

Unseating the Caliphate: Contrasting the Challenges of Liberating Fallujah and Mosul

By Zana Gulmohamad

The successful liberation of Fallujah from the Islamic State by a constellation of Iraqi forces in June provides pointers for the more challenging mission of liberating the much larger city of Mosul. Relatively effective coordination of Iraqi forces, coalition airpower, and vital intelligence from Sunni tribes and townspeople led to the Islamic State being driven out more quickly than expected, despite the fact that an unauthorized incursion by Shi`a militias risked compromising the offensive, as well as attempts to secure and rebuild the town. Mosul will be harder to take because Islamic State fighters are less likely to flee in large numbers. It may be possible to make significant progress in the coming weeks because of weakening Islamic State capabilities and morale and the emergence of resistance forces in the city providing key intelligence, as well as successful cooperation so far between Baghdad and Erbil. But the large number of rival Iraqi actors and regional powers—particularly Iran and Turkey—jockeying for position in Mosul means that unless their conflicting agendas can be resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting.

The offensive to liberate Mosul, which began in the early hours of October 17, is far more delicate and challenging than that of any previous Islamic State-held cities because of its size and because Nineveh province—which Mosul is the capital—consists of the most diverse and ancient ethnic and religious communities in Iraq. Moreover, a dug-in Islamic State looks set to fight to the death there unlike in Fallujah where over 1,000 fighters and members retreated from the town. Making it even more contentious, the geopolitical significance of Mosul has created competition between the federal government, pro-Iranian Shi`a militias, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraqi Arab Sunni factions, and regional powers to carve out future influence in the city.

Zana Gulmohamad is a Ph.D. candidate in the Politics Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, where he focuses on Iraqi security and foreign relations. He was previously a senior security analyst for the Kurdistan Regional Government and has published articles in a variety of outlets including Jamestown Foundation's Terrorism Monitor. Follow @ZanaGuli

The author would like to thank Paul Cruickshank for his considerable editorial input.

This article draws on interviews¹ with key Iraqi political and military players, including in Anbar and Nineveh, to outline and assess the operation that recaptured Fallujah in June and to compare and contrast the challenges faced there with those of the just launched Mosul offensive. It analyses the constellation of forces set to march on the northern Iraqi city, the Islamic State's ability to defend the city, and the political and military dynamics that will determine the ultimate success and failure of the war in Iraq against the Islamic State.

Part 1: The Fallujah Operation

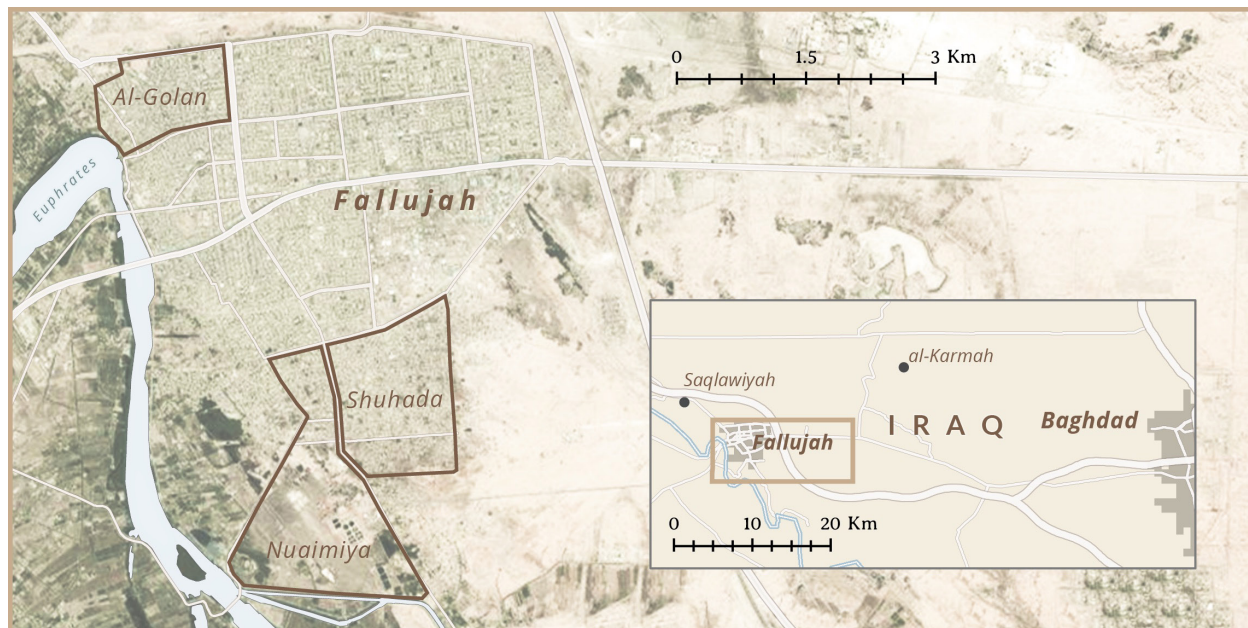
Why Fallujah Was First

Fallujah, 37 miles west of Baghdad, is the second-largest city in Anbar governorate and was the second most symbolic territorial prize in Iraq for the Islamic State.² The Iraqi government's decision to liberate Fallujah first, despite U.S. pressure³ to drive northward to Mosul first, was primarily to protect Baghdad from attacks launched from the area. "We used to call Fallujah Iraq's Kandahar as it was Daesh's stronghold,"⁴ Ghazi al-Kaoud,⁵ the Sunni chairman of the Committee of Tribes in the Iraqi Council of Representatives (ICR), told the author.

There were also political imperatives. Shi`a political factions, led by the Iraqi National Alliance and Shi`a militias' leaders, pressured Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to pursue Fallujah's liberation before Mosul's in order to retaliate against attacks on their fellow Shi`a in Baghdad.⁶ Amidst power struggles in Baghdad and criticism of the government, the Fallujah operation also provided al-Abadi with an opportunity to turn the fight against the Islamic State into a unifying issue.⁷

Competing Agendas

Initially, the Iraqi government and the Shi`a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) "al-Hashd al-Sha'abi"⁸ leaders sought to take the lead on Fallujah.⁹ But after U.S. pressure, a compromise was reached. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) would lead the operation inside the city while the Shi`a-dominated PMF militias would surround and isolate Fallujah and support the ISF from the outskirts. Al-Abadi appointed Lieutenant General Abdul-Wahab al-Sa'adi, a key commander in the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), to lead the effort. Al-Sa'adi was disliked by the PMF militias due to previous tensions in operations in Ramadi and Tikrit, particularly between himself and Hadi al-Amiri (the leader of the Badr Organization, the largest Shi`a militia in Iraq).¹⁰ Moreover, in 2008 the CTS and Jaish al-Mahdi (Sadrist militia) and its offshoots had fought.¹¹ Therefore, fissures in the military command surfaced. While they did not result in confrontation, various factions, particularly the Shi`a militias, did not completely adhere to the plan, which complicated the task of taking back Fallujah.



Fallujah, Iraq (Rowan Technology)

Participating Forces

The ground forces deployed to take back Fallujah—more than 30,000—involved three major loosely allied groups:¹² one, the Shi`a-dominated Iraqi Army (Defense Ministry),¹³ the Shi`a-dominated Interior Ministry's forces,¹⁴ and the much less sectarian CTS;¹⁵ two, the PMF's majority Shi`a militias including some local Sunni volunteers;¹⁶ and three, 6,000 Sunni tribesmen from Anbar belonging to a variety of al-Hashd al-`Asha'iri al-Anbari al-Sunni groupings.¹⁷ All of these forces were officially under the authority of the Joint Operation Command (JOC) and the Fallujah Liberation Operations Command, which was closely observed by al-Abadi.¹⁸ The local Sunni tribes and local police forces were supposed to control Fallujah after its liberation.¹⁹

Islamic State Defenses

The total number of Islamic State fighters in Fallujah according to al-Sa'adi were around 3,500,²⁰ with foreign Islamic State fighters (non-Iraqis) given key combatant roles.²¹ Al-Sa'adi and the Iraqi researcher Hisham al-Hashimi estimate around 85 percent of the group's fighters in the town were Iraqis and 15 percent foreign fighters.²²

The group put up defenses by building barricades, trenches, and around four miles of secret tunnel networks; prepared improvised explosive devices; booby trapped vehicles; and used heavy and small arms.²³ Tunnels were also a feature of the group's defenses in Ramadi, Tikrit, Sinjar, and Manjib in Syria, and are expected to play a significant role in the group's attempts to defend Mosul. In Fallujah, the tunnels were designed to help fighters encircle and ambush anti-Islamic State forces; avoid airstrikes; connect three frontlines, and deploy snipers, weaponry and logistic transportation around Fallujah; and to be used as escape passages.²⁴

Retaking Fallujah

The military operation consisted of two phases.²⁵ First, in January and February 2016, Iraqi forces conducted a shaping or isolating campaign to encircle Fallujah in order to cut the Islamic State's

supply lines.²⁶ It was led by the PMF and supported by the ISF and local Sunni tribes.²⁷ These forces encircled and took control of three major areas around Fallujah: the areas to the north and northwest close to Saqlawiyah, the area to the east around al-Karmah, and the area to the south around Nuaimiya.²⁸ Despite the encirclement, some small infiltration routes for the Islamic State remained, according to al-Sa'adi, the operation's top commander.²⁹ Meanwhile, the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi Air Force targeted Islamic State positions in Fallujah.

