

# Post-ISIS Mosul Context Analysis

**July 2017**

## INTRODUCTION

The city of Mosul is Iraq's second largest and lies within the Nineveh Governorate. After years of insecurity from insurgent violence, Mosul was captured by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in June 2014 as the Iraqi army collapsed under its attack. The operation to recapture Mosul, dubbed "We Are Coming, Nineveh," has been ongoing since October 2016. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and Kurdish Peshmerga began by securing villages to the east of the city, while advances into the city by the ISF itself began in November. Due to fears of sectarian violence from Shia PMF militias, the international Coalition pressured Prime Minister Abadi into blocking the PMF from fighting in Mosul. East Mosul was declared liberated on 24 January 2017. At the time of writing, the fighting in the west is almost over and celebrations have already begun.

The Concept of Operations initially laid down by Prime Minister Abadi ordered severe limits on the usage of heavy weapons during the battle. The intention was to keep as many civilians as possible safely in their houses to avoid mass displacement. To achieve this, ISF troops had to go 'house to house' to clear structures of ISIS fighters whilst protecting civilians inside. Although this mitigated total displacement, it has been extremely costly for ISF forces. Total casualty numbers are still unknown, in late March the US announced that 284 members of the Iraqi Security Forces had been killed and 1,600 wounded.<sup>1</sup> This has been reflected in the fighting to secure west Mosul. ISF, with coalition support, have relied on a far greater usage of airstrikes and heavy indirect fire such as artillery and rockets. This was raised as a cause for concern by Human Rights Watch who have suggested that inadequate care has been taken to mitigate civilian casualties, the numbers of which are still unknown.<sup>2</sup> Such casualties have been extremely hard to mitigate as ISIS fighters have made extensive use of the civilian population in Mosul as 'human shields'. Buildings that ISIS soldiers were fighting from were commonly filled with dozens of civilians. The intensity of this fighting has produced total displacement from many north western districts in the final stages of the battle. ISIS has also repeatedly targeted civilians who try and flee their territory.

Between October 2016 and June 2017, over 800,000 people were displaced from the city.<sup>3</sup> 380,000 are still displaced with 215,000 in formal camps.<sup>4</sup> Thousands of others have gone

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<sup>1</sup> Ali, I. March 2017. *Top US commander: 284 Iraqi security-force members killed fighting ISIS in west Mosul*. Business Insider. <http://www.businessinsider.com/284-iraqi-security-force-members-killed-fighting-isis-in-west-mosul-2017-3>

<sup>2</sup> *Iraq: Civilian Casualties Mount in West Mosul*. June 2017. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/06/iraq-civilian-casualties-mount-west-mosul>

<sup>3</sup> OCHA. June 2017. *Iraq: Mosul Humanitarian Response Situation Report No. 37*. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Mosul%20Humanitarian%20Response%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2037%20%285%20to%2011%20June%202017%29.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> *Logistics Cluster Concept of Operations*. June 2017. Logistics Cluster. [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/logistics\\_cluster\\_iraq\\_mosul\\_conops\\_170607.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/logistics_cluster_iraq_mosul_conops_170607.pdf)

to stay with friends and family, or are renting property in other parts of retaken Mosul and wider Nineveh.

Many of Mosul's neighbourhoods have returned to life extremely quickly after their recapture. Residents have often been eager to return home as soon as possible, despite risks in their neighbourhoods. Some neighbourhoods have started to see people return home within just a week or two of their displacement from the fighting. This is of course not universal, a variety of factors inhibit thousands from returning, including a lack of livelihoods and fears for their security. Markets have also been quickly reestablished and have been crucial in bringing supplies into the city, though many people lack the savings or income to support themselves.

People have suffered immeasurably living under ISIS' rule for years and families have often survived this only to lose loved ones during the fight to retake the city. Recovering from the trauma of these experiences will be an enormous issue for all involved. There is a vast amount of work to be done to return the city to normality. Great portions of its infrastructure, including businesses and family homes, have been destroyed and must be rebuilt. It is currently unknown how much of the funding for this shall be procured as it is often uncertain who is responsible for a site's destruction, whether it be ISIS, ISF or the Coalition. Questions of compensation and liability will be an important issue after ISIS.

This battle itself will not resolve the underlying political drivers that led to the rise of a group like ISIS. As shall be addressed in this report many new grievances and potential conflict dynamics are emerging in post-ISIS Mosul.

Iraq has seen much sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shias in recent years. The conflict has at times unified the groups as 'Iraqis' against the common threat of ISIS but has also exacerbated historical sectarian fears as well as internal divides in Sunni and Shia communities. The trauma of recent years and the hatred felt by both groups towards ISIS is manifesting itself against the families of those believed to be affiliated to the group. Many armed actors, as well as civilians, are involved in various forms of revenge violence against these people. Aside from the immediate legal issues raised by such violent reprisals, it risks producing further grievances to fuel future conflicts. These dynamics are dominated by the plurality of armed groups now emerging to fill the power vacuum in the city. Many of these groups are reportedly involved in abusive activities towards the local population and are recruiting locals into their militias in a move to gain political control over the city. Currently all the armed groups are working together as security actors to secure the city from the common enemy of ISIS. However, these groups have competing agendas. There are major concerns that such agendas could lead to armed conflict between these groups within Mosul or that if they abuse the civilian population, new insurgent groups will arise to counter them.

The conflict and ensuing power vacuum being filled by these armed groups has created space for competing regional actors such as Turkey and Iran to extend their influence over the city. It is likely that the Gulf States will also be attempting to gain local influence to counter any Iranian moves, though research has yet to reveal this. Such actions risk turning Mosul into the site of proxy conflicts to express international geopolitical tensions.

The Governorate has an extremely diverse ethno-religious population, it is predominantly Sunni Arab, but there are also significant numbers of Kurds, Christians, Turkomans, Shabak, and Yazidis.<sup>5</sup> Due to constraints on research, this report focuses mainly on the broader issues in Mosul and those faced by Sunni Arabs. However, each of these groups has their own social and political issues that must be addressed once ISIS are gone. A great deal more research is needed however to make sure these minority groups are not forgotten and that their issues are not left unaddressed.

## Contents

This report is broken into 5 sections. The first 3 provide overviews of the key civilian and military actors currently involved in the city. The last 2 cover the emerging social, political and conflict dynamics being produced by these actors in a post-ISIS environment, including threats to lasting peace in the city.

- 1. Civilian Actors in Mosul.** Outlines the tribal systems in Iraq, the social distinction within the city between Tribal Arabs and Moslawis and the current activities and local perception of the Nineveh governor.
- 2. The Iraqi Security Forces.** Covers the ISF groups that have been, and continue to be, active in securing the city.
- 3. The Popular Mobilisation Forces.** Provides a broad overview of the Popular Mobilisation Forces with specific information on those that are now active in the city.
- 4. Dynamics.** Covers the key social, political and conflict dynamics that are emerging in the city post-ISIS as well as their historical roots.
- 5. Post-ISIS Reconciliation:** Reiterates the key threats to a stable peace in Mosul and suggests some of the steps that could be taken to ensure it.

## Methodology

Interviews with key informants (KIs) have been the primary source of information for this research. Rise established 4 primary contacts in Mosul, one of whom is a local journalist. These contacts were carefully selected through trusted sources to ensure the validity of their responses and that they had no personal interest in distorting answers. The contacts have both been sources of information and have helped arrange interviews with a further 9 key informants in the city. Each contact has been interviewed several times over the past 6 months. Interviews have also been conducted with local NGO managers who have a strong understanding of dynamics in the city. Through these contacts it was also possible to arrange an interview with 9 Sheikhs of various local tribes who have populations across Mosul and its surrounding villages. The Sheikhs requested the names of their tribes be kept confidential for their security. These Sheikhs represent approximately ten thousand adult

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<sup>5</sup> A great deal of information on Mosul's demographics is available in the UN Habitat City Profile of Mosul. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/city-profile-of-mosul-iraq-a-city-under-siege/>

men dispersed across the city and nearby villages. Rise has also conducted regular rapid humanitarian assessments in Mosul throughout the battle. These assessments have involved interviews with dozens of local actors and have also greatly informed the research for this work. Secondary sources including NGO publications and news reports have also been used where existing research was available.

