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Mosul: The Day After

Understanding the Strategic and Humanitarian Consequences of Defeating IS in Iraq

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Image: Alaa al-Marjani, REUTERS.

Abstract

Now the operation to liberate Mosul has begun, a number of key questions must be answered. Firstly, this report notes that for the sake of future unity, the Iraqi security forces must find a way to take control of the city without exacerbating sectarian tensions. Shi'a militias have been at the forefront of controversy in previous operations for bloody reprisals against Sunni civilians. Secondly, the report discusses the potential strategic map in Iraq after IS's territory is regained, and the paths the organisation may take in response to this. Finally, it raises questions over the preparedness of the authorities and organisations at play with regards to the humanitarian crisis which may result from the operation. With up to one and a half million internally displaced persons expected, this report studies the examples of previously-liberated Iraqi cities to understand what further needs to be done.

Introduction

Iraqi government forces, Shi'a militias and Kurdish Peshmerga are in the initial stages of the assault on Mosul. Statements from Iraqi Army spokesmen indicate that they aim to conclude the assault before the end of 2016. If successful, this would essentially be the end of IS as a territorial body in Iraq.

The assault does, however, bring to the fore a number of strategic and humanitarian issues. The multiple groups which make up the coalition against IS are preoccupied with internal struggles. While keen to maintain or improve their positions in post-conflict Iraq, each is unwilling to make concessions to the other. Shi'a militias, under the command of the government as Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), are accused of committing abuses and war crimes against Sunni civilians. The PMF make up a significant proportion of the coalition's capability in the fight for Mosul, a predominantly Sunni city. With two million civilians in the firing line, it is clear that significant emphasis must be placed on planning for both the strategic and humanitarian fallout of defeating IS in Iraq.

Pseudo-statehood

Islamic State represent the archetypal neo-jihadist project. This can be described in three main characteristics. Firstly, the move from defensive to offensive jihad - an active process of conquest and conversion, as opposed to the defence of the faith from external forces. Secondly, the coupling of extreme sectarianism with assumed jurisdiction over territory - acting as a pseudo-state in the absence of political institutions. Finally, the desire to control large areas of a specific region, as opposed to the global jihad encouraged by twentieth century jihadists. These three qualities distinguish IS from more traditionally

subversive groups, and they are tied strongly to pseudo-statehood. IS, and neo-jihadist projects more generally, lack the theological integrity of other groups, who follow a 1400 year tradition of the 'theory of Jihad'¹. It is therefore imperative that their politico-military achievements remain in the forefront of their appeal, due to the dearth of compliance with Islamist and jihadist structures. This objective of IS has become increasingly difficult to maintain, undermining the credibility of the organisation. A steady advance by coalition troops has wrested control of much of IS seized territory back into the hands of the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces. IS has been pushed out of all of Iraq's major cities, with the exception of Mosul, which is expected to fall in the near future.

Controlling territory is therefore a key component of IS's credibility. Following the establishment of the supposed caliphate in 2014, affiliated organisations gained traction in fifteen other states, from Afghanistan to Libya. The highly successful campaign against IS in Iraq has threatened to undermine this progress. However, the war in Syria has provided IS with a relatively safe haven to counteract these losses. The ease of movement of weapons and supplies, and less coordinated opposition has meant that until recently, IS has been able to dominate large portions of the country. In the past few months, highly organised Kurdish attacks in the north of Syria have recaptured thousands of square kilometres of territory, including some key strategic towns along the border with Turkey. This has been somewhat mitigated by small gains in the area surrounding Palmyra, and a fiercely fought contest in Aleppo where forces remain evenly balanced.

¹ IISA (2015), 'Neo-Jihadism: A new form of Jihad', <http://iisa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Neo-Jihadism-a-new-form-of-Jihad-full-paper-updated.pdf>

Fundamentally, IS's position in Syria is stronger than it is in Iraq. With the ability to control and administer territory a major pillar of IS legitimacy, it is likely that the organisation will prioritise maintaining a degree of territorial integrity through a pivot to the Syrian branch of the organisation. Funding and fighters could be supplied to the group and its affiliates, with the aim of tipping the balance in their favour. While the advance of US supported Kurds looks powerful, it is fraught with disagreements between the US, the Kurds, Russia and Turkey. Turkey, in its staunch opposition to any increase in Kurdish power, looks set to undermine some of the progress the Kurds have made in the western edge of Syria, and their involvement in future conflicts. This is the most significant intervention Turkey has conducted in decades, and the stakes are high. Its military power may be useful in defeating IS initially, but it would undoubtedly be followed by an attempt to consolidate its regional power and delegitimise any Kurdish claims for greater influence. In a country that has already become a battleground for various conflicting powers, this could allow IS to gain a greater foothold in Syria, and maintain their territorial ambitions.