Despite a number of tribal chiefs pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in Fallujah one year before the liberation, there were tribal members inside Fallujah who secretly assisted the ISF and anti-Islamic State coalition by providing intelligence to target Islamic State positions.³⁰ The developments in this stage eroded the Islamic State's confidence and eased the next phase of operations to take back Fallujah.

Prime Minister al-Abadi announced the second phase, "Operation Breaking Terrorism," on May 23, 2016. As the U.S.-led coalition provided air power, joint forces led by the CTS and Iraqi army stormed the city center from the southern "Nuaimiya" front because it is closest to the city center and there are no agriculture areas where Islamic State fighters could hide. By this point, the PMF's Shi`a forces had secured the northern and western approaches to Fallujah and remained stationed there.³¹ Smaller PMF units were embedded with the ISF in the area to the south of the city.³² At this time, the pro-Iranian Shi`a factions were still sticking to the plan, as illustrated by the remarks in early June of al-Amiri, the leader of the Badr Organization, when he stated, "After we isolated Fallujah ... we [the PMF] scored a great achievement encircling Fallujah ... the remaining task will be entering and liberating it, which we [PMF] have completely left for the Iraqi armed forces, counterterrorism forces... We [the PMF] will not participate [enter Fallujah]."³³

With Iraqi forces pouring into the town, the PMF lobbied to also enter Fallujah and gave locals a deadline to evacuate. On June 13, some PMF forces, mainly from the Badr Organization, ignored

the injunctions from the Prime Minister's office, entered the city, and took up position in the southern suburbs, including Shuhada.³⁴ Al-Marjiya Sistani's, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's and Muqtada al-Sadr's militias also entered these areas but in fewer numbers.³⁵

The decision by some of the PMF's militias to act on their own initiative rather than execute the previously agreed plan risked jeopardizing the operation. Their entry without permission and the subsequent abductions and arrests of townspeople and Islamic State fighters could have created a major backlash among the town's Sunni population.³⁶ Ultimately, despite the PMF's actions, the JOC managed to distribute responsibilities among the military components and coordinate between the ground forces and the U.S.-led coalition's airpower effectively enough to drive the Islamic State out.

On June 17, the CTS reached the city center from the southern axis after the collapse of the Islamic State's defenses on the southern flank. That day, al-Abadi prematurely announced victory, but a few hundred Islamic State fighters halted the ISF advance and held Fallujah's northwestern district of al-Golan for a further week.³⁷ On June 26, after an intensive month of military offensives, the CTS announced the liberation of this last district.

After months of an attritional siege, the Islamic State's morale had collapsed. More than 1,800 of its fighters were killed in the final phase of Fallujah's liberation, around half the force the Islamic State originally had available to defend the city.³⁸ According to the Iraqi government, over 1,000 active Islamic State members infiltrated the group of refugees fleeing Fallujah.³⁹ Al-Hashimi said that Islamic State members in Fallujah could be classified in two groups: first, military, and second, logistical, finance, and administrative members. Islamic State members who infiltrated the fleeing masses of overwhelmingly innocent civilians were mainly from the second group.⁴⁰ But a significant number of fighters appear to have fled, too. As June progressed, reports streamed in of Islamic State fighters defecting, discarding their weapons, or escaping from Fallujah. One fleeing Islamic State convoy of hundreds of cars was destroyed by the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi Air Force at the end of the month.⁴¹

The liberation of Fallujah had been less difficult than many had feared. Intelligence from Sunni tribal fighters appears to have helped considerably. Abboud al-Issawi, an MP and a member of the Committee of Tribes in the ICR, told the author, "Besides the ISF and the U.S.-led coalition's air forces' significant role in defeating the Islamic State in Fallujah, Hashd al-Asha'ri had a positive role in supporting the Iraqi Army, providing them with information which included identifying Islamic State figures, and knowing the land."⁴²

A month afterward, al-Kaoud, the Sunni tribal leader, told the author, "Although we condemn some of Hashd al-Sha'abi's actions such as killing a number of innocents, bad treatment of civilians, and the arrests of individuals ... we expected that Fallujah's liberation would be with great difficulties, damage to the city, and significant civilian bloodshed. The results were to the contrary."⁴³

The Post-Conflict Phase

Liberating Fallujah was the easy part. According to the author's interviewees and al-Sa'adi, a long war of attrition is expected as Iraqi forces continue to press against the remaining Islamic State fighters in the region and the group's fighters' shift to guerilla war and terrorist attacks.⁴⁴

The PMF's arrests and abuse of locals not only risked the mission

to clear Fallujah of the Islamic State, but angering the local population has made it more difficult to hold and rebuild the town and its surroundings. As Hamid al-Mutlaq, the deputy chair of the Committee of Defense and Security in the ICR, remarked, "Fallujah's liberation was not a model operation because the fate of around 700 individuals, a number of whom were killed and kidnapped by Hashd al-Sha'abi, is unknown."⁴⁵

The risks of a backlash were mitigated by the fact most locals were evacuated from Fallujah before and during the operation. In recent weeks, residents have begun to return to Fallujah after their backgrounds were checked. To date, al-Hashd al-`Asha'iri al-Anbari, particularly the Dera' al-Fallujah Brigade, has been deployed in some areas of Fallujah, helping to reassure the townspeople, as has the fact that several areas are now controlled by locally recruited police.

However, other areas are still controlled by the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi Army, a regiment of Iraq's Emergency Rapid Response, and Shi'a PMF militias.⁴⁶ According to several local reports, not only has the Badr Organization formally opened a branch west of Fallujah in Abu Alwan in al-Nasaf called the Cultural Office of the Badr Organization, but Shi'a militias have hung Shiite flags with Shi'a slogans such as "Ya Hussein" along the main roads of the town. According to the same reports, this has increased locals' concerns about Fallujah's identity and about the presence of these militias.⁴⁷

Several challenges remain. A significant proportion of Fallujah's homes and infrastructure are destroyed, even if the damage is less severe than in Ramadi and Tikrit. There is no water or electricity, and the reconstruction process is slow. The strict screening processes to check the backgrounds of internally displaced person (IDPs) and to learn whether they have ties to the Islamic State risk further alienating locals. Those suspected of ties with the Islamic State are not permitted to return to the city.

According to the author's interviews,⁴⁸ local Sunnis yearn for their tribesmen to control the whole city. There is a danger that sectarian frictions, caused by the still large numbers of non-local and non-Sunni forces present as well as revenge attacks by those who were hurt by the Islamic State in Fallujah, could be exploited by the Islamic State to destabilize the security situation.

Incoherence between forces, inadequate support for local tribesmen that was expressed to the author, lack of a genuine plan to integrate local Sunni tribesmen into formal forces, and allowance of the Shi'a militias' to control districts and violate human rights will continue to hinder the stabilization phase in Fallujah.

Despite these challenges, liberating Fallujah was successful in reducing the security threats to the capital, and it shrunk the Islamic State's revenue streams, destroyed its regional command center, and scaled back its movements in Anbar.⁴⁹ Even as anti-Islamic State forces were fighting small resistance pockets in Fallujah, the Iraqi government ordered operations on new fronts south of Mosul in preparation for its liberation.

Part 2: The Mosul Operation

The Biggest Challenge Yet

The Mosul operation is more complicated and arduous than any other in Iraq due to several reasons. It is one of the Islamic State's twin capitals and the largest city under the group's control.⁵⁰ Its demographics are significantly different to any other province in Iraq as it contains Arab Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis,

Turkmen, Shabaks, Kakais, and Sabeans. Mosul has geopolitical importance to Baghdad, Erbil, Turkey, Iran, Syria, and the Arab Gulf States, and their divergent political and military agendas will complicate the retaking and rebuilding of the city.

Mosul fell to the Islamic State in June 2014 after the ISF's rapid meltdown. Other insurgent and terrorist groups that were holding the city alongside the Islamic State were quickly assimilated.⁵¹ With the Islamic State now losing ground, its leaders have recognized it may lose much of its territory, including Mosul, but they have made clear they will not give up fighting.⁵² They have had two years to prepare defenses and will fight for Mosul, where the caliphate was declared by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, more fiercely than other cities because their foothold in Iraq and the caliphate's legacy will be lost if Mosul is retaken. The Islamic State will likely resort to various tactics that it has employed previously in other towns. In recent weeks, they have filled trenches with oil to be set ablaze to lower visibility for coalition airplanes, have extended their tunnel network, and have resorted to arming children as young as eight years old and using them as spies.⁵³

Despite the challenges, the constellation of ground forces seeking to liberate Mosul should eventually prevail. They all share at least the common goal of removing the Islamic State. But their competing agendas and the lack of shared plans to stabilize Mosul will make securing and rebuilding the city and preventing the emergence of a destabilizing terrorist and guerilla campaign by the Islamic State very difficult.