# 1. MOSUL CIVILIAN ACTORS

## Tribal Structures in Iraq

Tribal structures have been central to society in the region for over a thousand years, many tribes in Iraq pre-date Islam. Peoples' affiliations with their tribes are generally much stronger in rural areas where the Iraqi Government has not established a strong presence. Such tribal structures provide groups with stability and support from those around them that they know and trust. Tribal structures are stronger in rural areas but are not irrelevant in many cities, such as Mosul.

Each tribe has its own Sheikh who is the leader of the tribe. This position is held by men and is generally hereditary, though this can vary if there is no suitable heir or if a Sheikh is deposed for any reason. Sheikhs themselves may be religious, but their position is not a religious one and does not require offering religious guidance. Tribes will often also have an Imam to serve as their religious guide. Sheikhs are responsible for the security and prosperity of their tribe and fulfil a combined executive, legislative and judicial role. A Sheikh will generally own a large portion of land and the resources on it, the consequent wealth strengthens his power. Much of their influence stems from this wealth, with tribal members hoping to achieve their own gains by following their Sheikhs' directives. They are the tribes' representatives in dealings with other tribes and with the Government. Sheikhs often have strong influence over the government because of their ability to direct the voting of their tribe's members as well as their wealth. Sheikhs may also be involved in arranging marriages and setting up businesses for the tribe. A Sheikh's power over their tribe is not absolute however, and their control depends upon how well they are perceived to be leading. Each tribe has its own laws, and the Sheikh's role also involves functioning as the judiciary when tribal law is broken. A notable example of this are cases of 'Diyah' when one member has harmed another, or damaged their property. Sheikhs will often settle such a dispute externally to the Iraqi judicial system, and instead arrange a form of compensation to be paid to the victim or their family. Such negotiation aims to resolve the issue peacefully without further violence.

Tribes can range from just a few dozen individuals to tens of thousands. Tribes are often organised together in pyramid structures, where smaller tribes will fall under the authority and membership of a larger one which is in turn under the authority and membership of an even larger tribe. In increasing order of size a tribe may be a clan ('ashira), unit (hamula, wihda), or branch (fara'), or a confederation (qabila).<sup>6</sup> Depending on the context, an individual may identify themselves as belonging to a tribe at any of these levels. Given all these sub divisions, there are estimated to be as many as 8,000 tribal groups in Iraq.

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<sup>6</sup> Stolzoff, S, G. 2009. *The Iraqi Tribal System*. Graftman and Graftman International

## Moslawis and Tribal Arabs

There is a historic social distinction in Mosul between two groups inhabiting the city, the Moslawis and Tribal Arabs. Within Mosul, 'Moslawi' refers to individuals with long standing family history in the city.<sup>7</sup> Many Moslawis are originally of Turkmen origin due to Mosul's time in the Ottoman empire between 1538 and 1918. Since the end of the Ottoman Empire, some of the Turkmen population merged into existing Arab Moslawi communities. West Mosul has a higher number of Tribal Arabs, while east Mosul has more Moslawis. Moslawis are generally considered, at least by themselves, to be the more urbanised and educated group, and accordingly wealthier. Tribal Arabs are considered, especially by Moslawis, to be less educated and have much greater ties to their tribes for social support.

Moslawis will still have tribal affiliations though this affiliation may be very weak and have little relevance on day to day life. A Moslawi will still know their tribal background and Sheikh, it is commonly considered shameful not to know this. Furthermore, even Moslawis may fall back on their tribal affiliations when required. An example was offered by one KI on the issue of 'Diyah'. If a Moslawi was in trouble with a tribe then they may need to contact their Sheikh for help if the harmed tribe's Sheikh was unwilling to go through the State judicial process.

Many of the Tribal Arabs moved to Nineveh during Saddam's rule as part of his 'Arabisation' policies to alter the demographic balance of the region. Arabs were encourage to move north to Nineveh as other groups, especially Kurds were forcibly displaced. Increasing numbers of Tribal Arabs later moved to Mosul itself for work opportunities given the lack of livelihoods in their villages. These groups continue to hold strong affiliation to their tribes. Unlike in rural areas tribal membership is often spread out across the city, not over a singular territory.

It was reported by KIs that much of the support for ISIS in Mosul came from the Tribal Arabs. It was stated that a key reason to join was that as less educated and financially secure, they were easily swayed. As was the case in Anbar, many Sheikhs pledged their whole tribe's allegiance to ISIS. Whilst some Sheikhs willingly pledged allegiance, many others were killed and new Sheikhs installed in their place. Others pledged allegiance as a way to protect themselves and their tribe. The reasons for allegiance to ISIS were often varied. Some agreed with IS' goals for religious reasons, or from political grievances against the Shia dominated government. Furthermore there is not necessarily a correlation between a Sheikh's decision to support any organisation and the views of the tribe's members. Other tribes resisted ISIS, seeking support from the government and have formed their own militias within the PMF called the Hashd Ashari.<sup>8</sup>

Some KIs have reported that the historic economic migration and perceived social differences have been sources of antagonism between the groups over the years. Others have suggested that it is currently a distinction with little significance. This is addressed in more detail in section 4.

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<sup>7</sup> This report shall follow this distinction. 'Moslawi' shall be specifically used for this demographic, and not as a general term for Mosul residents.

<sup>8</sup> *ISIL wins support from Iraq's Sunni tribes*. June 2015. Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/sunni-sheiks-pledge-allegiance-isil-iraq-anbar-150604074642668.html>

## Nineveh Governorate

Before the fall of Mosul to ISIS, the governor of Mosul was Atheel al Nujaifi. Al Nujaifi's position as governor was revoked by the Iraqi parliament in May 2015 for reasons relating to Mosul's fall to ISIS. In October 2016 the Iraqi Federal Court issued a detention warrant for al Nujaifi, accusing him of espionage and providing support to Turkey by allowing their military to enter northern Iraq. Since the capture of Mosul by ISIS al Nujaifi has been based in Erbil and has close ties with the KDP, this keeps him protected from arrest in Iraq.

Al Nujaifi became the leader of a militia in Mosul called Haras Ninevah in 2015. The militia is very popular as it is comprised by locals. KIs have recently stated that al Nujaifi intends to run for governor again in the upcoming elections. His political power is now tied to the success or popularity of his militia. Some locals continue to hold him responsible for the fall of Mosul, and note that he is currently wanted for treason, while others increasingly blame Baghdad. It remains to be seen how criminal proceedings against al Nujaifi will affect these issues. Al Nujaifi made various claims in an interview with al Monitor in February 2017.<sup>9</sup> He stated his belief that new governorate leadership is needed as Mosul's current governor and provincial council 'do not represent Mosul's leadership and, therefore, cannot be expected to play a positive role.' Al Nujaifi then played down the danger of internal conflict within post-ISIS Mosul, emphasising the conflict was between 'moderates and extremists'. He also claimed that aside from the displacement of Christians, there has not been a huge demographic shift and that the city's resistance to ISIS has produced social cohesion. He is apparently documenting abuses against civilians that have been carried out by other forces inside Mosul.

Al Nujaifi is also reportedly responsible for establishing the Mosul Brigades, a resistance movement that fought against ISIS inside Mosul. There is little information currently on the Mosul Brigades activities or what function, if any, the group might have post-ISIS.

The current governor of Ninevah is Nofal Hammadi and all KIs interviewed spoke poorly of him. The governor is reportedly highly corrupt, ineffective and disengaged from the reconstruction process. Though these are not unique criticisms of governors. Although elections are expected for a new governor within the next 12 months, no date has been set. Claims have been made that the budget for the city's reconstruction is being embezzled by Hammadi, who is only hiring contractors who will share a portion of the funding with him. The governor is allegedly using some of this funding to buy the loyalty of the city's Mukhtars. The Mukhtars may then bribe local residents to gain support in upcoming elections. A Mukhtar maintains records of the population in their area and has an administrative role, but generally has no political power. Little information has been collected about the local council. Councillors working in the governor are responsible for different committees such as education. However, more research is needed on specific councillors and their committees to ascertain if there issues of corruption, real or perceived.

