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THE MOSUL OPERATION AND ITS FUTURE: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES



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THE MOSUL OPERATION AND ITS FUTURE: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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PREFACE

ISIL, which dominated the headlines in Iraq since 2014, has started to lose major territory between 2015 and 2016. The operation to liberate ISIL's last major stronghold in Iraq, Mosul, started on 17 October 2016. Even with the start of the operation, there is still uncertainty about the future of Mosul. For example, there is no clear timetable about when and how the operation will be concluded. There is doubt about the success of the operation which was started before liberating the surroundings of Mosul and cutting logistical support lines of ISIL.

At the same time, there has been disputes between the forces involved in the offensive. The disputed included how Iraqi security forces and peshmerga would position themselves, how the PMU forces will take part in the operations, and what roles the Ninova Guards led by former Mosul Governor Etil Nuceyfi will play. Moreover, the status of Bashiqa Camp, which hosts Turkish military presence in it, has become one of the controversial issues regarding the Mosul offensive. With the US initiative, both Erbil and Baghdad decided for joint operations, and the offensive was eventually launched despite all those uncertainties.

Despite the launch of the offensive, the forces involved, operation plans, the pace of progress and more importantly the political and administrative structure of the Mosul in the aftermath of the operation are some of the questions that remain unanswered. Questions remain as to how security will be maintained after the operation, how Mosul will be restructured, social, political, administrative and economic equilibrium will be reestablished, and how the people of Mosul who were displaced can return.

This report seeks to cast light on Mosul's pre-ISIL political and administrative conditions, while at the same time summarizing the political-military conditions before the launch of the Mosul operation. Broadly addressing the basic dynamics of the operation, the report discusses the risks and opportunities that the operation presents for Mosul and Iraq. I hope that it will prove interesting for the readers.

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THE MOSUL OPERATION AND ITS FUTURE: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

The political system in Iraq set up after the U.S. invasion in 2003 has adopted federal administration and decentralized the government in a way that is unfamiliar for the Iraqi people. Federal regions and provincial governments were granted autonomy over a range of issues. As things stand, the Iraqi political system has fueled ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts while at the same time inciting *de facto separatism* in some regions. This structure as a legacy of the U.S. invasion has brought about a dynamic that fuels conflicts in Iraq. For example, the provinces of Mosul, Anbar and Salahaddin are dominated by the Sunnis, while the Shiites rule the provinces of Basra, Meysan, Dhiqar, Babel, Najaf, Kerbela, Qadisiyah, Muthanna and Wasit. Moreover, Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) covering the provinces of Arbil, Suleimaniyah and Duhok has become a force on its own. Even though Iraq has “national unity governments,” the political fracturing in the local level has spread to the national level as well. In this context, local politics has started to influence the Iraqi politics at the national level. The disagreements between the Shiite-dominated national government and the local governments of the Sunni-majority provinces such as Mosul, Tikrit and Anbar have defined the course of the Iraqi politics from time to time. The Sunnis’ faith in the Iraqi central government has waned

and they have begun seeking alternatives due to the oppressive practices of the former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, the exclusion of the Sunnis from the political system or their preference to stay out of it, the inner competition for leadership among the Sunnis, the lack of an integral Sunni leadership, and their preference for illegal ways outside conventional political mechanisms. The local governments in Sunni dominated regions have been opposing the Iraqi central government strongly even to the extent of armed confrontation at times. ISIS was able to take root in such an environment and started dominating these Sunni Arab regions from Summer 2014 onwards. It invaded Mosul in June 2014 and declared the “Islamic State” ruling over a territory comprising more than one-thirds of the Iraqi lands. ISIS has become a global problem, for it controls territory in Syria as well, enjoys the allegiance of other al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and conducts terrorist attacks in the Western countries as well as Islamic ones.

The anti-ISIS fight after June 2014 yielded a great success as of 2016 and vast territories under ISIS control have been liberated. A large operation against Mosul, the so-called “capital of the Islamic State,” was launched on 17 October 2016. Even if Mosul is cleared from the ISIS militarily,

policies to be adopted for Mosul's political and administrative future will directly affect Iraq's future. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the risks and opportunities as-

sociated with the Mosul operation and its aftermath by revisiting the main dynamics in Mosul in the pre-ISIS period is necessary.

