*karama*); the first antigovernment mass protest, on 28 December, was dubbed the "Friday of Honour". Demonstrators organised a sit-in; nearly 70 tribes helped establish a "camp", in reality a series of tents pitched right outside the city of Ramadi on the highway to Jordan. Inscribed over each tent is the name of a tribal leader. This became known as the "Square of Pride and Dignity" (Sahat al 'Azza wa al-Karama) and turned into the heart and stronghold of the protest movement. A protester said, "the idea of establishing a camp emerged when Anbar tribal leaders refused to leave the highway. They

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[66] Protesters chased Saleh al-Mutlak from the stage as he was preparing to deliver his speech, accusing him of betrayal and acting as a Maliki agent. They shouted at him and demanded his resignation. Footage is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=un2kAz9GeM8.

[67] An Iraqiya lawmaker said, "Rafea al-Issawi is not the real reason why people went to the streets. It merely was the spark that triggered what was ready to happen. They demonstrated to demand dignity, because they felt their rights were being violated, because they felt they were second-, third- or even fourth-grade citizens". Crisis Group interview, Raad Hamed Kadim al-Dahlaki, Baghdad, 22 January 2013. Mohammed al-Ashour, an Iraqiya parliamentarian, said, "Iraqiya was as surprised as the government when the demonstrations broke out". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 6 March 2013.

[68] Iraqiya lawmakers gave Crisis Group a list of demands they had addressed to Osama al-Nujayfi, the parliament speaker, "in the name of the people and the demonstrators".

[69] That said, mobilisation occurred strictly among Sunnis, despite that fact that several tribes comprise both Sunnis and Shiites. A Sunni tribal leader from Anbar said, "our brothers Abu Najaf and Abu Karbala [tribal chieftains in Najaf's and Karbala's Shiite-populated provinces] will move only based on what the *marjaiya* [the highest religious authority among Shiites] tells them to do. Their situation is very different from ours". Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Majeed, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

literally moved their *madhayif* [reception rooms] from their homes to the square. That is how the Square of Pride and Dignity began".[70] Other sit-ins, partly modelled after those in Ramadi, were organised in Falluja, Samarra, Hawija and Mosul.[71]

From the outset, tribes played a crucial role. In Ramadi, they not only mobilised protesters but, once the camp had been set up, also alternated providing lunch and dinner, organising camp logistics and supplying services such as water and electricity. Describing the Square of Pride and Dignity, a tribal sheikh from Baghdad said, "they [Ramadi tribal leaders] set up their homes there. They even co-ordinate sports activities. The protesters' square has become its own city within Anbar".[72]

To an extent, the struggle is intertwined with an attempt by tribal chiefs to regain privileges and power lost to Baghdad and resist central government encroachment in provincial affairs. In this sense, it is another chapter in a tug of war that has marked relations between tribes and central authorities since the state's early days. At times, tribal chiefs acquiesced in Baghdad's rule in exchange for recognition of their right to exercise authority over members and to enjoy some sovereignty over their territory; at others, when they felt that central authorities went too far in depriving them of influence, they rebelled.[73]

From 2007 onwards, Maliki's relationship with tribes has been a study in contrasts. In southern and predominately Shiite-populated provinces, his government has shored up consensus among tribal groups, forming the *Isnaad* councils – Majalis Isnaad al-Ashaa'ir – that grant tribal chiefs and members a monthly salary and employment opportunities. In the north, although some *sahwa* elements were offered leadership positions and a number reintegrated into the security forces, many other tribal members have felt left out, benefiting from only paltry, temporary remuneration and having to cope with the full deployment of federal forces on their lands.[74] Sheikh Majeed, leader of the Albu Issa, a prominent Anbar tribe, said:

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[70] Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013; observation, Ramadi, Square of Pride and Dignity, 9 March 2013.

[71] Unlike in Ramadi, Falluja protesters were barred from pitching their tents on the highway but continued to gather there before Friday prayers. Crisis Group interview, Falluja, 9 March 2013. Saadoun al-Findi, tribal leader from Hawija, Kirkuk province, said, "in Kirkuk, the [Kurdish] governor did not allow us to open the protesters' square in the city centre. All he permitted was Friday prayers, and he suggested that we set up the square in Hawija. Tribes from Dibis to Tuz joined the protests. Members of the two main clans, al-Obeidi and al-Jibouri, even competed to see who would go first". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013. In contrast, according to Faisal Humedi Ajeel al-Yawar, vice governor of Ninewa province, the absence of a strong tribal component in Mosul explains the frailty of its protest movement: "In Mosul, tribes are located outside the city, in the western part of the province. As a result, the city's Sahat al-Ahrar [Liberation Square] brings together former regime members only, and for this reason the movement is weak". Crisis Group interview, Mosul, 18 March 2013.

[72] Crisis Group interview, Sheikh al-Dulaimi, Adhamiya district, Baghdad, 6 March 2013.

[73] For history on relations between tribes and the centre, see Faleh A. Jabbar, Hocham Dawood, *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, (London, 2003).

[74] An employee of the national reconciliation ministry stressed this geographical discrepancy in the government's tribal policy: "As of 2012, *Isnaad* Councils existed almost exclusively in the south, providing tribal leaders almost ten million dinars [around $8,600] to redistribute among twenty members of their tribe [$425 each], in addition to job possibilities. By contrast, in the north tribesmen could only be granted *sahwa* status, and as such, receive a salary that represents approximately little more than half that amount and are denied civil service jobs". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 April 2013. The government says poor security impedes forming *Isnaad* Councils in the north. Local tribes reject this and blame sectarian discrimination.

> This government has crossed the line. It has dispatched SWAT teams [Special Weapons And Tactics, ie, special forces reporting directly to the prime minister], federal police and army, all of which intrude on our lands. This is not a state of institutions; it is a military state. We want the central government to be strong but not to police us in this way.[75]

The protest movement was also a surrogate for intra-tribal competition. Members co-opted by the government – especially the new generation of *sahwa* personalities – challenged the position of more established tribal leaders. However, the protests made affiliation with the government far harder to justify or sustain; as they spread, some who had sided with Maliki felt compelled to declare open support for and participation in the uprising.[76] For others, previously at the margins of local politics, the protests were a golden opportunity to take a stand and assume leadership positions. Tribal leaders from territories disputed between Arabs and Kurds were in a delicate position, torn between the need to secure local legitimacy by joining the protests and the importance of securing continued government support in their struggle against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). A tribal chief from Kirkuk said, "in Kirkuk, people don't want me to side with Maliki; plus, I cannot go against the Sunni street. I want to be with the demonstrations. But the central government is the only option I have to fight for our land".[77]

2. Clerics

If tribes provided the protest movement with manpower, material resources and organisational skill, clerics bestowed religious legitimacy and a broader sense of communal belonging. This was the case early on: on 30 December 2012, Abdul Malik al-Saadi, a prominent Amman-based Sunni cleric, visited Ramadi's demonstrations square.[78] An Anbar tribal chief said, "we follow Abdul Malik al-Saadi; we heed his advice on how to formulate our demands to the government and how to negotiate with it. He is our [Sunni] spiritual leader".[79]

Friday's prayers – renamed "Unified Prayers" (Salat Muwahhada) – became an opportunity for protesters to reiterate their demands, simultaneously cementing feelings of communal unity.[80] Clerics voiced these aspirations, delivering sermons

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[75] Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

[76] Some tribal chieftains, despite having earlier sided with the government, supported the protests once the movement was launched. Saad al-Mutlabi, a State of Law official, said of Ahmed Abu Risha's changing stance: "As Rafea al-Issawi was arrested, Abu Risha came to Baghdad, saying he agreed with the arrests. The day after the demonstrations began, he came back to Anbar and suddenly shifted positions". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 January 2013.

