

Eyeing Raqqa

A Tale of Four Tribes

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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For the past three years, the Islamic State has held Raqqa, the capital of its self-proclaimed caliphate. But lately, both the U.S.-backed, Kurdish-based Syrian Democratic Forces and the Turkish-backed Euphrates Shield forces have stated their intention to take Raqqa, raising complex questions about future governance in eastern Syria. Whatever the outcome, Arab tribes in the area will be central not only to defeating IS but to ensuring that the group does not return.

This new Policy Note, published anonymously for security reasons and edited by Andrew Tabler, is based on interviews with members of the four most prominent Raqqa tribes: al-Bayatrah, al-Ajeel, al-Breij, and al-Na'im. Along with detailed profiles of the tribes and their alliances, the paper discusses the related prospects for cooperation with U.S.-backed forces and notes potentially explosive issues, including Arab-Kurdish tensions and increasing concern over the involvement of Iran-sponsored Shiite militias. Only al-Bayatrah, based downtown, harbors no support for either IS or the Assad regime, offering a glimpse of challenges to come.

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