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<sup>9</sup> Saadoun, M. *Will Mosul witness a political battle post-ISIS?* February 2017. Al Monitor. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/02/mosul-governor-atheel-nujaifi-iraq-turkey.html>

## **2. The Iraqi Security Forces**

A major complexity during the battle to retake Mosul from IS has been the plurality of armed forces involved in the operation. The fighting itself has been conducted by at least 6 different Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) actors from three different ministerial level Government bodies. An American led coalition has provided air support as well as training for the ISF. Iraqi Security Forces is an umbrella term covering all of Iraq's armed forces, including the police. It is also used to refer to a single force when it is not possible to specify the name. ISF also now includes the PMF militias who have been formally incorporated into it by the Iraqi Government. However, this report shall use the separate terms of ISF and PMF due to key distinctions in the groups' organisations and operations inside Mosul. ISF forces are a mix of demographics, they aim to be increasingly non-sectarian in their composition but have recently been dominated by Shias. PMF militias are not required to achieve this balance and many are driven by a specific religion. This section provides brief overviews of the ISF forces involved in Mosul, the PMF are addressed below in section 3.

### **1. The Ministry of Defence Forces**

- Iraqi Army 9th and 16th Divisions
- Counter Terrorism Unit

### **2. The Counter Terrorism Service**

### **3. The Ministry of Interior Forces**

- Federal Police
- Local Police
- S.W.A.T
- Emergency Response Unit

All forces in Mosul, excluding the PMF, are under the command of the Iraqi army 16th Division while the battle to retake the city continues. Major General Najim Abdullah al-Jubouri and General Abdulameer Rasheed Yarallah of the Iraqi Army are the commanders of all Nineveh operations. This includes the local police. It remains unclear when martial law will end and when they will take the role of an independent, civilian police force, especially given the plurality of PMF militias working alongside them.

## **The Ministry of Defence**

### **The Iraqi Army**

The Iraqi army, was left shattered after ISIS' offensives seized Fallujah, Mosul and Ramadi. Many were shocked that the army crumpled so quickly in the face of what was perceived to be merely a weak militia. After the fall of Saddam, the US poured enormous amounts of money into rebuilding the Iraqi army with new training and equipment. However, corruption was still rife within both the Army and Mol forces It was common for officers to be given leadership positions based on their ethno-sectarian or political affiliation. Such officers were often highly corrupt. Officers siphoning off and embezzling salaries of nearly

created fake and empty positions serves as one example. Such practices made the army look much stronger on paper than it was in practice. These issues increasingly drained morale from the ISF. Administrative issues over the army's budget also left a gulf of funding for logistics elements such as resupplies, artillery, communications and medical facilities. The army was also predominantly Shia after the US's 'de-Ba'athification' process whereby tens of thousands who worked in the public sector and were members of Saddam's Ba'ath party were fired from their jobs. Many other non Ba'ath party Sunnis then refused to join the army in protest. This greatly exacerbated tensions in Sunni areas where the army was present as a security actor. Many who lost their jobs went on to join the insurgent groups fighting against the newly reformed army and government. In regards to Mosul, this meant that many soldiers stationed there had little motivation to stay and fight to defend the city against ISIS' takeover. These issues are expanded upon in section 4.

The Iraqi Army has recovered in the following years, though it still remains at around two thirds of its 2009 strength of 150,000 frontline troops. The army has been central in some of Iraq's key victories against ISIS, including in Tikrit, Bayji and Ramadi. The army's 16th , 15th and 9th Divisions have been involved in the operation to retake Mosul. 16th Division has had operational command of all ISF forces throughout the operation and fought in east Mosul The 9th Division is an armoured division, with limited infantry but many armoured vehicles. The 9th Division were a key force in the offensives from the north west edge of Mosul in early May where they advanced alongside ERU forces. This caused concern for the protection of civilians due to the destructive nature of fighting in a city with tanks and heavy weapons, which lead to increased civilian casualties and property damage in Mosul.

### **The Counter Terrorism Unit**

The Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) are small force within the Ministry of Defence, possibly within the Military Intelligence. They were only encountered briefly during field research and there is little information about them currently available. They primarily have been active conducting house to house screening in retaken east Mosul neighbourhoods. CTU appear to be a legitimate force for screening procedures and rely on official intelligence lists, not local informants.

## **The Counter Terrorism Service**

The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) is Iraq's elite counter terrorism special forces. They were used as the leading force in the battle for east Mosul and have been key for operations in the west as well.

The CTS is organised with a 3-tiered structure: CTS > CTC > ISOF. The CTS is the head organisation and operates at a quasi-ministerial level, reporting directly to the Prime Minister. However, the CTS was never legally codified as a ministry. Their independence is a contentious issue due to the autonomy it gives them as a military force. This was especially a problem when Maliki was Prime Minister, the CTS were often defamed as being his private army. Since his resignation this infamy has lessened and recent operations against ISIS have established ISOF's reputation as Iraq's most professional and effective fighting force. This in turn has elevated Abadi's legitimacy as commander-in-chief. ISOF's 1st brigade is the famous 'Golden Brigade' or 'Golden Division'. ISOF currently operates 2

other brigades in Mosul. Operational command of ISOF is managed by the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC) who report to the CTS. Some reports do not clearly refer to the correct organisational level and many use ISOF or the CTS as umbrella terms for the whole organisation.

The CTS was formed with extensive US oversight, including training from US special forces. Recruitment also includes an extensive security vetting process. This training has continued since the rise of IS with over 10,000 soldiers trained for the CTS. As such, the CTS is a key point of contact between the US forces and the GoI. The CTS aims to operate as a non-sectarian force, and are proportionally 60% Shia. Whilst it is not part of the MoD, the GoI funds the CTS through MoD resources.

Originally, the CTS was intended for very specific counter terrorism operations. However, since 2014 and the rise of IS, the CTS has had to adapt to fight as a more conventional ground force. This means fighting in longer operations with close integration with other elements of the ISF and coalition. The CTS' creation as a counter terrorism unit has provided it with close links to Iraqi intelligence organisations.

ISOF troops are well equipped and are distinctive for their black uniforms. Although an Iraqi army unit from the military intelligence branch called the CTU also wear similar black uniforms. ISOF have an exceptional reputation in Iraq as an effective fighting force. Notably they maintained cohesion and effectiveness despite the breakdown of the Iraqi army in 2014. This is in part attributable to the higher standard of training provided to them by the US. The new organisational structure separated them from the army, helping to avoid many of the issues of corruption and poor organisation that have destabilised the army.

### **CTS Operations inside Mosul**

ISOF brigades have been crucial in the fight to retake Mosul. As the lead force for east Mosul, ISOF took severe casualties. Some sources cite the ISOF casualty rate for east Mosul operations as being as high as 50%. Brigades were rotated in and out of Mosul to allow time for rest and refit. This allowed ISOF to maintain a high tempo of operations. Despite this, some analysts are warning of a danger of 'burn out' for the force, both due to its high attrition and the personal strain of protracted operations. In response, training for new recruits is being accelerated to replace lost troops. There is a concern that rushed training could reduce the professionalism and fighting capability of the force.

ISOF have also functioned as a short term security force in areas they have captured, and have their own screening procedures in place. During research ISOF was universally well regarded by the civilian population that encountered them.

## **The Ministry of Interior**

The Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) is the government ministry responsible for policing across Iraq. The current Minister of Interior is Qasim Mohammad Jalal al-Araji, a member of the Badr Organisation political party. In agreements made during the formation of the government to balance sectarian representation, it was established that a Badr member

would always be Minister of Interior. Accordingly, a high percentage of Mol staff are Badr members. Issues raised by this affiliation are addressed below. There are three key armed groups within the Mol, Federal Police (FP), Iraqi Police (IP) and the Emergency Response Unit (ERU). These are distinct forces with their own organisational structures within the Mol. The Federal Police have operational command of the ERU in the battle in west Mosul.

### Federal Police

Iraq's Federal Police functions in an equivalent manner to many countries' national guard or reserve forces. It was designed to be able to respond to domestic conflicts which require a military deployment beyond the capacity of local police, whilst avoiding the political difficulties raised by deploying the army domestically. The Federal Police have been heavily involved in the fighting to retake Mosul from ISIS. They are primarily used as a holding force to defend retaken territory. They also have operational command of the ERU during Mosul operations. Federal Police wear black and blue camouflage and vehicles, distinctive from other ISF forces though similar to Iraqi local police.

As a holding force, the Federal Police also functioned as a local security actor in retaken neighbourhoods in east Mosul and conducted screening procedures as part of this. This screening has involved usage of Mol databases of ISIS suspects as well as relying on local informants. As of July the Federal Police have conducted very limited database screening in west Mosul and have primarily relied on local informants.