[77] Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk (Arab) Political Council member, Kirkuk, 6 January 2013.

[78] Abdul Malik al-Saadi was careful to downplay any sectarian aspect: "The protests should not be in defence of a particular component or a particular person or province but to demand the rights of Iraqis from the south to the north"; he warned protesters "to reject hatred and sectarian chants". See "Abdul Malik al-Saadi: Beware to attribute these sit-ins to a particular component or person", National Iraqi News Agency, 30 December 2012.

[79] Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Majeed, Ramadi, 9 March 2013. Similar statements could be heard at the Ramadi protesters' square. In the wake of violence in Hawija, a Ramadi protester said, "when it comes to tribal matters, we follow [*sahwa* leader] Ahmed Abu Risha, and when it comes to religious matters, we follow Abdul Malik al-Saadi". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 April 2013.

[80] Fridays were given different names to mark specific themes: "Friday of Honour" (28 December), "No Retreat Friday" (25 January) and "Last Chance Friday" (8 March), to cite but a few.

(*khotba*) from stages in open-air spaces where thousands assembled or, alternative-ly, near sit-in areas or at mosques.[81] Where security forces banned public gathering – such as in Baghdad's overwhelmingly Sunni neighbourhoods – clerics took steps to ensure followers would gather in the main mosques, for example by shutting down secondary ones in the vicinity.[82] Whereas older-generation clerics tended to keep their distance, their younger counterparts often were at the forefront of demon-strations, shoring up their own legitimacy and appealing to the youth.[83]

As with tribes, the movement also provided an opportunity for intra-clerical con-flict.[84] Those who had benefited from Baghdad's perks and privileges – essentially those who eschewed politics – found themselves on the defensive. The mainstream Sunni Endowment leadership was challenged, blamed for both giving priority to its parochial interests over those of the community at large and adhering to a strict sep-aration of religion from politics.

Ideologically, the protests and sit-ins were golden opportunities for clerics with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi trends to heighten their credibility, boost the number of their followers and spread their own vision of Islam. From this, critics have concluded that the movement was heavily influenced by the Brother-hood, both in its regional and local (Iraqi Islamic Party, IIP) dimensions.[85] This is not clear-cut. At a minimum, however, the movement helped enhance the Brother-

[81] Jamal al-Ghilani, an Iraqiya parliamentarian, said, "clerics are the catalysers of the demonstra-tions". Crisis Group interview, 6 March 2013. In Ramadi, Samara and Mosul, Friday prayers take place in open-air spaces beside the sit-ins. In Falluja, the stage is set on Friday on the highway lead-ing to Ramadi; in Kirkuk, they are in the main city square. Crisis Group observations, January-April 2013.

[82] "In Adhamiya, security forces forbid public gatherings. So what we did was let people come into the mosque, and then we shut the door. Security forces encircle the mosque but, inside, we are safe". Crisis Group interview, Abdul Sattar Abdul Jabbar, imam, Abu Hanifa Mosque, Baghdad, 6 March 2013. All Adhamiya mosques but the central one (Abu Hanifa) typically were closed on Fridays. This provoked some criticism from residents who felt clerics were using the prayers for po-litical purposes. One said, "in Adhamiya they closed virtually all mosques to ensure that those who wish to attend prayer and have no interest in the protest will have no choice but to assemble in Abu Hanifa's central mosque". Crisis Group interview, Adhamiya district, Baghdad, 2 February 2013. Another said, "the clerics with close ties to the Islamic Party compel everyone to attend the same mosque. They know that if they control the mosque, they control everything. That's how they hope to become the sole available vehicle expressing demonstrators' demands". Crisis Group interview, Adhamiya district, Baghdad, 18 February 2013.

[83] The younger generation of preachers is in its early 30s. They lack the legitimacy necessary to serve as genuine religious guides but possess sufficient oratory skills to speak to the masses, espe-cially their younger members (*shabab*). For example, 27-year-old Sheikh Saeed al-Lafi, son of a prominent Sunni cleric from Anbar, has gained notoriety for attending demonstrations in Ramadi and issuing provocative statements; he also is a status symbol for local youth. See his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SheikhSaaedLafi.

[84] Abdul Ghafour al-Samarraie, government-appointed head of the Sunni Endowment, was viewed as responsible for transferring management of the Samarra Holy Shrines (with the tombs of Shiite imams) to the Shiite Endowment. This was perceived as an outrage committed on Maliki's behalf. As protests grew, he quickly found himself marginalised: "Even though [he] hails from Samarra, protesters did not welcome him. Should he travel to Samarra he too will be rejected as was Saleh al-Mutlak. For people there, he has sold out the Samarra to Maliki and the Shiites". Crisis Group in-terview, Amman-based Iraqi political analyst, 17 March 2013.

[85] A prominent clerical participant in the Ramadi sit-in denied any such affiliation, albeit with ca-veats: "Our duties are to orient people toward the path of righteousness. We are not entering into politics even though we might orient people to choose the most adequate candidate. We do not en-ter into politics. We orient politics". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

hood's standing. Sheikh Munir al-Obeidi, a cleric with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and deputy secretary general of the Council of Iraqi Religious Scholars, said, "the protest movement was born in order to change the mind-set of Sunnis, break their fear and alter Iraq's make-up. The movement gave rise to a new Sunni leadership that could alter community affairs in their economic, humanitarian and social aspects".[86]

3. The Iraqi Islamic Party and affiliated organisations

Its relatively low profile notwithstanding, the IIP has been the principal political entity within the protest movement. For the most part, the party participates in and supports protests through a network of local civil society and youth organisations. Younger members are in charge of administrative tasks, organise media relations and ensure security at sit-ins.[87] Its affiliated youth unions play a central part in logistical planning. An Anbar activist said:

> The Islamic Party has a key role in organising the protesters' gatherings. There are not so many IIP militants in the sit-ins, but those who are there possess strong organisational experience. They can provide what tribes cannot, including use of internet and mastery of media relations.[88]

This represents a turnabout of sorts for the IIP, which, in the wake of the 2005-2007 years of sectarian confrontation, had lost significant appeal. Some felt the party had first fuelled the conflict, then acquiesced to a faulty constitution under disadvantageous conditions and, finally, ruled those provinces in which it had been elected in a manner both inefficient and corrupt. Following meagre results in the 2009 provincial elections, some IIP leaders formed affiliated groups, ideologically close to the party even if formally independent; these groups joined the Iraqiya list.[89] One (the Tajdeed, Renewal, current) was headed by Tareq al-Hashimi; another (Mustaqbal, Future) by Rafea al-Issawi; and a third *(*Iraqiyoun, Iraqis) by Osama al-Nujayfi. Several smaller organisations emerged locally.

Relegated to the shadows of Iraqi politics for several years, the IIP and affiliated organisations saw in the protests a chance to rebuild consensus within the Sunni community, mobilise the grassroots, focus on youth organisations and ensure the party could act as representative of Sunni Arabs at the expense of more secular currents. They also felt they could capitalise on the growing success – at that time – of the Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa and Egypt in particular.[90] In this sense, the IIP seeks to model its practice after that of Shiites and Kurds, who each tended to

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[86] Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Munir al-Obeidi, Erbil, 23 March 2013.

[87] Crisis Group interview, student activist, Ramadi, 9 March 2013. An Anbar journalist said, "in Ramadi there is a Youth Committee (Lijnat al-Shabab) comprising some 200 people and headed by three Iraqi Islamic Party members. The committee for media relations also includes nine party members". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 March 2013.

[88] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 March 2013.

[89] See Crisis Group Report, *Iraq's Secular Opposition*, op. cit., p. 10.

