

## Briefing on Current Security Developments in Iraq

### Middle East Research Institute (MERI)

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#### Key Issues covered:

- Description of the current military situation
- Briefing on the KRI internal security situation
- Update on the status of Mosul
- Political and Economic issues affecting the KRG

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

## **Briefing on Current Security Developments in Iraq**

The Middle East Research Institute (MERI) held a Crisis Briefing on the 24<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 officials, representatives of the business community, members of the foreign consuls, and a large section of the international press.

Different factors in the ongoing crisis were discussed. A brief overview of the core issues that were discussed and the points that were raised follow in this document. The document is not a transcript of events and should not be treated as one. It outlines the core themes that were raised by speakers.

The key speakers at the event included:

- **General Jabar Yawar**, Secretary General, Ministry of Peshmerga
- **Mr Harry Schute**, Security Advisor, Ministry of Interior
- **Mr Safin Dizayee**, Spokesperson for the KRG
- **Mr Atheel Nujaifi**, Governor of Mosul

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 MERI, they are only issues that were raised during the course of the discussion. MERI does not vouch for the truth or accuracy of any of the following points.

### **Military update:**

- There are clashes between Peshmerga and ISIS forces in areas around Kirkuk, Rabea'a, Jalawla and Sa'adiyah. ISIS is now using new techniques. They are destroying the roads and the bridges around the areas they control. They have blown up the bridge between Kalar and Jalawla, and are trying to do the same between Jalawla-Khanaqin and Sinjar-Talafar. The military have currently been involved in fighting with terrorist groups in Baquba, which is 40km away from Baghdad. There is also an ISIS presence in Mahmodia, Taiji and Latifiya. This means that they are just 10km from Baghdad. There is information that they want to attack Hilla, which would allow them to surround Baghdad.
- ISIS is now intensifying their forces towards the south. They focused themselves at the Al-Qaim border area between Iraq and Syria and have now captured Al-Qaim. This is a historical area of great importance. It contains many large industrial factories that produce chemicals such as phosphates and sulphur, which can be used to manufacture explosives. There has also been movement towards the Trebeel border point. This is the main border with Jordan and is controlled by ISIS. Jordanian forces have brought large numbers of their troops into the area.
- The refugee movement towards Kurdistan is growing. This can be seen to affect the KRI internally, with food prices growing day-by-day. Iraq's central government imposed an obligatory holiday on government staff in the Sunni areas, which will mean that there are problems with the electricity and water in certain areas in Iraq. They have also cut all services such as Hospitals in many areas. There is no clear Government plans for areas affected by fighting.

- Beiji has not been taken up until now. There is still fighting there. Fadel Jameel Barwari, Commander of the Golden Divisions, who is based in Samarra, is planning on sending reinforcements to Beiji. Currently the refinery is half out of government control. They have surrounded refineries, which shows that fighting has been focused around strategic areas. There are no highway roads from KRG to the south and two brigades of the police, the 8th and 10<sup>th</sup> have now left the West of Iraq.

### **Security update:**

- Internal security in the KRG is good. However, there is now a long border with ISIS instead of Iraqi Armed forces. Internal security is now on a higher alert. The security services are active both within and outside of major built up areas. They may not be visible but they are present. There is international concern over Kurdistan's fundamentalist jihadist neighbour. Things are safe for now. The security services are professional and robust. There should be support for the Asayish and Peshmerga.
- There has been a lot of coverage about the situation in Kurdistan Region in the Western press, labelling it as a "land grab". This is not a "land grab". There is a Kurdish governor in Kirkuk. To use a military term, the Peshmerga forces "secured" Kirkuk. The Iraqi Army evaporated and effectively turned the keys over to ISIS. Peshmerga forces filled the vacuum, preventing ISIS advances. Rumours of attacks are high, being planted in order to create panic and fear for various reasons.
- The KRG Ministry of Interior leads the Oil Protection Force (OPF) and views the oil and gas sector as the most critical area of infrastructure. In general the OPF is connected well with local companies. They are on high alert and coordination between the OPF and the security managers of oil companies is needed.

