The Islamic State Campaign: Key Strategic and Tactical Challenges

Anthony H. Cordesman

CSIS | Center for Strategic & International Studies

Burke Chair In Strategy

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Grand Strategic Context

• Secular, “Christian” U.S. with poor track record in Iraq and ties to Israel; lack of allied confidence in U.S. in Arab world and Turkey; No allied unity.

• Islamist State is only one of many regional and “Islamist” challenges: Morocco to Philippines: Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Central Asia, Myanmar, Thailand.

• Islamist State is only one of many Jihadist movements and threats even within Syria and Iraq; 70+ in Syria alone.

• Defeating Islamic State will still leave Jihadist movements, continuing threat.

• Caught between in two increasingly sectarian civil wars with failed regimes in Syria (Alewites, Hezbollah, Iran-IRGC) and Iraq (Shi’ite militias, IRGC, Kurds).

• No chance of meaningful victory even in Iraq without Iraqi political unity. No clear good alternative in Syria.

• Many competing strategic priorities: Afghanistan, Ukraine, Asia, U.S. domestic issues and budget.

• Uncertain Congressional and public support; none for major ground presence.
US Must Deal with Three Major Threats in every Serious Counterinsurgency Campaign

• Threat One: The Enemy
• Threat Two: Host country(ies) allies, and “neutrals”
• Threat Three: The U.S.
A US Tactical Response using Airpower and Special Forces will Fail

- Must look beyond the Islamic State as an enemy
- Must respond to overall politico-military-economic challenges
- Integrated civil-military operations critical
- Integrated operations in Iraq and Syria critical
- Victory or defeat depends on fundamental changes in partners and partnering
War with Multiple Threats: The Enemy(ies)

- The Islamic State (ISIL/ISIS) plus Iraqi “Ba’athists,” Syrian elements of Al Qaeda, other Islamist forces, alienated Sunni local and tribal fighters.
- Maliki legacy of secular, authoritarian corruption, tensions with Kurds, military and police corrupted and used to abuse Sunnis and population.
- Anti-U.S. hardline Shi’ite militias, factions.
- Assad regime: Secular extremism and violence that has made 20% to 30% of population IDPs and refugees, killed at least 192,000 civilians.
- Hezbollah?
- Iran and IRGC?
- Private (and semi-official) funding from outside states. Tolerance of IS and other Islamist trade, financial flows, and exports.
War with Multiple Threats: Islamic State

• First protostate for Jihadist extremism.

• Ability to operate simultaneously in Iraq and Syria, potential sanctuary in Syria.

• Highly flexible in absorbing and using captured equipment, captured money, and economic resources.

• Effective use of irregular war and terrorism, exploit sectarianism.

• Superior intelligence on weaknesses in Iraqi and Syrian forces, and conflicting loyalties within them.

• Decentralization, delegation of initiative.

• Absorption of rival or similar force elements, ability to get foreign and tribal volunteers.

• Seeming ability to handle key elements of governance, local justice, fundraising, infrastructure, and economy.

• But, extremism, fact is isolated and fact is not real state, make potentially vulnerable.
War with Multiple Threats: Can’t win Without Changes to Iraqi Government

• Iraq ranked 171st most corrupt of 176 governments rated by Transparency International.

• World Bank rates as one of the worst performing governments in the world.

• Key divisions between central government and Kurds.

• Two years of Shi’ite abuses of Sunnis and Kurds: Maliki legacy of secular, authoritarian corruption, tensions with Kurds.

• Command appointments politicized and command chain bypassed. Military and police corrupted. State Department reports growing major abuses of Sunnis and population.

• Failed economic and human development progress at every level. Failure to share oil wealth or economic development.

• New prime minister is still part of Dawa faction; movement towards unity uncertain at every level.