[90] This had been an IIP goal for some time. Iyad al-Samarraie, IIP secretary general and former parliamentary speaker, said, "the provinces ask their representatives, 'what have you done for us?' and it is not easy to answer. Our representatives were not strong enough, because they did not enjoy support from their communities. Much of our effort is geared toward re-organising our community, supporting civil society, setting up youth unions. People need to be organised throughout the Sunni community". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 March 2013.

band together on the basis of communal identity after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.[91]

As protests began, the party quietly sprang into action, seeing in them a means not only to empower a new Sunni political leadership, but also to end the community's excessive dependence on Baghdad or even, for some, to form an autonomous Sunni region.[92] Political leaders and youth unions assisted the demonstrations, even as they concealed their affiliation to the IIP due to its low reputation and the stinging rebuke it suffered in the 2009 provincial and 2010 parliamentary elections.[93] They stepped in gingerly, avoiding the spotlight, claiming to be inspired by, not tied to, the party.[94] As the IIP saw it, its time would come at the provincial elections in April and June 2013, when it anticipated political figures would replace protest activists, and a new leadership would emerge.[95] Khaled al-Mufarji, a Sunni Arab politician from Kirkuk with close ties to Nujayfi, said:

> The Iraqi Islamic Party is not a political party. It includes clerics, political personalities and tribal leaders. At some point, we can expect all this to become a new political current. But for the time being, people should listen to the words of the *ulama* [religious scholars or clerics] rather than anyone else.[96]

IIP-affiliated branches and organisations competed in those provincial elections under the name Mouttahidoun (United List).[97] The list was headed by Nujayfi and Issawi and included prominent religious and tribal leaders in addition to local Sunni politicians. It performed well, especially in governorates that were witnessing protests,

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[91] "The Shiite community is united and organised. They have the *marjaiya* as well as strong and well-established parties. The Kurds too. But when we look at the Sunni community, it lacks basic organisation and unity. The only two parties that were well-structured are the Baath and Iraqi Islamic Party. The Baath party is banned, of course, and besides rejects the political process and wants to destroy it. We in the Iraqi Islamic Party are not happy with how the political process has developed so far, but we have to continue". Ibid.

[92] Adnan al-Dulaimi, a political figure with close ties to the IIP, stated: "Sunnis are the majority in Anbar, Mosul and Salah al-Din, and each of these provinces can become a region in its own right. Federalism and the establishment of Sunni regions is the solution to our grievances. The Kurds did it. Why can't we do it as well?". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 June 2013.

[93] An Anbar journalist said, "there are several civil society organisations present in Ramadi's square. If you ask them, none will admit to being from the Iraqi Islamic Party. This is their strategy. They don't want to say it publicly, because people do not like the party". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 March 2013.

[94] Iyad al-Samarraie said, "we are very happy about the demonstrations. It is something new and we are in close touch with them". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 March 2013. Dhafer al-Ani, a lawmaker with close ties to the IIP, was more explicit: "The heads of the Iraqi Islamic Party in Anbar have a central role in organising the protests. But Rafea al-Issawi and Ahmed al-Alwani are not operating as part of the Islamic Party. They are operating as anyone else in society, for instance as members of their respective tribes. The people have a bad relationship with the Islamic Party. What is important is that the project succeed. The name is not important". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 April 2013.

[95] Crisis Group interview, Mahmoud Zeidan al-Obeidi, Kirkuk IIP secretary, 22 March 2013.

[96] Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013.

[97] Dhafer al-Ani defined it in this way: "Mouttahidoun is not a political party. It is an electoral list meant to represent the Arab Sunni project. It includes all segments of the Sunni community: tribal leaders, clerics, seculars and youth activists who are well known in their respective provinces. Localism is our strength". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 2 April 2013.

but failed in its aspiration to become the leading political force representing Iraq's Sunnis.[98]

4.   "De-Baathified" personnel and members of the former armed resistance

Protests also presented an opportunity for former Baath party and armed resistance members to express their views, free(er) from fear of repression. Both eschewed active roles, instead merely joining the demonstrations. Referring to the two groups, a tribal chief from Hawija said, "they are unemployed; they and their sons live under permanent threat of arrest. At least with the sit-ins they found a place where they are safe, and security forces cannot attack them.[99]

Motivations differ. The principal issue for former Baathists (notably officers who served in Saddam Hussein's military, all of whom were compulsory members of the party) is a feeling of injustice and marginalisation, the conviction they have been denied the chance to earn a decent living – by the U.S. first and the Iraqi government later. They and their families have been deprived of employment, pension and social status. The harm is compounded by the sight of former colleagues and even past fellow Baath party members who happen to be Shiites regaining their previous positions or army ranks and resuming a normal life. One said, "the de-baathification law was a partisan law which only applied to Sunnis. Reintegration in the army solely benefited those who follow the lead of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard or Sunni officers who pledged loyalty to the prime minister".[100]

For members of the former insurgency, in contrast, protests are an opportunity to reactivate their armed struggle against the political system and leadership established after the U.S. invasion. Prime among them is the Naqshbandi army. In the earlier days of the U.S. occupation, it brought together some former Baathists and army officers and bore the name "Army of Muhammad"; in 2008, Izzat al-Duri – a former vice president and deputy chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council who remains at large – reportedly founded Jaish Rijjal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandiya as its successor. By opting for the name Naqshbandi, the armed group distanced itself from prevailing Salafi currents and chose a Sufi frame of reference instead.[101] Although some see the Naqshbandi as the Baath's armed branch, members deny any association with the former ruling party. In a statement provided to Crisis Group, the organisation said:

> We do not belong to the Baath party. The only thing connecting us to the Baath is Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, who is our Supreme Commander in his personal capacity, not as Baath party leader. We only follow the principles of our religion according

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[98] In Anbar province, almost exclusively Sunni and a stronghold of the protest movement, Mouttahidoun won eight of 29 provincial council seats. In Salah al-Din, it won five of 29, in Baghdad seven of 58 and in Ninewa eight of 39. The elections were in April, except in Anbar and Ninewa, where they were delayed until June. For analysis of the results, see, Reidar Visser, "Personal Vote Results from Provincial Elections in Anbar and Nineveh", www.gulfanalysis.wordpress.com, 5 July 2013.
[99] Crisis Group interview, Hawija tribal leader, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013.
[100] Crisis Group interview, former army officer, Falluja, 4 March 2013.
[101] Naqshbandi is a major spiritual order of Sufism, one of several schools of thought within Sunni Islam. For an overview on the evolution of the Naqshbandi army see, Michael Knights, "The JRTN Movement and Iraq's Next Insurgency", Combating Terrorism Center, 1 July 2011.

to the teachings of the Naqshbandi. We seek to liberate the country from the U.S. and Iran and defend its unity and sovereignty.[102]

Naqshbandis present their principal goal as repelling Iranian ambitions. When Duri announced the group's participation in the protests, he said, "the people of Iraq and all its nationalist and Islamic forces support you until the realisation of just demands and the fall of the Safavid [Persian] alliance".[103]

The Naqshbandis aside, former members of the Islamic Army in Iraq (al-Jaish al-Islami fil-Iraq) – militant Salafis – reportedly are involved in demonstrations.[104] As they see it, protests provide an opportunity to continue resisting the occupation forces, previously represented by the U.S. but now by a reputedly pro-Iranian regime. A former member of an armed group said:

> We think that the armed opposition did not achieve its goals in Iraq and that America handed Iraq to Iran and the Shiites. Factions of the former resistance have been scattered across the country. But we are counting on the success of the Syrian revolution, which will provide us with a surplus of men and weapons. Maliki's government fully realises this. We see in these protests a chance to liberate Iraq from Iran.[105]

C.   *The Movement's Narrative and Strategy*

Among groups participating in the demonstrations, three broad trends have emerged. The first advocates reform within the framework of existing state institutions; it eschews sectarianism as well as calls for violence. A second calls for the establishment of one or several Sunni autonomous regions as the only way for Sunnis to achieve equal rights; it also insists that protests remain peaceful. The third is inherently distrustful of the political process as a whole, views the protests as part and parcel of a wider struggle against Shiites as well as Iran and considers armed struggle a necessary way forward.

