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THE SCENARIOS AWAITING POST-ISIS MOSUL

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While the operation to re-take Mosul is on the horizon, several important challenges need to be carefully addressed in order to ensure that not only the operation itself, but also the process to reconstruct Mosul in the post-ISIS era run smoothly. This policy brief discusses the roles that might be played by the parties involved and possible scenarios for Mosul in the post-ISIS era. After investigating the challenges and efforts in terms of the planning stage and the operation itself, three scenarios will be put forth for the future of Mosul, namely the re-imposition of the pre-ISIS rule in the governorate, the creation of Mosul region, and the dissolution of the province. Lastly, how involved parties' views differ over these different scenarios will be presented, followed by suggestions to devise a comprehensive long-term strategy.

As the final chapter of ISIS military control in Iraq's second largest city comes to its inevitable end, political observers and decision makers in the West and the Middle East have expressed concerns about the post-ISIS era. There is widespread conviction that the next chapter in Iraq's history will be filled with uncertainties and that the country might be heading for a future which is bleak and unpromising. The conflicting agendas so far of the parties expected to participate in the Mosul operations are partly responsible for some of the uncertainties in the post-ISIS period. There are several scenarios which may unfold after the expulsion of ISIS from Mosul: re-creation of the pre-2014 administration, turning Mosul governorate into a region by itself, and disintegration of Mosul along sectarian and ethnic lines. This policy brief first explains the

conflicting agendas of the various parties participating in the battle for Mosul. Then it discusses how these differences affect the possible scenarios which may happen in the post-ISIS period.

Conflicting Agendas

With respect to the post-ISIS Mosul, the central government wants to dictate the terms, the composition of the forces which will participate in the battle and the timing of the battle, and to re-impose the pre-ISIS Shiite dominated administration of 2014 in Mosul. The Kurdistan Regional Government's officials want the battle to be waged with a huge input from peshmerga forces, and to take territory from Mosul almost in all areas to the north, east, and north west.¹ The Sunni Arab inhabitants of the city and its surrounding districts to the south, which control the provincial administration councils, want its militia (*Hashd*

al-Watani) to be the only force entering the city after ISIS defeat. These councils have passed a resolution not to allow pro-Iranian *Hashd al-Shaabi* militias to enter the city.² There is concern that *Hashd* may commit sectarian cleansing similar to what happened in other predominantly Sunni populated regions taken back from ISIS. The Mosul-based al-Mutahedon parliamentary bloc has lately been calling for the creation of a federal/autonomous Mosul Region with a decentralized administration to provide self-rule for its various ethnic and religious components.

Planning the Battle

Although the US-led coalition is the main actor to plan the battle for Mosul, the battle seem to be administered by the Iraqi government, especially by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. During the last two months, some leading figures from

the US-led coalition against ISIS have been engaged in an intensive shuttle diplomacy between various groups trying to work out the details of the attack on Mosul. There was a heavy traffic of the coalition officials visiting Baghdad and Erbil. These included US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon, and Canadian Minister of National Defense, Harjit Singh Sajjan.³

Three issues have so far proved to be the most serious challenges for this battle: The nature of post-ISIS administration of the province and the the extent of the role that will be played by the peshmerga in the battle, and the *Hashd*'s participation which has been rejected by the Mosul Administrative Council. The Iraqi regular army and *Hashd* have succeeded in getting some significant achievements from previous battles. Drawing

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on this military successes, they insist on excluding peshmerga and Hashd-al Watani, Sunni militias, in Mosul. Hakim al-Zamily, the head of Security and Law Committee in Iraqi Parliament, stated that Mr. al-Abadi and the other Shi-ite leaders are worried that peshmerga would not withdraw from territories which they may capture during the battle.⁴

After a long and demanding period of negotiation and tough bargaining, some compromises were achieved, too. Masoud Barzani has signed a “memorandum of understanding” with

Pentagon on July 12, 2016. This MOU ensures peshmerga’s withdrawal from any territories which will be controlled during the battle.⁵ Behind the scene, the American officials, including Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have worked out a compromise between Barzani and the central government. This will include peshmerga’s participation in the battle to support the offensive, not lead it. On July 30, 2016, having met US military officials, Masoud Barzani stated: “Liberating Mosul is impossible without peshmerga. He also added that



peshmerga will take part in the operation, but they will not enter the city of Mosul.”⁶ According to Jabbar Yawer, the Chief of Staff of Kurdish Forces, Kurds will participate in the battle with 50,000 peshmerga.⁷

However, both Kurds and Shiite leaders have different readings of the arrangements which have been worked out so far and their relationship is plagued by a significant amount of distrust. As late as August 25, there were acrimonious exchanges between al-Abadi and Kurdish leaders. The former insists that peshmerga have to withdraw from all “the disputed territories” they have captured from ISIS. This has irritated the KRG officials. Mr. Shaik Jafar, a political bureau member and a top Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) military commander, stated: “we are not going to withdraw from any territories which have been liberated by Peshmerga’s blood.

