

AQI'S "SOLDIERS' HARVEST" CAMPAIGN

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) announced “The Soldiers’ Harvest,” a new campaign on July 29, 2013, immediately after the Abu Ghraib prison attack. AQI then declared that event the conclusion of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign, which apparently achieved its goals: to stoke sectarian violence by targeting Shi’a communities; and to reconstitute the veteran AQI fighting force by breaking former members out of Iraq’s prisons. ISW has assessed that AQI has reconstituted as a professional military force.¹ It is therefore crucial to examine the first 60 days of the new “Soldiers’ Harvest” campaign for indications of what AQI means to accomplish this year. Initial indications suggest that AQI will seek to establish control of key terrain in Iraq while targeting any Sunnis who work for the government. The campaign name, “The Soldiers’ Harvest,” refers in particular to the intimidation and displacement of the Iraqi Security Forces, especially through the destruction of their homes.

Control of terrain is an important concept to define. Control is defined in doctrine as a tactical mission task that requires the commander to maintain physical influence over a specified area in order to prevent its use by an enemy or to create the successful conditions for friendly operations.² Control of terrain therefore refers to the nature of AQI’s established physical presence in a particular location. The ability to control an area is determined by AQI’s capacity to repel opposing forces from that location, and often the ability to govern or compel behaviors of a population within a defined space. Controlled terrain may be understood in contradistinction to *attack zones* and *support zones*. In an attack zone, AQI deliberately executes offensive operations while in a *support zone*, AQI executes combat support functions such as logistics to facilitate its offensive operations.

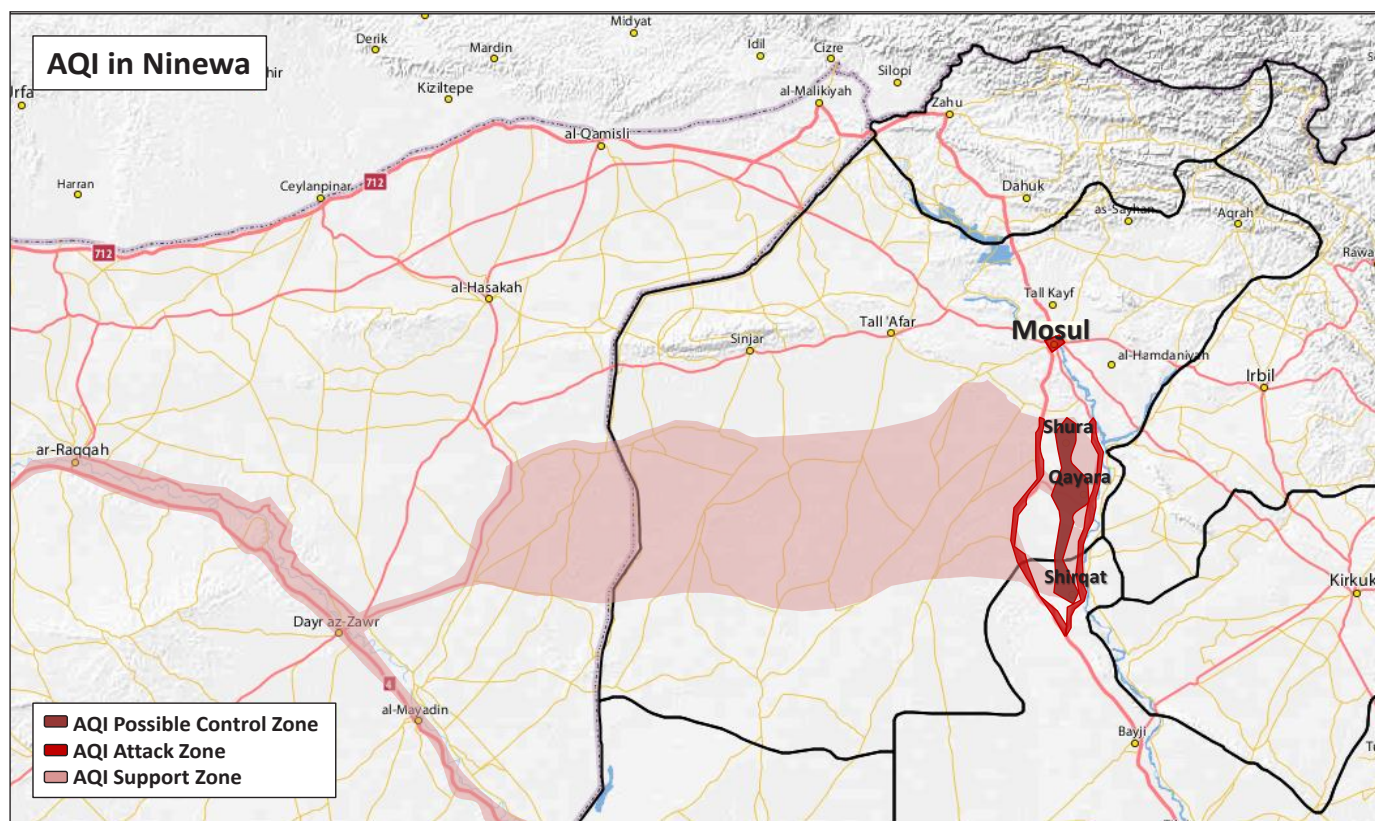
AQI has already established control in some locations in Iraq, such as northern Diyala province and eastern Salah ad-Din. It is necessary to take inventory of exactly where AQI has established control and to estimate where AQI may undermine state control. Where AQI controls terrain, the government of Iraq is prevented from re-establishing control without a military engagement. Where AQI controls terrain, AQI is able to further pursue their goal of establishing an Islamic state.