2. THE POLITICAL OVERVIEW OF MOSUL BEFORE ITS FALL TO ISIS

Following the government formation nine months after the elections of 7 March 2016, Nouri al Maliki sought to sway some Sunni political groups in Mosul in order to divide the political power of Sunni Arabs. The Nujaifi group rose to prominence in Mosul with its “Hadba” list, winning the provincial elections in 2009, and has formed an alliance with Kurds against al Maliki. In return, al Maliki made attempts with a view to weakening the Nujaifi group in Mosul. Nevertheless, Sunni Arabs had resentment against al Maliki due to his heavy handed policies against the protest movements that took place in Sunni provinces after December 2012, and his accusations about Sunni Arab politicians.

September 2012 left a dark mark on the history of Iraq, with the issuance of a death sentence against Tariq al Hashemi, Vice President of Iraq, in his absence, and the outbreak of violent attacks in the first ten days of the month. Al Hashemi was indicted for allegedly setting up “death squads” against Shiites and inciting terrorist attacks on 19 December 2011 and was sentenced to death on 8 September 2012. Yet, al Hashemi was also provided with the opportunity to appeal for acquittal. After the arrest order against himself, al Hashemi moved to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), where he stayed briefly before going to Qatar and finally from Qatar to Turkey. Turkey gave residence permit to him and provided residence and bodyguards. Even though Interpol issued a red notice for al Hashemi on 8 May 2012, Turkey stated that it will not return him to his country and he can stay as long as he wants. Tariq al Hashemi was sentenced to death five times until the elections in 2014.

Besides Tariq al Hashemi, a judicial process was started against Rafi Isavi, the Minister of Finance and a prominent Sunni Arab leader. Tensions increased after 20 December 2012, when his house in Fallujah and his office in Baghdad were raided by counter-terrorism units and 150 members of his bodyguard unit were arrested. Then, the crisis further escalated after a rape incident committed by an Iraqi army officer in Mosul and a Sunni Arab inmate was tortured to death in Diyala. After it was revealed that the special forces of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki carried on the raid against Isavi’s house and office, protests and demonstrations were held on 21 December 2012 after the Friday prayers in al Anbar (Ramadi and Fallujah). The anti-Maliki protests in al Anbar spread to Tikrit (Samarra and Baiji), Mosul, Diyala (Baquba and Jalaula) and Kirkuk. The interest and support among the Sunni Arabs for demonstrations have further increased due to such factors as al Maliki’s harsh crackdown measures and tough statements and attempts aimed at preventing protests. Particularly on 28 December 2012, Friday, thousands joined the protests in al Anbar. Protesters echoed demands such as the release of the detained and the declaration of a general amnesty, hoisted the former Iraqi flags (of the Saddam Hussein era), and voiced catchphrase slogans such as “Iraqi Spring,” and “Sunni Spring in Iraq.” In addition, Kurds supported these protests and held up Kurdish flags albeit in a lesser scale compared to the protests in al Anbar. Some Sunni protesters even held placard demanding “an autonomous government similar to the KRG.”

Anti-Maliki protests by Sunni Arabs had sprung up in Mosul as well. Large crowds

participated in the protests in the Mosul University and the Freedom Square (*Sahat al Ahrar*). The Iraqi army and police tightened security measures, banned exits from major neighborhoods and blocked major roads. “Hammer” type armored vehicles and tanks were deployed in Mosul University. There were rumors that the security forces cracked down and opened fire on the protesters with armored vehicles. On 7 January 2016, six people were wounded and two people were killed as a result of the police intervention in the protests that were held in the Freedom Square of Mosul.

Nouri al Maliki reached out to the protesters and called for moderation, asking them not to pay heed to those who wanted to hamper the political process. He also stated that some demands of the protesters might be taken into consideration. Afterwards, the protesters issued a statement containing 14 demands, which called for:

- Releasing the detained men and women,
- Delaying the execution of death sentences, in accordance with the calls of the international community,
- Reviewing the legal arrangements pertaining to the management of Holy Sites,
- Abolishing the provision in the Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law that gives death penalty to anyone who is charged with supporting and protecting terrorists, and canceling all the judicial processes related to that law,
- Declaring general amnesty,
- Canceling the legislation about judicial inquiries,
- Holding comprehensive investigations about corruption in all government departments, particularly in the security and judicial sectors,
- Holding population census under international monitoring,
- Abolishing the special military commands such as the Operations Command in Diyala and Mosul.