• Uncertain role of IRGC/Iran
Iraq: The “Poor” Oil State with Terrible Income Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>CIA GDP Estimate, PPP</th>
<th>World Bank GDP Estimate, PPP</th>
<th>IMF GDP Estimate, PPP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>2,251</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>7,100</td>
<td>6,625</td>
<td>7,209</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>13,200</td>
<td>7,228</td>
<td>12,444</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>30,900</td>
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<td>30,464</td>
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<td>Oman</td>
<td>29,200</td>
<td>23,570</td>
<td>28,843</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>29,600</td>
<td>41,692</td>
<td>29,176</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>29,100</td>
<td>23,040</td>
<td>33,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>41,800</td>
<td>56,374</td>
<td>39,877</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>100,900</td>
<td>93,825</td>
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Iraq: UN Estimates Human Development Far Worse than Syria

Figure 2: Trends in Iraq’s HDI 2005-2012

Table B: Iraq’s HDI indicators for 2012 relative to selected countries and groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>HDI value</th>
<th>HDI rank</th>
<th>Life expectancy at birth</th>
<th>Expected years of schooling</th>
<th>Mean years of schooling</th>
<th>GNI per capita (PPP US$)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
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<td>131</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<td>Algeria</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>74.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium HDI</td>
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<td>69.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5,428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Iraq: Population Pressure and “Youth Bulge”

Population in 2014: 32.6 million

**Age Structure:**
- Median age: 21.4 years
- 0-14 years: 36.7% (male 6,093,069/female 5,878,590)
- 15-24 years: 19.6% (male 3,237,212/female 3,142,202)

**Labor Force:** 8.9 million
**Dependency Ratio = 76.2%**
New entrants to the labor force each year
- Men = 332,000
- Women = 322,000
War with Multiple Threats: Key Military Challenge is Reforming The Iraqi Military

• Three years (2011-2014) of steady politicization, Maliki interference in command selection, tolerance of corruption, bypassing command chain.
  • Selective use of army and police against Sunnis and popular protests. Shift in order of battle to focus on loyalty, Shi’ite forces.
  • Lack of MOI and MoD and effective structure.
  • Selling of lower level posts and promotions.
  • Rise in absences, AWOLS, ghosts, and rapid turnover.
• Failure to create other elements of legal system and rule of law. Use of ill-trained and equipped police as paramilitary-repressive forces.
• Lack of US advisors to help transition from force generation to combat; key issues in sustainability, training, role of JOs and NCOs.
• Failure to build on Sunni “Sons of Iraq,” integrate Sunnis back into Iraqi forces and police; failure to correct de-Baathification abuses.
• Failure to integrate Pesh Merga into ISF; build up as effective force.
• Continuing role of Shi’ite militias, factions.
War with Multiple Threats: Partners

- Current lack of good and helpful relations between Arab states and Iraq; Turkey and Iraq.

- Scattered and divided efforts with serious rivalries within Gulf states, distrusts of US, uncertain role of Turkey.

- Turkey is seriously mismanaging Syrian refugees, Pesh Merga, and PKK ties. Major financial links to Islamic State through Mosul and oil trade.

- Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE show caution and restraint. Qatar and Kuwait present problems at least at the private citizen level.

- Islamic State money and trade flows do not face adequate barriers.

- Key issue of extent to which some kind of dialogue and modus vivendi is possible in with Iran in dealing with Iraq.

- Need to steadily reassess actual Syrian policy towards dealing with Islamic State.
War with Multiple Threats: The US Threat to the US

- Lack of clear and consistent commitment by Administration, uncertain resources. Confusion of rhetoric with reality.
- Critical issue of willingness to act in both Syria and Iraq, sustain action long enough to succeed.
- Military focuses on tactical goals to the exclusion of political and economic realities and need to defeat insurgents at the political, governance, and economic levels.
  - Uncertain fusion of military and CIA intelligence and targeting efforts – tensions exposed in dealing with Afghanistan.
  - Focus on having host country forced to do it “our way” rather than helping them improve by doing it “their way.”
  - High rates of civil and military rotation for short tours, lack of focus on proven area expertise
- Can’t be ruthlessly objective about problems in host country security forces and partners, effectiveness measures.
- Civil side usually too weak to press for effective reform and change; understates civil problems, fails to use aid effectively.
The Preconditions for Success

- Clear strategic commitment to what will be a long-term effort dependent on Iraqi political reform and support by regional allies.

