

Has Saddam Hussein's Deputy, "King of Hearts" Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri been finally run to Ground?



Former Saddam Hussein Deputy Izzat al-Douri ally of ISIS

During the Iraq War, a number of deputies to the late Saddam Hussein in the Iraqi Ba'athist government were targeted by the US-led coalition forces in wanted posters configured like a deck of playing cards. At the top of the pack was red mustachioed Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri who has been on the run for 12 years. He had been a much sought ally of the Islamic State and many experts thought he and his Sunni militia was the military muscle behind the conquests in Anbar province and Mosul. If the body allegedly found by Iraq security forces is confirmed, then the assessment is that may signify that ISIS no longer needed him.

Elias Groll in *Foreign Policy's* blog, [Passport](#) reported:

On Friday, Iraqi authorities reported that Douri is dead. If [reports](#) of his demise are true, it would mark a milestone in the post-Saddam era of Iraq.

Douri was the last living plotter in the 1968 coup that brought the Ba'athists to power in Iraq. Saddam's right-hand man and onetime interior minister, Douri would become a scourge of the invaders, breathing life into Sunni discontent. When the Islamic State swept across northern Iraq last year, he sided with the hard-liners, helping them score an astounding series of victories capped by the seizure of Mosul.

The governor of Salahuddin province [told](#) the Associated Press that Douri was killed during an operation in the mountains east of Tikrit, where Iraqi forces and Shiite militiamen are working to consolidate gains after retaking the city from the Islamic State. Separately, Gen. Haider al-Basri told Iraqi state TV that Douri had been killed when troops opened fire on a convoy in which the rebel leader was traveling.

But the report of his death must also be taken with a grain of salt. Douri has been reported killed on multiple occasions, including once by his own Baath party, to only turn up later once more leading an insurgent movement. And in Washington, State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said Friday she could not confirm the reports.

Photographs [circulating](#) on social media Friday show the dead body of a man with a flaming red beard, Douri's most unusual and distinguishing feature, which he usually cropped into a mustache. He had been perhaps best known in the public imagination as the king of clubs in the deck of most wanted Iraqi officials distributed before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Douri was accused of financing insurgent activity against U.S. troops.

In recent months, Douri and the militia movement that he leads, the Men of the Army of the Naqshbandia Order, also referred to by its Arabic initials, JRTN, has emerged as a powerful force amid the Islamic State's territorial gains. When the group swept across northern Iraq in the summer of 2014, seizing Mosul and several other major cities, it did so [with the uneasy support of Douri](#) and other Sunni rebel movements fed up with what they saw as the abusive, anti-Sunni leadership of then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Douri's group has its origins in the old Iraqi Ba'athist order and is mostly composed of former Iraqi military and intelligence personnel.

Why al-Drouri's criticism of his ISIS partner may have been his undoing:

While they have made common cause with the hard-line Sunni fighters of the Islamic State, as an Iraqi nationalist group, JRTN [has criticized](#) the Islamic State's treatment of the country's minorities, including its violent assault on Iraqi Yazidis. Tensions between the two groups have erupted into open fighting between them. The JRTN appears content to work with the Islamic State as an ally in its effort to unseat the Shiite-dominated government; it appears unwilling to fall under the rule of a doctrinaire brand of Islamic law. A spokesman for JRTN last year [called](#) the Islamic State "barbarians."

Douri's death, if confirmed, would break a symbolic link between this band of old-guard rebels and the Hussein regime. Douri had been a trusted confidante of the former strongman and married off his daughter to Hussein's sadistic son, Uday. But in a measure of his influence with the Iraqi leader, he was reportedly able to secure a concession that the marriage not be consummate and later secured a divorce for his daughter, according to [a 2014 profile of Douri in the New Republic](#). Douri's militia movement JRTN was formed after Hussein's death by hanging at the hands of Shiite militiamen in late 2006.

Note *FP's* Groll's conclusion:

If confirmed, Douri's death will arguably strengthen the Islamic State's position within the Iraqi rebel firmament. While a defeat for the broader Sunni uprising against the Iraqi central government, it will likely cement the Islamic State's position as the country's main rebel player.