Iyad al Allawi, the leader of the Iraqiya List and the greatest political opponent of Nouri al Maliki, stated that the protests proved the failure of al Maliki, urged the Prime Minister to resign and called for early elections. Ongoing protests in Iraq deepened the political crisis. Maliki sought to coopt the “Yaver” faction in Mosul and the Arab tribes of Hawijah in Kirkuk in order to shatter the anti-government Sunni Arab-Kurdish alliance. Yet, anti-Maliki protests were organized in Hawijah as well. On 11 January 2016, protesters were blocked from entering the Hawijah stadium after the Friday prayers by the Iraqi security forces deployed on major roads. Protests were held in Mosul, Tikrit, Samarra, Anbar (Ramadi) and Baghdad, and protesters performed Friday prayer *en masse*. Yet, Iraqi security forces prevented demonstrations in some cities, particularly in Baghdad.

All these events fueled “hatred” among the Sunni Arabs against the Iraqi government and Nouri al Maliki. Saleh al Motlaq, the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, stated that he will withdraw from the political process unless the guards and assistants of Rafi Issawi face a fair and just investigation process carried out by impartial judicial institutions. He visited al Anbar on 30 December 2012 and reiterated his support for the protests. Nevertheless, protesters reacted against him due to his good relations with al Maliki and expelled him from the area. Then al Motlaq’s guards

opened fire on the protestor killing one and wounding five. His ordeal speaks volumes about the extent that Sunni Arabs could go towards.

Besides, eighty five people were killed and hundreds were wounded when the Iraqi army units cracked down on the protesters in Kirkuk on 23 April 2016, after they decided to stage a hunger strike following a long period of demonstrations. The incidents took place not in the entire province of Kirkuk but in the Sunni Arab district of Hawijah and the district of Suleymanbeg in Tuzkhurmatu. In Hawijah and Suleymanbeg, Sunni Arabs took over government buildings and braced for a resistance under the siege of the army units. All the while, fighting erupted between the army and the tribal forces in Jalaula and Qaratepe in Diyala.

Iraq had gone to local elections in 2013 under these circumstances. Nevertheless, the Iraqi Cabinet decreed that local elections were postponed six months on the grounds that the security situation in Mosul and Anbar had prevented necessary preparations. The date of the provincial elections in Mosul and Anbar which were initially fixed as 4 July 2013 were changed to 20 June 2013. Twenty eight factions participated in the provincial elections of 20 June 2013 in Mosul. A total of 667 candidates from 28 factions raced for the 39 seats of the Mosul Provincial Council. Three seats in the Provincial Council were reserved for the Christian, Ezidi and Shabak minorities, one for each. The Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq declared the turn-out rate for the election as 37.5%. According to the election results, fourteen factions acquired the right to be represented in the Provincial Council.

The Muttahidoon List under the leadership of Atheel Nujaifi, the former governor of Mosul, was reorganized into the Coalition of Nahda consisting of 14 members, thereby forming the majority group in the

Provincial Council. Besides, the Loyalty to Nineveh List led by Dildar Zebari and the United Nineveh list led by Abdullah Yaver merged to form the National Coalition. Iraq's Benevolence and Generosity List joined the Brotherhood and Coexistence List, the winner of the elections. Therefore, three large groups emerged in the Provincial Council after the elections. The Muttahidoon List gained 8 seats in the Mosul Provincial Council with 22 percent of the total votes. It was remarkable that 5 of the 8 Muttahidoon deputies were Turkmens and out of these five deputies, four were the candidates of the Iraqi Turkmen Front. Meanwhile, the Muttahidoon List negotiated with the other parties and formed a new coalition called the "Nahda Coalition," in cooperation with the Al Iraqia National and United Coalition (2 deputies), Nineveh's National Alliance, Oum Rabih Tribes' National Gathering, Iraq's Benevolence and Generosity List, Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress with a view to acting together in the Provincial Council. The new coalition had 14 seats in the Council and Atheel al Nujaifi was once again elected governor.

After Atheel al Nujaifi was reelected as governor, the tensions between the Iraqi central government and the local government of Mosul further deteriorated and Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki increased the scope and scale of his oppression against Mosul. Nouri al Maliki's approach to the Iraqi domestic politics radicalized both Sunnis and Kurds, alienating them from the political process in Baghdad.

Parliamentary elections were held under these circumstances on 30 April 2014. After the elections, all Shiite political groups came together and formed the "National Alliance," but al Maliki opted out of cooperation with this alliance causing discontent among the Shiites who accused him of disrupting the Shiite solidarity. Moreover, the reaction of Shiites against Maliki further intensified as he sought to consolidate his power in provincial governments

in Shiite regions at the expense of other Shiite parties, by benefiting from his position as the Prime Minister. He was also deemed responsible for the political and security crisis in Iraq, which he deepened further by alienating Sunnis and Kurds.

Iraq stepped into a government formation process after the parliamentary elections of 30 April 2014. Maliki's claims for a third term of Prime Ministry were further strengthened when his "State of Law Coalition" won the elections. Nevertheless, all parties in Iraq were frustrated with his plans to form the government one more time. Maliki's statements about his intentions to form majority government inflamed the Iraqi political scene and caused the Sunnis to develop fears of exclusion from politics.

The government formation talks were shattered when ISIS entered Mosul on 6 June 2014 and captured it entirely afterwards. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, declared that their aim is to capture Baghdad after capturing Mosul and heading towards Kirkuk. ISIS reached the outskirts of Baghdad in a short time. Iraqi army and security forces had proven incapable against ISIS's assaults in Mosul, Kirkuk and Tikrit. They even abandoned their weapons and uniforms while fleeing in the face of ISIS's advance.

ISIS sought to ensure the people's support in Mosul by maintaining the daily life in Mosul, while at the same time seeking to create support and zones of control in the provinces such as Mosul, Anbar, Salahaddin, Diyala and Kirkuk. It adopted a new strategy of "territorial dominance" in Mosul, Tikrit and Anbar, which is different from its offensive strategy. Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki called the people to resist against ISIS and offered weapons to those who would back the central government.

Meanwhile, Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, the supreme Shiite religious authority in Iraq, called all the Shiites and Iraqis to resist against ISIS, which had been mov-

ing closer to the holy Shiite sites such as Samarra. Thereafter, thousands of Iraqi Shiites formed voluntary militia groups called "al-Hashdi al-Shaabi" (Popular Mobilization Units-PMU). Many former Shiite militia groups which were active after the US invasion of Iraq started fighting against ISIS alongside large numbers of common people who had not joined any militia group before.

Under these circumstances, Maliki was not assigned to form the government after the elections even though his party won 60 more seats than its closest rival. That is closely related to the perception that his political, social, military and economic practices during his second term led to the rise of ISIS. The Iraqi National Alliance, the coalition of the Shiite groups, assigned Haider al Abadi in August after a vote. He finished the government formation process in one month and obtained a vote of confidence on 8 September 2014 in a voting session attended by 289 deputies out of 325.

The ISIS offensive and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi groups brought about a regional and international character to the fight against ISIS. In this context, the U.S. declared its anti-ISIS strategy involving support to the forces fighting against ISIS after the government formation in Iraq and Iran's decision to directly intervene in Iraq. Therefore, the anti-ISIS coalition comprising approximately 60 states including Turkey have begun cooperating against ISIS. Yet, the increasing visibility of Iran and particularly Qasem Suleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, in Iraq brought forth doubts concerning Iranian influence over both the political process and the militia groups within the Al-Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq. Questions emerged particularly about Al-Hashd al-Shaabi for several reasons such as the increasing number of its component militia groups, its rising administrative as well as military power, and its practices in the Sunni Arab regions where its forces occasionally enters.

3. MAIN DYNAMICS OF THE MOSUL OPERATION

In 2015 and 2016, an intense struggle against ISIS was carried out in Iraq. Particularly in 2016, Iraqi army achieved advances against ISIS and cleared major cities such as Tikrit and Anbar, leaving only Mosul as a major city under the control of ISIS. In addition, other major cities such as Baiji, Shirgat, Fallujah and Rutba were liberated from ISIS. Besides Mosul, the ISIS control remains in Tal Afar, Hawijah and Qaim as well. Finally on 17 October 2016, the Mosul Operation was launched amidst a great deal of discussions. U.S. officials declared many times that the operation was planned for October 2016. Rumors about the Iraqi officials' unwillingness and the U.S. officials' pressure to launch the operation before the U.S. presidential elections in November 2016 emerged. Many Iraqi officials admitted that necessary preparations for the operation were not completed. Moreover, for most of the Iraqis, the operation would not achieve success without U.S. air support.

It is widely accepted that no advance is possible against ISIS in any region without U.S. air support. It was clearly demonstrated by the Tikrit operation in which the Iraqi army sought to advance without U.S. air support but remained in a stalemate for three months without any gain. The stalemate caused the loss of coordination among the forces on the ground leading to further complications. Therefore, the Iraqi government had to call off the operation. Afterwards, a new operation was launched with U.S. air support and Tikrit was easily captured. It demonstrated that the USA's priorities and guidance dictated the way that operations were launched. This is not only related

to the success of operations. The Iraqi government also knows that the United States also plays a balancing role in trimming down the extreme demands of Arbil. This is clearly demonstrated by the visit of Massoud Barzani, President of the KRG, to Baghdad in October 2016. The United States urged Arbil to reach an agreement with Baghdad. Eventually Barzani complied fearing that the U.S. would withdraw its support otherwise. Both Arbil and Baghdad had to agree with each other as a result of a necessity, not a preference. The parties realized that the U.S. acts as a center of gravity and has the ability to shift the balance. In short, the timing of the Mosul operation was decided by the U.S. while Arbil and Baghdad played along.

The operation is known to have been attended by approximately 15,000 Pashmarga and 30,000 Iraqi security forces. Among the security forces, the majority is the Iraqi army while there are also federal police, local police, anti-terror forces and tribal fighters. Meanwhile, al-Hashd al-Shaabi trained by the Turkish Army in Bashiqa started moving towards Tal Afar on 1 November 2016 and established its control on the Mosul-Raqqa highway. It also cleared many villages around Tal Afar from ISIS and captured the airport completing the encirclement of the city. Yet, the Iraqi government declared that Al-Hashd al-Shaabi will remain out of the city centers of Tal Afar and Mosul, where it is decided that the 72nd and 92nd Army Regiments will enter.

A five-pronged plan was put forward in the Mosul operation. According to this plan, the Iraqi forces advanced from Qayyarah in the south to the Hammam al-Alil and



-  al-Hashd al-Shaabi
-  Iraq Army and Federal Police
-  Iraq Army, Special Operations Forces, Anti-Terror Unit, Pashmarga

-  Gedu Military Base Field (Bashika Camp) - Turkish Forces-Ninova Guards
-  Coalition Forces
-  Iraq Security Forces - Mosul Operation Central Base
-  Pashmarga - Mosul Operation Central Base

Al Shura line, from the Mosul Dam to Tall Kayf, from the east to the Khazir-Bartilla-Bashiqa line, from the southeast to Hamdaniyah-Bashiqa line and from Qayyarah in the southwest to Hammam al-Alil Tal Afar line.

Prime Minister Haider al Abadi stated that in the first weeks of the operation, the Iraqi forces' advance was better than expected. Nevertheless, the joint operations undertaken by the Pashmarga and the Iraqi army achieved the largest advance, which is the east-west direction. According to the plans, the Pashmarga is supposed to keep out of the contested territories as stated in the long overdue Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. Only the Iraqi Army forces are authorized to enter the Mosul city center. The Pashmarga opened a frontline stretching from Mahmur located west of the Tigris River to the north of Mosul. They advanced in east-west direction along this frontline. Several fronts were opened from Arbil to Mosul. This line forms the outer perimeter of the city. Kurds and minorities used to live in these regions, yet they are no man's land as of now. After ISIS captured Mosul in 2014, the majority of the people living here had to flee. That also enabled the Pashmarga to advance easily. Arbil and Baghdad agreed to conduct joint operations in some of these regions.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi army started its advance from Qayyarah located west of the River Tigris and south of Mosul. The airbase in Qayyarah became the operational center of the anti-ISIS coalition led by the U.S. the Iraqi army and security forces moved northwards through a corridor along the River Tigris. They stretched the frontline in north-south axis forming eastern and western fronts. The Pashmar-

ga moved westwards, relying on the safe region on its rear.

In the meantime, Turkey's position vis-à-vis the Mosul operation was clarified after the visit by US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to Turkey on 21 October 2016. Carter stated after the visit that they want Turkey to take part in the operation and the Bashiqa problem between Turkey and Iraq was resolved through a principle agreement by the two countries. In this context, Turkey started to take an active role in the operation by giving support to the air operations against ISIS. Turkey also provided intelligence, logistics and military support and reiterated its position that it advocates Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity, even when its military presence in Bashiqa was being discussed. Therefore, Turkey's military presence in Bashiqa should be regarded as a support to Iraq's counterterrorism efforts. In addition, Turkey's military presence is not in contradiction with US President Barack Obama's anti-ISIS strategy declared in September 2014.