Weakening Islamic State Numbers and Morale

Iraqi sources and American officials believe a maximum of 4,500 Islamic state fighters remain in Mosul, of which more than 1,000 are non-Iraqis.⁵⁴ The significant reduction in the group's presence in Mosul is due to the transfer of some of its forces to Syria⁵⁵ as well as airstrikes targeting the group and its top commanders.⁵⁶ Despite the Islamic State fighters' counter attacks on areas such as those close to ISF positions north of Qayyara,⁵⁷ the pressure exerted on the Islamic State has led to growing frustration as evidenced by harsher punishments for those unwilling to obey orders to stay and fight.⁵⁸ While there are still a number of key commanders and caliphate ministers operating in Mosul, some important Islamic State figures have sold properties under their control in Mosul and moved their families to Syria.⁵⁹ There are also indications that al-Baghdadi has replaced Iraqis occupying key security roles for the group in Mosul with foreign fighters.⁶⁰ This policy was also reportedly implemented in Fallujah, and risks aggravating tensions between the Iraqis living in Mosul and foreign fighters who are increasingly calling the shots.

An Emerging Resistance Movement

A fledgling resistance movement has emerged in Mosul, increasingly challenging the Islamic State. Members use the letter M to symbolize resistance "*Muqawama*," and their number includes organizations known as Kataib Mosul, Kataib al-Hrar, Free Officers Movements "Harakat Thubat al-Ahrrar."⁶¹ These secret networks target Islamic State forces and spread liberation propaganda. They have exposed the Islamic State's harsh policies and actions and produce anti-Islamic State videos. They have connections with and provide intelligence to anti-Islamic State coalition forces.⁶²

The contribution of these groups will be relatively limited compared to the extensive fighters and firepower that are rallying around Mosul. However, small, organized local groups were in-

strumental during the offensive to liberate Qayyara, for example targeting Islamic State fighters on the streets, and also played an important role in Fallujah.⁶³ Several of the Iraqi sources interviewed for this article told the author that before, during, and after the operation to take back Mosul, these networks are expected to assist in identifying and targeting critical Islamic State locations and elements.⁶⁴ This could play a critical role in displacing the group from the city by making offensive operations more effective and weakening the Islamic State morale and its ability to hold ground. Just days before the Iraqi offensive of Mosul started, the Islamic State appears to have brutally suppressed an attempt by some of its fighters to switch sides.⁶⁵

Progress So Far

The preparatory phase of Operation "Fatah" (Conquest) was launched in March 2016 from Makhmour, 47 miles southeast of Mosul.⁶⁶ It involved the ISF, including the Iraqi Army's 15th division, backed by Peshmerga forces, Hashd al-Asha'ri, and Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition's air forces. It has succeeded in cutting off Mosul from Kirkuk and Salah al-Din provinces. A significant number of villages and areas west of Makhmour and south of Qayyara were recaptured.⁶⁷

In mid-June, while fighting was still raging in Fallujah, the second phase of Operation Fatah—designed to isolate Mosul—was launched from the south of Mosul by Defense and Interior ministries' forces, CTS, and Hashd al-Asha'ri, which consists of local Arab Sunni tribes.⁶⁸ Iraqi forces successfully crossed the Tigris between Makhmour in the east and Qayyara in the west to retake the latter.⁶⁹ Advancing north, they have retaken a number of towns and villages south of Mosul from the axis stretching from Baiji along the Mosul-Baghdad road to Qayyara, then on to Hammam al-Alil and toward Mosul.⁷⁰

In military terms, the operation's sequence can be called a lily-pad strategy. The capture of Qayyara was particularly significant as it was the center of the Islamic State's Wilayat Dijlah, a defensive line in its own right guarding the approach to Mosul, a major petroleum revenue source, and a logistical hub connecting the south of Mosul with Hawijah and al-Shirqat.⁷¹ Qayyara and its airbase, approximately 39 miles south of Mosul, has become a major strategic and military base of operations for the Mosul offensive with a significant number of U.S. forces now stationed there in a supporting role.⁷²

Despite their assertions, the Shi'a militias did not play a role in the shaping operation in Nineveh nor in the liberation of Qayyara.⁷³ Their lack of presence in the staging areas around Qayyara for the Mosul offensive will likely limit their influence on the initial phases of the Mosul operation. Over time, this is likely to change as the PMF have a presence in al-Shirqat, intend to retake Hawijah, and are likely to move toward the west of Mosul and possibly to the Nineveh plains or even to Mosul city as they did in Fallujah.⁷⁴

The initiation of the offensive to take back Mosul followed the completion of shaping operations and operations to isolate the city.⁷⁵ According to Hamid al-Sabawi, a Hashd al-Asha'ri commander, and open sources, the final offensive on the city itself is expected to launch from multiple directions.⁷⁶

The ISF will enter Mosul from the south and southwest. According to al-Sabawi as well as Kurdish officials, the Peshmerga, who control most other axes (north, northwest, east northeast, southeast), will have a closely supportive role and will pave the way



Northern Iraq (Rowan Technology)

for the ISF but will not enter the city.⁷⁷ Iraqi sources believe pro-Islamic State fighters in the east of Mosul will put up a less furious fight than the west and southwest of Mosul and will likely fall more easily.⁷⁸ Some sources say an escape route for the Islamic State will be left for its fighters on the western side of the city, an attempt to shorten the duration of fighting and the harm inflicted on civilians. Once outside the city, the source say these fighters would be easier to target from the air.⁷⁹

According to senior Iraqi figures interviewed by the author and some media reports, the offensive will consist of two phases. The first phase, launched in the early hours (local time) on October 17 with coalition air support, is completing the encirclement of Mosul, taking control of most of the city's outskirts and preparing to access the city. The second phase will involve entering the city from multiple directions after heavy airstrikes from the U.S.-led coalition.⁸⁰

In the opening phase of the offensive ISF and Peshmerga forces liberated a number of villages to the east of Mosul, while the ISF engaged in clashes with the Islamic State from the southern and southeastern axes backed by U.S. artillery and French artillery in Qayyara and Makhmour.⁸¹ Kurdish officials were pleased with the initial pace of progress⁸² and expected it would take more than a week for the constellation of Iraqi forces to reach Mosul's suburbs.⁸³

Participating Forces

According to Iraqi sources, the constellation of Iraqi forces involved

in the liberation of Mosul, including those carrying out the offensive, in supportive roles, and holding ground post-liberation will be between 80,000 and 100,000⁸⁴ and can be classified into six major groups.⁸⁵ Currently around 45,000 of these—mainly the Iraqi Army, CTS, and Peshmerga—are moving toward the city limits of Mosul.⁸⁶

First is the federal government's forces including the Defense and Interior ministries' armed forces,⁸⁷ CTS, military intelligence, and the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS).⁸⁸ Government forces have liberated swathes of Nineveh's southern territories and are spearheading the operation to liberate Mosul from the southern and southwestern axes.⁸⁹ A fragile understanding and compromise between the KRG and Baghdad was established in late September after President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani visited Baghdad. The agreement has paved the way for Iraqi forces to use the Kurdish-controlled areas around Mosul to conduct a multi-directional offensive.⁹⁰ The ISF were expected to attack from the south and southwestern areas that they control and were also expected to attack from areas controlled by the Peshmerga from Nineveh Plain northeast, including Bashiqa and Hamdniya, as well as Khazr east of Mosul, Gwer southeast, and Zumar northwest of Mosul.⁹¹ The early phase of operation to liberate Mosul followed this plan. On October 17 the ISF liberated a number of villages south east of Mosul and launched an offensive with the Peshmerga along the Khazr axis.⁹²

The second group is the Hashd al-Asha'ri, a Sunni militia force



Hashd al-Asha'ri leader Ahmad al-Jarba (in keffiyeh) inspects the Lions of Nineveh force in Rabia west of Mosul on October 10, 2016. (Photo provided to author by Ahmad al-Jarba)

under the nominal control of Falah al-Fayad, head of the National Security Agency.⁹³ Hashd al-Asha'ri in Nineveh governorate can count on 15,000 fighters from Mosul tribes trained by the United States, including the Shammar, al-Sabawi, al-Lihab, and al-Jubour tribes, to hold ground after the liberation.⁹⁴ Around 6,000 tribesmen are ready to engage in the Mosul operation.⁹⁵

Third is the "Hashd al-Watani," (now renamed Haras Nineveh),⁹⁶ which consists of a number of local Arab Sunni tribes who are led by Atheel al-Nujaifi and backed and funded by Turkey.⁹⁷ They are allied with the KDP's Peshmerga and based in Bashiqa 12 miles northeast of Mosul. There has been much diplomatic wrangling between Baghdad and Ankara on their role, with Baghdad nervous about a militia they view as defending Turkey's interests participating in the operation.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, as the Mosul offensive looms closer, the Iraqi government has grudgingly accepted Hashd al-Watani as part of the liberating forces.⁹⁹ There is close coordination between the KRG's Peshmerga and Hashd al-Watani, and the former will likely pave the way for the latter to enter the city, though the role of the Hashd al-Watani remains unclear and is expected to be limited by the federal government because of its close ties to Turkey.¹⁰⁰ In an agreement brokered just before the start of the Mosul offensive, a fraction of their forces (around 1500 fighters) have been allowed by the federal government to participate in the operation.¹⁰¹

Fourth is the PMF, a largely Shi'a constellation of militias that are also nominally under the control of the National Security Agen-

cy. It is not yet clear what role the PMF will play, though, as noted, its absence in Qayyara means these militias are unlikely to play a significant role in the initial parts of the operation. Some of the militias have announced they intend to enter the city, and while al-Abadi has accepted that they should play some role in the liberation of Mosul, this has yet to be clarified.¹⁰² The PMF is set to take up position south of Mosul, and it is expected a number will head toward Tal Afar west of Mosul as there are considerable numbers of Shi'a Turkmen inhabitants there.¹⁰³

According to leaked plans disclosed by the BBC, Shi'a militias are set to be deployed in the areas and roads south of Qayyara and west of Mosul, but they will not enter the city.¹⁰⁴ However, their adherence to this plan is very doubtful. Many Sunni political factions and the KRG are unhappy with the idea of the largely Shi'a PMF entering Mosul or even Nineveh governorate,¹⁰⁵ especially because Baghdad was not able to constrain PMF forces from carrying out abuses in Fallujah. Al-Issawi and Zebari told the author there is a danger of revenge killings during the liberation of Mosul.¹⁰⁶ Armed "microminority groups" affiliated with Shi'a militias¹⁰⁷ are also expected to head east toward "Sahal Nineveh" (Nineveh plains).

