

Iraqis fear a bloodbath in post-ISIS Mosul

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Baghdad

With the expected liberation of Mosul, residents are saying they worry about the day-after scenario that might be bloodier than the military operation to recapture the city from Islamic State (ISIS) militants.

Locals fear acts of vengeance against relatives and neighbours who joined ISIS. Threats of reprisal killings against people linked to the militants have started with postings popping up on social media showing pictures and addresses of ISIS “collaborators” with a message: “Death and revenge will be yours very soon.”

Other tribulations include disputes over properties of people who fled the city to escape ISIS. Some property was bought or seized by families that stayed in Mosul.

Equally significant is the potential for conflicts with the Kurds. The Kurds are eager to annex areas near Mosul and draw new administrative borders, which might lead to a bloody Arab-Kurdish conflict.

The population of Mosul, which totalled 2 million before ISIS took control, had a unique diversity of ethnic and religious groups. Some were persecuted and forced to leave the areas after ISIS militants seized the Arab, Sunni-dominated northern city in 2014.

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Christians were forced to leave their houses, which were confiscated. Members of the Yazidi religious minority were either killed or enslaved. Men who served in the security forces under the Shia-dom-

inated government were executed.

As Iraqi soldiers, Kurdish peshmerga and Shia militiamen close in on Mosul, local officials fear that such brutal acts by ISIS could bring about counter acts of revenge.

Bashar al-Kiki, a member of the Nineveh Provincial Council, said the chances for vengeance acts are “real”.

“We expect that some people will try to take the law into their hands against local militants who killed their relatives. Daesh’s practices in the city have led to social divisions and enmity among the residents,” Kiki said, using ISIS’s Arabic acronym.

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The revenge drive is simmering. There have been many postings on Facebook, showing pictures, names and even addresses of locals who allegedly joined ISIS and took part in atrocities against residents.

Kiki predicted that the situation in Mosul after ISIS “will be more difficult than the situation when it ruled”.

Another sticking issue is the property non-Muslim families left when they escaped the militants. Hundreds of displaced Christian and Yazidi families are living in the Kurdish autonomous region and outside Iraq. ISIS seized their properties and sold them.

In late 2015, the Baghdad government banned real estate dealings in Mosul but the move came late and some houses now have two owners.

Um Fadi, a Christian woman who fled Mosul with her family, leaving two houses behind, said she has no place to live after the city is liberated. She said one of her houses was turned into a bomb-making factory and the other was seized by a local who told her, through a third party, that he has no intention to give it up.



A displaced Iraqi gives the coordinates of ISIS militants to the Iraqi army, south of Mosul, last August.

“I have a long and difficult way to reclaim my two houses,” she said from her rented apartment in the Kurdish city of Erbil.

Dildar Zibari, a local official, said the situation in Mosul will be chaotic because no plans were made on how to run the city after recapturing it.

“There is no clear vision on how to create a united administration that would be able to run the city. The central government and Kurdish authorities and local government need to coordinate on the best ways to help the city after Daesh but till now this is not happening,” he said.

The Kurdish ambition to annex areas around Mosul in post-ISIS era could ignite a war with the Iraqi Army, backed by Shia militias. Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish Regional Government, has

demanding a greater role for Kurds in running Mosul in return for Kurdish military support in the war against ISIS.

Earlier, Barzani said peshmerga fighters were drawing with their own blood new borders for the Kurdish region.

Recently, former prime minister and Shia politician Nuri al-Maliki told the US ambassador that he was “concerned” about Mosul’s future. He cited the Kurds’ expansion ambitions and accused them of seeking to “persecute the Arab and Christian residents of Mosul”. Kurdish officials accused Maliki of trying to ignite “a future war in Mosul”.

Recently, Kurdish officials floated an idea to divide Nineveh province into three parts: One for the Sunni Arabs, one for Yazidis and a third for Christians living in the plains. Some, however, fear that the Kurds

would annex the last two areas later. Abdul-Rahman Allowaizi, a member of parliament from Mosul, warned that suggestions to divide Nineveh serve “the Kurdish expansionist schemes”. He accused Kurdish forces of forcing Arab families out of the areas near Mosul.

The issue of the disputed areas between the Kurds and the central government has previously led to deadly clashes in several areas in northern Iraq, he said, adding: “This scenario could be repeated in Mosul”.

“Kurdish forces are preventing Arab families from returning to their homes in the areas liberated from ISIS,” he said. “This is a dangerous policy that might lead to new wars.”

Sameer Nouri Yacoub is a journalist based in Iraq.

