

# Emergency Briefing on Current Security Developments

## Middle East Research Institute (MERI)

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### Key Points Covered:

- Facts about the situation before and after the fall of Mosul
- Update on the situation in Tal Afar and Baiji
- Political aspects of the current situation
- Recent gains made by ISIS
- Peshmerga an Iraqi Army incidents
- The future of the Disputed Territories
- Impact of displaced people

*The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the view of The Middle East Research Institute (MERI). The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.*

## **Emergency Briefing on Current Security Developments**

The Middle East Research Institute (MERI) held an Emergency Briefing on 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, covering the ongoing security situation in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Invited were high-level Kurdish political and military representatives, members of the foreign consuls and a large section of the international press.

With the whole of Iraq being taken by surprise and the serious nature of the events, MERI felt it necessary to hold a series of briefing events so that a clearer picture of the situation on the ground could be provided.

The situation before and after the fall of Mosul was discussed. The group was briefed on the reality on the ground for Iraqi and Peshmerga forces. Political issues were also raised including the climate that contributed to the situation, the issue of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and the Kurdish role in the disputed territories. A brief overview of the core issues that were discussed and the points that were raised follows in this document.

The event was intended to brief those who already had strong background knowledge of the situation. The following points do not represent the view of the organisation, they are just issues that were raised during the course of the discussion. The organisation does not vouch for the truth or accuracy of any of the following points.

### **Key facts about the situation before the fall of Mosul:**

- Before the fall of Mosul, from Fishkhaboor to the South in Nafitkhana, the border between the KRG and Iraqi Army was 1050km long. The line crosses four Governorates, including Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Diyala. Cooperation Centres were in place in each of these provinces, plus numerous checkpoints (11 in Mosul, 6 in Kirkuk and few in Diyala) between Peshamrga and Iraqi Army forces. In addition to Cooperation Centres, there were direct lines of communication from each province to Baghdad.
- The Iraqi military had the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> Divisions and two federal police divisions in northern areas, many in the disputed territories. In the border area of Rabea, there were Iraqi border forces, combined with local police in all areas.
- Before the US withdrawal, there were four divisions of the US forces, totalling 16,000 soldiers. There were brigades in Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit and Nineveh.

### **Key facts after the fall of Mosul:**

- The Iraqi administration along the KRI border has collapsed. 1000km of the 1050km border between KRI and Iraq is now under ISIS control. The only area where the Iraqi army still has control is a 50km area in Nafitkhana.
- All the weapons in the area, two divisions of the police force and banks are controlled by ISIS. Weapons that have been lost to ISIS have included a whole range from AK-47s to heavy weapons. These include a new generation of advanced US weapons such as 50mm machine

guns. \$155 million worth of new US weapons that had only been in the country for the last month have been taken.

- The Iraqi Army had left all of their postings in the disputed territories including Talward near Riyad, Qaratapa in Diyala and Jalawla near Khanaqin. KRG forces stepped into Kurdish areas to fill the power vacuum and to prevent ISIS from entering the KRG and Kurdish areas in the disputed territories.
- In Tikrit the Iraqi Army are in control of the military airport, the civilian airport is under ISIS control. This now makes a total of two main airports and three landing areas now under ISIS control. In addition, 30 military bases have been captured including Ghazlaniya in Mosul and Camp Speicher.
- Currently the 5<sup>th</sup> Division of the Iraqi Army is in Diyala. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was in the disputed territories, but has now left.

### **Update on the situation in Tal Afar and Baiji:**

Tal Afar had full defence units, combined with support from the local population and military support from the Iraqi Armed Forces and air support. Currently, Tal Afar and its airport are under ISIS control.

Baiji, containing Iraq's biggest oil refinery, is controlled by the Iraqi Armed Forces. Heavily attacked by ISIS, but is being held. The 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division (the only brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division left) is holding Baiji.