Fifth is the estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Kurdish Peshmerga forces¹⁰⁸ that surround Mosul in a crescent formation. They are in control of areas north, east, and northwest of Mosul,¹⁰⁹ including the main roads leading into the city from these areas.¹¹⁰ During the past few months at some locations, they were just five miles north

of Mosul's outskirts, and they are now driving toward the city from the east and northeast.¹¹¹ In August, Kurdish forces advanced from the southeast and recaptured more than 10 villages as well as Gwer Bridge, 29 miles from Mosul.¹¹²

The cooperation thus far between Kurdish and Iraqi forces has surprised pessimists. At a press conference on October 17, President Barzani praised the unprecedented coordination and cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil's forces. "This is the first time the Peshmerga and Iraqi forces have coordinated to fight an enemy in one place."¹¹³ As the Peshmerga are playing a supportive role, it is expected that in the final offensive, a fraction of the aforementioned number will take up position close to the outskirts of Mosul. It is possible that at the local, tactical level, they will be asked to assist if the ISF runs into difficulties in the city, even though there is no political agreement on this.

The sixth category consists of "microminority" armed groups including Christians,¹¹⁴ Yazidis,¹¹⁵ Shabaks,¹¹⁶ Kakais,¹¹⁷ and Turkmen¹¹⁸ that are affiliated with and supported by the federal government, the PMF, and the KRG and its Kurdish parties. Turkey is backing some Turkmen.¹¹⁹ All the microminority groups intend to engage in Nineveh plains. For example, the PMF's and KRG's Christian militias as well as their Shabak armed units intend to go to the Nineveh Plains because that is where they lived before the Islamic State takeover of the region. Meanwhile, the KRG, Baghdad, the PMF and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and People's Protection Units (YPG) have focused on arming and setting up Yazidi militias affiliated with them in Sinjar.¹²⁰ Some of the KRG's microminority armed units (Christian and Kakai) and Peshmerga will close in on Mosul from the northeast (Nineveh Plains) and have already started to bombard it by artillery.¹²¹

Divisions

The large number of rival Iraqi actors jockeying for position in Mosul means that unless their conflicting agendas can be resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting. The proliferation of armed groups is symptomatic of fragmentation of communities and the divisions between Iraqi and Kurdish political factions.

Various key players told the author the plan, as agreed, is that the Hashd al-Sha'abi and Peshmerga forces will not enter Mosul itself. However, many of those interviewed by the author remain skeptical this agreement will hold fully. The eastern and northeastern districts of Hai al-Tahreer, Hai al-Qahira, and Hai al-Arabi in Mosul are inhabited by Kurds and the Peshmerga want to reclaim and protect them.¹²² And Hashd al-Sha'abi officials have said that if Peshmerga enter then they will enter too.¹²³

While there appears to be an initial understanding between Baghdad and Erbil that both will play complementary roles in the liberation of Mosul, there is little sign the parties have agreed on how this will work in the long term,¹²⁴ which may lead to significant problems in the future because of their very divergent aims. Inevitably, there will be tensions when various anti-Islamic State forces with competing ambitions control the same areas, such as Nineveh Plains, Sinjar, and Tal Afar.¹²⁵ Further challenges are created by the conflicting agendas of regional powers, especially¹²⁶ (through its proxies) and Turkey, given the possibility that Turkish troops may engage without Baghdad's consent.¹²⁷

There is a "race to Berlin" aspect when it comes to the drive to recapture Mosul and the Islamic State-controlled areas around it because the involved actors all recognize that whomever controls

Mosul will have a great say in the future of Nineveh and Iraq. But despite various proposals,¹²⁸ no consensus has emerged on how this province will be administered in the future, suggesting fractures will emerge as soon as Mosul is liberated. In September, President Barzani said that there is not yet agreement on the future of Mosul.¹²⁹ Currently, the Iraqi government is not keen to divide Mosul into more than one province. There are differences between and reservations among some political blocs on the question of dividing Mosul, and if no consensus is reached, it could be an insurmountable challenge to stabilizing the province.

Conclusion

The operation to liberate and secure Mosul will be significantly more challenging than Fallujah. A significant number of Islamic State members and fighters fled the fighting there, but that is unlikely to be repeated in Mosul. While there is evidence some leaders and fighters have relocated to Syria, the Islamic State is likely to put up fierce and sustained resistance so as not to lose a city that is key to its caliphate pretensions.

Despite this, the constellation of ground forces seeking to liberate Mosul should eventually prevail. They all share at least the common goal of removing the Islamic State and may feel incentivized to participate because of a "to the winner go the spoils" dynamic.

But the battlefield is much more crowded and complex around Mosul than the other towns so far liberated. While pro-Iranian Shi'a militias were not interested in controlling Fallujah in the long term, as it is majority Arab Sunni in Nineveh, they are interested in Tal Afar, which was majority Shi'a Turkmen before it was taken over by the Islamic State two years ago, and the micro-minority areas east of Mosul. While there was no competition between the federal government and the KRG over control of Fallujah, the two groups have divergent interests when it comes to the future of Nineveh. Moreover, Turkey and other regional powers have a much greater stake in the future of Mosul, which could complicate the task of securing the city.

The Hashd al-Asha'ri commanders al-Jarba and al-Sabawi told the author that there is the potential for clashes between the liberating armed factions, for example between Kurdish Peshmerga and the Hashd al-Sha'abi when their forces come into proximity to each other. The operation in the city of Mosul, including liberating Tal Afar, will be more challenging than reaching and liberating the areas around it.¹³⁰ Only political compromise between their leaders and agreement to operate in separate areas can reduce the chance of confrontation. Although there was unprecedented military coordination between Baghdad and Erbil in the early phases of liberation of Mosul, there is still no clear plan for Mosul's future.

Although Fallujah is far less complicated politically and is an Arab Sunni city, lessons can be learned from its liberation. The entry of Hashd al-Sha'abi into the town without permission jeopardized the entire operation and complicated efforts to stabilize the town. Baghdad should therefore prevent Hashd al-Sha'abi or other de facto groups from exploiting the battle in Mosul for political rhetoric and gains. It will be easier to minimize sectarian tensions and thus secure the city if Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabak, and others who take control of areas in Mosul and the area around it are placed under the control of the federal government and the KRG instead of Hashd al-Sha'abi or the Interior Ministry's almost entirely Shi'a emergency response forces. The Shi'a-dominated ISF will also need to show sensitivity to the

majority Sunni local population. To a large degree, the security of Mosul will depend on a comprehensive political agreement between Baghdad and Erbil.

Another lesson from Fallujah is that Iraqi forces should do everything they can to build bridges with local Sunnis to gain vital intelligence and to encourage an uprising from within. The operations in Anbar including Ramadi and Fallujah demonstrated that empowering local communities is key to providing long-term stability. Every care should be taken not to repeat the ISF's sectarian and abusive behavior during the decade after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, which created significant resentment among locals.¹³¹ It is critical to build trust between the ISF and the locals in order to have a constructive outcome for the stabilization phase. Given the ISF is over 75 percent Shi'a and the proportion of Sunnis in Mosul has risen to 85-90 percent because many non-Sunni Moslawis fled Islamic State oppression, this will be ever more challenging.¹³² After liberation, safeguarding the return of minority IDPs to their original lands will be essential to restore the natural mosaic of Mo-

sul, but this is a difficult task as distrust between the communities runs deep.