It appears in August-September 2013 that AQI is attempting to establish control in portions of Ninewa province. Ninewa is critical for AQI because it possesses

a considerable border with Syria, a multi-ethnic and majority Sunni population, and Iraq’s northern capital, Mosul. It is also physically removed from Baghdad. AQI is attempting to isolate the ISF in Mosul by cutting its supply lines at Qayara, Shirqat, and Shura, areas south of Mosul along the primary lines of communication from Baghdad. This backgrounder will therefore focus upon AQI’s efforts to control this key terrain and explore the ongoing contest for control between AQI and ISF observed elsewhere in Ninewa province. It will also document AQI’s efforts to target Sunnis in government as well as minority groups in Ninewa.

AQI’s Ninewa Operating Area

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the frequently published spokesman for AQI, released a message through al-Furqan media on July 29, 2013 announcing the start of AQI’s new campaign, the “Soldiers’ Harvest.”³ He indicated in this message that the campaign had actually begun with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack in Hama, Syria on July 1, 2013, before the conclusion of “Breaking the Walls.” This is a curious artifact, given the offset in timing from the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. The message is nonetheless significant because it suggests that AQI’s new campaign may not be limited geographically to Iraq. Indeed, AQI has demonstrated many times its goal of establishing control of terrain inside Syria. The organization has had relative and increasing success in al-Raqqa and Deir



This map represents a qualitative assessment of AQI's operations in the Jazeera desert, which is based upon terrain analysis and consideration for the current disposition of the Iraqi Security Forces in Ninewa.

ez-Zour under the banner of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Most significantly, AQI announced the intent to establish an Islamic Court in Deir ez-Zour on October 3, 2013, which if successful will constitute a strong indication that AQI is exercising control of this terrain.⁴

Al-Adnani also promised in his speech to reoccupy territories formerly controlled by AQI, an affirmation of intent originally expressed in the announcement of "Breaking the Walls."⁵ This time, he extended the new campaign to include the pursuit of new territories. This was likely a reference to Syria and to the broader emirate that AQI has demonstrated the intent to form.⁶ Furthermore, though uncorroborated, an AQI source reported to *al-Mustaqbal* news that al-Adnani was appointed Emir of the Syrian Front within the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham on August 19, 2013.⁷ As part of the same message, the source indicated that AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ordered three brigades to move from Syria to Iraq, which reportedly caused Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to launch aggressive border security operations.⁸ Ninewa is key terrain for cross-border operations for AQI to provide mutual rear area support to its Iraq and Syria fronts. Not only does Ninewa contain a desert zone of communication, but it

is also an urban capital where AQI may seek to achieve control of strategic resources in Iraq.

