



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 18, 2015

Militias, Iraqi Government Try to Retake City From ISIS

After the Iraqi government's security forces retreated from the city of Ramadi on May 17 — abandoning the important city of half a million people to the Islamic State (ISIS) forces — Shiite militia fighters from the Hashid Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) are preparing to join government troops and Sunni tribesmen to recapture the city.



Ramadi is the capital of Anbar province, a vast desert area bordering on Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan. As ISIS moved in on Ramadi on May 17, the Anbar Provincial Council met in Baghdad and voted to ask Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to send the Shiite militia to come to the aide of Anbar, which is a largely Sunni province. Some of the militia units are more under the command of the Iraqi government, while others answer to Iran, which has backed them.

CNN cited a statement from Muhannad Haimour, a spokesman for the governor of Anbar, saying that the Popular Mobilization Units were no longer Shiite militias but officially recognized under Iraqi law.

Iraqi troops have proven to be ineffective in stopping ISIS during the past year. Last June 6, ISIS fighters seized control of the northern city of Mosul, which has a population of over one million. During that loss, 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.”

That apparent military meltdown prompted a harsh statement by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who said: “The commanders who retreated and wavered must be punished.”

Al-Abadi has decided to take more aggressive action against ISIS than his predecessor, and accepting help from the Shiite militias represents a change of heart for him, because he previously resisted doing so out of fear of provoking a sectarian backlash from Kanbar's dominant Sunnis. many Sunnis are suspicious of the Shiite fighters, and ISIS has even attempted to portray itself as a defender of Sunnis against militia, who are backed by the radical Shiite regime in Iran. However, by their violent behavior and terrorism, it should be apparent to all that ISIS does not reflect mainstream Sunni philosophy and is a rogue group of the most violent kind.

This point must have been obvious to a Sunni tribal leader, Sheikh Abu Majid al-Zoyan, who was quoted by Reuters. Al-Zoyan said that while he was suspicious of the Shiite militias, “at this stage, we welcome any force that will come and liberate us from the chokehold” of the Islamic State.

An [article posted by The New American on March 9](#) noted that General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee the previous week



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that the Iranian-backed Shiite militias made up about two-thirds of the Iraqi forces fighting ISIS in Tikrit. (ISIS took control of Tikrit last June, after which it executed more than 1,500 unarmed Iraqi Air Force cadets at Camp Speicher.) The combined Iraqi troops and Hashid Shaabi militants recaptured the city on March 31, and on April 12, Iraqi forces declared that the city was finally free of all ISIS forces.

At the same hearing, committee chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.) asked Defense Secretary Ashton Carter if it alarms him that Iran “has basically taken over the fight.”

“It does. It does,” Carter replied, adding, “We’re watching it very closely.”

The New American quoted Prince Saud al-Faisal, then-foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, who said at a joint press conference with Secretary of State John Kerry in Riyadh in March: “What is happening in Tikrit is exactly what we are worried about. Iran is taking over the country.”

Kerry described events with less concern than the prince, stating that the offensive in Tikrit “was put together by the Iraqis, formulated by the Iraqis, executed by the Iraqis, and that’s the best thing all of us could, frankly, ask for. So we take it the way it is and we’ll hope for the best results and move from there.”

The turn of events that has caused the United States to find itself on the same side as Iran — a country much maligned by U.S. diplomats for its “nuclear ambitions” — in the fight against ISIS is a direct consequence of our nation’s interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East.

We reported last November that President Obama had sent a letter secretly to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei the previous month, suggesting that the two nations shared a common interest in fighting ISIS.

News of the letter prompted a strong reaction from Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who issued a joint statement calling it “outrageous” that the president would seek to enlist Iran in its fight against ISIS in light of Iran’s support for Syrian President Assad and Shia extremists throughout the region.

“The consequences of this ill-conceived bargain would destroy the Syrians’ last, best chance to live in freedom from the brutal Assad regime,” said the senators.

Committed interventionists that they are, the senators’ statement selectively condemned the Obama administration for the *wrong kind* of interventionism. As was noted [in an article in *The New American* last October](#), Vice President Biden had admitted that the administration’s “anti-ISIS” coalition had actually served to build ISIS. Biden cast the blame mostly on our “allies” in the region, such as Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, who had “poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad; except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and Al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.”

Biden did a fair job of summarizing how all of this aid helped bolster ISIS (which the administration prefers to call ISIL, because the “S” in ISIS stands for Syria and they would prefer that the world forget that ISIS was part of the coalition fighting to topple Syrian president Assad):

Where did all of this go? So now what’s happening? All of a sudden everybody’s awakened because this outfit called ISIL, which was Al Qaeda in Iraq, which when they were essentially thrown out of Iraq, found open space in territory in eastern Syria, work with Al Nusra who we declared a terrorist group early on, and *we could not convince our colleagues to stop supplying them.*” [Emphasis



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added.]

However, it was not just our Arab “allies” who helped the ISIS-connected rebels in Syria fighting to overthrow Assad. Our own government provided assistance that was diverted to ISIS. The *New York Times* reported back in October of 2012 that “most” of the U.S. weapons being sent to the Syrian rebels were going to “hard-line Islamic jihadists.”

The October article in *The New American* noted that the Obama administration was reportedly training ISIS fighters in Jordan under the pretense of helping “moderate” rebels overthrow Assad, according to Jordanian security officials cited by WND journalist Aaron Klein. “The officials said dozens of future ISIS members were trained at the time as part of covert aid to the insurgents targeting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Syria,” Klein reported. “The Jordanian officials said all ISIS members who received U.S. training to fight in Syria were first vetted for any links to extremist groups like al-Qaida.”

Volumes could be written about how our decades-long foreign policy in the Middle East has created the current crisis involving ISIS. First, we removed Saddam Hussein in Iraq, creating a power vacuum. Though Saddam was certainly no humanitarian, he was unquestionably preferable to the ISIS terrorists, who have taken advantage of the weak government in Baghdad to take over much of Iraq. (For example, Saddam had Christians in high positions in his government, while ISIS prefers to behead Christians.) Then, in an effort to remove another strongman, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, we aided rebels who were in league with ISIS and much of our aide helped strengthen that terrorist group. Our government constantly holds up Iran as the poster child for Islamic hegemony in the Middle East, but our government has decided that ISIS is even worse, so has offered to work with the Iranians against ISIS. Even the hard-line Islamist government in Iran that we constantly find ourselves at odds with came to power as a result of prior U.S. interference in that country, going back as far as the 1950s.

In short, there is hardly any crisis in the Middle East that has not been made worse than it might have been by our policy of trying to remove governments in the region that did not meet with our approval.

Photo of Iraqi security forces and tribal fighters in Ramadi: AP Images

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