The Turkish units in Bashiqa provided training to the groups fighting against ISIS as well as carrying out the fight itself. As a matter of fact, Turkish trained groups take part in the operation, which is also approved by the Iraqi authorities. In other words, Iraq has accepted Turkey's presence in Bashiqa. Turkey aims no land grab, neither in Iraq nor in any other country. Turkey looks out for self-defense and it even lost military personnel as a result of ISIS attacks against Bashiqa. Turkish counterattacks around Bashiqa are known to have killed approximately 700 ISIS militants. Turkey has moved in coordination with the international coalition and the Iraqi security forces in the Mosul operation.

4. CONCLUSION: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Mosul operation has brought along numerous discussions. Besides the discussions over the participants, various risks and opportunities involving issues such as timing, planning, conduct and humanitarian problems have emerged throughout the operation. All participants and supporters of the operation seem to agree that Mosul will be liberated, yet differ on the emerging risks and opportunities. At this point, it is needed to cast light on the discussions pertaining to the future of Mosul.

Firstly, there is still ambiguity about the administrative structure of Mosul after the operation. Even though the Iraqi parliament has decreed that the administrative borders of Mosul will not change after ISIS is expelled, it is by no means set in stone. USA is also known to be preparing for post-ISIS Mosul. Atheel Nujaifi, former governor of Mosul, has put forward proposals involving a federal system for Mosul comprising 6-8 districts. US Congress has prepared a draft about a federal system for the “Saheel Neynova” region covering the minority districts at the border of Duhok and Arbil. Nevertheless, KRG also has ambitions regarding these “Kurdistani regions outside the KRG.” These regions are indeed captured by the Pashmarga in the onset of the Mosul operation. Massoud Barzani, President of the KRG, declared that the Pashmarga will not give up the regions it captured and will fight if needed. In addition, the future of Sinjar and Tal Afar is still unclear. There are debates in political circles about whether the resolution adopted by the Iraqi cabinet on granting the status of province to Tal Afar will still be relevant. In addition, it is well known that the KRG has ambitions for annexing Sinjar. Nevertheless, PKK and PKK-affiliated groups

control the city therefore complicating the situation in the post-ISIS period.

One of the most important problems in Mosul after the liberation will be the maintenance of security. Even if Mosul is retaken, it will be the case that ISIS has a support base within the city. Therefore, problems are likely to occur in the post-ISIS period about the investigations to be carried out in the city. If the Iraqi security forces practice oppression over the people, the maintenance of security in Mosul will be problematic. Therefore, the security force of Mosul should be formed from the people of Mosul. In addition, the Iraqi security forces trained by the international coalition should participate in the provision of security, as well. This will be a test for the international coalition. In this sense, the important issue is not only the liberation of Mosul but also the preservation of Mosul from potential conflicts. The success of the operation will depend not only on the number of forces but also on their military competence. There are discussions about the lack of experience and training of the Iraqi troops conducting the operation.

ISIS's different methods bring about questions about the competence of the Iraqi security forces conducting the operation. ISIS uses non-conventional warfare methods as well. In particular, it makes use of tunnels for inflicting surprise attacks on the Iraqi forces. Conventional military methods do not seem sufficient for fighting against ISIS. Therefore, the maintenance of security in Mosul after the operation through efficient methods is vital.

In addition, the defensive preparations of ISIS is said to focus on the city center

instead of the outer perimeters. For this reason, the fighting is expected to get more violent as the forces move closer to the center. ISIS may sometimes even push back the attackers in some regions. A civilian population of approximately 1 million must also be taken into consideration. Therefore, the air operations will be restricted as the fighting nears the city center.

The Mosul operation cannot be considered independent from its surroundings. The capture of Mosul city center will not mean the end of the operation. The vital point is the maintenance of stability in Mosul. ISIS's raid in Kirkuk just one week after the operation's beginning is a serious message. The operation started before the district of Hawijah in Kirkuk, a smaller town compared to Mosul, is cleared from ISIS. It is likely that ISIS will activate its sleeper cells in other regions as well. Unexpected developments may take place.

One of the most important issues after the operation is the resettlement of the displaced people and rebuilding of the residential areas. In addition, necessary preparations must be made for ensuring peaceful coexistence. Defeating ISIS would not be enough to prevent civilian losses. Terrorist attacks must also be prevented for that.