Mosul's humanitarian prospects are the worst in Iraq's history. The Iraqi government and international organizations are not yet prepared for the possibility of a million fleeing refugees.¹³³ And there is concern that displaced young men could be recruited by the Islamic State as it pivots back to guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks in the hopes of making a comeback.¹³⁴ Ultimately, security can only be restored in Mosul and in other parts of Iraq via an end to the politics of sectarianism, a devolution of powers to locals, and the establishment of domestic and regional compromises between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey with the latter two agreeing to end their interference once the Islamic State has been defeated. This will require supervision from the United Nations and the U.S.-led coalition during the stabilization phase. Without this, it is likely the country will be further destabilized and again descend into chaos, recreating the conditions that set the stage for the rise of the Islamic State in first place. **CTC**

Substantive Notes and Citations

- 1 During the summer and fall of 2016, the author interviewed Dr. Khasraw Gul Mohammed, the head of Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Abdul Bari Zebari, chairman of Iraq's Foreign Relations Committee; Ghazi al-Kaoud, chairman of the Tribes Committee; Hamid al-Mutlaq, the deputy chairman of the Committee of Defence and Security in Iraq's Council of Representatives; Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, an MP and member of the Tribes Committee and a former advisor to Nouri al-Maliki; two senior Hashd al-Asha'ri commanders who have participated in liberating Islamic State-held areas and who are set to take part in the Mosul operation, namely Hamid al-Sabawi and Ahmad al-Jarba, who is also a member in the Tribes Committee and an MP; and Ahmad, a Kurdish Peshmerga colonel, whose last name was withheld at his request.
- 2 Fallujah was partly seized by al-Qa'ida in Iraq from 2004 to 2006. The Islamic State held it from January 2014 to July 2016. Some local tribes in Fallujah pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, while others are discontented with the federal government. Fallujah has been a persistently rebellious town for the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) since 2003. There have been at least three major military operations against jihadis by the ISF and the United States. Micheal J. Totten, "The third battle of Fallujah," *World Affairs*, June 1, 2016.
- 3 In May, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesperson Colonel Steve Warren said, "Fallujah doesn't really have any tactical influence on Mosul ... there is no military reason to liberate Fallujah now." U.S. Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," May 13, 2016; Andrew Tilghman, "No U.S. combat advisors for Fallujah invasion," *Military Times*, May 23, 2016.
- 4 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016.
- 5 Al-Kaoud is also the leader of the Abu Nimr tribe and a leader of Anbar's Hashd al-Asha'ri Sunni militia force.
- 6 Patrick Martin, "Fallujah control of terrain map: prior to May 23, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, May 27, 2016.
- 7 Threats emerged from Muqtada al-Sadr's factions against the government, political (quota) system, and the Iraqi pro-Iranian Shi'a militias.
- 8 This is an umbrella group for armed majority Shi'a militias affiliated with political parties and Iran. See Zana Gulmohamad, "A Short Profile of Iraq's Shi'a Militias," *Terrorism Monitor* 13:8 (2015).
- 9 Mustafa Habib, "Behind the Scenes: How the US, Iraqi army and militias came to unite - then split - in Fallujah," *Niqash*, May 13, 2016.
- 10 Mustafa Habib, "Taming the Beast: Can Iraq Ever Control its Controversial Volunteer Militias?" *Niqash*, August 4, 2016.
- 11 David Witty, "The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service," Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 16, 2015.
- 12 Saudad Al-Salhy, "Fallujah escape: families pay \$100-a-head to IS militant - to flee his group," *Middle East Eye*, June 20, 2016.
- 13 There is no formal percentage of the Shi'a in the Iraqi Army. However, according to various reports, they are estimated to make up more than 75 percent. Florence Gaub, "an Unhappy marriage: Civil-Military relations in post-Saddam," *Carnegie Europe*, January 13, 2016; Ummar Ali, "Iraqi Army: the journey from the military of Umma to sectarian Army," *Al-Taqreer*, 2015.
- 14 The federal police, Anbar police, and Iraq's Emergency Rapid Response "Qwuat al-Rad al Sari" are part of the Shi'a-dominated Interior Ministry. More than 70 percent of Interior Ministry forces are Shi'a, and most have strong links to Shi'a militias including Badr. Ned Parker, "Political struggle: Power failure in Iraq as militias outgun state," *Reuters*, October 21, 2015. Currently, the Deputy Minister of Interior is running the ministry and is aligned with the Badr Organization. It was previously run by Muhammad al-Ghabban from the Badr Organization. The ministry's forces adhere to the Prime Minister's and JOC's orders.
- 15 The CTS's elite force is known as Iraq's Golden Division that today number around 10,000. Highly trained by U.S. advisors, they are under the Iraqi government's and PM's authority. The CTS is the most cross-ethnic sectarian force in Iraq as it contains Arab Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and minorities. The Iraqi Special Forces "Golden Brigade," which is part of the CTS, is headed by Fadhil al-Berwari, a Kurd with a long history in the Peshmerga ranks. It is the only professional and sophisticated armed forces in Iraq that was created, equipped, and intensively and closely trained by the United States. David Witty, "The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service," Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 16, 2015; Iraqi Special Operation Forces-iq, "Counter Terrorism Agency: Special Operations-Golden Division," October 10, 2016. (Isof-iq.com is its formal website.)
- 16 There are three Shi'a militia blocs in the PMF that participated in Fallujah's liberation—pro-Iranian; pro-Sistani, closer to al-Abadi; and pro-Muqtada and other parties such as Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. See Zana K. Gulmohamad, "Iraq's Shia militias: Helping or hindering the fight against Islamic State?" *Terrorism Monitor* 14:9 (2016).
- 17 Three groups of Sunni volunteers have been fighting in Anbar: first, a group locally funded and organized without the federal government's or PMF's involvement; second, a group equipped by the U.S.-led coalition and Baghdad and connected to the Iraqi Army; and third, small armed units affiliated with the PMF. Author interview, Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, Baghdad, August 2016. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk said there were about 20,000 local tribal fighters in Anbar province working with ISF and being paid

- by the government of Iraq. C-SPAN coverage of Future of Iraq event at the United States Institute of Peace, July 19, 2016. The chairman of the Tribes Committee told the author that "although there are other Sunni Arab tribes that might have received support from Baghdad, my tribe in Anbar has been self-sufficient in fighting the IS. We call our actions and rally as Faza'a [a sudden awakening]." Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, July 2016. "Warren: Iraqi forces will enter Fallujah soon with participation of 4000 Sunni fighters," Iraqi News, May 26, 2016; Munaf al-Obeidi and Heba El-Koudsy, "International Coalition halt advance of PMF towards Fallujah," Asharq al-Awsat, May 27, 2016.
- 18 "Abadi arrives in Fallujah Operations headquarters to check military operations progress," Iraqi News, May 23, 2016; "The PM meeting to supervise Fallujah operation liberation," Iraqi Prime Minister's Office, May 23, 2016.
- 19 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016.
- 20 "Interview with the commander of the Abdul Wahab al-Sa'adi," Al-Sumaria, June 29, 2016.
- 21 Mustafa Habib, "Suicide bombers + Secret Tunnels: Extremists' tactics on Fallujah's frontlines," Niqash, June 7, 2016.
- 22 "The debate on the Arab land: Operation liberation Fallujah," CCTV Arabic, July 24, 2016.
- 23 Terri Moon Cronk, "Fights to retake Fallujah, Manbij city from ISIL begin," Department of Defense News, Defense Media Activity, June 3, 2016; Habib, "Suicide bombers + secret Tunnels: Extremists tactics on Fallujah's frontlines."
- 24 Mustafa Habib, "Battle for Fallujah: ISIS snipers use four mile-long tunnels to stall Iraq offensive," Niqash, July 7, 2016.
- 25 PMF factions led by the Badr Organization have been operating in the environs of Fallujah since April 2015 before the first phase. At this time, they failed to control the terrain around Fallujah. Patrick Martin, "The campaign for Fallujah: May 26, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, May 27, 2016.
- 26 George Allison, "Iraqi forces recapture the city of Fallujah from Islamic State," UK Defence Journal, June 27, 2016; "Video: Iraqi army troops begin massive operation against ISIS in Fallujah," Al Alam, February 25, 2016.
- 27 Al-Sumaria.
- 28 "The third battle of Fallujah," Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, June 10, 2016.
- 29 Al-Sumaria.
- 30 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016; "Fallujah Tribes protest against Daesh in several neighbourhoods," Sky News Arabia, February 19, 2016. These networks were smaller than those that have now grown up in Mosul, less organized, and more spontaneous. In February 2016, months before the town's liberation, Fallujah tribesmen attacked Islamic State positions and killed dozens of Islamic State members, including key figures such as the Wali of Fallujah, Wahib Abu Aber. The tribesmen were subsequently crushed by the Islamic State. The resistance fighters had contacts with Anbar Provincial Council members and Hashd al-Anbari. Although cell phones were banned by the Islamic State in Fallujah, these networks used them covertly to contact outsiders. Al-Hurra, "Tribes in Fallujah revolt against IS," February 20, 2016.
- 31 "Al-Muhandis announces the end of the second stage of the battle to liberate Fallujah," Al-Manar, June 5, 2016.
- 32 Martin, "Fallujah control of terrain map: prior to May 23, 2016."
- 33 "Press TV's full interview with Hadi al-Ameri," Press TV, June 7, 2016.
- 34 Austin Bodetti, "Fallujah: the Iraq victory that could lose the war," Daily Beast, June 21, 2016.
- 35 Martin, "Fallujah control of terrain map: May 26, 2016;" Haider Majid, "A commander of Saraya al-Salam: we don't have a negative stance against Fallujah liberation operation," Al-Sumaria News, May 31, 2016; "Saraya al-Salam control two sides of Fallujah city center," Al-Mirbad, June 2, 2016.
- 36 "Iraq: Ban Abusive Militias from Mosul Operation," Human Rights Watch, July 31, 2016.
- 37 Erika Solomon, "Iraq declares battle for Fallujah is over," *Financial Times*, June 26, 2016.
- 38 Stephan Kalin and Ahmed Rasheed, "Iraqi commander declares defeat of Islamic State in Fallujah," Reuters, June 26, 2016.
- 39 "The debate on the Arab land: Operation liberation Fallujah," CCTV Arabic, July 24, 2016; Al-Sumaria.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Mustafa Salim and Thomas Gibbons Neff, "Iraqi US aircraft bomb convoy of Islamic State fighters fleeing with their families," *Washington Post*, June 30, 2016.
- 42 Author interview, Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, Baghdad, August 2016.
- 43 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Author interview, Hamid al-Mutlaq, Baghdad, September 2016.
- 46 Munaf al-Ubaidi, "After liberation Al-Fallujah between the hands of al-Asha'ri fighters," Asharq al-Awasat, July 12, 2016; "Anbar's Fawch emergency reclaim its duties in holding the ground in Fallujah," Al-Hashd Body of Popular Crowd, July 11, 2016.
- 47 Al-Rafidain Channel, "Badr officially opens a branch west of Fallujah," October 3, 2016; "Shia militias distribute sectarian postures in Fallujah," Erem News, October 2, 2016.
- 48 Author interview, Ghazi al-Kaoud, Baghdad, July 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Mutlaq, Baghdad, September 2016.
- 49 Terri Moon Cronk, "Fights to retake Fallujah, Manbij city from ISIL begin," Department of Defense News, Defense Media Activity, June 3, 2016.
- 50 The Islamic State renamed Nineveh governorate "Wilayat Nineveh." It drew its own borders and included the following towns: Mosul, Tal Kif, Hammam al-Aliil, Qara Tabba, Ba'ashiqah and Bahzani, Al-Khidhr, Khorasabat, Bazawiyah, Tarjalah, and Mount Aski. "Iraq & Islamic State- Wilayat Nineveh/ Ninawa," Tracking Terrorism, August 2016.
- 51 Groups that fought alongside the Islamic State to take back Mosul, including the Naqashbandi Army, the Jihad and Reform Front, the Mujahdeen Army, Asaib Iraq al-Jihadiyya, and the Army of Ahmed Bin Hanbal, soon disintegrated and were either absorbed, eliminated, or went underground. See Zana K Gulmohamad, "Who is in control of Mosul?" OpenDemocracy, July 7, 2014.
- 52 On May 21, 2016, the Islamic State's Furqan Media published an audio recording by Islamic State spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani conceding it was possible the group would lose significant amounts of territory, but vowing to fight on. "Daesh, according to its spokesperson, mourns itself," Al-Alam, May 26, 2016; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Islamic State's Iraq Caliphate on the Brink of defeat," *Terrorism Monitor* 14:15 (2016).
- 53 Bethan McKernan, "ISIS 'ready and waiting' for Mosul offensive with booby traps, suicide bomber squadrons and network of spies," *Independent*, October 17, 2016.
- 54 These include Europeans, Chechens, and Arabs. Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016. Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016. In late September U.S. military officials said they believed 3,000 to 4,500 fighters remained. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," September 29, 2016.
- 55 Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; Ben Kesling and Gordon Lubold, "U.S. gets ready to assist offensive to retake key Iraqi city from Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2016.
- 56 In September, U.S. airstrikes killed 13 Islamic State leaders who were part of the group's military intelligence communication networks in Mosul. "The people who replace these leadership figures have not established their bona fides with al-Baghdadi, his inner circle, and they are often not as seasoned as those they replace. This is especially true around Mosul," stated Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Colonel John Dorrian. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq."
- 57 "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," September 29, 2016.
- 58 Fighters and commanders who desert or order withdrawal have been executed. For instance, the Islamic State beheaded commanders who withdrew their forces from Nineveh, such as Abu Qutada al-Uzbaki, the commander of the Battalion of Uzbek. On August 20, Abu Mzmachr al-Mhairi, an Islamic State military commander, was burned alive for withdrawing his forces from around Qayyara. "Daesh execute the commander of Uzbek battalion," Al-Masdar News, August 17, 2016; "Daesh execute Abu Mzmchar al-Mhairi," PUK Media, August 20, 2016.
- 59 "Shelling then selling: In Mosul, extremists lament damage, then sell scrap to highest bidder," Niqash, August 18, 2016; "Baghdad asserts that IS leaders escaping the Islamic State from Mosul," Middle East Online, August 1, 2016.
- 60 Hamid al-Sabawi told the author that al-Baghdadi replaced Islamic State's key security figures because they had wrongly claimed that Qayyara would be difficult for the ISF to retake. Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; "Al-Baghdadi removes security leaders," Al-An TV, September 3, 2016. According to the author's research, replacing Iraqis with foreign fighters in the senior echelons of the Islamic State's security apparatus has become a pattern in Islamic State strategy. Foreign fighters are judged more willing to fight to the death and are more