It has been reported by several KIs that some PMF troops, often specifically Badr, have worn the blue uniforms of the Federal Police and embedded with them. This has been a way for the PMF to be active in areas they are not officially operating in, such as Mosul and is likely facilitated by the Badr influence over the Mol.

Amnesty reported in late November that soldiers 'in Federal Police uniforms' tortured and executed at least 10 people on suspicion of IS affiliation.<sup>10</sup> The executions took place between the town of al-Qayyarah and the al-Shura sub-district. Amnesty also cites several other cases of men in the area being tortured and executed. Members from local tribal militias may have been present at the time. Amnesty also notes a similar case near Sijir in May, during the battle for Fallujah. Men in federal police uniform reportedly killed 16 men and boys who had surrendered as fighters.

### Iraqi Police

The Iraqi Police (IP) form Iraq's civilian policing component, within Nineveh they are referred to as the Nineveh Police. Iraqi Police are recruited from residents within the region they're policing. Prior to ISIS' take over, because of the poor security situation in Mosul the local police were under the authority of the Iraqi army. There was a poor relationship between the two forces and the security of the city was primarily managed by the army.<sup>11</sup> Several thousand newly trained police have arrived in eastern Mosul since its

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<sup>10</sup> *Investigate reports Iraqi forces tortured and killed villagers near Mosul in 'cold blood'*. November 2016. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/investigate-reports-iraqi-forces-tortured-and-killed-villagers-near-mosul-in-cold-blood/>

<sup>11</sup> Dr, Khedir, M.M. June 2015. *After ISIS*. PAX. <https://www.paxvoorvrede.nl/media/files/pax-iraq-report--after-isis.pdf>

recapture. Spain has assisted with the training of the Nineveh IP. After their initial arrival, many sources claimed that the IP were of little use as a security actor, with almost no visible presence. This is changing over time with more people viewing them positively as a good security force. However, KIs have also claimed that their authority in Mosul is effectively subordinate to PMF forces (addressed below). In practice this manifests in cases where both IP and PMF are stationed at a checkpoint, that PMF troops will be the senior officers in charge. In one Mosul Neighbourhood, in late January, it was reported that the Iraqi Police had little control over the security situation. They were not treated with respect by other security forces and had no authority over them.

Some sources have cited friction with local residents as many of the IP are members who were originally stationed in Mosul fled before ISIS took over and have now returned as a reinstated police force. Abuses were also reported in early February in the neighbourhood of Tharir. IP publicly attacked the local Sheikh. He had intervened when IP also took control of water trucking deliveries and unfairly allocated water distributions. IP were also reportedly also forcing people to label others as IS members to fill a 'quota' of arrests.

Two KIs have claimed adamantly that these new police are former members of various Shia PMF groups, and are loyal to Badr. These claims come from one informant's personal contact inside the police, as well the KIs witnessing PMF forces working alongside the police at checkpoints where Shia flags are commonly displayed. These KIs also suggested that the police were not locals, as the IP should be, but were from southern Iraq. Other KIs have repudiated this, saying that the vast majority of the new police are locals from Nineveh, but that a small amount may have their own Shia PMF affiliations. In reality, it is possible that some of the police are local Shia from Turkmen or Shabak communities. They may well have loyalties to organisations such as Badr. However, it is also very possible that rumours have spread out of proportion inside Mosul, especially given sectarian differences and concerns of the Badr influence over the Mol through al-Araji.

### **S.W.A.T**

S.W.A.T are a unit within the Iraqi Police that have been operating in Mosul. These forces have worked alongside Iraqi army and ISOF units to retake Mosul neighbourhoods, and have then been used as a holding force within them. S.W.A.T was created in 2008 with US oversight. They were deliberately formed as dominantly Sunni force, to offset the power balance of the new Shia dominant government. Reportedly they have access to US supplied equipment. Initially S.W.A.T were meant as a small elite police force, with local recruits from their assigned areas. Some of its members from Mosul survived the city's capture by ISIS and have since recruited other locals to the force. As a result, the troops who have been fighting in Mosul will now likely remain in the city as a security force.

### **Emergency Response Division**

The Emergency Response Division (ERD) is an elite counter terrorism force. They have been used extensively in the fighting to retake Mosul from ISIS. The ERD is relatively small and currently has approximately 8,000 troops. Their equipment, green uniform and training are all separate from other ISF components.

The ERD is reported under many names including: Emergency Services Unit / Emergency Reaction Force / Emergency Response Unit/ Provincial Security Forces / Emergency

Response Brigade / S.W.A.T / IRU. ERD appears to be the official name though ERU can often be seen on troops' uniforms and vehicles. There is also an unrelated 'ERU' unit operating within the Iraqi army in southern Iraq which may be a source of some confusion. Some sources reporting on Mosul frequently refer to the Federal Police's 'Rapid Response Division,' this is an error. Federal Police have operational command of ERU for Mosul operations, but they remain separate forces within the Mol.

### **3. The Popular Mobilisation Forces**

The Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) are a military organisation comprised of approximately 60 militias from across Iraq. The PMF are also known as the Popular Mobilisation Units, or the Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi in Arabic.

The PMF were formed in 2014 after the Iraqi army collapsed and ISIS took control of Mosul in June. The then Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki called for volunteers to aid the Iraqi army to defend the country from ISIS. This call was followed by a fatwa from Iraq's supreme Shi'a religious cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani for men to join the fight against IS. Many new militias were formed, while others were reactivated and given new legitimacy. Therefore the PMF were originally predominantly comprised of Shia militias. The militias remained as separate armed forces, with their own political and religious interests, but were grouped under the umbrella of the PMF which now has a combined strength of between 100,000 - 150,000 men. The PMF has been widely recognised as vital in Iraq's defence as its army recovered. Their origins from al Sistani's fatwa and battlefield successes has made them extremely popular with Iraqis, especially Shias.

Since 2015 PMF militias fall under the authority of the Prime Minister as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.<sup>12</sup> The Prime Minister's office created Order 91 in February 2016 and it was formalised by the Iraqi Parliament in November. Order 91 formally incorporated the PMF into the Iraqi Security Forces as an 'independent military formation.'<sup>13</sup> However, despite these organisational structures, the PMF militias are largely organised by individual alliances, depending on how closely one militia's goals may align with another. Militias within the PMF come from every strain of Iraqi society and politics, and often have very different or opposing political and religious interests. Order 91 has potentially backfired. It has given the PMF a great deal of legitimacy, but there have not been corresponding changes to ensure a strong chain of command over the militias.

The Popular Mobilisation Committee was established as a government ministry to administer the militias of the PMF. This also means that the PMF receive funding and support from the Government though many of its militias have also received funding from international or private sources. Funding is allocated by the Committee, not by Abadi, this has raised complaints from some militias that funding is not being allocated equally.

The PMF are commonly mistakenly considered in totality as a Shia, Iranian proxy force. Although many are Shia, there are also militias from other ethno-religious groups and not all Shia forces favour Iranian involvement in Iraq. There are intra-Shia divisions with Shia PMF militias loyal to one of three Shia leaders. Some militias are loyal to al Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran who is head of state and Iran's highest religious authority. Others

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<sup>12</sup> *Iraq: Turning A Blind Eye*. 2017. Amnesty International.

<sup>13</sup> Wille, B. *Integrating Iraqi Fighting Forces Is Not Enough*. January 2017. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/06/integrating-iraqi-fighting-forces-not-enough>

follow al Sistani, or Muqtada al Sadr.<sup>14</sup> Al Sadr is another Iraqi Shia cleric and leader of the nationalist, Islamist movement, Sadrist. These latter two are both critical of Iranian influence in Iraq, and were hostile to former Prime Minister, al Maliki. They have at times offered positive but conditional support for current Prime Minister Abadi.

A recent report by the Middle East Research Institute highlights the dangers of divergent political and religious loyalties.<sup>15</sup> Firstly there is the issue of armed groups with allegiances beyond the Iraqi state holding territory in Iraq and serving as security actors. This is especially a concern in areas where the security actor and civilian population do not share the same demography or political interests. Furthermore there is a deeper issue that these forces become a platform for diverging subnational identities and ideologies at a time when a unified Iraqi identity is already so fragile. Long term this presents challenges for Iraqi politics if Iraqis feel less unified in their national identity and more affiliated with the interests of an armed political group with regional interests.

