

ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Much of the group's early military success was due to the weakness and unpreparedness of its enemies, so the right blend of countermeasures could still roll it back.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has the world on edge. Since its nadir in the spring of 2010, ISIL is considered to have evolved from a terrorist group on-the-ropes to "a full-blown army," in the words of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Brett McGurk. An analysis of ISIL's recent military accomplishments is difficult due to the lack of confirmed facts about much of what has transpired in Iraq, particularly during the hectic months since the collapse of federal security forces in Mosul on June 10, 2014. Nevertheless, using a range of case studies from the Iraqi side of ISIL's area of operations, this article explores what is currently known about the movement from a military standpoint. If ISIL is an army, what kind of army is it, and what are its weaknesses?

This article finds that ISIL is a military power mostly because of the weakness and unpreparedness of its enemies. Lengthy shaping of the battlefield, surprise, and mobility made its recent successes possible, but all these factors are diminishing. As a defensive force, ISIL may struggle to hold terrain if it is attacked simultaneously at multiple points or if its allies begin to defect. With the right blend of countermeasures, the group could once again be pushed back to its roots as a rural insurgency operating largely outside the cities.

To read the full article, download the PDF. This report originally appeared on the [CTC website \(https://www.ctc.usma.edu/publications/sentinel\)](https://www.ctc.usma.edu/publications/sentinel). ❖

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