### **The situation in Mosul:**

- The current crisis is not just about the 10<sup>th</sup> of June. Ever since the Iraq occupation began in 2003 such crisis has been a possibility. Sunni leaders were arrested and the Sunni community lost its faith in any political solutions. Sunni politicians did not have enough say. The problem is not ISIS. ISIS is easy to deal with, but a lot of people have accepted ISIS in Mosul out of no choice or out of protest. If this situation is not dealt with, the KRG will not be safe. Most of Northwest region is now controlled by ISIS. The political elite must show that there is a will to change the political process in Iraq, if not, nothing will change.
- ISIS will not control the area for a long period of time. They cannot supply the public with services. If things carry on there is the possibility of the situation descending into a Syria style scenario. The Iraqi Army is attempting to use Shia militias to control the Sunni triangle. This is not possible. There is the need for Sunnis to join the fight if things are going to get better or if the Sunni triangle is to be calm.
- People in the Sunni areas need support. Iraqis need a political solution that would help Sunnis participate in political life in Iraq. ISIS do not want to participate. The Baath party organisations can easily turn to politics; it is the Baath groups that have the ability to get public opinion on their side.
- Armed groups in Mosul saw that politics had no aim and that there was no political option for them. However, now they are fighting alongside ISIS, but this alliance will not last. There

are no real tribal forces in Ninevah, there are 7 or 8 armed groups. They would not be able to fight ISIS alone, they would want a political solution. I asked the central government to establish some local forces, the idea was agreed but never implemented.

- The Governor is responsible for all issues in his area including military and security ones, but this is remains written only in the constitution. In reality, Mr Maliki had centralised control to himself. Everyone was following Maliki's orders, and there was no real leadership. Information was passed to Adnan Assadi, acting Minister of the Interior. He was told that Peshmerga were needed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June at midnight there was a return call asking to bring in the Peshmerga, but by then it was too late.

## **KRG and political update:**

- The situation has changed. To what extent ISIS is able to control the area is questionable. During the visit of Secretary of State, Mr John Kerry, there was a general concern and it was agreed that there should be a unified position in order to save Iraq. The concerns of Iraq's neighbours and Iraq's citizens may differ. There are concerns over the new border with ISIS. Normal life continues but precautions need to be taken. In regards to any military actions, a political roadmap is also needed. We are in a post-Mosul Iraq, things have now changed. However, from Baghdad there is no visible shift. The central Government's briefings on military activities show that they are in denial. There needs to be a comprehensive political solution. Many say that this is the remaking of Sykes-Picot, but this is Iraq still in the making after 10 years. Maliki is adamant that he is right. There has been no contact with the Kurds. Things cannot move forward like this. We need to get a consensus, with all of Iraq agreed on a way forward. Precautionary measures have to be taken and will be taken.
- On fuel shortage: Bazian and Kawargosk refineries produce 3 million litres per day, with the rest was being supplied from Baiji. 17% of petrol supply should have come from central Iraq, however this never reached more than 5%. The KRG has been shipping crude oil to countries like Azerbaijan in order to get petrol back. Two refineries produce 50% of the petrol for the KRI. Beiji produced 650,000 barrels per day. This was 25-30% of the KRG's needs. Now there is nothing from Beiji and the KRG have to import petrol. The council of ministers sent a document to governorates covering the regulations for petrol pricing. The price will have to be regulated to benefit the importing companies and also the public. Subsidised petrol is now a drain on the KRG. Some are taking petrol and selling it for profit in Mosul at inflated prices. Checkpoints are trying to crack down on this but smugglers will always find a way. Private companies have now been given permission by the KRG to import their own petrol and benzene. Since March, Kirkuk pipeline has been partly damaged. Iraq has been losing 400,000 barrels per day in exports. Northern Oil and Baghdad have been in contact to see if it could be connected with KRG pipelines.
- The KRG has contributed a lot to Iraq. Opposition figures, now key figures in Baghdad, used to live in the region. Federalism was brought in by the constitution, but the constitution is violated. Like in the Iraqi Army, there is no loyalty to the state of Iraq, the new Iraq. The consensus has been ignored. The KRG cannot do much in Baghdad. A new government needs to be forced through. There has to be a change of faces for the KRG to be involved. Independence is a right, but the KRG feels that the future agreement will be for a federal system until there is a referendum.

MERI is an 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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