Fallujah, Tikrit & Ramadi – Lessons to Learn

In order to avoid the sectarian violence which has too often characterised the liberation of Sunni urban centres, Iraqi forces and their American allies must be willing to change their tactics. An appraisal of previous operations to recapture Fallujah, Tikrit and Ramadi is necessary to understand and avoid past mistakes. Retaking Mosul without adequately mitigating the risks of accompanying sectarian violence and the impact on two million civilians living there will cause enormous problems for the future of Iraq. The issue is not one of simply removing IS from these cities, but rather ensuring that the Sunni population is dealt with sensitively. If not, as one Iraqi commander stated, IS would return, stronger, and under a different name.²

² George, S. (2016) 'After IS defeat, Fallujah victory takes on sectarian tones', *The Big Story*, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/1c4516b0391b45b596dffa8ea809d6da/after-iss-defeat-sectarian-fears-rise-iraqs-fallujah>

³ Doanvo, A. (2016). Murder and Militias - Iraq's Sunni-Shiite Plan After ISIS. *AntiWar.com*. [online] Available at: http://original.antiwar.com/anhvnh_doanvo/2016/07/22/murder-militias-iraqs-sunni-shiite-plan-isis/

⁴ George, S. (2016) 'After IS defeat, Fallujah victory takes on sectarian tones', *The Big Story*,

The experience of Fallujah is notable. During the American campaign in the early 2000s, it was seen as a hotbed for anti-government terrorist activity. The response to this by both American forces and the Iraqi administration deepened a sense of Sunni alienation and engendered further violent anti-government sentiment. The city, retaken from IS by a collaboration of American air

power and Iraqi government forces (one third of which were PMF³), was left in ruins by after over five weeks of intense fighting. Fallujah was liberated by the end of June this year, but at great human cost. Since the end of the fighting, the UN has received reports from fleeing civilians of abuses perpetrated by Shi'a militiamen in the city. Officially, it was agreed that the Shi'a militias would not enter the city centre out of respect for the Sunni majority population⁴. The fact that this agreement had to be put in place is indicative of the challenge posed by the PMF. The government either feared that Shi'a militias could not be trusted in the predominantly Sunni city; or alternatively, believed that the perception of Iran-backed Shi'a militias being given freedom of operation in Sunni areas would be destructive to future reconciliation attempts. Which of these was the primary concern is somewhat irrelevant: both serve to illustrate the risks associated with allowing the militias to expand their power. Nevertheless, reports indicate that this agreement remained unenforced; Shia soldiers, flags, graffiti and slogans were seen throughout the city⁵. Human Rights Watch (HRW) have confirmed reports of PMF troops abusing and killing fleeing Sunni civilians during the operation in addition to demolishing buildings and restricting the movements of people fleeing the violence.⁶ It is clear that the PMF, while obviously providing assistance to the Iraqi government, are contributing to increased anti-Shia, anti-Government sentiment. Afzal Ashraf, a former counterterrorism strategist for US operations in Iraq, questions why they are needed at all, given the extent of US and

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/1c4516b0391b45b596dffa8ea809d6da/after-iss-defeat-sectarian-fears-rise-iraqs-fallujah>

⁵ Mansour, R. (2015). From Militia to State Force: the Transformation of al-Hashd al-Shaabi. *Diwan, Carnegie Middle East Centre*. [online] Available at: <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/61986> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

⁶ Human Rights Watch, (2016). Iraq: Fallujah Abuses Test Control of Militias. *Human Rights Watch*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/09/iraq-fallujah-abuses-test-control-militias> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

Iranian support.⁷ It appears that the liberation could have been achieved without the Shi'a militias, avoiding the violence and ongoing resentment which may linger in Iraqi politics indefinitely. The actions of the PMF are not limited to Sunnis either; A leading humanitarian organisation told IISA that their staff were constantly harassed by the Shi'a militias and they continue to operate under threats to the safety of their personnel.

Operations in Tikrit and the surrounding areas also saw PMF abuses that may foreshadow events to come in Mosul. A HRW report found that after the battle for Amerli, a precursor to the assault on Tikrit, Shi'a fighters systematically destroyed and looted Sunni buildings, businesses and homes. It also documented the abduction of at least eleven men, with villagers reporting many more missing.⁸ US officials had admitted their concern that similar events could take place in Tikrit,⁹ where Shi'a militias vastly outnumbered Iraqi Security Forces.

However, the desire to take the city at all costs superseded the need for farsighted planning. Retired Marine General John Allen, US special envoy to the coalition, stated: 'Iraq's future as a unified nation depends upon how the liberating force treats those living under Daesh rule.'¹⁰

Despite this, Shi'a militias were still able to operate with relative impunity: the Iraqi government denied any patterns of violence perpetrated by the groups¹¹, and American officials still provided support and training, distancing themselves instead of condemning the violence. This essentially sanctioned the violence, a move which Amnesty International describes as

having the potential to tear the country apart.¹² Predictably, reports of lootings and extra-judicial killings did surface in the aftermath of the fight for Tikrit. Though questions were raised regarding the identities of the perpetrators, the crimes were committed with the assistance of the PMF^{13 14}. Whether the PMF were active or merely complicit in these crimes, trust in their ability to conduct themselves respectfully is distinctly lacking. Mr al-Nujaifi told us "I do not feel confident that these forces would be disciplined in their fight to liberate Mosul."

Recruitment as a consequence of 'liberation'?

The 'liberation' of the above-mentioned cities was more of a symbolic liberation than a literal freeing of the population. The extent of the damage to property and public buildings and the risks associated with unexploded

“I do not feel confident that these forces would be disciplined in their fight to liberate Mosul”

bombs and remnants of the battle has left thousands of people displaced from their homes. The precarious position of IDPs could hold the key to the future of IS. Testimony has surfaced from IDPs indicating that many of them believe coalition forces to be as bad as IS for persecuting Sunnis and destroying their livelihoods. Unhelpful comments by various Iraqi elites including Prime Minister al-Abadi, implying that neutrality towards IS is tantamount to supporting them¹⁵, alienates many Sunnis and allows IS to portray itself as

“Shia extremist militias kidnapped 1400 men who were trying to flee the military operations in Fallujah. They are still missing.”