In this particular message, al-Adnani specifically called on Sunni communities in Muqdadiah, Diyala to mobilize. Northern Diyala is also key terrain for AQI. It represents the eastern bound of the territory formerly controlled by AQI in 2007 and extends to the mountainous border with Iran. After U.S. Forces drove AQI from northern Diyala in late 2007, AQI established its last stronghold in the vicinity of Mosul, the capital of Ninewa province.⁹ AQI's lethal capacity was destroyed there, though published estimates through 2010 expressed the reality that AQI retained its original goals despite leadership attrition.¹⁰ It is therefore reasonable to look first to Ninewa as the likely point of origin of AQI's resurgence, with access to urban resources and desert logistics, licit and illicit revenue streams, and conditions of violent conflict in neighboring Syria, and all at great distance from the political machinations and security institutions of Baghdad.

Ninewa also stands out in AQI's recent statements. On September 11, 2013, a day reserved for symbolic messages, AQI announced the formation of an operations command in Ninewa encompassing al-Jazeera, al-

Ba'aj, al-Dakhil, and al-Janobeya, which likely denote regional zones within Ninewa corresponding to the Jazeera desert, Ba'aj district along the Syria border, and central and southern Ninewa.¹¹ In effect, this operations command will cover the Ninewa governorate south and west of Mosul to the Syrian border. This region once held significance for AQI because the Sinjar border crossing from Syria to Iraq was likely the principal route for foreign fighters in 2007.¹² It also corresponds with the current areas of operation of the Iraqi Security Forces in Ninewa under the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC) and the Jazeera and Badeya Operations Command (JBOC), specifically encompassing the 2nd Division, the 3rd Division, units of the Federal Police, and the 6th Brigade of the Border Police.¹³

AQI's need for border region logistics still prevails; it appears that AQI means to establish freedom of movement in these sparsely populated zones. This announcement also coincided with increased ISF operations into the Jazeera desert, suggesting that AQI will fight to contest them if needed. AQI will not likely need to fight ISF in order to preserve its freedom of movement across the Jazeera. The entire desert is highly traversable by wheeled vehicles, and while the zones in this message herald a deliberate assertion of regional control by AQI, it does not follow that AQI will fight to maintain control of any single portion of it. It is too vast for either side to control; rather the contest is to prevent or sustain AQI's freedom of movement and logistics across the desert.

Mosul, the capital of Ninewa, is the key terrain that AQI is contesting. ISF presence in the city is extensive, but Iraqi Army and Federal Police are also socially ostracized and mismatched against the demographic of the population. Many Iraq Army soldiers stationed in Mosul hail from other provinces in Iraq, and ISF are a source of social friction throughout the province.¹⁴ This is important to understand as the security situation in Mosul makes evident certain critical opportunities for AQI. Mosul may generally be regarded as a prize for multiple groups with slightly different aims, including Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandiya (JRTN), Ansar al-Islam, and competing political factions, some of which appeal to segments of Mosul's population. The stakes have risen for all of these groups because of current events in Iraq and Syria, including the shift in provincial council representation in favor of Ninewa's Kurds, the longstanding majority Sunni anti-government protest movement, and the rise

in Kurdish-AQI fighting nearby in Syria. If federal security forces are perceived by Mosul residents as outsiders rather than protectors, and if a divide between federal and local security forces manifests itself, then the contest for security in Mosul will favor elements opposing the state, regardless of whether they cooperate or compete. This is an ideal arrangement for AQI, which may be inclined to foster infighting among groups in Mosul proper.

Another opportunity afforded to AQI in Mosul, which is far less feasible in Baghdad, is to target ISF directly. AQI may do this a number of ways. First, AQI may attempt to cut ISF supply lines to Mosul. Second, AQI may target Sahwa [civilian government-sponsored militiamen] in Mosul to exacerbate the urban-desert social divide, and thus also the divide between local and federal security forces in the city. Third, AQI may target minorities and constituencies in the greater Mosul area in order to precipitate their mobilization in self-defense, as their confidence in ISF's ability and will to protect them diminishes. In this way, AQI's proven strategy to target Shi'a communities in Baghdad may also transpire in Mosul, with one primary divergence. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), which have typified attack patterns against Shi'a in Baghdad over the course of 2013, have not occurred in Mosul to the same degree.¹⁵ In fact, compared to other northern provinces where AQI likely enjoys freedom of movement and attack, Mosul is the least targeted with VBIEDs. This may not be because Mosul is impenetrable to VBIEDs; it may be because it does not want to antagonize the urban population through which it moves and retains passive support. Thus, AQI will not likely target civilians so extensively in Mosul that they mobilize themselves in self-defense. Rather, AQI will likely conduct low-level attacks such as IEDs against the general population in order to inspire fear and thus exert control. AQI already benefits from conditions there, and the trajectory of Mosul's security conditions already favors their control. VBIED attacks in these cases would actually disrupt the conditions favorable to AQI.