- ideologically indoctrinated than locals who mainly joined for benefits or out of fear or discontent with the Shi'a-led government. Finally, the foreign fighters are judged by the group less likely to flee, and it is more difficult for them to blend in with IDPs.
- 61 Their members are locals, including former Iraqi army elements and university students. They rely on their personal capabilities and target Islamic State forces using snipers, assassins, and small IEDs. "Mosul hit Daesh from inside," Sky News Arabia, June 1, 2016. The Free Officers Movement includes current military and security officers and those from Saddam's era. "Thubat al-Ahrar killed Daesh Mufti in Mosul," Rudaw, November 3, 2014.
- 62 Some of the Katib Mosul sub-groups such as Katib al-Suqur and Kataib al-Nabi Yunis have ties with the anti-Islamic State coalition and Hashd al-Asha'ri's leaders and provide them with information. Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi September 2016. Most published YouTube videos show anti-Islamic State resistance network activities such as targeting checkpoints, committing arson, marking letters on the wall, and distributing anti-Islamic State flyers. On August 26, 2015, Katib Mosul "Mosul Battalions," which consists of smaller groups such as Katibat al-Raa'd, Katibat al-Nabi Sheet, and Kataib al-Zilzal, posted a video showing a speech by these groups; the post-Saddam Iraqi flag; anti-Islamic State songs and poems; and a list of their anti-Islamic State activities. "Return... publishing first visional for Katib Mosul," Katib Mosul, August 26, 2016.
- 63 "Details about the operation to retake Qayyara by the ISF," Al Arabiya, August 25, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.
- 64 In addition, Atheel al-Nujaifi has stated on multiple occasions that based on internal anti-Islamic State activity, revolution is expected. "Ex-Mosul governor: many prefer ISIS to Shiite militia for fear of revenge and abuse," Rudaw, July 8, 2016; "Interview with Atheel al-Nujifi," al-Jarida, February 29, 2016.
- 65 "Exclusive: Islamic State crushes rebellion plot in Mosul as army closes in," Reuters, October 14, 2016.
- 66 The long-awaited liberation of Sinjar, west of Mosul, was completed by the Peshmerga at the end of 2015 and provided a new front for Mosul's liberation.
- 67 From March until May, a number of small towns west of Makhmour, such as Kudila, Kharbadan, Karmadi, Mahana, and Kabruk, were slowly recaptured, paving the way to recapture Qayyara. "The battle to retake Mosul enters the phase of battlefield details," Al-Arab, February 9, 2016; "Iraq declares the first phase to retake Mosul," BBC Arabic, March 24, 2016; "Operation of Mosul," Al-Kulasa, March 24, 2016.
- 68 The Iraqi Defense Ministry announced the start of the second phase of the operation in mid-June. "The start of the second phase of the operation for the liberation of Mosul... Iraqi Minister will participate in the battles," Asharq Al-Awsat, June 15, 2016; "Supervised by the Defense Minister, the second phase of the operation has started," Al-Watan Voice, June 12, 2016; Hamza Mustafa, "Operations to Liberate Mosul Commences, Phase Two," Asharq Al-Awsat, June 15, 2016.
- 69 Mohammed A. Salih, "Iraqi forces in Nineveh eye the ultimate prize: Mosul," Al-Monitor, July 19, 2016.
- 70 Muhannad Al-Ghazi, "Mapping the road to the liberation of Mosul," Al-Monitor, July 17, 2016.
- 71 Qayyara airbase was freed on July 9. In the last week of August, Qayyara town, which is home to around 80,000 people, was liberated. The Islamic State used Qayyara town as a rich revenue source due to its 63 oil wells, sulfur, and old refinery, which has the capacity to produce around 16,000 barrels a day. "Iraqi forces press towards key air base south of Mosul," Reuters, June 29, 2016; "Iraqi army announces recapture of ISIS-held Qayyara airbase east of Mosul," Al-Alam, July 9, 2016; "Qayyara in the hand of the Iraqi forces," Al-Hurra, August 25, 2016. The oil in Qayyara is reported to generate more than \$2 million a month for the Islamic State. During the fighting, the group lost special armed units such as Katibat Tareq Bin Zaid, Jaish al-Khilafa, and the foreign fighter unit Jaish Dabiq. "Interview with Hisham al-Hashimi," Al-Hurra Iraq, August 27, 2016; "Qayyara the last Dijla stronghold," Rawabet Center, July 16, 2016.
- 72 The liberation of Qayyara was led by the CTS and forces from the Defense and Interior Ministries and Hashd al-Asha'ri. They attacked from three directions: close from the oil wells in the west, from the Tigris River in the east, and entered the governmental compound from the south. "Iraqi Forces continue to advance to retake Qayyara," Elaph, August 24, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016. Hundreds of U.S. troops are currently stationed at the Qayyara air base. See Ryan Brown and Barbara Starr, "US, Iraqi troops close in on last ISIS-held city," CNN, September 17, 2016. U.S. assets in Qayyara airbase include U.S. Apache attack helicopters, and it was announced High Mobility Rocket Systems (HIMARS) were also to be deployed. Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Missy Ryan, "US approves additional troops, artillery systems and helicopter gunships for Iraq fight," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2016; Richard Sisk, "DoD to Send HIMARS Rocket Artillery to Turkey, Northern Iraq," Military.com, April 26, 2016.
- 73 Shi'a factions are stationed around al-Shirqat, a northern district in Salah al-Dalah. Al-Shirqat was liberated on September 22 by the Iraqi Army and Hashd al-Sha'abi. "Baghdad declares the liberation of al-Shirqat from Islamic State," BBC Arabic, September 22, 2016.
- 74 "Hashd al-Sha'abi found communication centre of Daesh in al-Shirqat," Annabaa, September 29, 2016; "Hashd al-Watani: the participation of Hashd al-Sha'abi in liberating al-Shirqat is concerning for the Arab Sunnis," Sotaliraq, September 20, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 75 "Security forces finish 2nd phase of operations to liberate southern Mosul," Iraqi News, June 21, 2016; "Abadi emphasises the completion of the first and second phases of Mosul's liberation," Mehr News, August 10, 2016.
- 76 Author third interview with Hamid al-Sabawi, October 5, 2016.
- 77 Author second interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September - October 2016. As of early October, Kurdish officials—including Jabar Yawar, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs—were still stating their role would be as supporting forces for the ISF and that Peshmerga fighters would be stationed in the outskirts of the city and would not enter Mosul. "Peshmerga Official: we will not enter Mosul, only Kurdish land," Rudaw 24, September 24, 2016; "Sunni militia to come under Peshmerga command for Mosul operation," Rudaw, October 5, 2016.
- 78 Mosul is divided east to west by the Tigris River. It is expected that Islamic State fighters will withdraw some of its forces to the west bank as it has narrow streets where tanks, artillery, and heavy armor will find it difficult to gain access and operate effectively. Many of the residents on the east side have fled while on the west side, residents are poorer and unable to flee. It is anticipated that the Islamic State will, therefore, use them as human shields. Helen Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Michael Gordon, "U.S. set to open a climactic battle against ISIS in Mosul, Iraq," *New York Times*, October 7, 2016; "The Battle for Mosul," *Economist*, October 8, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 79 Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 80 Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 81 "The French artillery are participating in retaking Mosul," Wakala Noon al-Khabaria, September 12, 2016; "Operation to liberate Mosul from ISIS: Prospects and problems," South Front, October 16, 2016; Sky News Arabia coverage, October 17, 2016.
- 82 "President Barzani hails historic coordination between Kurdish and Iraqi forces," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.
- 83 Author interview, senior Kurdish security official, October 2016. Khasraw Gul Mohammed the head of Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq told the author, "Mosul's liberation will be within a reasonable time due to the great cooperation between the Peshmerga and the ISF. However, we cannot give an exact estimate of how long it will take to reach the outskirts or liberate Mosul as there are many forces engaged and there are political and military complications within the plan." Author interview with Dr Khasraw Gul Mohammed the head of Asayish (internal security) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, October 17, 2016.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 The plan on paper is for the various Iraqi forces and militias involved in the Mosul operation to be coordinated and assigned tasks by JOC in Baghdad, headed by Lieutenant General Taleb al-Kinani; JOC in Erbil headed by Major General Ali al-Faraji; and Nineveh Operation Command led by General Najm al-Jubouri. The U.S.-led coalition, particularly the Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), is closely involved in and a part of these command centers, which are ultimately overseen by Prime Minister al-Abadi. Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016; "Iraqis, Kurds, coalition forces coordination center," United States Central Command, September 3, 2015; "Denying Daesh safe haven," Global Coalition, January 10, 2016.
- 86 "Battle for Mosul: How the Military Operation will work," Sky News, October 17, 2016; "SitRep: Mosul Burns as Iraqi Forces Push Closer; Putin and the Nuke Game," *Foreign Policy*, October 17, 2016.