The most moderate tribal leaders and clerics belong to the first camp. They favour engagement in the political process and negotiations with the government; continued protests, they fear, risk degenerating into violence. The struggle, in their eyes, is not sectarian but rather expresses rejection of an unjust power. Abdul Razzak al-Saadi, a prominent Sunni cleric and brother of the Sunni spiritual leader Abdul Malik al-Saadi, said:

> My brother [Abdul Malik al-Saadi] visited demonstrators in Ramadi for two reasons: to keep the protests peaceful and non-sectarian. Many wanted him to issue

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[102] Statement to Crisis Group, Mosul, 25 March 2013. Many observers view the organisation's purported Sufi identity as largely manufactured. "Their struggle is simply a struggle for power. They are militarily weak, however. So they claim credit for operations they did not conduct". Crisis Group interview, consultant at national reconciliation ministry, Baghdad, 1 April 2013.
[103] See www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iPOZ4u10c. Al-Duri called on civilians and military personnel to participate in the protests. The most recent statements and operations of Naqshbandis are reported on the official website, available at: www.dhiqar.net.
[104] The Islamic Army in Iraq was established in 2003. It grew into an alliance of various groups, whose public discourse blended a highly Salafi narrative with patriotic undertones. Crisis Group Report, *In Their Own Words*, op. cit., p. 2.
[105] Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 14 February 2013.

a *fatwa* [religious statement with binding legal force] to allow people to fight or legalise the call for the formation of a Sunni region. But he refused. Also, he clearly stated that protests are not against Shiites but instead a call for justice levelled against an unjust government.[106]

Advocacy of a Sunni autonomous region is most prevalent among persons affiliated with the Islamic Party and Muslim Brotherhood.[107] Only when gaining autonomy from Baghdad and administering their own territory – thereby emulating the Kurdish example in the north – they believe, will Sunnis truly enjoy their rights. Adnan al-Dulaimi, a political leader with close ties to the IIP, argued:

> If there is no federalism, there will be no other solution but to go to war [against the central government]. Federalism is the only way to keep Iraq peaceful and united.[108]

That notion appears to be generally unpopular among those Sunnis who tend to insist on maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and thus oppose any talk of a so-called federal solution.[109]

The third school of thought sees no possibility of compromise with the current political establishment, leaving armed struggle as the sole option. Members of the former armed insurgency are not its only advocates; to an extent, the call to arms meets broad approval among the youngest protesters, who have never had a positive experience of the state – reeling under international sanctions and opprobrium prior to 2003 and now suffering from near-continuous conflict and sectarian strife. As a result, they tend to be more readily drawn toward their communal and local identity. By the same token, they perceive the struggle primarily as a region-wide fight against Shiites and Iranian domination. Negotiations with the government, it follows, are naïve and unlikely to close a very wide gap. A protester in Ramadi square said:

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[106] Crisis Group interview, Amman, 21 June 2013. During his visit to Ramadi, Abdul Malik al-Saadi had stated: "Protesters have to stay away from that, because we are all Iraqis and brothers in blood …. The son of Baghdad is the son of Iraq, the son of Karbala [a Shiite-populated province] is the son of Iraq". See, "Abdul Malik al-Saadi: Beware to attribute your sit-in to a particular component or person", National Iraqi News Agency, 30 December 2013.
[107] For an overview of the major proponents of federalism within the protest movement, see Yehia al-Kubaisi, "Iraq: Recent Protests and the Crisis of a Political System", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, February 2013, p. 26.
[108] Crisis Group interview, Amman, 21 June 2013.
[109] A Sunni resident of the Adhamiya district in Baghdad expressed concern over the proposal: "I am with the protest movement, but I am against the formation of a Sunni region. Iraq is one country and should remain united. Besides, this [call for a Sunni region] is an unrealistic demand. If those [Sunnis] in the provinces declare their own region, what will happen to Sunnis in Baghdad? We will be even more marginalised". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, April 2013. Similar arguments have been heard in numerous Crisis Group interviews. Abdul Razzak al-Saadi expressed broadly shared reservations: "The formation of a Sunni region is not in the Sunnis' best interest but is in the interest of those who want Iraq weak and divided. I strongly disagree with the Islamic Party, as some of their leaders support this idea only because they want larger power [for themselves, in a smaller entity]". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 21 June 2012. Sheikh Rafea al-Rafea, a prominent Sunni cleric, offered some nuance: "The call for a federal region is an option of last resort. Some fear that federalism would entail Iraq's partition, but this is not accurate. It only means that such a region would enjoy autonomous powers, but Iraq as a state would remain one". Crisis Group interview, Suleimaniya, 25 March 2013.

> We [Sunnis] share more with Christians than we do with Shiites. We cannot live
> with them. We refuse to leave the country under the control of Shiites or to toe
> Iran's line. Iran is our biggest enemy; we will not submit to their rule. We are
> ready for battle.[110]

D.   *Unity and Divisions*

To an extent, protesters have united around common institutions and a single deci-
sion-making body. By January, they had established a Supreme Coordination Com-
mittee (al-Lijna al-Tansiqiya al-Alia) in Ramadi's square that included 25 people
selected from among tribal chiefs, clerics and intellectuals.[111] It was responsible for a
multi-layered series of "coordination committees" that handled protest movements
throughout the country. In March, Ramadi square leaders sought to select members
of a quasi-parliament that would comprise roughly 200 individuals – three from
each tent – and choose Friday themes and speeches.

Before long, however, differences in strategy, interest and ideology surfaced.
Group loyalty – to tribe, clerical institution, association, etc. – prevailed over collec-
tive unity. Tribal chiefs set up their own committee (Majlis al-Ashaa'ir) that included
representatives from all provinces; IIP-aligned organisations and clerics mobilised
and bolstered their own networks across the country.[112] Even within specific groups,
unity sometimes was hard to come by. A member of the tribal committee said:

> We tried to build a Committee of Tribes, including representatives from Hawija,
> Bayji, Samarra and Anbar. But each one holds to a different priority. In Anbar,
> they focus on passing the Amnesty Law; in Samarra, the Justice and Accountabil-
> ity Law; and in Hawija, they have their problems with the Kurds.[113]

In effect, the movement brought together disparate groups that not long before had
considered themselves mortal enemies. They might well have shared a common an-
ger toward the government as well as a common feeling of injustice, but tribes, cler-
ics and Islamist currents had difficulty overcoming their mutual suspicion. Tribal
leaders, who had fought the Islamists during the anti-U.S. insurgency, mistrusted
their political project.[114] Clerics feared that tribal figures might well shift sides at any
time, viewing their past alignment with Baghdad as a symptom of political (and finan-
cial) opportunism and a possible precursor of things to come.[115] For tribes, coordi-

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[110] Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.
[111] Ramadi also witnessed attempts to divide labour, as committees in charge of security, political
relations, education and administration all were formed.
[112] Abdul Sattar Abdul Jabbar, deputy secretary general, Council of Iraqi Religious Scholars, said,
"we [the council] have fifteen branches across Iraq. We try to co-ordinate our activities as well as
the topic of Friday sermons". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 March 2013.
[113] Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Faisal al-Dulaimi, Adhamiya district, Baghdad, 7 March 2013.
[114] For an overview of the relationship between tribes and insurgent groups see Crisis Group Re-
port, *Iraq after the Surge I*, op. cit.
[115] A cleric from Ramadi said, "we share an Arab and Islamic identity with the tribes, but we know
that we cannot fully trust them, as they can easily be bought by the government. It has been like this
since the beginning of Iraqi history". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 15 February 2013. Tribal el-
ders show respect for clerics but do not fully trust them, especially those close to the IIP. One from
Ramadi said, "we are Muslims and believers just as they are, but some are secretly affiliated with
the IIP, and we do not support their political project". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 9 March
2013.

nating with former Baathists or armed group members presented its own challenge, given deep political and ideological divides.[116] In turn, Islamists saw little possibility for military cooperation with the Naqshbandis, whom they considered ideological rivals.