AQI's statements give indicators of their strategy for Mosul. AQI's September 11 announcement included a declaration of the organization's intent to attack "apostates" in the greater Mosul area. This was likely a reference to local Sahwa forces. Additionally, on September 24, 2013, AQI issued a warning to the sheikhs of the desert tribes of Ninewa to withdraw their

sons from the security forces.¹⁶ The warning specified a grace period of 30 days during which the tribes and their sons would be spared. This affirms that AQI will exploit the urban-desert divide and approach control of their desert lines of communication and Mosul as complementary efforts. This warning letter also provides insight into how AQI in Ninewa is currently organized, because it was posted as a formatted letter addressed from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Media Department of the Mosul Section, Ninewa State. This indicates that AQI's aspires to have an organizational structure involving a Ninewa state entity, a Mosul section, with a media office at the local level. AQI in Ninewa is thus not solely oriented on the desert, but instead is executing a strategic plan for Mosul.

Attack Patterns in Ninewa after 30 July 2013

An analysis of the attacks which have occurred in Ninewa since the announcement of the "Soldiers' Harvest" campaign may validate this assessment of AQI's battle plan. In Mosul and elsewhere in Ninewa, the possibility that some of these attacks may not be the work of AQI is high. Other groups, particularly JRTN and Ansar al Islam, are likely also engaged in fighting with the goal of mobilizing elements of Ninewa's population against state control. It is not assessed at this time whether AQI is operating in conjunction with either group. This caveat applies throughout the following attack review. Nevertheless, all attacks may be considered to produce advantages for AQI, whether or not they were designed to do so.

Isolating ISF along the Baghdad-Mosul Highway

A tight cluster of attacks occurred in three areas south of Mosul in August 2013, indicating a deliberate operation by a unified armed group to control the northern stretch of the Baghdad-Mosul Highway. Within this attack cluster, Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army personnel were targeted with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and small arms fire on roads and in their homes near Qayara, Shura, and Shirqat.¹⁷ In Shirqat, gunmen also attempted three times to attack police stations, which is a worrisome escalation.¹⁸ This study encompasses 14 such events in August 2013, although low-level violence is likely under-reported at this time, even against the ISF. National attention to events in these areas is growing, however. There have been several highly publicized

cases of murders of ISF in Qayara and Shura over the course of the last six months, which have been portrayed by Iraqi media as indicative of social dynamics.¹⁹ The soldiers in question reportedly hailed from Anbar and southern Iraq, which might suggest that the division between the local communities and the national ISF has escalated to armed conflict. However, it is more likely that the armed group responsible for these attacks is AQI, because it is clear from other attack signatures presenting in these same areas that AQI has designated them as key terrain and is actively seeking to control them.

The most prominent signature attack is House-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (HBIED). The armed group focused upon attacks in these areas executed a new campaign of HBIEDs targeting Iraqi Police in Qayara and Shura on August 2 and August 12. A total of eight houses were destroyed on these days, not necessarily to kill the ISF officers or their families, but to destroy their homes in order to intimidate and displace them.²⁰ This effort directly reflects the principal narrative of the "Soldiers' Harvest" campaign, giving meaning to the name.

The series of HBIED attacks was likely the work of AQI, because the technique has been attributed to AQI elsewhere in Iraq this year.²¹ They have been used recently to displace Shi'a populations south of Baghdad in areas formerly under AQI control.²² Furthermore, HBIEDs were executed in conjunction with the first VBIED waves of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign, particularly in Taji, north of Baghdad. The HBIED campaign in Qayara and Shura indicates that this effort to isolate ISF from Mosul may be attributed with confidence to AQI. An IED attack against an oil well near Qayara on April 5 and May 6 also has an AQI signature. The first event reportedly caused such a massive fire that burned for over a month.²³ This event may indicate not only AQI's effort to establish control, but also to secure a permanent funding stream. Attacks of this nature may induce local security, the local population, Iraqi facilities services, or major oil companies to comply with AQI's demands for subsidies in return for abstaining from attacks.