- 87 The Iraqi police and local tribes are set to be deployed behind or following the Iraqi Army and the CTS in order to secure and stabilize the liberated areas and impose order. Terri Moon Cronk, "Mosul liberation from ISIL 'Inevitable', Canadian General says," U.S. Department of Defense, October 5, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 88 Some of the Iraqi Army's and Air Force's more than 30,000 strong forces, such as the 9th, 15th, and 16th divisions, will be stationed in Makhmour and Qayyara. The CTS, headed by Lieutenant General Abdul Ghani al-Asaadi, will lead the operation alongside the Iraqi Army as it approaches and enters the city. The Interior Ministry includes the federal and local police and the Command of Nineveh Police "Qiyadat Shurtat Nineveh," which consists of battalions to liberate Nineveh "Afwach Tahrir Ninewa," and the Emergency Rapid Response Nineveh. Shallaw Mohammed, "Leaders of Nineveh Liberation Operations," Yalla Iraq, April 4, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.
- 89 Stephen Kalin, "Iraq Readies for Offensive to Rid Mosul of ISIS," *Time*, September 9, 2016.
- 90 Dilshad Abdullah, "Erbil: Kurdish delegation in Baghdad," *Asharq al-Awsat*, October 6, 2016; author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 91 Author third interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016.
- 92 "Live Updates: The battle for Mosul," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.
- 93 Author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016; "Abadi emphasizes the participation of Shi'a militias in the liberation of Mosul," Fallujah TV Channel, September 7, 2016. Al-Fayad is the national security advisor to Prime Minister al-Abadi and head of the National Security Agency. He officially heads the PMF. He is a key figure in coordinating between various Iraqi armed factions and the U.S.-led coalition.
- 94 Ahmad Jarba, a Hashd al-Asha'ri leader and an MP, told the author "My forces are part of the directorate of Hashd al-Asha'ri, which is related to the PMF. The Lions of Nineveh will be stationed around Sinjar and will head west to liberate a number of towns and villages and 25 kilometers from the Iraqi-Syrian border to cut Mosul off from Syria." Author interview, Ahmad Jarba, Baghdad, July 2016. Tim Lister and Hamdi Alkshali, "Stakes for Iraq's future couldn't be higher as Mosul offensive looms," CNN, October 4, 2016; "The leader of Hashd al-Asha'ri says we are related to Hashd al-Sha'abi and Hashd al-Watani is not legal," Al-Masalah, June 29, 2016; "Baghdad prepares 15000 fighters and gives Hashd al-Watani conditions," Shafaq News, June 27, 2016.
- 95 Michael Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold," BBC, October 4, 2016.
- 96 On October 12, al-Nujaifi renamed his forces Haras Nineveh. "Al-Nujaifi changed the name of Hashd al-Watani to Haras Nineveh," Rudaw, October 12, 2016.
- 97 Hashd al-Watani was founded in 2014 by Atheel al-Nujaifi, the then-governor of Nineveh, who leads the militia today. It has an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 fighters also based in Zilkan in Sheykhkan, where Turkish military forces are training them. Many of them receive their salary from Turkey. Al-Nujaifi opposes the PMF's participation in the Mosul operation. The role of his militia is unclear as the federal government, the PMF, and some of the Hashd al-Asha'ri do not view Turkey-sponsored Hashd al-Watani as a legitimate force unless it submits to Iraq's National Security Agency's authority. "Report: Iraq's al-Hashd al-Watani forces; troublemaker for Mosul liberation?" Alwaght, June 21, 2016. Tensions between Turkey and Baghdad had escalated after President Erdogan's and Prime Minister al-Abadi's clashing statements about Turkey's troops in Bashiqa. On October 6, the Iraqi government and Defense Ministry approved Hashd al-Watani's bases in the Bashiqa area. Mewan Dolmari, "Iraqi government approved Turkish-Bashik military base: KRG," Kurdistan 24, October 6, 2016; author fourth interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016. The role of this Sunni militia is still unclear, despite the fact that Hashd al-Watani announced that they will be under the authority of the Peshmerga forces. "Sunni militia to come under Peshmerga command for Mosul operation," Rudaw, October 5, 2016. "Under ISIS fire, Sunni military base readies for Mosul offensive," Rudaw, March 29, 2016.
- 98 For example, Abdul Rahman al-Luwayzi, a Nineveh MP and Nineveh's deputy governor, said, "There are conditions for Hashd al-Watani's participation in Mosul: The withdrawal of Turkish troops or moving from their base [to areas controlled by Baghdad]." "Preparation to liberate Mosul," Al-Rashid Satellite Channel, September 7, 2016.
- 99 Delegations of ISF have visited the Hashd al-Watani, and Hashd al-Watani now have representatives in the JOC in Erbil. "Hashd al-Watani: we will participate in Mosul liberation and we reject to be part of Hashd al-Sha'abi," Al-Quds al-Arabi, October 10, 2016.
- 100 Barham Arif Yassin the General Peshmerga Commander stationed in Bashiqa Mountain said, "We will open a way for Hashd al-Watani to go inside Mosul." Wilson Fache, "What is Turkish army really doing in Iraq?" Al-Monitor, September 6, 2016. Barham Arif Yassin the General Peshmerga Commander stationed in Bashiqa Mountain said, "We will open a way for Hashd al-Watani to go inside Mosul." Wilson Fache, "What is Turkish army really doing in Iraq?" Al-Monitor, September 6, 2016.
- 101 "Interview with Atheel al-Nujaifi, the commander of Haras Nineveh," Qanat al-Fallujah, October 15, 2016.
- 102 A number of the PMF's militias, including Hadi al-Amiri and the rival Asaib Ahl al-Haq, have announced their participation. "Asaib Ahl al-Haq: We will participate in the battle of Mosul," April 2016. Rai al-Youm, "Hadi al-Amiri: Hashd al-Sha'abi will participate in the battle of Mosul," NRT, August 31, 2016. Karim Nuri the PMF's spokesperson said on September 10, "We are going to take part in the battle for Mosul. We do not need the Kurds or Peshmerga to assist us." "Shiite militia leader advises Peshmerga to 'protect own borders', stay out of Mosul," Rudaw, September 10, 2016. Maher Chmaytelli, "Iraqi Shi'ite paramilitaries say will join offensive to retake Mosul," Reuters, April 7, 2016; "Sectarian rhetoric crisis in preparation for Mosul," Rudaw, July 30, 2016; Bill Roggio, "Sadr's 'Peace Brigades' prepares for Mosul offensive," The Long War Journal, May 17, 2016.
- 103 The majority of Tal Afar's population at the time of the Islamic State takeover in 2014 was Shi'a Turkmen. There is concern the Sunni Turkmen who have helped the Islamic State will be targeted. Conflicts may emerge between the Shi'a Turkmen and the Sunni Turkmen communities, but it is likely that one of the areas that will be liberated from the Islamic State will be Shi'a-controlled as they were in the majority. One of Turkey's justifications for its presence around Mosul has been its protection of the Sunni Turkmen there.
- 104 Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold."
- 105 "Al-Nujaifi emphasizes the rejection of the PMF's participation in Mosul's liberation," Iraqi News Network, July 12, 2016; "Nineveh Governorate Council reject participation of Hashd [Shi'a militias] in battle of Mosul," Sky News Arabia, March 1, 2016. Hamid al-Mutlaq and key tribal leaders asserted to the author their concerns over the Shi'a militias' human rights violations and potential clashes with Peshmerga forces.
- 106 Author interview, Abdul Bari Zebari, September 2016; author interview, Dr. Abboud al-Issawi, August 2016.
- 107 The expression "microminorities" refers to non-Arab, non-Sunni, and non-Kurd communities from the region, such as Christian, Yazidi, Shabak, and Turkmen. These communities are themselves divided. Some of their men are fighting with Shi'a-dominated PMF factions; some are fighting with the federal government, while others are fighting with the KRG or PKK or YPG.
- 108 The Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs have two unified brigades equipped by the U.S., and some of them plan to be part of the Mosul operation in a supporting role for the ISF. The majority are divided between the KDP and the PUK, known as the KDP's 80 unit, which are mainly distributed around Mosul, and the PUK's 70 unit, which has a lesser presence around Mosul. Author interview, Ahmad (last name withheld), a colonel in the unified armed brigades, October 2016. "Jabar Yawar the spokesperson of the Peshmerga forces reveals information about participating forces," Rudaw, October 16, 2016. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," The number of the Kurds in the Iraqi army was historically around 20 percent and declined significantly after the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 as most of them joined the Peshmerga. Florence Gaub, "An Unhappy marriage: Civil-Military relations in post-Saddam," Carnegie Europe, January 13, 2016; Umman Ali, "Iraqi Army: the journey from the military of Umma to sectarian Army," Al-Taqreer, 2015; Nawzad Mahmoud, "Lawmaker: Kurds make up only 1 percent of Iraqi Army," Rudaw, January 17, 2016.
- 109 Aziz Ahmad, "No Kurd will die to restore Iraqi unity," *Atlantic*, May 28, 2016; author interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, September 2016.
- 110 The Peshmerga do not control the south and southwest main and minor roads. The roads the Peshmerga control are Badoush and al-Kasak northwest of Mosul; Nawaran north of Mosul; Khazer northeast of Mosul; and Gwer west of Mosul. The last main route is the Baghdad Mosul road, which is controlled by the federal government. "Mosul indicates increasing differences between Baghdad and Erbil," Al Arabiya, August 25,