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[116] Saadoun al-Findi, a Kirkuk tribal leader, said, "we are sharing the same camp in Hawija with the Naqshbandi, but it is difficult to cooperate with them. Just imagine that some of them still believe that Saddam Hussein is alive!". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 22 March 2013. An ex-army officer with close ties to the Naqshbandis echoed the sentiment: "We do not count much on the tribes given our bitter experience with them. We are dealing with them cautiously; sometimes we tell them what they want to hear". Crisis Group interview, Falluja, 4 March 2014.

IV. **Waiting for Answers**

Protests weakened the prime minister's position, giving voice to a louder anti-Maliki sentiment even within his own coalition, the Shiite National Alliance; they also brought his parliamentary opposition closer together. More broadly, the move against Issawi undercut his image as a national leader, validating his appearance as a sectarian politician intent on self-promotion even at the cost of perpetual crises.

Within the National Alliance, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) benefited most, as its appeal grew among Shiite nationalists disenchanted with the prime minister.[117] The Sadrist movement, another key Alliance member, sought to capitalise on Maliki's tarnished reputation by burnishing its own, recasting itself as a non-sectarian player by showing empathy for Sunni protesters and their demands. Amir Kinani, a senior Sadrist member of parliament, stated:

> We [the Sadrists] have sent more than one delegation to meet protesters and voice our support. We told them that we are part of the National Alliance, but we are firmly against Maliki's way of dealing with the demonstrations. What we are trying to do is prevent a sectarian war by sending a message to Arab Sunnis and to Kurds that Maliki does not represent the Shiites and that his mistakes are his own.[118]

After nearly two years of virtual standstill, the parliament initially showed signs of activity. The day after government forces clashed with protesters in Falluja, it passed a law limiting a prime minister to two terms of office. The vote was a striking political statement, both in what it said – essentially opposing Maliki's assumed intention to run for a third term[119] – and in who it brought together: Iraqiya, the Kurds and members of the Shiite National Alliance.[120] Ahmad al-Chalabi, one of those members, said, "with the move against Rafea al-Issawi, Maliki made his biggest mistake. He united the Sunnis and the Kurds and divided the Shiites".[121]

Dissent also broke out within the government. Two members of the Iraqiya list – Finance Minister Rafea al-Issawi and Agriculture Minister Izuldine al-Dawla – resigned in March; the education, industry and technology ministers joined them in April. Iraqiya, Sadrist and Kurdish ministers withdrew from the cabinet, although,

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[117] ISCI performed well in the 20 April 2013 provincial elections in most southern provinces, mostly at the expense of Maliki's State of Law list. See Reidar Visser, "Twelve Iraqi Provinces Have New Governors", www.gulfanalysis.wordpress.com, 20 June 2013.

[118] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 March 2013.

[119] On 26 January, parliament passed a law limiting all three "presidencies" (president of the republic, prime minister and speaker of parliament) to two terms. Article 76 of the constitution already did so regarding the president but was mute for the other two. The State of Law coalition immediately appealed the law as unconstitutional to the Federal Supreme Court, which has yet to rule. For details, see Reidar Visser, "New Law Limits the Terms of Iraq's Prime Minister", www.gulfanalysis. wordpress.com, 27 January 2013; and Mushreq Abbas, "Iraqi Federal Court Delays Ruling on the Term-Limit Law", Al-Monitor.com, 3 July 2013.

[120] The bill passed with 170 votes, seven more than required. Shorsh Haji, a parliamentarian from the Kurdistan Alliance, said, "for the first time, State of Law was alone and had tense relations with everybody. Some Shiite groups voted against Maliki to show that they are distinct from State of Law. Also, most Iraqiya parliamentarians could not but be on the side of the people". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 January 2013.

[121] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 January 2013.

because they did so in an uncoordinated manner, the Council of Ministers continued to function.[122]

These developments weakened the prime minister but only temporarily. They did not seriously threaten his hold on power and failed even to force him to negotiate over the protesters' demands. Tellingly, immediately after the vote on the two-terms law, parliamentarians gave up seeking a no-confidence vote that could have removed Maliki from office. Many stood to benefit from a weakened prime minister more than from the political vacuum that would have followed his departure. The result left Maliki's power structure and style of leadership essentially intact. He even turned the crisis somewhat to his advantage, pointing to his survival amid rough times as a political achievement and catering to a relatively widespread popular hunger for a strongman.

A.   *Baghdad's Response*

The protesters' failure to produce a clear and united leadership capable of engaging in negotiations enabled Maliki to respond to their demands in ad hoc fashion, reduce structural reforms to a minimum and claim progress according to his own terms. In essence, his response was twofold: unilaterally appoint various high-level committees in Baghdad to address the crisis;[123] and cherry-pick issues and interlocutors by reaching out to preferred Sunni personalities.[124] Notably, the government appointed Salih al-Mutlak, an Iraqiya member with closer ties to the prime minister than to the protest movement, as its primary counterpart in negotiations over key legislation.[125] In like manner, in March the prime minister engaged with a delegation of selected Anbari tribal chieftains whose identity immediately sparked criticism among protesters. One from Ramadi said:

> Those tribal leaders who went to Baghdad never set a single foot in Ramadi's Pride and Dignity Square. They are like those officials in Baghdad who reside in the Green Zone and know nothing of Anbar demonstrations.[126]

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[122] In May, Iraqiya ministers except Issawi rejoined the cabinet. Sadrist ministers abstained from cabinet, 22 March-1 April. Kurdistan Alliance ministers boycotted 12 March-3 May.

[123] In January, he appointed a ministerial committee headed by a close ally, Deputy Prime Minister Hussain al-Shahristani, to deal with the protesters' demands. Crisis Group interview, Shahristani, Baghdad, 20 April 2013. That same month, the interior ministry formed a committee charged with receiving complaints in Baghdad and the provinces. Crisis Group interview, Farik Kaukas, committee head, Baghdad, 4 April 2013.

[124] Thus, Maliki selected Mahdi al-Sumaydaye, a Sunni cleric with ties to the government, to head a committee on prisoner releases. Yasir Ghazi, "Bomb wounds Iraqi Sunni cleric who urged cooperation with shiites", *The New York Times*, 19 August 2012. Asked about the committee, al-Sumaydaye said, "in January, Maliki asked some Sunni clerics, myself included, to meet with him and help him find a solution to the crisis .... I proposed to form a committee to solve the issue of prisoners, male and female". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 1 April 2013.

[125] In January, Saleh al-Mutlak was appointed to a committee of five to discuss amendments to the Justice and Accountability Law; Article IV of the anti-terrorism legislation; and the Amnesty Law. Falih al-Fayyadh, the national security minister, explained: "We decided to open a dialogue with the Sunni secular trend of Saleh al-Mutlak. We can negotiate with them, unlike with the Islamists, who have links with terrorists". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 30 January 2013.

[126] Crisis Group telephone conversation, March 2013. For more details, see "Anbar protesters: Delegation that met with Maliki does not Represent us", *Al-Hayat,* 15 March 2013.