- Effective civil-military unity of effort focused on defeating Islamic State by creating Iraqi unity, allied unity of effort in dealing with Syria. Defeat it by exploiting its extremism, economic weaknesses, political tensions.

- Major and lasting commitment to rebuilding Iraqi forces; supporting efforts to find some effective answer to creating rebel forces in Syria.

- Integrate air-land-intelligence operations in Iraq and Syria to defeat the Islamic state.

- Make it clear to all Iraqis and regional allies that US operations, aid, and training will not be used to take sides in Iraqi sectarian and ethnic tensions and conflicts even if this means shift to containing the Islamic state rather than defeating it.

- Fully understand the ideological and religious character of the war and work with Iraqis, Syrians, and regional allies so they fight on this level.

- Understand the problem of dealing with an enemy with the ideological and religious advantage, anticipate the use of human shields, efforts to limit air strikes.
“Imploding” the Islamic State - I

• The key is fusion of Iraqi, US, allied effort with possible expansion to include Syrian moderate rebel factions.

• Use combination of military and civil action to exploit extremism, weakness as a protostate.

• Fully analyze and constantly monitor ideological/religious, political, governance, and economic fault lines.

• Focus Arab and Iraqi strategic communications.
  • Get Sunni Islamic support to counter IS from Arab Sunni clerics; joint Sunni and Shi’ite messages of unity within Iraq.
  • Get Iraqi, Syrian rebel, Arab, Turkish media to constantly publicize IS extremism, abuses, atrocities.

• Target key and mid-level IS political, military, religious figures – include local leaders that provide key support.

• Use sanctions, financial warfare, strategic bombing, sealing of border to deny economic viability, military financing.

• Offer meaningful federalism, provincial power.
“Imploding” the Islamic State - II

• Create strong financial incentive programs to bring Sunnis back to supporting government; create stable financing and oil revenue sharing arrangements with Sunnis and Kurds. Pass petroleum laws.

• Restructure and clean up Iraqi forces to make them national and professional; end de-Baathification abuses of Sunni officers.

• Include Pesh Merga in aid to Iraq forces, support Sunni fighters on government side.

• Create strong neutral Ministries of Defense and Interior.

• Restructure key police elements to give then national paramilitary capability.

• Publically suppress an sectarian or ethnic violence, especially by Shi’ite and Sunni militias.

• Attack stream of foreign volunteers by preventing entry, giving targeting priority and killing, arresting on exit.
Focusing the Use of Air, UCAV, and Missile Power

- Expand strikes to include Islamic State targets in Syria.
- Commit to a long campaign at the needed level of intensity and do not give the Islamic State freedom of action when it is not attacking.
- Use Special Forces, CIA, and local assets to develop targeting that can reliably attack Islamic State and its support with minimal civilian casualties and collateral damage.
- Make US strike action and support for the IAF conditional on Iraqi restraint in avoiding Sunni and Kurdish targets, actions prolonging civil war.
- Use Special Forces and locals to create targeting that shows Sunnis that oppose Islamic State that they will have direct strike support.
- Develop a strategic targeting plan to cripple Islamic State in key areas like oil exports, trade, power, communications in ways that minimize impact on civilians.
- Bring Saudi and UAE air forces into strike action.
- Explain and re-explain that such strike action produces far less civilian suffering than alternative forms of military action.
There is Nothing Funny About Avoiding Support of a Civil War; Being Seen as Careless with Civilian Casualties
Tie All Operations to Shaping the Domestic (and International) Strategic Message

• Minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage. SOF role in targeting, limiting Iraqi forces secular and ethnic clashes.

• Show humanitarian concern at all levels, protect minorities, civilians,

• Real time justification of air and UCAV strikes. Don’t let IS capture the initiative.