Beyond a shared interest in defeating ISIS, it is therefore very hard to make any generalised assessments of the interests and goals of the PMF as a whole. After the defeat of the common enemy of ISIS, it is likely that further differences of interest will become apparent between PMF forces. Such divergences also risk undermining the Iraqi State, as many of these groups become involved in politics and the State lacks a monopoly on armed force with which to keep them in order. Given their political interests, it is unlikely that many of these militias will be willing to disband after ISIS, or integrate into the regular Iraqi Security Forces.

Programs for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of PMF forces into the ISF once the conflict against ISIS ends are being considered. Most forces loyal to Sadr and Sistani have stated their willingness to integrate into the ISF in the future. Though it remains to be seen if forces would commit to this in practice. DDR would be an extremely complex process as many PMF groups' political interests, such as al Khamenei's followers, are opposed to it as it would restrict their capability to actualise their own political goals. It is also uncertain whether militias would be incorporated as whole forces or troops would be merged individually to different units. As long as the security situation in Iraq remains poor, such groups can continue to justify their existence. Though this is a self-fulfilling situation, keeping the ISF weak through the expansion of PMF forces. Equally, the Iraqi Government's capacity to integrate such large numbers of people into its own forces is limited.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, it seems that PMF militias will be involved in Iraqi politics for the foreseeable future.

The PMF's brigades are now assigned identification numbers. For example, Brigade 21 is a Shabak militia based on the edges of Mosul. However, such brigades are still members of specific PMF militias with their own names and organisational structures. The numbering is more of a formality to present the PMF as a unified military formation.

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<sup>14</sup> Mansour, R; Jabar, F, A. *The Popular Mobilisation Forces and Iraq's Future*. 2017. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

<sup>15</sup> O'Driscoll, D; Zoonen, D, V. *The Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq*. March 2017. Middle East Research Institute.

<sup>16</sup> O'Driscoll, D; Zoonen, D, V. *The Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq*. March 2017. Middle East Research Institute.

Abuses of civilian populations have been reported by many PMF militias. This has included unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, and torture of individuals suspected of ISIS affiliation.<sup>17</sup> Often this suspicion is based on very limited information. The sectarian nature of some of this violence, from Shia against Sunni was particularly prevalent during the fighting to retake Fallujah in 2016. It is partly these reports that pushed the Government not to allow the PMF to be involved in the fighting to retake Mosul.

## **The PMF in Mosul**

Whilst PMF forces have not been directly involved in the fighting to retake Mosul from IS, many have begun to develop a presence in the city as security actors in retaken areas. Their role as security actors primarily involves manning checkpoints, often alongside other ISF forces such as the local police or Iraqi army. PMF forces are involved in searches and arrests of IS suspects, this is further addressed in section 4. Many Hashd flags are visible at sites across the city, especially checkpoints. Shia flags are also commonly visible, though these are often placed by Shia ISF members.

There are currently an unknown number of PMF groups active in Mosul. This section provides brief overviews of the seven that have been identified.

- **Badr Organisation**
- **Kata'ib Hizballah**
- **Hashd Mosul**
- **Saraya al-Salam**
- **Hashd Ashari**
- **Shabak Hashd**
- **Haras Nineveh**

### **Badr Organisation**

Badr Organisation is both a Shia militia and a political party loyal to al Khamenei. The leader of Badr, Hadi al-Ameri, has been quoted as saying about Badr that “the majority of us believe that... Khamenei has all the qualifications as an Islamic leader. He is the leader not only for Iranians but the Islamic nation. I believe so and I take pride in it.”<sup>18</sup> Badr was founded with Iranian support in 1982, as Badr Brigades and was the military branch of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) (Now called the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)). Badr Brigades fought against Saddam’s regime for Iran. In 2008 Badr separated from the ISCI and became its own political party with a militia. Badr Organisation currently has 22 seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Furthermore,

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<sup>17</sup> *Iraq: Fallujah Abuses Inquiry Mired in Secrecy*. July 2016. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/07/iraq-fallujah-abuses-inquiry-mired-secrecy>

<sup>18</sup> O’Driscoll, D; Zoonen, D, V. *The Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq*. March 2017. Middle East Research Institute.

the current Minister of Interior, is Qasim Mohammad Jalal al-Araji, a member of Badr and former military commander of Badr. Prior to this, Mohammed Al-Ghabban, another member of Badr, was the Minister of the Interior. Accordingly Badr has strong influence over the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and its armed forces. More research is needed into the extent of this influence in practice.

Badr Organisation are allegedly responsible for human rights violations during recent military operations including torture, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, summary executions, looting and mass destruction of houses.<sup>19</sup>

Badr troops do not appear to be openly active in Mosul as a security force. A small number of their forces are training and guiding Hashd Mosul, alongside Kata'ib Hizballah

### **Kata'ib Hizballah**

Kata'ib Hizballah are a Shia PMF militia with extremely strong ties to al Khamenei and Iran, which provides funding and training. They are a separate organisation to Hizballah in Lebanon. Currently they are the only PMF militia listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States. This is in part due to the militia fighting against the Americans during the Iraq War. The leader of Kata'ib Hizballah is Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who is also Vice President of the PMF Committee. Reportedly many of its forces deployed, and likely recruited, in northern Iraq are ethnic Turkmens. Kata'ib Hizballah are considered one of the most feared PMF militias, far more so than Badr. They are allegedly responsible for many human rights violations during recent military operations including summary executions, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, torture, looting and mass destruction of houses.

### **Hashd Mosul**

Hashd Mosul are a new PMF militia currently active as a security actors in east Mosul. They were formed by Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah after the city was retaken from ISIS. Hashd Mosul's troops are recruited primarily from local Sunnis, but some of their commanding officers are PMF troops from Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah. Hashd Mosul is under the authority of its creators, Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah. There is currently little information about their specific activities in the city other than that they are working as security actors, primarily at checkpoints across the city. They are generally stationed at smaller checkpoints alongside other ISF troops.

This practice of Badr creating Hashds recruited from locals in areas retaken from ISIS is not uncommon and has been crucial in creating security forces. For example in Shirqat a militia of Sunni locals that reports to Badr called Brigade 51 was created.

### **Saraya al-Salam**

Saraya al-Salam are another Shia force. Originally formed as the Mahdi Army in response to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. They are the armed wing of the Sadrist Movement, a conservative Islamic and nationalist movement that is against foreign involvement in Iraq. Unlike some of the other Shia PMF they are also hostile to Iranian influence. Likewise,

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<sup>19</sup> *Literature Review of Local, Regional or Sub-State Defense Forces in Iraq*. January 2017. GPPI.

unlike some other forces they have openly supported future PMF integration into the State, but there is limited information on their human rights record.

### **Hashd Ashari**

Hashd Ashari comprise a variety of tribal militias that have been incorporated into the PMF. Hashd Ashari in Mosul and Nineveh is mainly comprised of tribes from the Jabouri, Sab Awi Hadidi tribes. Hashd Ashari militias generally function as security forces for the villages that their members are from. Accordingly most Hasd Ashari forces are deployed in the surrounding villages to the south of Mosul. Some KIs have reported that a number of the militias are now being funded by Badr Organisation and Kata'ib Hizballah and are following their directives.

### **Shabak Hashd**

The Shabak are a Shia group of people that live in areas east of Mosul. They created their own militia to defend their people against ISIS. It has a strength of approximately 1000 members. This militia is now active as a security force in Shabak villages in Nineveh, and at checkpoints at the edge of Mosul city. Some reports have suggested that the Shabak Hashd are working for Kata'ib Hizballah, though this has not been confirmed during research.

### **Haras Nineveh**

Haras Nineveh is a PMF militia established and led by al Nujaifi (April 2009 - May 2015). Founded in 2014 after ISIS took Mosul it was originally called called Hashd al Watani. The militia changed its name to Haras Nineveh on October 14, 2016. Many sources still refer to it by its original name. The militia is currently active as a security actor in the areas around Mosul University as well as some of the Northern neighbourhoods in west Mosul. They also have bases in Shalalat and Bashika, north of Mosul.

In early July it was announced by Nineveh Operations Command that Haras Nineveh would soon take over security for east Mosul and other forces would focus on securing the west. It remains to be seen how or when this will be actualised.