⁷ Ashraf, A. (2016) 'What success would look like in Fallujah', *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/05/success-fallujah-160531060907776.html>

⁸ Human Rights Watch, (2015). *After Liberation Came Destruction: Iraqi Militias and the Aftermath of Amerli*. [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: http://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2015_reports/Iraq_Amerli/ [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

⁹ Brannen, K. (2016) 'What Happens When the Fighting Stops?', *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/18/what-happens-when-the-fighting-stops/>

¹⁰ Allen, J. (2016) in Brannen, K., 'What Happens When the Fighting Stops?', *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/18/what-happens-when-the-fighting-stops/>

¹¹ Nashashibi, S. (2016) 'The risks of mishandling the Tikrit offensive', *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/risks-mishandling-tikrit-offensive-150311051311135.html>

¹² Amnesty International (2016) 'Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq', https://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute_impunity_iraq_report.pdf

¹³ Afghanistan Times (2015), 'What really happened in Tikrit after ISIL fled', <http://afghanistantimes.af/what-really-happened-in-tikrit-after-isil-fled/>

¹⁴ Arango, T. (2015) 'After Wrestling Tikrit from ISIS, Iraqi Face Sectarian and Tribal Tensions', *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/world/middleeast/tikrit-wrested-from-isis-sectarian-challenges-persist.html?_r=0

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch (2016), 'Iraq: Prevent Militia Reprisals in Tikrit Fighting', <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/03/iraq-prevent-militia-reprisals-tikrit-fighting>

the defender of Sunni rights. Even if the Mosul operation is successful and IS is defeated sectarian narratives like these may drive vulnerable IDPs into the arms of whatever survives. One and a half million Sunnis, expelled from their homes by rampant Shi'a militias, could find themselves making a difficult choice.

That these abuses have had an effect on popular Sunni opinions of the PMF and wider coalition forces is dear. Atheel al-Nujaifi, the former governor of Mosul and now leader of the Sunni militia Hashd al-Watani, has argued that many Sunnis believe that should the 'Hashd al-Shaabi Shi'ite militia [PMF] come to Mosul, they will avenge and torture them'.¹⁶ He does not appear to be alone in these fears. Citing recent abuses in Fallujah, other Sunni leaders have also criticised atrocities committed by Shi'a militias and warned of the alienating effect their actions are having on Iraqi Sunnis.¹⁷ These feelings regarding PMF involvement in recapturing Mosul were very recently paralleled in Anbar where a number of tribes opposed the involvement of Shi'a militias on the grounds that they would commit human rights violations just as they had done in Salah al-Din province.¹⁸ These fears were sadly confirmed when later in the Anbar campaign Suhaib al-Rawi, the provincial governor, announced a committee recommendation that Abadi command PMF units to withdraw from areas around Fallujah following reports of abuse.¹⁹

Accurately judging opinions of the ISF and PMF by the general Sunni populace is obviously more difficult. However, recent surveys performed by the polling

company IIACSS suggest that in general the rise of the PMF has been met with suspicion and fear by Iraqi Sunnis. A national poll conducted in February 2016 recorded that 93% of Sunni respondents said they were concerned by Shi'a militias in Sunni areas. Of the 120 Sunni respondents in Mosul, 74% said they did not want to be liberated by the ISF on its own while 100% claimed they did not wish the city to be liberated by Shi'a militias. National polls conducted also showed that for 42% of Iraqi Sunnis asked, their top concern was that Shi'a militias might take revenge on local civilians.²⁰

While many Sunnis are clearly worried about PMF abuses and the role that Shi'a militias will play in the Mosul campaign, it remains unclear how far this works to IS's benefit. Atheel al-Nujaifi has argued that if it comes down to a choice between IS and the PMF, some Sunnis may feel that fighting alongside IS is a better option.²¹ In Anbar, resentment and fear of PMF predation helped boost IS's appeal and allowed the group to promote the idea that it was the protector of the Sunni community, obtaining pledges from a number of tribal leaders to fight with the group or at the very least remain neutral.²² Furthermore, according to Iraqi officials, before the recapture of Fallujah, IS informed many residents that the government assault would result in sectarian slaughter.²³ Exactly how much support this new IS guise as guardians of Iraqi Sunnidom generates remains unknown, but playing on Sunni fears and advertising PMF abuses is certainly becoming a popular tool of the group.

¹⁶ Rudaw, (2016). Iraq: Ex-Mosul governor: Many prefer ISIS to Shiite militia for fear of revenge and abuse. *Rudaw*. [online] Available at: <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/08062016> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

¹⁷ Mansour, R., (2016). *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq*. [online] Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_59_Mansour_Sunni_Final.pdf [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

¹⁸ El-Hamed, R. (2015). Ramadi and the Debate Over Shia Militias in Anbar. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. [online] Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/60168> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].; Saadoun, M. (2016). Fallujah residents fear abuse from Popular Mobilisation Units liberators. *Al Monitor*. [online] Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/iraq-fallujah-liberation-pmus-violations.html> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

¹⁹ Saadoun, M. (2016). Fallujah residents fear abuse from Popular Mobilisation Units liberators. *Al Monitor*. [online] Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/iraq-fallujah-liberation-pmus-violations.html> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

[monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/iraq-fallujah-liberation-pmus-violations.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/iraq-fallujah-liberation-pmus-violations.html) [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