### **Political aspects**

Political aspects of the situation were also covered in the discussion including the different political, social and economic factors contributed to the current situation and the impact on the future of Iraq. Key issues that were discussed included:

- There should have been a political solution that would have kept all members of Iraq happy. The political climate has changed over that last 8 years of Al-Maliki's rule. This has led towards a totalitarian regime. He has asserted full control over armed forces and government over the last two years. People in Sunni areas demanded rights and he used force against them. He demolished protest camps in Anbar. Rafi Al-Asawi was a technocrat and when Al-Maliki went after him there was no longer a chance of bringing the Sunnis on-board. If the situation was handled differently there may have been the possibility that it could have been contained.
- Ex-Baathists had been called back from countries they had fled to and had been put into military positions. It is believed that the intelligence that Al-Maliki was receiving was not the same as the facts on the ground. Evidently, Al-Maliki did not handle the situation. The KRG had urged the US to stay in Iraq. The US was the only intermediary between Erbil and Baghdad.
- Iraq had an estimated standing army of 800,000, but there was no loyalty to the Iraqi state. Rather, loyalty was to political groups or sects. Without the statement from Ayatollah Sistani the situation in the south would have been different.
- Disputes between the Iraqi Army and Peshmerga over the last year, specifically in Kirkuk, Khanaqin and in last July, Sinjar, had made relations worse. Kurdish representation in Iraqi Army is at the low figure of under 3%. Peshmerga had not been paid and trained like the

Iraqi forces. To pay the Peshmerga and government-worker wage bill, Kurdistan is now effectively forced to sell its own oil. The story has been focused on the selling oil not withholding of the budget.

## **ISIS**

The strength and ability of ISIS were discussed and the nature of their military successes were analysed:

- ISIS crossed the border in cars from Syria, nobody stopped them. Four divisions of the Iraqi Army totally and unexpectedly disintegrated. This shows that the ISIS expansion across Iraq was not a planned sequence of events. The way that events unravelled shows that ISIS were opportunistic.
- ISIS numbers attacking Mosul were initially 3,000. The numbers are reported to have increased. There are now at least 5,000 ISIS fighters and they are exponentially growing. The KRG is believed to be immune because there is no space for ISIS to grow. Currently there is thought to be no direct lines of communication between ISIS and the KRG. ISIS has the upper hand in the situation. It is aided by the fact that former Baathist groups are in control of certain areas and parts of Mosul.
- KRG warned Baghdad about the situation in Mosul before 10<sup>th</sup> of May. President Barzani had even sent messages to Maliki about the serious nature of the situation a year ago. However, by the time the Iraqi Army wanted Peshmerga support, it was too late. The city of Mosul fell.

## **Peshmerga and Iraqi Army incidents**

The recent issue of Iraqi armed forces firing on Peshmerga was raised:

- Total Peshmerga deaths since the fall of Mosul are 7, with 41 injured across Iraq.
- In the incident between Iraqi Army and Peshmerga, a helicopter injured 7. The most damage was done by artillery. The KRG immediately opened an investigation into the case. This led to an agreement that videos of the incident would be sent from Baghdad to Erbil to confirm the incident was unintentional.

## **Disputed territories**

The issue of Kurdish control of the disputed territories was also raised with differing opinions in relation to the constitution and specifically article 140.

- Areas covered by Article 140 of the Iraq constitution are now in Kurdish control. The Iraqi Military had disappeared. This left a vacuum, which had to be filled by either ISIS or Peshmerga. The Kurdish priority is to protect fringe areas. The KRG is the only government to take decisive action by moving Peshmerga into these fringe Kurdish areas.
- The constitution is considered as positive, however, it has been used selectively for political reasons. There has been a lack of commitment to Article 140. Some believe that the constitution is effectively dead, however, if it is still intact, Kurds can negotiate 140 with the disputed territories in their hands.
- The fact that Kirkuk is under Peshmerga control should not just be seen as a “land grab”. In Kirkuk there is an elected council so any change from Iraqi to Peshmerga forces will not be problematic. Nothing has changed in the city centre.

## **Displaced people**

The refugee and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) issue was raised including:

- 200,000 displaced people are in the KRI including 26,000 Christian families and 40,000 from Anbar. The estimate is 300,000.
- There is a potential risk with IDPs because they may support or be members of ISIS.
- Support is needed from the International Community for refugees. The KRG is not financially able to deal with the situation.

MERI is a newly registered independent, not-for-profit organisation, focused on policy issues relating to the people, the land and the system of governance in the Middle East in general, and Kurdistan and Iraq in particular. It is based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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