Haras Nineveh was originally funded by Turkey and was separate from the PMF. In December 2016, Haras Nineveh was merged into the PMF with all other non-PMF militias. The merge means that ostensibly the militia no longer receives financial backing from Ankara and is now funded by Baghdad. The move was publicly welcomed by both al Nujafi and a PMU spokesperson. The merge may have been an attempt to improve Iraq's relations with Turkey by formally legitimising the Haras Nineveh. This legitimacy will be key in post-ISIS reconstruction when such groups may be competing for political influence. Alternatively the merge may minimise Turkish influence in Nineveh by bringing the militia under Baghdad's authority and funding. This is less likely however, given how weak the formal chain of command is between the Commander-in-Chief and the militias.

Since their establishment, Haras Nineveh have been based in areas around Mosul under KRG control. Their main base was in Bashiqa, 12 miles north of Mosul. This base was officially approved by the Iraqi government on October 6, 2016. Haras Nineveh reportedly have 4,000 - 6,000 fighters which have been trained there by the Turkish military since late 2015, possibly earlier.

Originally, most of Haras Nineveh's soldiers were ex-Iraqi army, apparently from both pre and post-2003 forms of the army. Many recruits were also IDPs from Mosul who fled into KRG territory. Recently Haras Nineveh has begun recruiting from locals inside Mosul. Haras Nineveh is primarily comprised of Sunni Arabs though potentially 1000 members come from other local ethno-religious groups. Given its composition of Mosul locals, it has been self-advocated as a highly useful security force in Mosul.

### **Unknown PMF groups**

Some KIs and sources have begun to report many more militias emerging in the city. These militias are being referred to as new 'Hashds,' though it is unknown if they are being formally incorporated into the PMF or not. A specific issue raised was the amount of local political figures, especially those in governorate office who are recruiting their own small Hashd militias. Many members are recruited from troops in existing militias, though it is unclear if this means the other militia is officially 'lending' its forces. These militias may not be overtly affiliated with any political leader, who is commanding them via proxy. There is currently little information on what these militias are doing, but a plurality of civilian political figures responsible for armed groups creates serious risk of future armed conflict.

## 4. Dynamics

This section covers the main social, political and conflict dynamics that have been produced by the actors covered in sections 1 - 3. The social and political situation in Mosul is defined by two main factors. Firstly, the post-ISIS power vacuum which has been filled with a plurality of ISF and PMF armed security actors, including Shia militias from southern Iraq. Secondly, the not unrelated issue of widespread fear of distrust of anyone possibly affiliated with ISIS. This is leading to ongoing arrests, both legitimate and illegitimate, as well as extra-judicial violence including killings, by both armed actors and local civilians. Some KIs interviewed have reported that the situation is currently relatively calm despite these issues. The reason for this is that people are utterly exhausted from nearly three years of life under ISIS and the protracted battle to reclaim the city. How people may respond to these issues in the future as they recover remains to be seen. Lack of livelihoods and income remains a widespread issue. Various Ministries have been slow, or are still failing to properly pay public sector workers. This is pushing some people to join militias to secure an income to support themselves and their families. Looting and robbery reportedly continue to be widespread. It is now apparently common for poor individuals who have joined the militias to use the position to rob and loot houses, both empty and inhabited.

There are 7 main, but closely interlinked dynamics addressed:

- **Upcoming Governorate Elections**
- **Locals' distrust of perceived ISIS Affiliates**
- **Fears of Shia involvement and historic Sunni ostracisation**
- **Post-ISIS Judicial Processes And Abuses**
- **Tensions between Haras Nineveh, and Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah**
- **Regional Influences From Turkey and Iran**
- **Recruitment Into New Militias.**

### **Upcoming Governorate Elections**

Elections for the new Governor of Nineveh are expected to be held within the next 12 months. Both Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah, as well as Prime Minister Abadi's Islamic Dawa Party have opened political offices. Al Nujaifi is also expected to run for governor again. Although mixed, support for al Nujaifi is increasing. Initially many locals held Al Nujaifi responsible for the fall of Mosul to ISIS. This perception has shifted somewhat, in part due to his creation of Haras Nineveh. Some claimed to support him because of his distance from the government of Iraq. However, other KIs do not support him due to the ongoing warrant for his arrest for treason and for his perceived role in the fall of Mosul to ISIS.

An effective election may be able to resolve the tensions between these organisations peacefully, by legitimising one party, and their respective militia. However, the process could exacerbate tensions and may lead to armed violence. Nujaifi is unlikely to accept Shi'i influence over Mosul, even if there is some form of election involved.

### **Locals' distrust of perceived ISIS Affiliates**

There are currently enormous tensions regarding remaining civilian families that had members affiliated with ISIS. There have been recent protests to encourage security actors to forcibly remove ISIS affiliated families from the city. This is likely the main driver behind much of the extra-judicial violence that is happening in the city now. Research has highlighted several cases of people deliberately going to harass or attack the families of ISIS members at their homes, regardless of the family's actual affiliation. Dead bodies showing signs of execution also continue to be found on Mosul's streets, though specific numbers remain unknown. The killings are never claimed by any group but are likely executions of suspected ISIS affiliates, and could be conducted by civilian, ISF or PMF actors.

Earlier in the year KIs reported a wider distrust within Mosul of those who did not flee ISIS and those who did, as well as heightened distrust of Tribal Arabs from the west due to the perception that much of ISIS' support came from them. Recent KI interviews have suggested that the issue is overstated and that there is not as much tension between such social groups. The reason being that locals now believe that they know which remaining families were affiliated with ISIS members.

### **Fears of Shia involvement and historic Sunni ostracisation**

In Mosul 2014 the army and the Federal Police were present as a security force against the ongoing insurgency before losing the city to them. The Army secured east Mosul while Federal Police secured the west. Both were highly unpopular with locals in this time. Checkpoints and curfews were restricting movement between neighbourhoods and arbitrary arrests and disappearances were not uncommon. The majority of army troops at the time were Shia from southern Iraq. Fears of armed forces led by Shia and a feeling of ostracisation from the Shia dominated governments since 2003 are a key concern for Sunnis in Mosul. This 'sectarianisation' of the State has been one of the ongoing drivers of conflict in Iraq.<sup>20</sup> Many Sunnis felt especially ostracised under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in power between 2006 - 2014. Maliki enacted economic policies that were perceived to marginalise Sunnis and his reforms of the ISF pushed out many Sunnis, replacing them with Shia whilst also increasing his Government's ties to Shia militias. This exacerbated existing grievances over the de-Ba'athification process. Maliki then failed to hold ISF and Militias accountable for sectarian violence committed against Sunni populations. The government formed by current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has attempted to win back the trust of Sunni populations, to mixed success. KIs in Mosul generally reported still feeling that the national government does not represent them nor care for their interests. This ostracisation has historically fuelled reliance on tribal or other local ties that can provide social support and political representation in place of a disconnected government. Despite distrust of the Government, trust in the ISF is currently

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<sup>20</sup> Rohwerder, B. *Contemporary conflict analysis of Iraq* (Rapid Literature Review). 2014. GSDRC.

hard to assess. Some KIs have spoken very well of them and their treatment of civilians during the battle to retake the city. Others have suggested that people are afraid to speak badly of them in interviews and that there is a common distrust of the Badr influence over the Mol. During the fighting the ISF were crucial in providing food and water to residents in recently retaken areas. This does seem to have greatly improved their popularity. Though it is unclear how the arrests of ISIS suspects have influenced perception.

Several KIs have repeatedly stated fears of Shia PMF forces as a widespread issue. This is generally articulated as a broad fear of all Shia involvement, regardless of which leader they are loyal to. For a lot of Sunnis in Nineveh over the past year, the Shia PMF were more threatening than IS. The reported abuses conducted by Shia PMF, as well as historic sectarian violence across Iraq, led many to expect massacres whenever the PMF encountered Sunni civilians. This was one of the key reasons that the PMF were not part of operations to retake Mosul. Sunnis often feel that they may be killed by PMF forces simply for being Sunni, that they will be judged as being ISIS members. Whereas under IS' rule, even if they did not agree with ISIS' ideology, there was at least a system of rules that could generally be obeyed to keep themselves alive.

There has been little overt protest to the arrival of Shia PMF militias, despite the perceived threats that their presence brings. There are various reasons for this addressed below, as well as the aforementioned exhaustion of the population. However, this involvement is not a source of reconciliation between Sunni and Shia but rather a source of tensions that could well build over time. Many Shia PMF groups, have been active in east and west Mosul to deliver supplies of aid to civilians inside the city. Some KIs have reported that although this aid has been desperately needed, they still view it as a shallow move by the PMF to try and look good for the media. Others have suggested that it is hugely improving locals' perceptions of the Shia groups. This is likely dependent on to what extent they needed to rely on Shia PMF support.