Early on, the ministerial committee led by Maliki's ally, Deputy Prime Minister Hussain al-Shahristani, visited northern provinces and announced good-will measures: the release of thousands of prisoners; streamlining of judicial procedures for those detained without sentence; a ban on the practice of "secret informants"; and the transfer of female detainees to serve sentences in their home provinces. But it was hard to verify that these concessions were actually implemented.[127] Moreover, the committee left the legal framework for arrests and imprisonment essentially untouched.[128] In April, the cabinet pledged to amend the Justice and Accountability Law to allow mid-ranking Baathists to re-integrate into the civil service and members of a paramilitary formation loyal to Saddam Hussein, the Fedayin Saddam, to claim pension rights. Here again, the sincerity of the overture was in question, as the measure failed in parliament.[129]

B.   *Politics on the Brink*

The government saw, or at least publicly characterised the protests as serving a foreign agenda, aimed at fuelling sectarian strife and led by a group of individuals moved by parochial interests. Ali al-Moussawi, the prime minister's media adviser, blamed Turkey, saying:

> Some protesters want the division of Iraq and the establishment of an autonomous Sunni region. Others support the protests only because they have personal grievances against the government. In order to solve this crisis, Turkey should change its policies toward Iraq; it should stop cooperating with our communities, stop fuelling extremism, sectarianism and terrorism in Iraq and Syria. It should establish friendly ties with the Iraqi state.[130]

In an attempt to attract protesters back to its side, Baghdad offered a series of concessions. It aimed these particularly at tribal chiefs, raising the salaries of *sahwa*

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[127] For an assessment of pledged government judicial and criminal justice system reforms, see "Iraq: Executions Surge but No Actions on Reform", Human Rights Watch, 25 April 2013.

[128] According to the prime minister's media office, as of April the ministerial committee had already received 7,000 complaints, released 3,000 prisoners, and facilitated the investigation of 4,000 cases eligible for amnesty, among others. Crisis Group interview, Ali Moussawi, media adviser, Baghdad, 21 April 2013. Mahdi al-Sumaydaye stated that his committee released ten women and 987 prisoners and transferred 150 files pertaining to female detainees from Baghdad to the provinces. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 March 2013. According to Farik Kaukas, its head, the interior ministry committee received and examined 400 cases of prisoners without sentences. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 4 April 2013. However, according to a Human Rights Watch analyst, the published names of released prisoners have been virtually impossible to crosscheck. "Beyond Shahristani's statements, we have a hard time verifying any of these cases. Besides, what is most important is that the government has not yet taken steps to reform the judicial system and change the practice of arrests". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 April 2013.

[129] An Iraqiya lawmaker, Nada al-Jibouri, commented: "It was predictable that this was going to happen. They announced the measure, and then we got nothing, as usual". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 April 2013.

[130] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 April, 2013. Falih al-Fayyadh, the national security minister, said similarly: "This crisis is not only a domestic crisis. These are not like other protests in the region. It is a matter of Turkish interference and reflects the Muslim Brotherhood's project. Some demonstrators are normal citizens who have simple demands. But there are others who ask for the fall of everything – the government and the constitution – and are eager for a conflict". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 30 January 2013.

members willing to cooperate with the government.[131] In doing so, it backed the emergence of "new awakening" (al-sahwa al-jadida), whose leadership distanced itself from the protests, declaring its intention "to oppose all those threatening the country's unity".[132]

Maliki and his allies also were at pains to depict their opposition to the protests as an endeavour to prevent the country's division. This further exacerbated tension between the protest movement and Sunni officials in Baghdad. Pro-government Sunni groups denounced the demonstrations as politicised and contrary to the national interest. Mahdi al-Sumaydaye, a Sunni cleric with close ties to the government, said, "before, imams only were responsible for mosques. The new generation of clerics is politicised. There is a Muslim Brotherhood project that aims at breaking up Iraq".[133] The newly elected *sahwa* head, Wissam al-Hardan, echoed the sentiment with regard to tribal figures who partook in sit-ins:

> The *sahwa* should be an exclusively security body. By contrast, those [other *sahwa* leaders] who participate in the demonstrations are deeply involved in politics. They want the division of Iraq and instigate sectarian tensions. We do not agree with that and are ready to fight to keep Iraq united.[134]

In line with such conspiracy theories, pro-government factions increasingly characterised protesters as a threat to the country's security, accusing them of being deeply sectarian; enjoying ties to extremist organisations; and seeking to take up weapons in order to spread chaos across the country. In the combustible atmosphere gripping Iraq, the government seized on mere anecdotal evidence to justify its approach. In March, local television channels showed footage of Ramadi protesters brandishing a flag associated with al-Qaeda; the incident led security forces to immediately tighten their measures to "fight terrorism and impose the rule of law", as the interior minister put it.[135]

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[131] In January, Shahristani announced that the government would raise the salaries of thousands of *sahwa* members from 300 ID ($250) to 500 ID (nearly $415). See "Iraq raises sahwa militia pay to appease protesters", *The Daily Star*, 30 January 2013.

[132] On 27 February, a group of *sahwa* leaders elected Wissam al-Hardan as their new head, replacing Ahmed Abu Risha, who had led the protests, as well as the *sahwa* since 2009, when his elder brother was killed by the Islamic State of Iraq insurgent group. Anbar protesters claimed the replacement was under government pressure. Al-Hardan replied: "When Abu Sattar [Abu Risha's older brother] died, we appointed Abu Risha as new head. But this only was because he was Abu Risha's younger brother. While we were fighting against al-Qaeda, he was out of the country. So the change of leadership is logical and natural". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 March 2013. The "new *sahwa*" reportedly comprises nearly 13,000 members, 10,000 of whom fall under al-Hardan's leadership, while the rest are a special unit led by Hamid al-Hayes, another Anbar tribal chief with close government ties. The government pays its members higher salaries and pension benefits similar to those of regular army soldiers. Crisis Group interview, Hamid al-Hayes, Baghdad, 1 April 2013.

[133] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 30 March 2013.

[134] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 March 2013.

[135] Crisis Group interview, Adnan al-Assadi, acting interior minister, Baghdad, 2 April 2013. On the night of 8 March, individuals in Ramadi's square raised the Islamic State of Iraq's flag. The next day, army divisions surrounded the city, barring foreigners' entry. Al-Assadi commented: "Confronted with such actions, the only answer is security", ibid. April saw a striking increase in execution of prisoners for terrorism and al-Qaeda ties, 21 on 17 April alone. Human Rights Watch reported: "The [Iraqi] Human Rights Minister ... justified the execution as 'a necessary deterrent to protect citizens' lives', ... and said the government would continue to carry out executions until 'violence ceases in Iraq'". "Iraq: Executions Surge", op. cit.

Meanwhile, security deteriorates steadily across the land. Frequent attacks aim at both Sunni and Shiite targets, apparently perpetrated chiefly by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Army of the Chosen (Jaysh al-Mokhtar*)*, a new Shiite militia.[136] Many Iraqis from all walks of life discern in the uptick of violence signs of a dreaded return to sectarian strife.[137] The government, however, has adopted a largely one-sided posture: the greater the level of insecurity, the more stringent measures to tighten its grip on Sunni-populated areas. Army divisions, federal police and various special units have come out in force, mainly in areas witnessing protests, limiting access to those areas to residents only, discouraging protesters from joining Friday prayers and enhancing overall security checks. A resident of the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood of Adhamiya said:

> SWAT forces, the army's 11th division and local police all are present in Adhamiya. During Fridays, use of cars is forbidden. They will not physically prevent local residents from entering Abu Hanifa Mosque, but they often take pictures of those who do enter. In the past weeks, they have gone on a house-by-house search and asked for IDs. People live in fear they will come and arrest them if they go to Abu Hanifa on Fridays.[138]

This pattern of behaviour has validated both the Shiites' conviction that violence originates exclusively from Sunni areas and Sunnis' sense of discrimination and persecution.