ISF appeared to respond to the incidents in Shirqat with search and raid operations and arrests.²⁴ A police commander was also relieved in Shirqat in early August, validating that these were not the first indications of intent to control the highway leading to Mosul.²⁵ ISF also launched the Ninewa arm of the national counter-

AQI "Revenge of the Martyrs" campaign on August 16-17. The Ninewa Operations Command reported the arrest of 124 people during this period, focusing operations upon al-Jazeera, Qayara, and Shura.²⁶ ISF also reported that they had detained AQI leaders and discovered a VBIED factory. Unfortunately, one month later, attacks in these areas have resumed, indicating the inefficacy of the ISF operations. AQI detonated 22 HBIEDs in Qayara on September 16 and another six HBIEDs the following day, primarily focusing on the homes of ISF personnel.²⁷ Also in Shura, Iraqi Police reported to have found flyers sealed by AQI threatening those who work for the Iraqi government.²⁸ These are indications not only that ISF was unsuccessful in staving off attacks in these areas, but also that AQI is more prominently poised to establish control there in the future.

Maintaining the Jazeera Desert Zone

Detecting AQI's presence in the Jazeera desert in western Ninewa is difficult because attacks do not often occur there, since the area is unpopulated. Four Katyusha rockets were reported to strike in Tel Afar on August 10, but this is not yet assessed to indicate a main effort by any armed group operating in Ninewa at this time.²⁹ Nevertheless, Tel Afar and areas west of Mosul should be examined more closely as barometers of encroaching AQI control. Instead, ISF operations into the Jazeera indicate Baghdad's perspective that this area is a potential support zone for significant AQI assets. Federal Police reported to have destroyed three AQI camps 120 km west of Mosul on July 31, seizing ammunition and caches filled with explosive components and light weapons. Unfortunately, confidence in the veracity of this police assessment is low, but the reporting confidently indicates that Federal Police in Ninewa are responding to the AQI threat from the desert.³⁰ Federal Police conducted additional operations on August 12, August 31 into the Jazeera, reportedly seizing additional explosives and conducting arrests.³¹

On September 10, the ISF announced its intention to deploy along the Iraq-Syria border in preparation for a potential U.S. strike on Syria.³² According to an ISF source reporting to al-Sumaria news, the plan involved the deployment of three combat brigades and one Federal Police brigade. The plan also involved daily over-flights of the border, curfews enforced upon shepherds and farmers, and refugee entry points to be announced later. The Iraq-Syria border region in question is vast

and remote, stretching from north of Mosul down through Anbar province. It is a herculean effort for the ISF to establish control of this region, where conditions favor AQI. On September 11, the following day, AQI announced their Ninewa operations command to cover areas of Ninewa that correspond with this ISF operation and the pre-existing disposition of the ISF. The AQI announcement may therefore be viewed as a contest for the terrain, which also has strategic value for them. AQI succeeds in this contest if they can continue to operate despite ISF's best efforts. For this reason, ISF operations in the desert are not likely to be decisive. They may yet be successful in disrupting AQI cross-border logistics, and this is the mission of the Jazeera and Badeya Operations Command (JBOC). The JBOC announced on October 4, 2013 the interdiction of 42 vehicles at a hidden rest point in the Jazeera, which could be a major tactical victory against AQI.³³ Perturbations of AQI's attacks may be evaluated over the next month to confirm or deny this success.

Targeting government affiliates in Mosul

The AQI push for Mosul has also begun. Establishing control of this urban center is a massive undertaking, much like establishing control in Aleppo, Syria. In order to establish dominance in Mosul, AQI may seek to accomplish several tasks: to destroy popular confidence in ISF such that they seek their own guarantors of security; to isolate Mosul's population and government from the state; to exploit the ethnic and social fractures within Mosul's diverse community; to intimidate the population into tolerance of AQI's presence; and then later to compete with local and provincial governance structures for control. Given the assessment that AQI began its regeneration in the vicinity of Mosul in 2010-2011, and considering the progress they have made to establish attack zones in Baghdad, it is reasonable to consider that AQI may be farther along in these objectives in Mosul than in Baghdad, northern Diyala, and Aleppo. We should therefore measure the indicators of their current operations against this anticipated strategy.