The Sheikhs interviewed cited their main fears for the wellbeing of Mosul post-IS as the developing involvement of Shia PMF groups and the abuses that they are perceived to be committing, as well as the perceived corruption and failings of the governorate. They were keen to develop their own militias to secure their tribes against Shia PMF forces. Those spoken to did not reportedly have their own forces with the Hashd Ashari. The reason for which is possibly that they had only recently been liberated from ISIS and had not yet been able to form militias inside the city. They had apparently made petitions to the governor for funding to create militias, but the request was ignored. Given the dispersed nature of the tribal members in the city, there would not be a specific area of the city for a given tribe's militia to be defending the way they guard their villages in rural areas.

### **Post-ISIS Judicial Processes And Abuses**

The danger of ISIS operatives remaining in post-IS Mosul has been a key security concern for all actors involved in the city, especially given attacks by suicide bombers in March and June. Ongoing screening processes have been conducted by all actors, including database checks of residents and house-to-house searches. This has been a necessary process to secure the city, and in itself has been accepted by locals, keen to see ISIS gone from their city. It has nonetheless been a source of widespread abuses, and potential future social

grievances. In March 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that prisons in Qayyarah and Hamam al Alil, south of Mosul, were holding 1,269 prisoners without charge. Some of these prisoners were as young as 13 and being kept in appalling conditions.<sup>21</sup> There are also an unknown number of secret prisons run by various armed forces. It is unknown how many people may be held in such places. Those taken that have been released have been interrogated, and often tortured. Others have simply disappeared with no trace. Some individuals arrested have later been found dead with their bodies dumped in the street.

All armed groups active in the city have been involved in ‘detaining’ ISIS suspects in Mosul at some point. KIs interviewed have reported that many people inside Mosul and on displacement routes fleeing ISIS territory have been screened and detained by PMF forces and that many of these people have disappeared without record. HRW has raised concerns over PMF screening and detainment procedures as the PMF have no legal authority to conduct them.<sup>22</sup> Many of these detentions, even those by legitimate actors, have been conducted without a transparent judicial process. ‘Official’ daytime searches conducted without proper warrants of arrest or notification to family members of where the suspect has been taken have been reported. It is unclear quite how widespread such detentions are but in late January the greatest fear reported by KIs across east Mosul was of being accused of supporting IS. One KI reported that these abuses were not as widespread as some people feared. Rather, the fear and uncertainty of the situation was helping spread rumours out of proportion, making the disappearances seem much more common. Claims were also made about abuses committed by local Sunnis working for Shia directed PMF militias. Given the negative perceptions of the Shia PMF and greater trust in the ISF, there is a high possibility that they are taking a disproportionate amount of blame for these detentions given that the perpetrators are often not identified.

It has been common that after an area in Mosul was liberated, the relevant security actors would often rely on local informants to label which residents were ISIS affiliates. This would later be supplemented by formal ‘house to house’ screening. By late June very little formal screening has been done in retaken neighbourhoods inside west Mosul but there are some cases of ISF relying on locals to inform them of any ISIS members. Some KIs in east Mosul cited cases of individuals labelling those that they had a personal grievance against as being IS as a means to get them arrested. In one case KIs reported a former ISIS member was trying to get other people arrested to remove those who could accuse him in turn, and to gain influence with local security forces. Another KI stated that this is unlikely to work as a second informant is needed to corroborate such claims in court. However, given the amount of detentions leading to disappearances, this is a major concern.

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<sup>21</sup> *Iraq: Hundreds Detained in Degrading Conditions*. March 2017. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/13/iraq-hundreds-detained-degrading-conditions>

<sup>22</sup> Wille, B. *Where are Mosul’s Detainees Going?*. March 2017. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/19/where-are-mosuls-detainees-going>

In January Abadi ordered an investigation into potential abuses being committed during the battle for Mosul.<sup>23</sup> However, the investigation is limited to specific PMF forces and an unknown number of ISF members. Therefore the investigation will not expose those abuses committed by other groups at different times.

At other times, people have been taken during the night by unidentified armed actors. One KI highlighted his concerns that many of these are abductions done by civilian actors simply wearing military uniforms to present themselves as legitimate actors. Extortion has also been a feature of some detentions, with armed actors demanding money from a suspect's family to ensure their release. This rarely led to much success.

In interviews conducted in May and June, KIs reported fewer concerns about these detentions and fewer cases of people disappearing, despite the influx of new IDPs from west Mosul. One KI still reported their main fear was the ability for criminals, or individuals looking to settle personal grievances, disguised as security actors to get away with abuses.

Given the above issues and the highly militarised nature of security actors in Mosul, those with strong tribal ties are increasingly relying on tribal law to resolve personal grievances. Cases of Diyah were too sensitive to ask Sheikhs about directly but it was suggested in interviews with the Sheikhs that the tribes are predominantly using tribal law, not Iraqi judicial processes, to resolve their issues. This increasing reliance on tribal support is very much a reflection of the situation in east Mosul, with a weak state and a plurality of armed groups. It was claimed by the Sheikhs that under a functional governorate, if a Sheikh was asked to settle a tribal dispute, a formal statement was made to the government to help resolve the issue within state law. If this was not addressed, then the Sheikhs would resort to tribal laws. The Sheikhs interviewed have found the governor to have no interest to contact them, and many are distrustful of the local and national government due to perceived corruption and the Shia influence over the Ministry of Interior. However research has also suggested the reverse, with one non-Sheikh KI suggesting that Sheikhs prefer first to resolve the issue themselves and will then turn to the government if they cannot. This possible strengthening of tribal law may be an inevitable result of the weak governance situation in Mosul, or a useful opportunity to for Sheikhs to reestablish tribal power.

### **Tensions between Haras Nineveh and Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah**

There have been tensions between Haras Nineveh and Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah. Prior to its incorporation into the PMF, Haras Nineveh was not recognised by some PMF leaders as a legitimate force for Iraq's defence. In turn, Haras Nineveh has been very afraid of Shi'is, and by extension, Iranian involvement in Mosul's recapture and restoration. Al Nujaifi has stated in interviews that Shia involvement would trigger new sectarian conflicts and that it would have been better for Mosul to remain under ISIS control than for Shi'i forces to retake it.

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<sup>23</sup> *Iraq PM orders investigation into abuses reported in Mosul battle.* January 2017. Rudaw. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-violations-idUSKBN1571NM>

Haras Nineveh were temporarily absent as a security actor inside Mosul city, between March and June. They remained based in Sha'lat, close to Mosul in this time. Prior to this absence, during Haras Nineveh's time as a security actor in Mosul, KIs reported ongoing disagreements with Badr loyal forces in the city. These were at times simple personal arguments in the streets between members, but also inter-organisational disagreements over who would secure which neighbourhoods. Reportedly in early March this culminated in a gun battle between the two sides. It was suggested that this was a personal dispute between militia members. However, the consequence is that the local police, under orders from the Mol and therefore possibly Badr, ordered Haras Nineveh out of Mosul neighbourhoods. Haras Nineveh have since returned as a security actor in areas around the Mosul University, it is unclear what changed to allow them to return.

Within Mosul Haras Nineveh have a lot of popular support, but al Nujaifi is not a member of government and is wanted for treason which has greatly affected his popularity with some Badr organisation have the stronger influence over Baghdad and corresponding legitimacy but are generally not welcome inside the city. Given that Haras Nineveh are a force comprised of locals from Mosul and feel that they are the most legitimate security force, it is unlikely that this situation will be tolerated for long. Some concerns were raised at the start of the year regarding kidnappings and abuses by Haras Nineveh but most KIs suggested locals were eager for their involvement as a security force, due to being local and therefore trustworthy. Whilst Haras Nineveh does have Turkish ties, KIs so far have not reported this as a concern the way PMF Iranian ties are perceived.