Mistakes made since 2003 should not be repeated in Mosul

Viewpoint



Ahmed Twajj

Other than the invasion of Iraq, two key decisions in the aftermath of the 2003 war have shaped the state of the country today. Unelected and inexperienced administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Paul Bremer enforced CPA Orders 1 and 2; the de-Ba’athification process of Iraq barring Ba’athists from a role in the new Iraq and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army.

In a country where the only political party that existed was the Ba’ath Party, these decisions alienated thousands of otherwise peaceful individuals.

The concept of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) rose in popularity in the early 1990s as a means to establish a lasting peace. Mats Berdal, a professor of Security and Development at King’s College London, explained how DDR needs to be considered as a sequential process involving a systematic collection of weapons from combatants, the disbanding of warring parties and the provision of alternative sustainable livelihoods.

Not only have unsuccessful DDR programmes proven to be

detrimental to countries they are implemented in but they have severe ramifications in the region, highlighted by the Liberian civil war.

Today, 13 years after the invasion of Iraq, the mistakes by the CPA not only destabilised Iraq but the unrest has spread across the region.

Following approximately two decades of experience in DDR programmes prior to the ousting of Saddam Hussein, Iraq was not considered a unique case by the United States. In March 2003, plans for reintegrating the Iraqi Army were finalised and more than \$70 million were pledged by the Pentagon for Iraq’s DDR process. This money was never spent on the project and remains unaccounted for. By May 2003, a mere one week into Bremer’s authoritarian rule of Iraq, the leader of the CPA reversed any plans for reintegration.

Order 1, the de-Ba’athification of Iraq, affected up to 100,000 Iraqis, including 40,000 teachers who joined the Ba’ath Party since no alternative was available under the iron-fisted rule of Saddam. This decision prevented many Iraqis from being able to support themselves or their families.

With the rising insecurity in Iraq, grievances turned into anger and the formation of insurgency groups initially against the occupying US forces and eventually giving rise to the Islamic State (ISIS). At the time, the Baghdad CIA station chief warned Bremer, regarding Order 1: “By nightfall, you’ll have driven 30,000 to 50,000 Ba’athists underground

and in six months, you’ll really regret this.”

Zahraa Ghandour, an Iraqi filmmaker, described how her neighbours – a former schoolteacher and the teacher’s husband who worked as a manager of a factory belonging to Saddam’s government – were both prevented from returning to work in the new Iraq. Ghandour said: “They were a very, very peaceful family. The husband was only part of the Ba’ath Party by name. After years of going through financial hardships, starvation for him and his family and repeatedly trying but being prevented from seeking employment due to his prior affiliation with the Ba’ath Party, he joined al-Qaeda to the approval of his whole family.”

The Iraqi Army was disbanded with the signing of Order 2, driving hundreds of thousands armed and experienced military personnel underground. This left a massive security gap, which was exploited by looters and later filled by non-state actors. Many frustrated ex-soldiers eventually took up arms and created insurgency groups.

Douglas Feith, US undersecretary of Defense for policy, said the de-Ba’athification process was partially a marketing strategy as rolling back the process would “undermine the entire moral justification for the war”, especially considering the weapons of mass destruction claim turned out to be false.

In 2011, Nuri al-Maliki repeated the mistakes of Bremer. Iraq passed through years of heavy sectarian violence and war. In a movement known as the “Awak-

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ening”, tribal leaders were promised that, after ending the sectarian war, they would have a role in the future of Iraq.

The success of the Awakening was met with the disarmament of the tribes by the Maliki regime with no reintegration. A further broken promise by the government resulted in some of those fighters, up to 90,000 according to US Department of Defense, pledging allegiance to ISIS.

As Iraq steps to liberate Mosul from ISIS, provisions must be taken to ensure mistakes are not repeated. A full DDR programme must be formulated for the 1 million-plus citizens of Mosul, many of whom have had no option other than being forced to interact with ISIS. As shown before, without reintegration, the resulting alienation will lead to the formation of new terrorist organisations.

In the last month, Iraqi forces have prevented families from returning to Tikrit due to allegations of affiliations with ISIS, families whose alienation is likely to push them to support other terrorist organisations. In the post-ISIS world, to maintain peace, the mistakes of the US occupying forces and Iraqi government must be avoided and transitional justice coupled with DDR must be implemented.

Ahmed Twajj is a British doctor, born to Iraqi parents, researching in Iraq for a master’s degree in global health with conflict, security and development from King’s College London. He is also a freelance writer and photojournalist.

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