²⁰ al-Dagher, M. and Kaltenthaler, K. (2016). Why Iraqis living under the Islamic State fear their liberators. *The Washington Post*. [online] Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/04/11/why-iraqis-living-under-the-islamic-state-fear-their-liberators/> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

²¹ Rudaw, (2016). Iraq: Ex-Mosul governor: Many prefer ISIS to Shiite militia for fear of revenge and abuse. *Rudaw*. [online] Available at: <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/08062016> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

²² El-Hamed, R. (2015). Ramadi and the Debate Over Shia Militias in Anbar. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. [online] Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/60168> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

²³ Naylor, H. and Salim, M. (2016). In fighting ISIS, Iraq's Shiite militias could ignite a sectarian mess. *The Washington Post*. [online] Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-fighting-isis-iraqs-shiite-militias-threaten-to-ignite-a-sectarian-mess/2016/06/02/1eb8b1a0-28d5-11e6-8329-6104954928d2_story.html [Accessed 3 Oct. 2016].

What next for IS?

Should IS be unable to continue their pseudo-statehood in Syria, it is likely that the group will continue to exist in a more traditionally subversive manner. It has already been noted that as IS territory has diminished, suicide attacks and intimidation have been on the rise, both in the region and in Europe^{24,25}. This tactical development, caused by a shortage of manpower and territory, is far more similar to the type of jihad understood by the West since the Global War on Terror began; covert operations with the intention of breeding terror instead of controlling territory. In an interview with IISA, ex-governor of Mosul Atheel al-Nujaifi stated clearly: “I think ISIS ideology and fighters will stay after being driven outside Nineveh. They would re-organise themselves somewhere in the desert. ISIS, AQ and other extremist groups will stay unless we address the root causes of radicalisation”. He further added that while Mosul holds symbolic value to IS, and will be a massive blow to their operation, he is confident that they will adapt to survive. IS, he said, is versatile and cross-border: “I don’t think losing cities will end these groups”.

What next for Iraq? Power struggles on the Coalition Side

Atheel al-Nujaifi is clear in what he prescribes to Iraq’s post-IS political structure. He described to us the need for “decentralisation tailored to address Iraq’s governance complexities”. Alon Ben-Meir, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Global Affairs, prescribes that this be achieved in the form of Sunni autonomous regions, following a Kurdish model.²⁶ With regional, sectarian and tribal divisions still so dominant in Iraqi society, these comments are pragmatic: the country likely faces a choice between decentralisation or break up. While this should go some way towards easing sectarian tensions, he also advocates an extensive counter-radicalisation programme to discourage young people from joining IS or similar extremist organisations.

However, it is not clear that all parties on the coalition side would be so supportive of this strategy. This would play well for the Kurds, whose regional government has been seeking greater powers for many years now, but Shi’a leaders may reject what can be read as a reduction in their power. The prime role that Shi’a militias have been allowed to play in the conflict may add a sense of entitlement to these daims. The collective strength of the PMF is now greater than that of the Iraqi Security Forces, and attempts by Prime Minister Abadi to appear in control have resulted in greater funding and integration of the PMF into the apparatus of the state.²⁷ It seems likely that with a divided government, the Shi’a militias could consolidate many of the gains they have achieved so far, to the detriment of sectarian peace.²⁸

To Mosul

Mosul represents a far graver issue for national unity than Fallujah and Tikrit, should mass reprisals against Sunnis occur. It is the second largest city in Iraq, comprising two million predominantly Sunni inhabitants. Its symbolic value as the capital of IS in Iraq raises concerns that should Shi’a militias wrest control of the city from the militants, it will be a Shi’a victory and not an Iraqi one, adding further fuel to the sectarian tensions.

For this reason, Shi’a forces cannot play a leading role in the assault. This move, already attempted unsuccessfully in Ramadi, must be effectively enforced in order to limit violence and provide the best possible opportunity for national unity. At this stage, it is largely symbolic – the images that surface from the successful campaign must be that of Iraqi flags flying in the centre of the city.

This is a realistic ambition. The coalition of Kurds, Iraqi forces and Shi’a militias has already swept through the surrounding towns and villages to great effect. Kurdish forces, who have stated their intention to stay outside the city in order to foster greater

²⁴ NATO (2016) ‘Understanding the changing tactics of so-called Islamic State’, <http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2016/Also-in-2016/tactics-isil-fighters-goal/EN/index.htm>

²⁵ Abi-Habib, M. (2016) ‘Islamic State Shifts Tactics, From War-Fighting to Suicide Bombing’, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-shifts-tactics-from-war-fighting-to-suicide-bombing-1463181100>

²⁶ Ben-Meir, A. (2016) ‘Defeating ISIS and Ending Sunni-Shiite War in Iraq’, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alon-benmeir/defeating-isis-and-ending_b_11219328.html

²⁷ Mansour, R. (2015) ‘From Militia to State Force: the Transformation of al-Hashd al-Shaabi’, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/61986>

²⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit (2016) ‘Shia militias threaten the state’, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1843998368&Country=Iraq&topic=Politics>

“Iraq needs political restructuring... decentralisation”

harmony²⁹, have control of many of the routes into the city. They have a significant role to play in the build-up to and initial phases of the operation, but must exercise control in order to balance the various political factors at play. The Shi'a militias must take a similar task in order to give the maximum opportunity to rebuild the country after IS has been defeated.

Difficult decisions must be made. The Shi'a militias have been afforded greater influence than either the Iraqi government or US administration would have desired. It is absolutely imperative that this is not allowed to continue: if it does, Iraq will defeat IS in name only.