### **Regional Influences From Turkey and Iran**

The presence of Haras Nineveh and Shia PMF groups with Iranian ties in Mosul - Badr and Kata'ib Hizballah - is not simply a reflection of national politics but also of Turkish and Iranian interest in Nineveh. The conflict against IS in Iraq is intrinsically connected to the civil war in Syria where various nations and sub-state militias are also fighting ISIS and each other. Iran and Turkey are supporting opposing sides of the war. Iran has been providing crucial support to the Assad regime to keep it in power, including deploying its own troops to fight. Turkey has been a key ally of the Free Syrian Army who are fighting the regime and ISIS. In 2016 Turkey also deployed its own troops into northern Syria to fight both ISIS and Kurdish Democratic Forces, though there has been limited conflict directly between Turkey and the Syrian Regime.

Iran has two main interests in supporting the Assad regime. It is attempting to secure direct land access through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon to support Lebanon's Hizballah, which remains at war with Iran's enemy, Israel. Iran also is attempting to extend its political influence over the region, including both Iraq and Syria, as part of its geopolitical struggle against the Gulf States. Iran's support has been crucial for both the Iraqi defence against ISIS and the enduring survival of the Syrian regime.

In 2015 Turkey established a military base in the town of Bashiqa, north of Mosul in Nineveh. Establishment of the Turkish base has caused huge diplomatic issues as their presence was not requested by the Iraqi government. The deployment has involved up to 600 troops and 25 tanks. Turkish forces are still present in Bashiqa to aid training of Haras Nineveh. The issue remains a source of contention between Ankara and Baghdad. Haras Nineveh's participation as a security force in Mosul caused tension as it was feared that

the militia was a means for extending Turkish influence into the operation. They were ‘grudgingly’ accepted to be a limited part of the operation, under Peshmerga authority. This was likely accepted as local Sunni fighters were desired for operations inside Mosul due to the political difficulties of Peshmerga and Shi’i PMF involvement. The Mosul Local Council approved Haras Nineveh’s presence in the city prior to military operations. However the Council did not approve any Shia militias due to fears of sectarian violence. Nevertheless, as noted, Baghdad did order Haras Nineveh out of the city itself.

Turkey feels that it has a responsibility to protect Sunnis and Turkmen from the threat of Shia militias in Nineveh. Turkey may be attempting to create a safe zone for these inhabitants. Though only Haras Nineveh has the power to do this unless Turkey commits its own ground troops. Turkey also continues to conduct regular airstrikes against PKK targets in the KRG and having a military presence and influence over territory further south may be highly useful for them in the future.

The countries do have strong economic ties. 90% of Iran’s gas exports goes to Turkey, which make up 20% of Turkey’s gas imports.<sup>24</sup> Whilst this might prevent direct conflict, it may not prevent Mosul from being a site of Proxy conflict between the militias they are backing there.

### **Recruitment Into New Militias**

The militias now in Mosul are continuing to recruit locals, especially Hashd Mosul and Haras Nineveh. This is done both to strengthen armed capabilities and to foster local support. In both cases, it is not known how many people are continually being recruited.

There are four main reasons for joining the militias: poverty, fear, power and a need to distance oneself from ISIS. For some people with no livelihoods or savings, working for a militia has become a necessary way to support themselves and their families. Many people are very afraid of Shia led militias, therefore they hope that by being a part of such an organisation they will earn a degree of protection. It has also been reported that joining Hashd Mosul provides the recruit with an ID card that protects them from arrest. In an environment where fears of arbitrary detention are so prevalent, this is an extremely strong draw. The ability to be absolved from arrest may also be a motivation for individuals involved in personal revenge violence or criminal activities. After years of living under ISIS’ rule, the chance to be involved in the city’s security and gain some personal power is also a strong draw for many, especially youths. Many of those who have joined Badr and Haras Nineveh are from families who fled from ISIS during the occupation. It was suggested in some interviews that part of recruits willingness to join a Shi’i organisation like Badr, or to be involved in abusive practices against other Sunnis was a distrust of those who did not try and flee IS. However, this has since been repudiated by other KIs. As all militias are currently still united against ISIS as the common enemy, joining one is a useful way to displace any social tensions over whether an individual or their family was affiliated with ISIS.

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<sup>24</sup> Bora, B. *What is behind the hostility between Iran and Turkey?* February 2017. al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/02/hostility-iran-turkey-170225184418231.html>

Badr is also investing in developing influence over Tribes in the region. Just as Badr is trying to recruit individuals, it is also pursuing direct agreements with Tribal Sheikhs. The consequence of which is that tribal relations are currently being damaged by this attempt to buy loyalty. Those tribes that are now working alongside Badr reportedly have been ostracised from the others, though details were not given on the consequences of this rift. The non-Badr affiliated tribes in Mosul reportedly have good relations with each other, in part due to their shared opposition, and are effectively and peacefully resolving any inter-tribal disputes through their own mechanisms.

For individuals with strong tribal affiliation, joining a militia requires the approval of their Sheikh. The Sheikhs reported that in cases where individuals have joined when their Sheikh does not support the given group, approval is not given and the individual is effectively cut out of the tribe. This ostracisation leaves such individuals without a social group to return to if they want to leave the militia later. This is especially risky if the given individual gets into trouble with another tribe and no longer has a Sheikh to represent them.

Rise was told by one informant in February that although there had been attempts by the police, and other ISF forces, to recruit local Sunnis, very few people could afford to get to Baghdad for training. It has also been claimed that some Sunnis are being deliberately not recruited due to Shia control over the Ministry of Interior and therefore the recruitment process. The accuracy of this statement is disputed, but it is an important marker of the extent of distrust locals often have of the Mol.

A common issue reported earlier in the year was armed groups' usage of civilian structures. Many empty houses were been taken over to accommodate PMF and ISF troops. This occupation has partly been a result of the widespread damage to police and military infrastructure in the city which will take time to rebuild. KIs reported that in some cases families had been evicted for such a purpose, generally by the PMF or the Iraqi army. It is difficult to verify the extent of this but research has shown several examples of civilian structures with general PMF and Shia flags outside, with one house also displaying a specific Badr flag. This occupation reportedly also involved degrees of anti-social behaviour, a common example was the playing of loud Shia music at night which antagonised locals. These occupations have also commonly involved looting.

These occupations blocked families returning to their homes; prior to return families were in touch with local friends, family, Sheikhs or Mukhtars, to notify them if their home was inaccessible. Those that do still return often tried to petition their Sheikh or Mukhtar for help. In some cases the Sheikh or Mukhtar was able to go to the Iraqi army 16th division or the Intelligence Services to petition their help, though these forces do not always have the capability or will to evict a militia. The issue is mostly resolved now. Recent KI interviews had stated that such forces are now residing in structures that were known to belong to ISIS members. It is not known if this is just houses that were left empty after the fighting or if evictions of suspected ISIS families have been conducted to free up space.

## **5. Post-ISIS Reconciliation**

Much has been done during the battle to retake Mosul that could produce great anger within communities themselves, and towards the ISF, PMF, and the Government. Between the use of heavy indirect fire, airstrikes, revenge violence and the illegitimate arrests of possibly innocent people, there are many sources of potential grief to fuel future conflict in the form of new insurgencies. At the same time, terrorist groups, and even some of the new militias, will thrive on this grief and distrust. If the armed actors securing the city do not treat civilians as civilians, but as potential terrorists, they risk creating the very conditions that improve the appeal of joining terrorist organisations. To this end, there must be accountability for any abuses committed by the ISF and PMF.

The new militias in Mosul are likely to develop as one of the central issues for the city's reconstruction, especially if their competing interests or treatment of the civilian population produces armed violence. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of these forces into the ISF in the near future seems significantly difficult but is something that could be advocated for. Even for the groups that are willing, there will be huge costs and political challenges involved. However, as long as there are PMF militias steps should be taken to influence how they operate as security actors.

Without some form of peace process to reconcile the emerging distrust between communities that is emerging it will be extremely unlikely that there will be lasting peace in Mosul. Without strong civilian governance, and an ongoing disconnect between locals and the national government, armed actors will have the space to take on an ever more political role. Although this is a very precarious time, there is an opportunity to resolve historic sectarian tensions while many Iraqis are united by a common threat. Peacebuilding platforms could rally behind a shared Iraqi identity that has survived the damage done by ISIS.

Securing Nineveh from ISIS will not end the conflicts and tensions across the region. Rather, the fighting is creating new spaces for competing regional actors to extend their influence. Care must be taken by all sides of the conflict, including the Coalition, not to exacerbate these tensions and provoke more conflict. Mosul could very easily become the site of a proxy conflict between regional forces because of the Turkish and Iranian involvement, and the US' ongoing tensions with Iran.