• Real time explanation in depth of US role in operations within security limits: Make the case in depth.

• Highlight all Iraqi and allied progress and success.

• Show SOF and US role in encouraging effective governance, security for population.

• Making Sunnis and Kurds into allies is critical in messaging as well as fighting.

• No cases where US forces become associated with security abuses, killings of civilians, ties to militias and Iraqi forces abusing other factions, POWs.
Provide and Sustain an Adequate and Conditions-Based US Military Presence

- Accept the fact that no US ground combat units can be committed for the foreseeable future, but,

- Commit an adequate mix of Special Forces, US military Advisors, Agency experts, and area experts if the Iraqi government makes suitable reform and progress.
  - Put Special Forces and military/CIA advisors into forward combat units and key police elements to target, advise, create bridges between Iraqi government, Sunni, and Kurdish forces.
  - Put Special Forces and military/CIA advisors to Sunni tribal forces if this becomes possible.
  - Reexamine past contingency plans to provide a limited forward presence and advisory role with moderate Syrian rebel forces.
- Do not plan for “30 days.” Adopt an intelligent, phased rotation policy rewarding longer deployments.
Combat Capability, Not Force Generation, Approach to Aiding Iraqi Forces

- Focus on current order of battle, immediate SOF and other advisory efforts to aid and strengthen good and more effective units.
  - Aid them in doing it their way; not our way.
- Seek to insert SOF elements into Sunni forces if they develop; find mechanism for SOF or intel monitoring of any Shi’ite militias that are active and linked to government,
- Work with new Iraqi government to withdraw and rebuild worst units that have committed sectarian abuses, or have gone sour.
- Limited SOF presence or role in stepping up transfers for sensitive weapons like MANPADs, SHORADS, ATGMs.
- Use SOF embeds in forwards to aid in targeting air/missile strikes, provide focused intelligence in ways that have tactical value.
- Use SOF embeds to identify areas where action risks creating conflicts with Sunnis and Kurds. Forward “civil-military observers.”
Don’t Nickel and Dime: Size the US Presence to the Need if the Iraqi Government Reforms

“Fusion” Effort in Dealing with Regional Partners

• Effective US support of Iraqi government and forces depends on “fusion” of uncertain efforts with local allies.

• Syria as important as Iraq: Need to strengthen US-Jordanian-Saudi-UAE support of moderate rebel factions in Syria as much as possible.

• Need to get Jordanian-Saudi-UAE support of new Iraqi government if it truly becomes national, and funds and arms to push it towards unity with Sunnis and Kurds.

• Turkey can play key political and economic role in sealing off Islamic State access to the North.

• Need every possible US effort to get Arab and European support to sanction Islamic state in terms of money and trade. Shut off volunteers and financing.

• Need Arab and Turkish ideological support of US role and British role; efforts to bring Sunnis and Shi’ites together, counter Islamic State religious arguments and indoctrination.

• Need to create US civil-military coordination effort: Top policy levels to Special Forces and operators in the field.
No One Follows Where No One Leads: Need to Win Uncertain US Domestic Support

No meaningful support for conventional ground troops

Public divides on providing arms and ammunition to the Kurdish military forces who are opposing the insurgents, with 45 percent in favor, 49 percent opposed.

Increase in support for U.S. military action among Democrats and political independents – up by 10 and 8 points, respectively, while remaining largely stable and higher among Republicans. Similarly, support has increased by 8 to 12 points among liberals, moderates and those who say they’re “somewhat” conservative, while holding steady among strong conservatives.

Two-thirds of Democrats and 63 percent of liberals approve of the president’s handling of the situation, falling among political independents and moderates (to 37 and 44 percent, respectively) and plummeting to a quarter of conservatives and two in 10 Republicans.

In June, among Democrats who opposed air strikes, 74 percent also approved of his work on the issue; today it’s only 56 percent.

ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL: Iraq
EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AFTER 7 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2014