C. *From Crisis to Open Conflict*

Over time, divisions between government and protesters became starker. The former remained unmoved by popular mobilisation, irresponsive to street demands and determined to strengthen security. The latter increasingly grew frustrated, persuaded that peaceful action would not produce desired results.

Predictably, the impasse simultaneously bolstered the position of more extreme voices among demonstrators and marginalised those calling for or engaging in negotiations, who quickly were labelled collaborators. Qosey al-Zein, a young cleric from Ramadi, put it as follows: "The government is not willing to give us anything. If you were in our position, what would you do? Is there any solution other than fighting?"[139] In turn, divisions within the movement coupled with its increased radicalisation were seized upon by the authorities to justify their own inflexibility.[140]

The four-month stalemate ended on 23 April, when government forces raided the Hawija sit-in, killing over 50 and injuring 110; this came days after gunmen had attacked a nearby checkpoint manned by security forces, killing one soldier and in-

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[136] For instance, on 19 March, the tenth anniversary of the U.S. invasion, the Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility for coordinated attacks across the country. On 4 February, Wathiq al-Battat, secretary general of Hizbollah in Iraq, a Shiite militant organisation, announced the militia's establishment, "to confront Sunnis who might attempt to topple the government". "Return of sectarian threats in Iraq raises alarm", Associated Press, 24 February 2013.

[137] A Baghdad resident said, "in 2006, al-Qaeda killed my best friend, and in 2007 I fled the country because of sectarian strife. Last year, I came back to Baghdad because I want to live in my city. By all means, I don't want those days to return". Crisis Group interview, 8 May 2013.

[138] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 31 March 2013.

[139] Crisis Group telephone conversation, 3 April 2013.

[140] Ali Moussawi, Maliki's media adviser, said, "we tried to launch a negotiation, but the demonstrators lack a leadership with whom to negotiate". Crisis Group interview, 3 April 2013.

juring three.[141] The government characterised the raid as a security operation;[142] protesters viewed it as a premeditated and deadly crackdown. A Hawija protester asserted: "The government sent SWAT forces from Baghdad to Hawija. They are all Shiites and they committed a massacre. This put an end to any peaceful negotiations. Now the battle will begin.[143]

The impact of events at Hawija was profound. They empowered more extreme elements among demonstrators, while giving a green light to former resistance groups to stage a series of armed retaliations. Over the ensuing days, gunmen believed to be affiliated with the Naqshbandi and Islamic Army insurgent groups organised a series of operations across the country against government forces; these included attacks against army convoys and federal police stations.[144]

Protesters in Anbar immediately announced their intention to organise militarily in order to prevent similar government operations against other sit-ins. They called for the formation of a "Tribes' army" (Jaysh al-Ashaa'ir) that several days later took the shape of the "Pride and Dignity Army" (Jaysh al 'Azza wa al-Karama); it reportedly comprises tribal members, each division led by former army officers.[145] The Sunni spiritual leader Abdul Malik al-Saadi momentarily reduced tensions through a negotiations initiative, but it soon collapsed amid protester divisions and government prevarication.[146]

The violent crackdown in Hawija inaugurated a phase of radicalisation on both sides. In ensuing weeks, attacks on security forces and, above all, civilian targets grew in intensity and frequency, making May 2013 the most violent month in almost five years. Bombings focused in particular on Sunni or Shiite religious sites and ceremonies and more specifically on confessionnally mixed areas, exacerbating fears of a return to communal strife.[147] The Islamic State of Iraq reportedly increased the scope

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[141] See Crisis Group Conflict Alert, "Iraq After Hawija: Recovery or Relapse?", 26 April 2013.

[142] The day after the Hawija events, the interior ministry issued a communiqué stating that the security forces carried out the raid in retaliation for an attack on a checkpoint. "Our armed units protecting the sites of the demonstrations in Hawija were attacked …. Fighters took our weapons and disappeared among protesters …. The security forces gave a deadline to protesters and called with loudspeakers to evacuate the sit-in …. Our security forces did their duty to impose the law, but [once they entered the sit-in] they were faced with heavy gunfire". Interior ministry statement, seen by Crisis Group, 24 April 2013.

[143] Crisis Group telephone conversation, Saadoun al-Findi, tribal leader, 23 April 2013.

[144] On 25 April, two days after Hawija, gunmen led an operation in Sulaiman Bek, Salah al-Din province, against army and police convoys, seizing control of the town for several hours. That same day, in Mosul, Ninewa province, gunmen assaulted a police station; ten police and 30 gunmen reportedly died. William Dunlop, "Gunmen seize Iraq town as violence kills 128", Agence France-Presse, 25 April 2013; "Iraq police and gunmen die in Mosul clashes", BBC Middle East, 25 April 2013.

[145] A few days after the Hawija events, a young protester in Ramadi said, "we need to defend ourselves from what amounts to nothing less than an Iranian army. We can expect a governmental attack at any moment". Crisis Group telephone conversation, 27 April 2013.

[146] Al-Saadi attempted to form a negotiation committees to represent protesters, but the latter remained divided between those backing and opposing creation of a federal region. Abdul Razzak-al Saadi, a Sunni cleric and brother of Abdul Malik, sees the government as chiefly main responsible for the failure of negotiations. He said, "the government reportedly refused the offer of dialogue, and the Shiite Endowment rejected holding talks in the city of Samarra as we [Abduk Razzak and Abdul Malik] had proposed". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 21 June 2013.

[147] According to the UN mission in Iraq, May was the deadliest month in Iraq since June 2008; over 1,000 people were killed in violent attacks, 963 of whom were civilians. "Iraq Records Highest Monthly Death Tool in Years," *The Guardian*, 1 June 2013. For instance, on 17 May, a bomb blast

of its activities, in both Iraq and Syria.[148] The government responded by imposing strict security measures in the capital[149] and deploying additional troops in an offensive against al-Qaeda that it launched in Anbar, Ninewa and Salah al-Din provinces. None of these moves appear to have produced tangible results other than increasing Sunni resentment.

One manifest impact has been the shift toward a more confrontational posture on the protesters' part. Sunni armed groups that for the most part had been relatively quiescent over the past several years are slowly but steadily reappearing, finding evermore recruits among young protesters disillusioned with peaceful dissent. So far, the government has dismissed the risk of a renewed insurgency, displaying little urgency or interest in genuine negotiations.

Clashes between security forces and armed groups for now tend to be localised and disconnected from each other. Still, with mounting pressure on Sunni Arab constituencies and lack of progress toward a political settlement, a gradual build-up of armed groups that may ultimately coordinate and deepen ties to Syria's own armed opposition cannot be ruled out. Indeed, facing paralysis at home, many protesters look to Syria as an arena in which to wage a struggle against the Iraqi government and its allies. A protester in Ramadi said,

> For months, our demands were clear and we had no response. Baghdad's political class failed us. Now, there are more armed people than there are people interested in politics. And among them, many have begun to think along the same lines as their Syrian brothers. They are reaching the conclusion that their struggle in Iraq will be resolved only when the Syrian battle has been won.[150]

Unfortunately, with 2014 parliamentary elections on the horizon, the prime minister and the political class as a whole seem inclined to invest in identity politics as a way of shoring up their rank and file, suggesting a continuation of the same toxic dynamics in the months to come.

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targeted one of the main Sunni mosques of Baquba in Diyala, a province populated by both Sunnis and Shiites, as worshippers had gathered for Friday prayers. Duraid Adnan, "Blast Kill Dozen of Iraqis as Sectarian Tensions Boil", *The New York Times*, 17 May 2013.