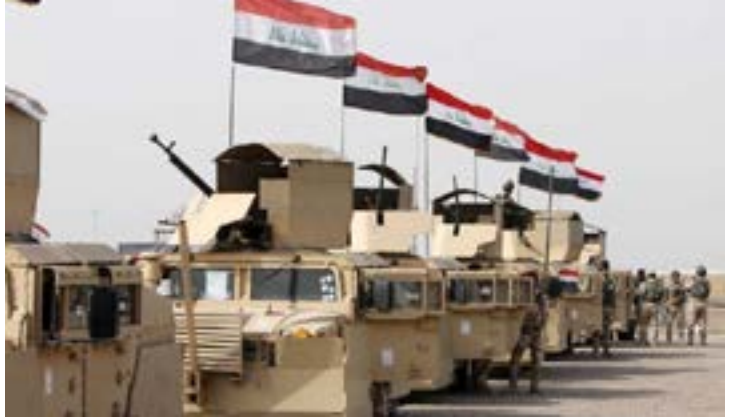
Al-Abadi forces could only come to our liberated territories over our dead bodies.”

⁸ This and similar other divergences would keep having a potential for future clash between Shiite forces and Kurds during the war and beyond.

As for the Hashd’s participation in the battle, al-Abadi was under a lot of pressure not to exclude them. In fact, Hashd have already sent units to the districts near Mosul, and regardless what the US and Iraqi officials have to say, arguably their role in this battle will not be any different from that of the previous battles in Salahaddin, Diyala, and Anbar. It is important to remember that their behavior in these battles have been condemned by several human rights organizations and categorized as quite close to the acts of “crime against humanity.”⁹

On August 13, 2016, Masoud Barzani, President

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of the KRG, hosted a joint meeting with Brett McGurk, US envoy for the global anti-ISIS coalition, and Falih al-Fayadh, Iraqi National Security Advisor. They discussed the latest progress regarding the preparation stage for the battle. The statement issued afterwards pointed to satisfaction with the level of cooperation between peshmerga and Iraqi forces.

Kurdish peshmerga are marching on the city from the west, east, and north. It is expected that the encirclement of Mosul to be completed by October. Government troops are engaged in fierce battles with the ISIS

south of the city, while US engineers and service men are busy upgrading an airbase in Qayyara, 40 KM south of Mosul, to serve as main military base for the Operation.

The Possible Scenarios for the post- ISIS Mosul:

One of the possible scenarios which al-Abadi and central government will try to impose is to recreate a system similar to that which existed in Mosul before ISIS takeover: to remain as a governorate with a Shiite-dominated state apparatus controlling it. This

scenario would unsurprisingly cause significant disagreements between them and the people of Mosul with Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish background, as well as the KRG. Both Usama al-Nujaifi, the leader of al-Mutahedon Sunni bloc, and the Mosul provincial council have already made it clear that they would not accept such a scenario. US General David Petraeus, Coalition Commanding Officer in Mosul, insists that any role to “Shia militias” in running the affairs of the city should be denied. He recommends an inclusive decentralized administration for the province to provide Mosul’s various religious and ethnic groups with some degree of self-rule.¹⁰ This is in agreement with al-Mutahedon proposal except for the fact that the latter calls for the creation of a region, not a governorate.

The second scenario calls for the creation of Mosul

Region. This option faces feasibility problem and legal challenges. The ethnic and religious components of the people of the province have no common political understanding about the future of their province. In general, some Turkmen groups with Shiite origin support central government to restore the pre-2014 Shiite-dominated administration in the province. For the most part, the Kurds and other religious minorities want either join KRG or to form a separate province of their own. Neither the Sunni Arab leaders have a unanimous voice to call for the creation of Sunni Arab region nor will the central government be willing to facilitate such a regime, which will empower Sunni Arabs. This scenario is only possible when the power equation changes in Iraq in favor of the Sunni Arabs. Iran and the central government have strictly objected such a scenario which may develop into a

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model for other Sunni provinces and empower them vis-à-vis Baghdad.

The third scenario is the dissolution of Mosul province in line with ethnic and religious lines into several smaller provinces. This scenario has been favored by KRG. The Kurds claim 15 out of Mosul's 23 districts which they regard as a part of the disputed territories must be under the KRG rule according to the article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. The religious communities such as Christians, Yezidis, Kakais, and Shabaks who live in Mosul plain have

been campaigning for years to be under KRG rule. The leaders of these communities have been attracted by the relatively more tolerant attitude of the Kurds compared to their previous experiences with the Sunni Arabs.¹¹ This scenario will face a stiff resistance from the central government which views the detachment of Mosul plain as a further step towards Kurdish independence. In fact, the Shiite groups have also managed to raise units for Hashd among the Shiite Turkmen, Shabak, and Yezidis.¹² These militias might challenge peshmerga



for power and influence after the defeat of ISIS.

Overall, it would be valid to argue that the arrangements which were so far agreed upon by the central government and the KRG could not avoid the inevitable clash in Mosul in the future. The KRG is taking part in the war to end ISIS threat posed to itself and to grab more territories up to the eastern part of Mosul city, in order to have some bargaining chip in future negotiation. Iraqi government has no plan other than re-imposing Maliki's administration in Mosul. This picture of divergent and clashing interests results in a significant amount of uncertainty for the post-ISIS Mosul. Unless the US-led coalition puts more pressure, which appears doubtful, Iraqi

government will go ahead to impose its own scenario in Mosul. Only an effective coalition presence in Mosul after the defeat of ISIS and the desire of the concerned parties for compromise will prevent another wave of bloody encounter in Mosul in the post-ISIS era.

Due to geographic proximity, good ties between Sunni leaders of Mosul and Turkey, historical, cultural and economic factors, the future of Mosul is bound to have strong ties with Turkey. In this light, it is also in Turkey's national interest to assist Mosul leaders to come up with a comprehensive long-term and acceptable formula to all concerned actors which will safeguard the rights of all sections of the people in the province, including Turkmens.

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