The Humanitarian Effects of the Assault on Mosul

An estimated 1.5 million people are expected to be displaced following the anticipated siege on Mosul by a coalition of Iraqi troops, US forces, Kurdish Peshmerga and Shi'a militias. The humanitarian consequences of such a potentiality of mass displacement must be thoroughly deliberated in order to understand the extent of its impact on the social and political conditions of Iraq altogether. By analysing the statistics of involuntary movement and caused by the siege of Fallujah, and through the primary accounts of Iraqi political figures such as Atheel al-Nujaifi, this section of the report will analyse how the conditions of a siege can contribute to an increase in internal humanitarian strife in Iraq, particularly within the context of mass civilian displacement.

IDPs and Fallujah - Lessons to learn

The Battle of Fallujah was an offensive launched in Fallujah on the 22nd May 2016; three months after the initial siege conducted by government forces and a rebellion of local Sunni residents against IS in al-Karmah and Fallujah. According to Lieutenant-General Abdelwahab al-Saadi, "Iraqi forces entered Fallujah under air cover from the international coalition, the Iraqi air force and army aviation, and [were] supported by artillery and tanks"³⁰. The counter response of Islamic State was one consisting

of 'booby-traps', or improvised explosive devices to be more exact. Speaking to Middle East Eye, the commander of a group of fighters with the Iraqi paramilitary forces, identified by Suadad al-Salhy as 'Muntadhar', stated that "the land is totally planted [with roadside bombs]. Even the grass is linked to wires ... Most of our casualties have come from booby-traps; we stopped defusing them and our new orders are to blast them"³¹. From the onset, one can regard the battle to have been destructive to the entire infrastructure of the city; both in a physical sense and in regards to the detriment of civilian life. It is no surprise how such conditions of conflict and danger have compelled civilians to leave the city in order to safeguard themselves and their families from any threat. Within the first ten days of executing 'Operation Breaking Terrorism', footage emerged showing citizens of Fallujah crossing the Euphrates River in order to leave the besieged city³². It was estimated that more than 350 families attempted to cross the river, particularly after Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi cited concerns that IS could use residents as human shields against the incoming Iraqi forces' anti-IS offensive³³.

The humanitarian consequences of such fierce dashes involving coalition forces, the Iraqi government, Shi'a militias and the Islamic State are considerable³⁴. Approximately 40km west of Baghdad are the camps of Amiriyat al-Fallujah, hosting thousands of displaced Iraqis who have fled from various parts of the al-Anbar province. According to a report published on the 16th June 2016 by the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 42,000 Iraqis have been displaced since the beginning of the military operations in May in Fallujah. WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Ala Alwan, reported that "the health situation inside and around Fallujah is deeply worrying ... We are

“Winter is coming soon making life conditions in refugees' camps much harder.”

²⁹ Mustafar, J. (2016) in 'Peshmerga official: we will not enter Mosul, only Kurdish land', *Rudaw*, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/240920161>

³⁰ Al-Jazeera, *Iraqi forces intensify assault against ISIL in Fallujah*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/iraqi-army-launches-assault-isil-fallujah-160530053337977.html>

³¹ Middle East Eye, *Iraqi forces battle IS booby-traps, car bombs in fight for Fallujah*, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraqi-forces-battle-booby-traps-car-bombs-battle-fallujah-1290884422>

³² INP+,

https://twitter.com/INP_PLUS/status/738655759584628736/photo/1.

³³ Middle East Eye (2016), *WATCH: families in Fallujah risk Euphrates crossing to flee IS*, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/watch-families-fleeing-risk-lives-crossing-river-fallujah-1186460912>

³⁴ al-Marjani, A. (2016), *Shi'ite fighters and Iraqi security forces fire artillery during clashes with Islamic State militants near Fallujah, Iraq*, in *Reuters*. <http://pictures.reuters.com/archive/MIDEAST-CRISIS-IRAQ-IRAN-FALLUJA-SIAETGVVLAB.html>

concerned about the low immunity status of children ...[and] coupled with poor hygiene conditions [this] raises the risk of disease outbreaks, such as measles. Additionally, it is estimated that hundreds of pregnant women are trapped in Fallujah and are in urgent need of reproductive health services”³⁵. Such conditions raise a pertinent concern in regards to the potential humanitarian outcomes of the anticipated siege in Mosul. The expected volume of IDPs is enormous, their movements unpredictable and the strain on international aid organisations and the local government to deal with the sudden influx is significant. For example, according to the International Organisation for Migration, between the dates of 22nd May 2016 and 13th June alone, approximately 10, 458 individuals (1, 758 families) have fled the Fallujah district, arriving mainly to Amiriyat al-Fallujah. The IOM reports that it has been “assisting displaced persons from Fallujah, the majority in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, through the distribution of more than 3,600 non-food items kits. These kits include lightweight summer blankets, towels, plastic mats, a cool book, rechargeable fan... a hygiene kit, first aid kit, and sewing kit”³⁶. Nevertheless, what has been made clear through witness testimonies on international news platforms is the inability of the government and various international organisations to respond rapidly and effectively to such an excessive need for protection. Um Anwar, a former resident of Fallujah who fled with her family to Amiriyat al-Fallujah following the dashes between the coalition forces and Islamic State, accounts to Al-Jazeera’s Salam Khoder the difficulties that have faced her and her family in the camps; “we have been sleeping out in the open for days now ... My four daughters and I take turns in sleeping during the night. Two of us have to stay up watching while the rest of us fall into sleep. This is the only way to ensure no one is coming our way during the night. They told us that they had no tents to spare us one as a family”³⁷.