[148] On 8 April, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, head of the Islamic State of Iraq, announced the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi-l Iraq wa al-Sham). On 24 June, the newly minted formation launched operations in al-Qaim, Rawa and Hit, in western Anbar. Immediately thereafter, security forces imposed a curfew over the province, deployed additional troops and announced a campaign to eradicate al-Qaeda there. See *Al Mada Newspaper*, 24 June 2013. On 23 July, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant claimed responsibility for attacks against two prisons at Abu Ghraib and Taji that freed more than 500 inmates, most of whom were on death row or sentenced to life imprisonment on terrorism-related crimes. Michael Gordon, "Brazen Attacks at Prisons Raise Worries of Al-Qaeda's Strength in Iraq", *The New York Times*, 23 July 2013.

[149] In July, security measures in Baghdad were so tight that residents could not move freely across the city and visit relatives in other neighbourhoods. Mustafa Habib, "New Security Measures See Baghdadis Locked out of Home", *Niqash*, 18 July 2013.

[150] Crisis Group telephone interview, 27 June 2013.

V.   Conclusion

Iraq is on the verge of a relapse into a generalised sectarian conflict, so it is urgent to remember a critical lesson from the not-so-distant past: that cooperation with local tribes and officials, and above all support from the local population, is the best way to reduce the appeal of armed insurgents. The converse is equally true: that deploying additional troops and special forces, arresting more people and attempting to subdue through intimidation whole swathes of society produces the opposite effect, consolidating the split between Sunni Arabs and Baghdad's central authorities. Maliki, who partly owes his power to the U.S., ought to know this best, insofar as Washington pursued both approaches before concluding that the former alone could succeed.

A good starting point would be for Baghdad to engage relevant provincial councils – recognisable interlocutors whose legitimacy recently was reaffirmed through elections – in negotiations over the terms of province-wide ceasefires. This would entail restraint on the part of government security forces that have been prone to escalation; the quid pro quo should be a more cooperative attitude from local officials and opinion leaders. A mutually acceptable security strategy, fully involving local and federal security forces, is the optimal way to improve security in Sunni-populated areas.

Efforts also are needed to restore confidence in the political process among disillusioned Sunni Arabs. This has several components. In the run-up to the 2014 parliamentary elections, national Sunni Arab leaders ought to learn from their mistakes and reach out to provincial constituencies in order to both reflect and help articulate their expectations and demands. Sunni clerics and *sahwa* leaders should realise how little they have to gain from divide-and-rule government policies that superficially empower some personalities at the expense of the institutions they purport to represent and upon which their authority ultimate depends. It would serve their interest to develop a unified platform, thereby boosting both their leverage with the government and appeal vis-à-vis the street.

Of course, the government must also assume its responsibilities. Six months of piecemeal concessions have not yielded a positive outcome; instead, they deepened confusion over long-pending issues such as the Justice and Accountability Commission and counter-terrorism legislation. Addressing these problems would begin to refurbish Baghdad's tarnished image not only among Sunni Arab citizens, but among Shiites as well.

Procrastination might strike Maliki as the more cautious course, but it would be a mistake. Given current dynamics, he might well prevail at the polls yet find himself unable to rule effectively. His apparent predilection for brinkmanship could empower him as a *chef-de-guerre* in another round of civil strife, but that would hardly bode well for the country's future. This time around, U.S. firepower would not be available, and Iraq's volatile strategic environment would present far greater challenges than a weak state could hope to overcome. Maliki's strength typically has resided in his ability to present himself as a national leader. He would be well advised to do so again.

Baghdad/Brussels, 14 August 2013

Appendix A: Map of Iraq

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 150 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices or representation in 34 locations: Abuja, Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Bishkek, Bogotá, Bujumbura, Cairo, Dakar, Damascus, Dubai, Gaza, Guatemala City, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kabul, Kathmandu, London, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Pristina, Rabat, Sanaa, Sarajevo, Seoul, Tbilisi, Tripoli, Tunis and Washington DC. Crisis Group currently covers some 70 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, North Caucasus, Serbia and Turkey; in the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara and Yemen; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, Colombia, Guatemala and Venezuela.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, institutional foundations, and private sources. The following governmental departments and agencies have provided funding in 2013: Australian Agency for International Development, Austrian Development Agency, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Canadian International Development Agency, Canadian International Development Research Centre, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument for Stability, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Agency for International Development, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Kingdom Department for International Development, U.S. Agency for International Development.

The following institutional and private foundations have provided funding in recent years: Adessium Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Charitable Foundation, The Elders, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Humanity United, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Oak Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Ploughshares Fund, Radcliffe Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Stanley Foundation, Tearfund, and Tinker Foundation.

August 2013

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2010

Israel/Palestine

Tipping Point? Palestinians and the Search for a New Strategy, Middle East Report N°95, 26 April 2010 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Drums of War: Israel and the "Axis of Resistance", Middle East Report N°97, 2 August 2010 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).

Squaring the Circle: Palestinian Security Reform under Occupation, Middle East Report N°98, 7 September 2010 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?, Middle East Briefing N°30, 24 March 2011 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).

Radical Islam in Gaza, Middle East/North Africa Report N°104, 29 March 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Palestinian Reconciliation: Plus Ça Change …, Middle East Report N°110, 20 July 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Curb Your Enthusiasm: Israel and Palestine after the UN, Middle East Report N°112, 12 September 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Back to Basics: Israel's Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Middle East Report N°119, 14 March 2012 (also available in Arabic).

The Emperor Has No Clothes: Palestinians and the End of the Peace Process, Middle East Report N°122, 7 May 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Light at the End of their Tunnels? Hamas & the Arab Uprisings, Middle East Report N°129, 14 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Israel and Hamas: Fire and Ceasefire in a New Middle East, Middle East Report N°133, 22 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Extreme Makeover? (I): Israel's Politics of Land and Faith in East Jerusalem, Middle East Report N°134, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Extreme Makeover? (II): The Withering of Arab Jerusalem, Middle East Report N°135, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Buying Time? Money, Guns and Politics in the West Bank, Middle East Report N°142, 29 May 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Egypt/Syria/Lebanon

Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current, Middle East Report N°96, 26 May 2010 (also available in Arabic).

New Crisis, Old Demons in Lebanon: The Forgotten Lessons of Bab-Tebbaneh/Jabal Mohsen, Middle East Briefing N°29, 14 October 2010 (only available in French and Arabic).

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Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?, Middle East/North Africa Report N°101, 24 February 2011 (also available in Arabic).

Uncharted Waters: Thinking Through Syria's Dynamics, Middle East Briefing N°31, 24 November 2011 (also available in Arabic).

Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow-motion Revolution, Middle East Report N°108, 6 July 2011 (also available in Arabic).

Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VII): The Syrian Regime's Slow-motion Suicide, Middle East Report N°109, 13 July 2011 (also available in Arabic).

Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma: The Struggle Over Nahr al-Bared, Middle East Report N°117, 1 March 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Now or Never: A Negotiated Transition for Syria, Middle East Briefing N°32, 5 March 2012 (also available in Arabic and Russian).

Syria's Phase of Radicalisation, Middle East Briefing N°33, 10 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF, Middle East/North Africa Report N°121, 24 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Syria's Mutating Conflict, Middle East Report N°128, 1 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition, Middle East Report N°131, 12 October 2012 (also available in Arabic).

A Precarious Balancing Act: Lebanon and the Syrian conflict, Middle East Report N°132, 22 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle, Middle East Report N°136, 22 January 2013 (also available in Arabic and Kurdish).

Too Close For Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon, Middle East Report N°141, 13 May 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Syria's Metastasising Conflicts, Middle East Report N°143, 27 June 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Marching in Circles: Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition, Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°35, 7 August 2013.

North Africa

Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way, Middle East/North Africa Report N°106, 28 April 2011 (also available in French).

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Appendix D: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees