



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

24

THE IRAQ CRISIS

GEORGE GVIMRADZE

EXPERT OPINION



2014



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

EXPERT OPINION

GEORGE GVIMRADZE

THE IRAQ CRISIS

24

2014



The publication is made possible with the support of the US Embassy in Georgia.

Editor: Jeffrey Morski
Technical Editor: Artem Melik-Nubarov

All rights reserved and belong to Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, including electronic and mechanical, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Copyright © 2014 Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies

ISSN 1512-4835
ISBN 978-9941-0-6886-7

In early June 2014, the Iraq crisis entered a new phase. The situation at hand has been described as the biggest threat to the survival of Iraq since the country gained independence in 1932. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (generally modern Syria) (the infamous Sunni terrorist group) had managed to establish control over a relatively large area of the country's north-west, including the command over Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. Following their attack, approximately five hundred thousand people were forced to abandon the city. The aforementioned radical group also controls a fairly large territory in the north-east of Syria along the border with Iraq. In early July, the organization declared the abolition of the Syria-Iraq border, proclaimed itself an Islamic state, a caliphate, and named its leader Caliph. According to UN data, in June, the number of casualties reached 2,500, of which approximately 1,500 were civilians.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the Parliament of Iraq, which convened for the first time on July 1 since the parliamentary elections held in April, is faced with the obligation to establish a new government. According to procedure, the Speaker of the Parliament must be elected, followed by the President, and finally the Prime Minister along with a new cabinet. As per the agreement, these three main posts are to be distributed as follows: Speaker of the Parliament – a Sunni; President – a representative of the Kurdish ethnic group; and Prime Minister – a Shiite. Political opponents have yet to reach a consensus regarding the candidates. The Sunnis and Kurds are strongly opposed to upholding the current Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki. In turn, the latter intends to retain his post for the third term already and rejects the idea of a coalition government, called for by the Western partners, especially the United States.

Iraq's Controversial Religious and Ethnic Picture

Iraq in turn is not distinguished by particular ethnic or religious diversity in the Middle East. A relatively significant part of its population, approximately 80%, is ethnic Arab, about 15% is comprised of Kurds, and the rest are representatives of Turkish, Armenian, Hebrew, Circassian and other small ethnic minorities. The country's religious majority is the Shiites, who account for approximately 60% of the population. The second largest group in Iraq is the Sunni community, which affiliates approximately 30-35% of the population. The rest are Yezidi, Jews, Christians and other confessors.

It is noteworthy that Iraq is one of the most significant sites of historic confrontation between the Shia and the Sunnis. Similarly difficult have been

the relations of the ethnic majority with the Kurdish ethnic group. The latter has enjoyed wide autonomy under US protectorate since 1991; possesses its own army and conducts independent foreign trade, including, primarily, in the field of energy resources.

The current crisis is an extremely aggravated form of the aforementioned historical confrontations. The final phase of the crisis began during Saddam Hussein's rule, when the latter, in order to benefit his own so-called Sunni-secular political power, forcibly and entirely removed the Shia majority and the Kurdish ethnic minority from political life, consequently fully ignoring their interests.

The Causes of the Present Crisis

As already mentioned, the principal basis of the present crisis in Iraq is the historical confrontation between the Shiites and the Sunnis, although the task at hand is not to review historic digressions. It is interesting to showcase the factors that have contributed to the emergence of the last critical phase over the past decade in the form and composition, with which it began in June.

Primarily, it is the US land operation in 2003, as a result of which Saddam Hussein was ousted from power and ultimately received the death penalty. Following US intervention, the political picture in Iraq was completely altered in terms of the object of discrimination. If previously this was a Sunni dictatorship, now, the Shiites came to power, whose form of government was not much different from that of their precursors and under the new regime, Sunnis were subjected to political persecution and harassment. Moreover, Saddam Hussein was executed on December 30, 2006, the day the Sunnis celebrated the commencement of Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice), also known as Kurban Bayram. Accordingly, the execution was perceived as Shia revenge encouraged by the Americans, characterized by elements of mockery.

Saddam's government was not found to possess so-called weapons of mass destruction. It also became clear that the Bush administration had no long-term action strategy, under which Saddam's government would be replaced by a political power acceptable for the Iraqis, which would not usurp power via one specific religious group and based on which it would become possible to establish effective and, most importantly, respectively authoritative state institutions. This was essential in order to ensure that there was no space for informal paramilitary religious institutions to gain public confidence and in order to finally establish a unified Iraqi state.

US withdrawal from Iraq is also considered a mistake, given the fact that the nearly ineffective Iraqi army, which, save for American weaponry, did not bear any other hallmarks of an army, was tasked with ensuring safety. It is noteworthy that despite US aspirations for a specific group of soldiers to remain in Iraq to assist the locals, an agreement on this issue could not be reached with the Iraqi government, following which the Americans left the area in 2011.

Iraq's socio-economic status presents a significant factor. Moreover, some analysts associate social issues to the radicalization of certain social strata. Despite commanding a wealth of energy resources, the level of corruption and the exclusivity of access to these resources determine the fact that a rather large segment of the population lives below the poverty line.

Naturally, the regional context is also significant. As stated above, Iraq is one of the principal fronts of opposition between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The ousting of Saddam cemented Shia positions in the region, clearly, primarily those of Iran, which, of course, leads to Saudi Arabia's irritation. There is much talk about the fact that at least some individuals in Arab countries send material support to radical groups. Equally significant is the Syrian conflict, whose protraction allowed Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups to engage in the existing confrontation and exert serious influence on its progression. One of these groups was the so-called Islamic State. It is noteworthy that Bashar Assad's government in turn contributed to the strengthening of such groups. He even released certain individuals associated with Al-Qaeda from prison. Through such action, Assad managed to marginalize his opposition and pitted his radical and so-called 'balanced' opponents against each other. As a result, the West faced a dilemma, in which the retention of Bashar Assad for a certain period of time was an alternative to the coming to power of radical terrorist groups. Ultimately, as mentioned above, the prolongation of the Syrian conflict contributed to the reinforcement of rebel groups, both with human resources and material and technical means.

Another factor, which is truly worth mentioning, is the sacred significance of the area itself. According to the Islamic unwritten tradition, Sham ('the North' in Arabic), the area located to the north of Mecca and Medina, or the Levant, the territory of Palestine and modern Syria, is believed to be the Holy Land, which should see the second coming of Isa, the greatest of Allah's Apostles, and where all Muslims should gather at the time. The issue is discussed as one of the most significant elements for the various radical groupings operating in the region to conduct the warfare against Syria. It should be noted that al-Sham also includes Iraq.

“The Islamic State” and the Iraqi Rebel Movement

The principal actor in the crisis beginning in June 2014 is the Sunni radical movement, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. Approximately a month after the commencement of the crisis, the organization announced the establishment of a caliphate subsequently concisely refers to itself as “the Islamic State” and, as mentioned above, has named its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Caliph Ibrahim. On July 5, a video recording emerged, where the latter calls upon Muslims in all countries to declare subservience to the newly elected Caliph and combat infidels and traitors in order to strengthen and expand the Caliphate. The battle should especially intensify during the holy month of Ramadan, which began on June 28.

The aforementioned organization has already been described as the most influential, well-organized, well-funded and well-armed in the region. It has been noted that the organization is distinguished by its brutal methods of fighting and treatment of opponents.

The organization was founded in 2003, when, after the replacement of Saddam Hussein’s regime, an insurgent movement began against the Americans and the Shiite government. Initially, the group was called Tawhid and Jihad (Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad), headed by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who soon became “enemy number one” for the US. In 2004, the organization associated itself with al-Qaeda and became known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In 2006, after the death of al-Zarqawi, the organization was renamed to the “Islamic State of Iraq”, with Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as its new leader. Following al-Baghdadi’s death in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, currently referred to as the Caliph by the members of the organization, was named the leader of the group. During his leadership, the organization declared its international claims, despite the fact that its reputation was initially based on its Iraqi origins unlike its predecessors, who, due to their so-called ‘foreignness’, were unable to attain a similar degree of trust among the insurgents, which was also reflected on the authority of the organization.

In 2011, the organization became involved in the Syrian conflict as it took part in the establishment of the Syrian radical group, the Al-Nusra Front. The leader of the Front, Abu Mohammad al-Jawlani was sent to Syria by al-Baghdadi himself. At a later stage, there was an altercation between them. Al-Nusra remained affiliated to al-Qaeda, while al-Baghdadi’s group openly opposed Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda’s leader. Currently, Al-Nusra Front is under a fair amount of persecution, and the situation on insurgent territory in Syria is controlled by the Iraqi group.

As mentioned above, the group is rather well-armed. Moreover, in late July, the organization conducted a so-called military parade in the Syrian city of Ar-Raqqah, where it deployed its own heavy machinery, which it had acquired as a result of fighting against government forces. As is well known, upon taking control over Mosul and Tikrit, the Iraqi state troops abandoned military equipment and weaponry. Iraq's government has already confirmed that the group holds control over the former Iraqi chemical weapons base, where thousands of warheads loaded with the Sarin nerve agent were being prepared for destruction. Despite the fact that, given the condition of the substances and weapons, US and Iraqi specialists rule out the possibility that the chemical weapons will be employed, the object of further observation and concern is the fact that the insurgents have transported certain technical equipment from the base.

According to specialists, the "Islamic State" has a financial system superior to all similar organizations. They have imposed taxes on areas controlled by them. They control oil extraction plants in Iraq and Syria. A portion of their income is constituted by ransom received from kidnappings. According to certain information, upon capturing Mosul, the organization managed to obtain approximately half a billion US dollars from banks in the city. There is also talk of donations from the Sunni states of the Persian Gulf, although, according to experts, this amounts to no more than 5% of the organization's income. In accordance with unofficial reports, their assets exceed USD 2 billion.

Naturally, discussion of their structure and internal strength is superfluous. In a relatively short period of time, they managed to occupy a fairly large territory in Iraq and Syria. Their control is so commanding that al-Baghdadi does not shy away from holding worship services at mosques. All of a sudden, he has become a public figure. His address did not resemble the customary speeches of insurgent leaders issued from clandestine locations; on the contrary, he addressed Muslims from a particular place, the Grand Mosque of Mosul, which was significant to underscore his stature as Caliph, rather than simply a combatant leader. He is a political and religious leader, who is also able to conduct worship services. The proclamation of the Caliphate also signified a certain opposition with all other radical and non-radical Islamic unions. Al-Baghdadi called on all Muslims to obey him as Caliph, and also, as a politician should, encouraged them to criticize him and spare no advice should he err.

In order to broadcast its activities, the organization effectively utilizes social media. The exact number of the members of the organization is unknown. Approximately 10,000-15,000 individuals have been named, although, at this stage, their numbers continue to grow.

Until recently, little was known about al-Baghdadi himself. According to reports, he holds a PhD from the University of Baghdad and practiced worship until 2003, when he joined the insurgent movement. In 2004, he was arrested by the Americans and served his sentence at the Iraqi Camp Bucca detention facility, known for its abuse scandals. As reported, his extreme radicalization came about through his interaction with other insurgents in prison. Only two of his photographs were publicly known.

It is significant to note that this was not the only group taking part in the insurrection against the Iraqi government. A part of them, in turn, is at odds with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or the so-called Caliphate. As a rule, large groups, e.g. Ansar al-Islam, the Army of the Men of the Naqsh-bandi Order, the Islamic Army in Iraq, etc. oppose al-Baghdadi's group and highlight their own contribution to the defeat of the Shia government, although a certain part of these groups has already joined the "Caliphate". Small Sunni groupings have also declared fealty to al-Baghdadi.

In addition, Syrian rebels have announced that they can no longer resist the "Caliphate's" attack and will likely be obliged to surrender.

Threats and Challenges

A larger-scale confrontation between the Shiites and the Sunnis, which is not ruled out by orientalists, should be seen as the primary threat. Official Tehran is already indirectly engaged in the confrontation. It is attempting to arm Iraq's Shiite government, including with military aircraft and instructors. Iranian leaders have also voiced a statement, according to which Iran will defend Shia relics in Iraq. Despite the fact that Iran's spiritual leader, the Ayatollah al-Sistani has urged all residents of Iraq to oppose the rebels, this was still interpreted as a call directed at the Shiites to fight against the Sunnis. Although, officially the Arab states do not support the Sunni rebels, and, furthermore, Jordan regards the current situation as a threat directly facing its statehood, since it has been named as the insurgents' next target, there is much talk of Saudi Arabian interests, as those of Iran's historic rival in the region.

It is essential that the proclamation of the Caliphate be regarded as a serious challenge to the security of the region, as it reveals that the organization's aims go significantly beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. Much will depend on how Iraq, together with Western partners, and primarily, of course, the United States, will manage to respond to the insurgents, since each new day substantially reinforces the organization with both material and human resources. Only effective and rapid response actions will allow

for the devaluation of the idea for the establishment of the so-called Caliphate, which seems rather attractive to radically minded Muslims.

On the other hand, it can already be said that even in case the group is compelled to return to the so-called underground, the conflict should still be seen as a rather lingering process, which is likely to continue, accompanied by numerous terrorist acts, including well away from its current geography. It is known that among the insurgents there are numerous radicalized Muslims of Western origin. It is not excluded that following the conclusion of the conflict, or even at a specific stage of its progression, at least some of them will attempt to return to their home country and continue their activities there, which is, certainly, evaluated as a threat to Western states.

Of course, the fact that the insurgent organization itself views the process in a rather long-term perspective also harbors a threat. Footage showing 10-12 year old children being ideologically trained for battle is disconcerting. Some of them, it seems, are being brought up as future leaders of the movement, who should be well aware of the insurgents' ideology based on religious grounds, and the second, larger segment, is likely being brought up as fighters, and perhaps as so-called 'live bombs', since in the footage their faces are concealed. Therefore, it is likely that the first segment contains the future generation, which in approximately 10-15 years will lead the current movement and which will possibly be even more radical and brutal, while the second segment holds a significant challenge to the entire Western cultural consciousness. Through them, obviously, Western army combatants will face constant psychological pressure, as they will be compelled to fight against young suicide bombers. In this context, the insurgents hold a considerably significant psychological advantage.

The necessity for consensus within Iraq remains a serious challenge. Many experts believe that as a result of the crisis, there is a high probability that the country will be divided into three – Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish – parts. Naturally, the Kurds will try to maximize the opportunity to create an independent state. They have already managed to defend their autonomy from the aggression of the "Islamic State". They have also established control over the disputed city of Kirkuk, which is adjacent to the autonomous region. It should be noted, however, that their independence is not within the interests of any of the bordering states, since the Kurds, as is known, reside in neighboring regions of four states, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, and accordingly, this can trigger a similar movement within all of the aforementioned countries.

The coalition in the broad sense also presents a challenge. Overcoming the current crisis and defeating the insurgents is within the interests of two historically competing states. It seems that an opportunity for cooperation between Iran, the US, Turkey, and Jordan has presented itself; moreover, in a specific layout, even Israel can be envisaged, stating that it is prepared to render assistance to Jordan, with which it has a peace treaty in effect, in case the latter addresses the former with such a request, and if Jordan's statehood comes under significant threat.

The current crisis strengthens Russia's positions in the region. It has already sold military aircraft to the Iraqi government and accordingly provides the country with aviation instructors. Hence, it is attempting to take advantage of the West's delayed response and occupy a niche in the Middle East. As a minimum, Russia will endeavor to reinforce its standings in the Caucasus, a development which will clearly threaten Georgia as well. It is likely that in case of further deepening and prolongation of the crisis, Russia will attempt to exploit Georgia in order to additionally enhance its military presence in the Caucasus region and possibly to occupy new positions.

The actual rapprochement between Iran and the West is also unacceptable for Russia, which is caused by the fact that Iran is being given serious consideration as an alternative for energy resources. The Iraqi crisis also impedes the stable supply of region's energy to consumers, especially the West, which in turn, is in the interests of Russia as well as the Arabic states of the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, in case the West manages to regulate its relations with Iran, one of the motivators of which, as stated above, could be the present crisis, Russia is likely to increase its efforts to seize control of the Caucasus energy transit. It is also essential for Russia at this stage to keep the loyal Bashar Assad in the Syrian government, which, for a certain amount of time, could be ensured by the Iraqi crisis.

The subsequent return of combatants from Iraq and Syria to their home countries should be perceived as a threat to our region. It should be noted that, among others, several dozen individuals from the Pankisi region in Georgia are engaged in battle on the side of various radical Islamic groups. Upon their return, the government will need to be concerned with at least their rehabilitation and resocialization, not to mention certain cases of legal prosecution and their potential insurgent attitude toward the Georgian state. Clearly, the return of North Caucasian combatants to their homeland will significantly reinforce the insurgent ranks, which will exacerbate the more or less dormant conflict in the North Caucasus, whose danger to the South Caucasus has been repeatedly highlighted by experts.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that, given all of the above, the timeframe within which an adequate response is provided to the aforementioned challenges is crucial. The current standoff between Sunni insurgents within Iraq should be regarded as a major contributing component. It will naturally be impossible to support either group; however, it is essential to employ the current confrontation between al-Qaeda and the “Caliphate”. If al-Baghdadi’s fighters are given the opportunity to extend their success, they will gain the support of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, and vice versa. It is unfortunate that within Iraq itself, the opponents of the Caliphate are unable to consolidate, and what’s more, on the contrary, their ongoing rivalry is increasingly expanding. The West’s rapid and adequate response in this process is of utter significance, although it should be noted that at this time, a number of factors will have to be taken into account, one such factor being that the local population does not wish to see foreign forces, albeit in their support.

It should also be noted that the crisis is becoming progressively more compounded. The “Islamic State” continues to strengthen its positions in the territories it controls, which, in turn, it expands, further enhancing its authority. On the other hand, more and more actors are prepared to engage in the crisis in order to depose the insurgents. Thus, the conflict has not yet reached its decisive phase. At this point it is difficult to say when and how positive signs in the Iraqi crisis should be expected. The process remains under active observation and examination. One aspect is undoubtedly clear, regardless of the response provided by formal instructions to the insurgent actions, we are to witness a rebellious Middle East for yet a long time to come.

References

Revaz Gachechiladze - The US is the only state, interested in everything that happens anywhere in the world - Interview with InterPressNews (IPN)
www.interpressnews.ge/ge/interviu/287493-revaz-gachechiladze-amerika-erthad-erthi-sakhelmtsifoa-romlis-interest-tsarmoadgens-yvelaferi-rac-msoflios-nebismier-kuthkheshi-khdeba.html

The Endlessness of Arab Revolutions Alexey Malashenko:
www.carnegie.ru/2014/07/04/бесконечность-арабских-революций/hf6f

ISIS Rebels Declare ‘Caliphate’ in Iraq and Syria
www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140630_isis_iraq_islamic_state.shtml
www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28082962 (English equivalent)

US Secretary of State Kerry Promises Support to Iraq's Authorities

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140623_iraq_kerry_visit.shtml

www.theguardian.com/world/middle-east-live/2014/jun/23/iraq-crisis-isis-take-more-border-towns-live-updates (Possible English equivalent)

Russia's Interests in Syria Dmitry Trenin

www.carnegie.ru/2014/06/09/интересы-россии-в-сирии/hdt4

www.carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/28/syria-russian-perspective/cdrd (Possible English equivalent)

Iraq: Maliki Intends to Include Sunnis in the Government

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/rolling_news/2014/06/140627_rn_iraq_government_isis.shtml

Iraq: Maliki Does Not Intend to Establish a Unity Government

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140625_iraq_maliki_government_rejects.shtml

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28015169 (Possible English equivalent)

Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki Vows to Fight for Third Term

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/07/140704_iraq_maliki_elections.shtml

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28170468 (Possible English equivalent)

'Iranian Attack Jets Deployed' to Help Iraq Fight Isis Jonathan Marcus

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/07/140702_iran_iraq_su25.shtml

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28125687 (English equivalent)

Maliki: Iraq Prefers Russian Jets to American Ones

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140626_iraq_maliki_russian_planes.shtml

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28042302 (Possible English equivalent)

Iraq War III Has Now Begun

www.inopressa.ru/article/12Jun2014/foreignpolicy/iraq1.html

www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/06/11/iraq_war_iii_has_now_begun_mosul_isis_takeover (English equivalent)

US and Iran Ready for Talks on Iraq

www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140616_us_iran_iraq_talks.shtml

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27863870 (English equivalent)

Al-Maliki hints at another try for Iraqi PM By Chelsea J. Carter and Mohammed Tawfeeq, CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/07/04/world/meast/iraq-crisis/index.html?hpt=imi_c2

America Can't Fix the Middle East, but It Can Fix Its Middle East Policy David Rothkopf

www.carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/23/america-can-t-fix-middle-east-but-it-can-fix-its-middle-east-policy/hee4

Anger boils over in the 'Fallujah of Jordan'

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/anger-boils-over-fallujah-jordan-20147575130478577.html

Beware the Salesmen of Simple Solutions on Iraq Moisés Naím

www.carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/24/beware-salesmen-of-simple-solutions-on-iraq/heek

EU-Iran Relations: A Strategic Assessment Cornelius Adebahr

www.carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/23/eu-iran-relations-strategic-assessment/hea1

Floodgates open as ISIS takes over swath of Syrian-Iraqi border By Holly Yan and Samira Said, CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/07/08/world/meast/syria-civil-war/index.html?hpt=imi_c2

How ISIS is overshadowing al Qaeda By Tim Lister, CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/06/30/world/meast/isis-overshadows-al-qaeda/index.html?iid=article_sidebar

Iraq crisis: Kerry urges unity to expel Isis rebels

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27991414

Iraq crisis: Key players in Sunni rebellion

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28053496

Iraq militant groups ordered to swear Isis allegiance By Jim Muir

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28123258

Iraq Parliament to Start Talks on New Government

www.online.wsj.com/articles/iraq-parliament-to-elect-new-government-1403794106

Iraq to split in three: So why not? By Tim Lister, CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/07/07/world/meast/iraq-division-lister/index.html?hpt=hp_c1

Iraq's parliament fails to agree on formation of new government By Liz Sly and Loveday Morris

www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraqs-new-parliament-convenes-inaugural-session/2014/07/01/08f99008-6035-4fe6-89d0-f7bc6e9adf2d_story.html

ISIL: Rising power in Iraq and Syria Graeme Baker

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isil-eminent-threat-iraq-syria-20146101543970327.html

ISIS caliphate declaration of war against Al-Qaeda Written by : Asharq Al-Awsat

www.aawsat.net/2014/07/article55333843

Kerry assures Iraqis of U.S. support if they unite against militants

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/06/23/world/meast/iraq-crisis/index.html?hpt=imi_c1

More Than ISIS, Iraq's Sunni Insurgency Hassan Hassan

www.carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/06/17/more-than-isis-iraq-s-sunni-insurgency/hdvi

Muslim leaders reject Baghdadi's caliphate Shafik Mandhai

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/muslim-leaders-reject-baghdadi-caliphate-20147744058773906.html

Negotiating the Turkish Hostage Situation in Iraq Bayram Balci

www.carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/23/negotiating-turkish-hostage-situation-in-iraq/hea4

Press Availability on Syria and Iraq

www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/06/228327.htm

Saudi Arabia: Sandwiched by jihadists in Iraq and Yemen By Frank Gardner

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28133086

Six things that went wrong for Iraq By Jonathan Marcus

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27802746

The fierce ambition of ISIL's Baghdadi Graeme Baker

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/fierce-ambition-isil-baghdadi-2014612142242188464.html

The Rise of ISIS, a Golden Opportunity for Iraq's Kurds Sirwan Kajjo

www.carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/06/19/rise-of-isis-golden-opportunity-for-iraq-s-kurds/he37

U.S. Foreign Policy on Syria and Iraq: Between Words and Actions Lina Khatib

www.carnegie-mec.org/2014/06/29/u.s.-foreign-policy-on-syria-and-iraq-between-words-and-actions/heso

Viewpoint: Isis caliphate a dangerous development By Charlie Cooper

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28090386

Viewpoint: ISIS goals and possible future gains

www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801680?print=true

Why the Middle East's borders will never be the same again By Scott Anderson, war reporter, special to CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/06/20/opinion/middle-east-borders-redrawn/index.html?hpt=imi_r1

Will al Qaeda fight ISIS Islamic state? By Jonathan Russell, Special to CNN

www.edition.cnn.com/2014/07/02/opinion/isis-quilliam-opinion/index.html?hpt=imi_c2