



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 11, 2014

Al-Qaeda Splinter Group's Insurgents Overrun Mosul, Iraq

Following a week-long advance on the city, militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) seized control of most of Mosul — a city in northern Iraq and the capital of the Nineveh Province. With a population of one and three-quarter million, Mosul is Iraq's second-largest city.



A report from BBC originating with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy noted that since June 6, ISIS insurgents have seized control of the western half of Mosul. Despite the fact that Iraqi security forces outnumbered ISIS fighters by more than 15 to one, the government troops suffered what the reporter described as “a dramatic collapse of morale.”

This apparent military meltdown prompted a harsh statement by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on June 11, when he said: “The commanders who retreated and wavered must be punished.” Maliki also called Mosul's fall a “conspiracy” and vowed to regain it by force, but he did not elaborate further on his statement.

The BBC noted that more than 7,000 former Saddam-era military officers live in Mosul, along with more than 100,000 other former soldiers, but many of these were removed from military service by the process of “de-Ba'athification” — the purge of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party supporters after he was deposed.

Nineveh Governor Atheel Nujaifi made an appeal on the night of June 9 for citizens to use their personal weapons to form self-defense militias in their neighborhoods to resist ISIS gains. This might serve as a good lesson for those who would limit the right to keep and bear arms in the United States and demonstrate just how valuable a citizens' militia can be.

The importance of Mosul — because of its size, ethnic and religious diversity, and proximity to an oil producing area — makes its recapture imperative to the Baghdad government. It is also important to Iraq's Kurds, a large ethnic minority whose Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has a capital only an hour away. This factor may lead to Baghdad seeking to enlist forces from the KRG's Peshmerga, an infantry force with some artillery and light armored vehicles, in a joint operation against the insurgents.

As for who these insurgents are who have captured much of Mosul: The ISIS (also abbreviated ISIL) is an Islamic militant group active in both Iraq and Syria that was established in the early years of the Iraq war. It pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004.

The Levant is generally considered to include Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and part of southern Turkey. Lebanon's *Daily Star* reported on November 8, 2013 that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda, ordered ISIS disbanded in 2013.

Abu Bakr Baghdadi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, had announced the formation of ISIS earlier in 2013



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and the group continued to operate in Syria, as well as Iraq. On October 4, 2011, the U.S. State Department had listed al-Baghdadi as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” and offered a \$10-million reward for information leading to his capture or death.

Al-Baghdadi moved to Syria after the beginning of that country’s revolution against Bashar al-Assad, and in April 2013 announced the merger, with himself still in overall command, of his group with Syria’s Jabhat al Nusra, under the new name of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

A study of the crisis in Mosul prepared by CNN stated that when U.S. troops left Iraq, “the extremist militants found new leadership, went to Syria, grew stronger and returned to Iraq, making military gains often off the backs of the foreign fighters drawn to Syria’s conflict. Now the group has footholds in both countries and is blamed for destabilizing both.”

As *The New American’s* writers have reported repeatedly, the rebel coalition fighting against the Assad regime in Syria has been supported by the U.S. government, with President Obama expressing hope in a news conference to “mobilize the international community to support” installing a new regime in Syria.

After Senators Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) co-sponsored a bill that authorized “critical support to the Syrian opposition through provision of military assistance, training, and additional humanitarian support” last year, Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) made a statement on May 21, 2013, directed at his colleagues, nearly all of whom voted to send arms to Syrian rebels: “This is an important moment. You will be funding, today, the allies of al-Qaeda.”

Paul was obviously aware that elements of al-Qaeda were among the anti-Assad rebels, and that some of the U.S. aid sent to the rebels would undoubtedly find its way to these extremists. And since the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) operates in both Syria and Iraq, it is not rash to say that U.S. aid to the rebels in Syria may have helped ISIS take Mosul.

In an article posted by *The New American* on April 10, 2013, “Top Syrian Rebel Group Merges With Al-Qaeda in Iraq,” foreign correspondent Alex Newman cited an AP report that the new jihadist alliance could “become a dominant player” in whatever new regime eventually replaces Assad. Newman noted:

The establishment press around the world has largely attempted to downplay the role of al-Qaeda and other jihadists in fighting Assad — not to mention the U.S. government’s crucial part in creating and funding the opposition even before actual war broke out.

Newman also quoted a statement from the prime minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, who addressed the strong possibility that the consequences of the Obama administration backing “rebel” forces in Syria would be disastrous. In an opinion piece published by the *Washington Post* on April 9, al-Maliki — who was installed after the U.S. government’s “regime change” operation in 2003 — called for an end to all arms transfers heading into Syria, both to the “rebels” and to the regime, which is being supplied by the governments ruling Russia and Iran:

We have been mystified by what appears to be the widespread belief in the United States that any outcome in Syria that removes President Bashar al-Assad from power will be better than the status quo.... A Syria controlled in whole or part by al-Qaeda and its affiliates — an outcome that grows more likely by the day — would be more dangerous to both our countries than anything we’ve seen up to now. Americans should remember that an unintended consequence of arming insurgents in Afghanistan to fight the Soviets was turning the country over to al-Qaeda.



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A report in today's *Christian Science Monitor* noted that the U.S. invasion of Iraq — waged under several false claims including that Saddam Hussein had been cooperating with al-Qaeda — “spurred the development of the strongest core of Sunni jihadists in the Middle East.”

The fallout from that destabilization led to the region's powers, including Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, supporting a number of rival Sunni and Shiite jihadists and militants, with the result that Iraq and Syria have seen nothing but turmoil ever since. The *Monitor* article concludes:

There aren't any easy answers. But Iraq's crisis is making for strange bedfellows, with both the U.S., Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia eager to see the growing strength of ISIS curtailed. A kernel of a solution might be found in this common interest.

In retrospect, even such an unlikable tyrant as Saddam Hussein seems to have brought a welcome stability and religious freedom to Iraq. It is hard to believe that Iraq would not have been better off had the United States never intervened.

It is also apparent that the United States might be better off if, instead of serving a “common interest,” it would look after its own interests for a change. As John Quincy Adams stated in a speech on July 4, 1821:

[America] goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.
She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.
She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

Photo of refugees fleeing from Mosul: AP Images

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