AQI's pursuit of these objectives is most visible at this time in the targeted assassination of government officials, particularly Sunnis working in government, in keeping with the tenets of the "Soldiers' Harvest" campaign. A number of prominent assassination attempts occurred in August 2013. On August 3, gunmen assassinated the bodyguards of judges in Hammam al-Aleel in southern

Mosul.³⁴ Judges are classical targets for AQI. On August 7, the house of the former Ninewa Governor Duraid Kashmoula was destroyed via HBIED in Najjar, western Mosul.³⁵ Kashmoula was favored by the Kurds, and this may be considered a retaliatory attack by AQI. On August 8, an IED targeted the Mosul Provincial Council Chairman, again in Hammam al-Aleel.³⁶ On August 11, a former senior army officer was assassinated in Tammoz, west Mosul.³⁷ On August 16, General Khalid al-Hamdani, the commander of the Iraqi Police in Ninewa, survived an IED targeting his motorcade in Um al-Mahajir village.³⁸ On August 21, IEDs struck the convoys of General Khalid al-Hamdani, the Iraqi Police chief in Ninewa, and General Ismael al-Jabouri, the director of the Intelligence Department of the Ninewa Operations Command, while they engaged in search and raid operations in west Mosul.³⁹ On August 28, an IED targeted the motorcade of Ninewa Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi south of Mosul.⁴⁰ On August 30, another IED targeted the motorcade of the Saba'ween Sahwa leader Ibrahim al-Sabawee in Makhmoor district, southeast Mosul.⁴¹ These figures represent a thoughtful and determined cross-section of governance, Iraq Army, Iraqi Police, and Sahwa leadership.

On September 29, five mukhtars, neighborhood government representatives, were killed.⁴² This represents a different target demographic from the August 2013 set, and potentially one with grave social consequences affecting the population throughout Mosul. Eighteen mukhtars resigned following this incident, and the Mayor of Mosul Hussain Ali Hachim suspended the activities of the rest, a measure of AQI's success in this approach. Communities in Mosul have been mired in low-level violence and spectacular attacks prior to this, though attacks during the month of August 2013 are particularly important to examine in detail for what they illustrate in a broader context of AQI's initiatives in Ninewa. Reports of IEDs targeting cafes, soft drink shops, and gas stations were documented in August, as well as an incident of small arms fire against civilians in their homes.⁴³ In other instances pointing specifically to the targeting of minority civilians, Shabak civilians were targeted in Muthana neighborhood on August 19 and in al-Sidiq neighborhood on August 29, and a Turkman-majority village was struck with mortar shells on August 7.⁴⁴ These are indicators that the population is also targeted by AQI, as other armed groups assessed to operate in Mosul and possibly to wield the same techniques have hitherto directed their attacks predominantly on the ISF. It is important to note, however, that AQI has not been using VBIEDs

to target civilians in Mosul, though they are primarily directed against civilians in Baghdad. In Mosul, the five VBIED attacks documented in August and September 2013 have all been directed against Iraqi Army and Federal Police targets.⁴⁵

Targeting Minorities, Tribal Leaders, and Religious figures

AQI has also been targeting minority leaders and religious figures for assassination in Mosul. On August 4, IEDs targeted the Ninewa Iraqi Turkmen Front leader, Mohamed Ali in Rashidiya, Mosul and the Turkmen Front Ninewa Provincial Council member Luqman Najim.⁴⁶ On August 16, gunmen shot the imam of the Safa Mosque, Abdul Kareem Thanoon al-Hamdani, in western Mosul during a prayer service.⁴⁷ On August 22, an IED targeted the chieftain of the al-Jabour tribe, Saeed Abbas al-Jabouri, near Hamam al-Aleel, southern Mosul.⁴⁸ On August 27, gunmen also killed the leader of the Bagran tribes in Mosul, Barza Hazim al-Badrani in Dorat al-Mahatah, southern Mosul.⁴⁹ Al-Badrani was also an anti-government protest leader. AQI, more than any other armed group might target the political opposition in order to capture, disrupt, or destroy the movement al-Badrani had been leading.