Initial statements by the Iraqi officials stated that al-Hashd al-Shaabi would not join the operation against Tal Afar city center and only the Iraqi army would be allowed to enter. Yet, the law on al-Hashd al-Shaabi was passed in the Iraqi Parliament decreeing that al-Hashd al-Shaabi will be a unit of the Iraqi army. This has raised some concerns that al-Hashd al-Shaabi might enter Tal Afar under the banner of the Iraqi army. Al-Hashd al-Shaabi's sectarian attitude cause worries for the fate of Tal Afar and Turkmens. In such a case, the balance in Tal Afar between the Sunni and Shia Turkmens would be shattered and

sectarian conflicts would occur among the Turkmens.

Leaving aside political disagreements and uniting over the fight against ISIS is vital for eliminating risks in Iraq. The Mosul operation has for the first time brought the Pashmarga and the Iraqi army together for a common cause and it has achieved success. Therefore, if the sides maintain their cooperation and solidarity in the post-ISIS period, success in counterterrorism, stability and security will be easier to achieve. This will bridge the rifts in Iraq. A critical point in the fight against ISIS is the maintenance of security in the liberated areas and preventing their capture once again. The continuity of the anti-ISIS operations must be ensured. Lasting operations require a high level of coordination among the actors fighting against the ISIS.

Moving the struggle beyond the national borders will be useful for reinforcing security and stability in Iraq. In addition to the international coalition, a regional cooperation model in which all Iraqi actors will take place for the fight against ISIS is needed. At the same time, cooperation and solidarity on local level is likely to bear fruit as well. The Iraqi government has sought cooperation and agreement with Sunni tribes in the provinces of Anbar, Diyala and Salahaddin under partial ISIS invasion, which are at odds with the terrorist organization. For example, a united anti-ISIS front has been set up in Salahaddin by the tribes Juburi, Liheib, Quways, Obaidi, Israwi and Habesh. Yet there is also the risk that geographical factors contribute to conflicts among the groups in the post ISIS period; therefore it is of vital importance to ensure the harmony among different factions.

It should be kept in mind that the mentality of ISIS has taken root in Iraq. It is indeed a fact that the ISIS mentality has started to grow after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Since 2003, the terrorist group is known through several different names

and has been receiving considerable local support. In this context, integrating Sunnis to the political life is of utmost importance. As things stand currently, the Sunni people's demonstrations and demands before the ISIS advance must be taken into consideration and sectarian attitudes and vengeance motives must be avoided. In order to annihilate the ISIS, its root causes must be addressed, since Nouri al Maliki's oppression of the Sunnis caused the resurgence of the ISIS. In addition to the military measures, the fight against ISIS requires social, political and economic reforms aimed at the social, political and even economic factors that lie beneath the rise of the ISIS in the Sunni regions.

In this context, actors in the Iraqi domestic politics should take into consideration the demands about an administrative reform which loosens the federal system in Iraq and grants more autonomy to the Sunnis at least in their own regions. Also related to that is Prime Minister Abadi's government's plan aimed at forming a "National Guard" for each province that would recruit local people. Yet, non-Shiite groups in Iraq are worried about the proliferation of militia groups. Their main concern is that increasing militia groups would weaken the control and power of the central government. Therefore, the lack of a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism could make way to other dynamics of confrontation even after ISIS is annihilated.

In addition, continuing political crisis and instability in Iraq poses risks for the fight against the ISIS. Prime Minister Abadi is still under great political pressure and the reforms he promised are still not passed. As discussions for a cabinet reshuffle became prevalent, the Interior Minister resigned after the terrorist bombing in Baghdad in July 2016, and the Ministers of Finance and Defence were discharged due to corruption allegations. Since security issues form the foundation of the fight against ISIS, the vacant top posts in the security-related ministries pose a serious risk. Nevertheless, each group has important internal problems in addition to the problems among the groups. In other words, the political parties of the social groups which have acted together until the 2014 elections have splintered. In this context, the groups lost the consensus within themselves in addition to the problems with other groups. Furthermore, the unresolved conflict between Arbil and Baghdad remains while the country is in dire economic straits. Economic problems further complicate the political problems. Therefore, political, economic and social reforms are direly needed for both Mosul and Iraq in the post-ISIS period. In this context, reconstruction of the regions cleared from the ISIS is needed as well as projects for political, social and economic integration, national consensus and cooperation.