³⁵ United Nations Iraq (2016), *WHO expresses concern over disease outbreak in response to Fallujah crisis*, http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=5784:who-expresses-concern-over-disease-outbreaks-in-its-response-to-fallujah-crisis&Itemid=605&lang=en

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Khoder, S (2016), *Iraq: Fallujah’s displaced endure ‘inhuman’ conditions*, in *Al-Jazeera*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/iraq-fallujah-displaced-endure-inhuman-conditions-160621102739398.html>

³⁸ Norwegian Refugee Council (2016), *Desperate situation for civilians fleeing Fallujah*, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2016/juni/press-release-fallujah/>

Another aid organisation of significant physical importance in assisting IDPs who have fled Fallujah since the beginning of the siege is the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Cited in various media reports, the NRC have stated the necessity for effective coordination and camp management in areas such as Amiriyat al-Fallujah to alleviate the harsh conditions facing IDPs fleeing the siege in Fallujah. Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the NRC, stated that “we have a humanitarian disaster inside Fallujah and another unfolding disaster in the camps”³⁸. The NRC’s press release continued that “thousands fleeing the cross-fire after months of besiegement and near starvation deserve relief and care, but our relief supplies will soon be exhausted. The humanitarian community needs immediate funding to avoid a completely avoidable disaster on our watch”³⁹. Alongside the NRC, the United Nations Human Rights Chief in the same week urged the Iraqi government to “take immediate measures to ensure that all people fleeing the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-occupied city of Fallujah are treated in strict accordance with international human rights and international humanitarian laws”⁴⁰. The actions of the PMF further compound the risk to IDPs. According to a statement by Anbar councilman al-Muhamidi on the 6th June 2016, “The Popular Mobilisation Forces illegally detained 605 people ... They tortured many of them [and] five people died from the torture”⁴¹. Two days later a press release was issued by Amnesty International echoing this and demanding that Iraqi authorities rein in Fallujah forces amid allegations of torture and deaths in custody. The perpetrators have, almost without exception, avoided trial. On September 7th 2016, the Anbar Provincial Council confirmed that groups linked to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were still detaining over 1,500 of the IDPs in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, “who have been held in poor conditions for more than four months based on suspicions of their involvement with ISIS”⁴². The council “condemned the ISF for their failure to release innocent detainees despite their having what they

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ UN News Centre (2016), *Civilians fleeing Fallujah ‘facing double-jeopardy’ – UN rights chief*, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54153#.WADtmPmANBd>

⁴¹ George, S. (2016), *Allegations of human rights violations in Fallujah fight*, in *The Big Story*, Associated Press, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/9bbb432f0d474e94ad59f6b006ab5f55/aid-group-says-shooting-civilians-fleeing-fallujah-battle>

⁴² Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor (2016), *ISHM: September 2 – 15, 2016*, <http://www.epic-usa.org/ishm78/>

termed a complete database of persons involved in ISIS in the Anbar province, and called on leaders to accelerate the investigation and release those known to be innocent”⁴³.

With the conditions of malnutrition, lack of adequate shelter and reported cases of human rights violations occurring within the refugee camps of internally displaced peoples following the Fallujah siege, it is evident to see the absence of an effective international and local support system providing consistent

protection to IDPs within Iraq. In an interview conducted by IISA, the former governor of the Nineveh Province Atheel al-Nujaifi commented on the failure of the Iraqi government to protect

IDPs. He stated that the “Iraqi government has dedicated very little resources to help IDPs in general. We do not expect the situation to change with Mosul. [The] Iraqi government will have minimal role in helping IDPs – similar to its role with IDPs from other cities”. He continues by mentioning the 1,500 IDPs kidnapped by Shi’a militias working alongside the ISF, reminding us that they are still in fact missing. This raises the question of whether the anticipated siege of Mosul will entail the same conditions of humanitarian strife as that seen in Fallujah. Given the already strained resources of non-governmental humanitarian-aid organisations and local provincial political entities in coping with the influx of displaced peoples, it is possible that one of the principle outcomes of the siege on Mosul will be the creation of an even bigger crisis of dislocation within the Iraqi nation-state. The lack of sufficient funding for aid organisations and the paucity of accountability by the national government and its military forces to the international community offers a damning insight into the distressing future for civilians fleeing conflict in Mosul.

Mosul – Anticipating crisis

There is no way of knowing for sure how many people will be displaced from Mosul. Based on the experience of previously liberated cities, the majority of people are likely to stay in the city during the fight. The

difficulty is that preparations have been made for the best case scenario, involving approximately 200,000 IDPs. If Shi’a militias play a key role in the assault, fear of reprisal against Sunnis will likely cause a mass exodus from the city. This would leave the humanitarian response woefully underprepared.

According to Humanitarian Response (.info), a specialised digital service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “as many as 1.2 to 1.5 million civilians are likely to require protection and assistance once the military operations to retake Mosul begin”⁴⁴. Published in support of the operations conducted by the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the report details the potential movement of Mosul’s citizens following the start of the siege, including estimates as to where the vast majority of the displaced will migrate to; the report also elaborates that once the operations begin, the displacement is expected to be “either cumulatively over time, or suddenly and en-masse”⁴⁵. The limitation of OCHA’s report in estimating the volume in which the flows of migration are anticipated to occur causes significant setbacks in regards to the efficacy of preparation prior to the siege. The disconcerting tone of probability embedded in the ‘either, or’ disposition towards Mosul’s civilian displacement is a harsh reminder of the inability of humanitarian-aid organisations and response units to provide adequate equipment, healthcare and shelter due to the unpredictability of movement. One only needs to regard the conditions of IDP camps during the Fallujah siege to remind oneself of the volatility of forced migration and the consequent insecurity of foreseeing the number of people fleeing and towards which area.