The two small arms fire assassinations were reportedly conducted with silenced weapons, a signature of Shi'a militia groups, but which AQI is known to use.⁵⁰ As with other IED, mortar, and small arms fire events in this study, the method of attack does not point automatically to AQI; however, the targeting of civilians rather than their defense, the systematic targeting of social, religious, and political leaders, and the alignment with AQI's likely battle plan for Mosul lead to the assessment that AQI is responsible for these attacks. They also demonstrate how well AQI is positioned in Mosul, having the requisite knowledge to target the social and political landscape so precisely.

Applying pressure to ISF in Mosul

AQI is also directly engaging ISF in Mosul, though they may not be the only armed group attacking Iraqi soldiers and police. Five small arms fire incidents against Army and Federal Police checkpoints were documented from July 31 through August 29.⁵¹ A number of IEDS set on Mosul's roads have also been detonated against IA convoys and patrols.⁵² Another detonated in front of a police station in al-Qayrawan, northwestern Mosul, on August 20.⁵³ These events may appear insignificant

individually, and at such small numbers they resonate only as indicators of an active threat to security forces in Mosul. Reporting of these events is also likely under-representative of the urban battle in which ISF is engaged. ISF constitute a formidable force in Mosul, including the Ninewa Operations Command, the 2nd Iraqi Army Division, and Federal Police. It would be hasty to question their capacity to defend Mosul based on this attack sample.

Nonetheless, their duty must still be considered perilous at this time. The government of Iraq announced on October 3 the allocation of funds to provide a 50% bonus for hazardous duty pay for soldiers operating in the provinces, including Ninewa.⁵⁴ ISF in Mosul have responded to the threat against them with raids, arrests, cache seizures, and curfews.⁵⁵ Despite their strength, ISF in Mosul are somewhat compromised by their distance from Baghdad, which creates a logistics vulnerability that AQI is exploiting in southern Ninewa. An Iraqi Army helicopter was also shot down over Baiji in northern Salah ad-Din on October 3, indicating that ISF aerial resupply operations and tactical over-watch must now pay heed to a surface-to-air threat.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

The prospect of multiple threats against the ISF, by AQI along with other groups seeking other goals, increases the opportunity for AQI to establish control. Even if these groups engage in in-fighting, to counter AQI or to fight each other, their mutual contest for control within Mosul collectively may degrade the legitimacy of the ISF. Furthermore, such threats would imperil the population, which is a strategic objective for AQI. AQI thrives in a chaotic environment from which they may emerge as the most well-organized contender. They seek to create this disorderly condition as they pursue control of urban terrain presently secured by ISF.

This has been their approach in Baghdad since December 2012, prosecuted primarily through VBIED waves.⁵⁷ AQI appears also to be active in Mosul, from which they were never removed fully, and it is likely that they will exert control there as well. Over the course of the last six months of the "Breaking the Walls" campaign, from December 15, 2012 to July 29, 2013, ISW documented 294 violent events in the greater Mosul area, the majority of which were small arms fire engagements targeting ISF. This compares to 310 violent events in Baghdad over the same timeframe, the majority of which were

VBIEDs targeting civilians. Their methods will likely continue to differ based upon Mosul's demography.

Because attack trends in Mosul prior to the start of the "Soldiers' Harvest" demonstrate that AQI has been very active in Mosul for some time, it will become necessary to determine if there are neighborhoods within Mosul in which AQI has already established control. This will permit an objective assessment not only of AQI's status in pursuit of a transnational emirate, but also how vulnerable the Iraqi state is to compounding threats in Mosul. It still appears that there are operational opportunities for ISF to achieve considerable gains against AQI in Ninewa, by targeting them in the southern areas of Shura, Qayara, and Shirqat. ISF should also reinitiate outreach to the tribes in Ninewa to achieve their cooperation to counter AQI. ISF operations along the Iraq-Syria border will not be sufficient to address this threat.

Jessica Lewis is the Research Director at the Institute for the Study of War. Special thanks to Ahmed Ali and the ISW Iraq Team for their research support.

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