Nonetheless, OCHA predicts that “the majority of the newly displaced families are moving towards areas under the control of the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government”⁴⁶. In a report conducted by the Office overseeing the displacement occurring throughout the continuing siege on the Mosul corridor, the above prediction is fortified through statistics that over 36,000 displaced peoples (IDPs) have already taken up temporary residence in Makhmur in the Erbil Governorate, under the control of the Kurdish Regional

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Humanitarian Response (2016), https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/mosul_flash_appeal_final_web.pdf p1

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p1

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p2

“The Iraqi government has dedicated very little resources to help IDPs”

Government, as well as approximately 2,000 (180 families) in an Iraqi Security Forces controlled camp in the liberated Tinah village⁴⁷. Witness testimonies from various camps containing IDPs from the Mosul corridor explain the difficulties facing dislocated civilians during these sieges against Islamic State within Iraq. In the IOM's Mosul updates, published in September 2016, an account by an Iraqi displaced person named Um Nour is disclosed. Explaining how she fled with her family from Nineveh in early September, Um Nour recounts how they had "cars and equipment, but has to leave everything behind. We only brought water, and carried our youngest children, who are one and two years old"⁴⁸.

Given the already displaced 100,068 people from the Mosul corridor since the start of the Mosul Liberation Operations in Salah al-Dain and Nineveh on the 16th June 2016⁴⁹, the anticipations of displacement from the Iraqi government, the Kurdish Regional Government, and the international community are not disproportionate. In a flash update by UNHCR on the situation in Mosul on 11th October 2016, 64,000 have been recorded as displaced from Mosul and surrounding areas since March 2016⁵⁰. Out of a USD 196.2 million of funding necessary for the Mosul emergency response, approximately 33% of the sum has been met. These funds have been considered vital in order to support UNHCR's expansion of capacity to cover Nineveh with mobile protection monitoring teams, as well as the establishment of more emergency sites suitable for camps⁵¹. The necessity for international humanitarian-aid organisations to financially prepare for the upcoming siege is not unjustified. As seen in previous accounts of conditions in camps such as Amiriyat al-Fallujah, the international community is not always able to provide adequate networks of support for IDPs in Iraq. Within the camps created as a response to the operations along the Mosul corridor alone, reports have already

emerged about the inadequate conditions in which IDPs are forced to survive. A report published by the International Medical Corps on the Tinah camp in the Nineveh Governorate on September 21st 2016 recalls the lack of effective protection offered to newly arrived families in the village; "it is dear that there are no protection actors operating in the camp and in the village in general ... As for the household conditions, the shelters afford minimal protection from heat or cold. Some women complained how difficult it was to have children sleep at night due to inadequate blankets. Similarly, the thin material of the shelter does not provide protection from perpetrators"⁵².

The operation to liberate Mosul and the surrounding areas (the corridor) has been ongoing for three months, and is likely to produce the single largest, most complex humanitarian operation in the world this year. The signs for Mosul's residents are not positive, given the fact that the coalition operations in the Mosul corridor alone have had a colossal impact on the displacement of Iraqi civilians. In the recent week, in preparation for the coalition forces entering and liberating Mosul two fundamental new developments have occurred within the international community that will have significant impact on the humanitarian condition of IDPs from Mosul. On the 10th October 2016, the IOM, "at the request of the Government of Iraq and in collaboration with the Humanitarian Coordinator, has agreed to construct emergency sites in Nineveh governorate. These will eventually provide shelter for up to 200,000 civilians who may be displaced in the first weeks of the military operations⁵³. A contact within a major NGO expects that the majority of civilians will remain in the city, in a similar pattern to previously liberated cities. Therefore these emergency

"If extremist Shia militias participate in the military operations in Mosul, the chances of massive waves of IDPs leaving Mosul are high."

⁴⁷ReliefWeb (2016), http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/tinah_a_sessment_report_21_sept_2016_shared_0.pdf p1

⁴⁸International Organisation for Migration (2016) https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/OM-Iraq-Mosul-Response-Update3-Sept-23-2016.pdf

⁴⁹ International Organisation for Migration (2016) https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/OM-Iraq-Mosul-Response-Update3-Sept-23-2016.pdf

⁵⁰ ReliefWeb (2016), <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Iraq%20Flash%20Update%20-%2011OCT16.pdf>

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²ReliefWeb (2016), http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/tinah_a_sessment_report_21_sept_2016_shared_0.pdf

⁵³ International Organisation for Migration (2016), <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-iraq-prepares-build-emergency-sites-expected-mosul-displacement>

camps could provide adequate protection. The intention of these 'emergency sites' is a quicker and more accessible establishment of support zones for IDPs than that offered by standard camps; the IOM reports that "the sites are designed to enable progressive improvements in order to meet and maintain minimum living standards based on the displaced context and timelines", and include services such as shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)⁵⁴.

However, further problems will arise if Shi'a militias are active in the assault, triggering a mass exodus for fear of reprisals. At this point, the plans in place currently will be distinctly lacking. Most importantly, Thursday 13th October marked an integral moment in regards to international, regional and national collaboration in alleviating the harsh conditions facing IDPs across Iraq. A tripartite protocol, or a Memorandum of Understanding, was signed by the Kurdish Regional Government, the Iraqi Government and the UN "aimed at limiting the displacement of civilian populations during an anticipated operation to recapture Mosul from Daesh"⁵⁵. In an interview given to the IISA, a representative of a leading humanitarian organisation, operating in areas close to Mosul, expressed frustration at the lack of coordination between the regional and federal government. While at the local level there was some preparation to accommodate current refugees, the source said that it is wishful thinking to assume that a new wave of refugees can be accommodated.

Our sources indicate that the most likely movement of people from Mosul will be to Kurdistan; the former governor of Nineveh comments that "the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have been very generous with IDPs. We are grateful to the KRG. [Potentially], a number of refugees (up to 300,000) may also head down to Saladin province". However other sources have told us that Saladin province is not ready to receive such a number as it is already struggling with the existing refugees. It is further expected that many people will stay in Mosul if possible, raising concerns about the provision of essential supplies within the city.

However, much can be learned from both the result of mass displacement in the siege of Fallujah earlier this year, as well as in the preliminary Mosul sieges conducted in the so-called 'corridor'. The

international community, the KRG, and the Iraqi Government have demonstrated a limited efficacy in protecting and resettling IDPs across the country; raising a pertinent question in regards to the current policies enacted by these entities in safeguarding the rights of IDPs. The conditions of camps such as Makhmur in Erbil Governorate and Amiriyat al-Fallujah in al-Anbar Governorate reflect the finite resources offered by the NGO/IGO community in alleviating the hardship of IDPs escaping siege. Malnutrition, lack of basic shelter and overcrowding have become household circumstances within the IDP camps of Iraq, with organisations voicing the need for more funding and support in providing basic infrastructure and materials for IDPs. Additionally, the dearth of governmental accountability and a centralised military system conducting counter-sieges against Islamic State within Iraq has led to allegations of human rights violations conducted against IDPs in camps. Public figures and international organisations lobbying against the ISF's detention of IDPs have been unsuccessful in organising their release from detention facilities, and reports of severe injury and death under ISF custody has stirred uncertainty in regards to the future conditions of vulnerable Iraqi citizens.

The IGO, regional and national responses to the IDP crisis, coupled with the likelihood that the Mosul siege will displace up to 1.5 million people, leaves the future of humanitarian action in Iraq in a very bleak state. Al-Nujaifi comments that although the international community, especially the United Nations, have been trying to help refugees as much as possible, the "resources dedicated by the UN & NGOs are limited – not enough to cover the needs of IDPs. The international community could definitely help more. People of the world should know more about the suffering of IDPs in tents". Thus it would not be excessive to assume that another mass-displacement from Mosul similar, on the basis of humanitarian conditions alone, will contribute to increased conditions of malnutrition, mistreatment, lack of effective shelter and an overall inadequate degree of protection and support for vulnerable peoples within Iraq. In order to break this systematic cycle of miscalculation and unpreparedness that has categorised much of the emergency response, there needs to be the establishment of a clear and obligation synthesis of accountability and action between the actors involved on the ground. The tripartite

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Ugurlu, S. (2016), <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/baghdad-krq-un-ink-deal-to-avoid-mosul-displacement/664448>

agreement between the UN, KRG and Baghdad is an integral step towards implementing this obligation to act. The Memorandum of Understanding allows for increased dialogue between focal actors within Iraq, as well as more financial fluidity between Erbil, Baghdad and international organisations, to allocate funds to develop better equipped and more accessible camps.

However the issue is not primarily about funds or the lack of it. The coordination between the UN and Iraqi government has been significantly slow. UN security laws etc. are a main source of the problem. UN did not have access to the sites where many refugees are expected to flee. It relied therefore on other organisations, Iraqi government and private security companies to collect information, a humanitarian organisation based on the ground told IISA.

It is also necessary to develop on the IOM's establishment of emergency centres across the predicted routes of displacement within the nation. The overcrowded nature of camps such as Amiriyat al-Fallujah, Tinah and Makhmur contribute to the impoverished conditions endured by its inhabitants, as well as the material and organisational strain put onto administrators of the camps. These emergency camps must also offer temporary relief for those en-route to other safe areas within Iraq, rather than forcing IDPs out of the battle and into despair.

Securing Iraq's Future

The situation facing Iraq in the aftermath of defeating IS will be challenging on a number of levels. It is clear that while the government and its allies may beat IS as an organisation, it will be more difficult to defeat its brand of jihad as an idea. It may relocate, but the violence will continue unless dealt with effectively. This task will be made all the more difficult if Shi'a militias are allowed continued disproportionate influence in the military and political future of the state. Allowing the continuation of sectarian bias will increase the likelihood of violence even after the defeat of IS. The addition of a humanitarian disaster of a huge scale, with millions of people displaced and housed in underfunded camps, will place greater strain on the resources and time of the Iraqi state. The government is placing itself in a perilous situation by underfunding efforts to house potential IDPs, and by lack of coordination and preparation and will regret it when further security problems manifest. The Iraqi state will not be able to enjoy security in its borders until the precarious position of these vulnerable people is improved. However, none of these problems

can be addressed at the expense of any other: a concerted effort to tackle the military threat must be coupled with an intense de-radicalisation programme, political reform and provision for IDPs. If this three-part strategy does not occur, IS and organisations like it will find Iraq to be ripe for the propagation of their ideas for years to come.