2016. Therefore, the KRG has at least five corridors, and Baghdad has far fewer.
- 111 "Update: Day two offensive against ISIS liberates more villages; 35 militants killed," Rudaw, August 15, 2016; "In two-day battle Peshmerga capture important Gwer bridge, onwards to Mosul," Rudaw, August 16, 2016. Hisham Arafat, "Kurdistan remains graveyard for terrorists," Kurdistan 24, May 3, 2016.
- 112 Gwer Bridge crosses the Grand Zab River that flows into the Tigris. It is a critical point that permitted the Peshmerga to open a new front toward Mosul. Said Hameed, "Kurdish forces launch fresh thrust to retake Mosul from Islamic State," Reuters, August 15, 2016. "Update: Day two offensive against ISIS liberates more villages; 35 militants killed," Rudaw, August 15, 2016; "In two-day battle Peshmerga capture important Gwer bridge, onwards to Mosul," Rudaw, August 16, 2016.
- 113 "President Barzani hails historic coordination between Kurdish and Iraqi forces," Rudaw, October 17, 2016.
- 114 There are three Christian groups: one, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac Christians affiliated with the Assyrian Democratic Movement backed by Baghdad and the Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU) founded in 2014; two, supported by the KRG—the Nineveh Plain Force (NPF), an Assyrian Christian militia affiliated to Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, and the Dwekh Nawasha founded in 2014 by the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) I; and three, created by the Shi'a militias in 2014; the Brigade of the Spirit of God Jesus Son of Mary is part of the Imam Ali Battalion, a pro-Iranian Iraqi Shi'a militia. The Babylon Battalion is part of the PMF. Zana Gulmohamad, "A short profile Iraq's Shi'a militias," *Terrorism Monitor* 13:8 (2015). Christian factions envisage an autonomous region for Christians. Adam Lucente, "Iraqi Christian militia draws foreign fighters," *Al-Monitor*, July 24, 2015. "Assyrians in Kurdistan arm themselves," *Nationalia*, January 9, 2015. The first and the second groups are expected to have a major role in the Mosul operation.
- 115 Yazidis are divided into three armed groups: one, 2,000 of the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBD) backed by the PKK and trained by the YPG and YBD's all-female unit, the YBJ; two, the relatively autonomous Yazidi Protection Force funded by the Iraqi government with connections to the PUK and the first group, as well as other Yazidi units within the PMF such as Hashd al-Sha'abi al-Yazidi and Kataib the Fury of Malek Taus; and three, KRG-supported units under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs such as 13 units and a few thousand fighters of Qasim Shesho's Peshmerga (Yazidi Battalion). There were tensions between PKK, YPG, and its Yazidi militias on the one side and the KRG's Peshmerga forces in Sinjar on the other. The Yazidi's role in Mosul's liberation is not clear, but at the very least they will control and defend their bases' areas and possibly close in on the Islamic State on Mosul's western flank. Saad Salloum, "Yazidi infighting, disputes over Sinjar stall battle against Islamic State," *Al-Monitor*, August 18, 2015.
- 116 Shabaks mainly inhabit the Nineveh Plain and have two military units totaling less than 2,000. One is affiliated with the KRG's Peshmerga and another to the PMF. Their role will focus on the Nineveh Plain. Saad Salloum, "Division among Iraq's Shabak minority reveals Kurdish-Arab land rivalry," *Al-Monitor*, August 16, 2015.
- 117 The Kakai's armed regiments of a few hundred fighters are mainly supported by the KRG. Saad Salloum, "Iraq's Kakai minority joins fight against Islamic State," *Al-Monitor*, September 22, 2015.
- 118 Their units of a few thousand are backed by the federal government and the PMF. Other units are trained and supported by Turkey. "Nearly 4,000 Iraqi Turkmen fighters to take part in Mosul liberation operations," *Fars News Agency*, May 10, 2015.
- 119 Bassem Dabbagh, "Turkish forces training Turkmen force in Iraq," *The New Arab*, April 7, 2015.
- 120 "Hashd al-Sha'abi al-Yazidi participate in the battle to liberate Sinjar," *Baghdad Times*, November 12, 2015. "Kataib Yazidis alongside Hashd al-Sha'abi," *Al-Masalah*, March 10, 2016; Mohammed A. Salih, "With the Islamic State gone from Sinjar, Kurdish groups battle for control," *Al-Monitor*, December 10, 2015.
- 121 Knights, "Islamic State conflict: How will the battle of Mosul unfold?," "The Army defeated Daesh attack on the frontlines," *Al-Hayat*, October 4, 2016.
- 122 Author fourth interview, Hamid al-Sabawi, October 2016; author interview, a Kurdish security source, October 2016.
- 123 *Ibid.*
- 124 On September 9, Barzani said, "Until now the forces that will participate in Mosul's liberation are the Iraqi Army [ISF] and Peshmerga." "Interview with Masoud Barzani," *France 24*, September 9, 2016. "We do expect the Peshmerga to be involved, although the details of their involvement are still being worked out," Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Colonel John Dorrian stated in late September. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq." This is acknowledged by some of the players. Ahmad Jarba, an MP, a member of the Committee of Tribes in the ICR, and a leader of one of Hashd al-Asha'ri's armed groups called The Lions of Nineveh whose forces will be stationed in west Nineveh and around south Sinjar toward the Iraqi Syrian border told the author, "Although our forces will not cross with the Peshmerga and the YPG forces in Sinjar, there will be complications when the forces get closer to each other, for example in the Sinjar Mountains. Therefore, I think it requires international intervention to solve these complications." Author interview, Ahmad Jarba, July 2016.
- 125 Iran is using its Shi'a militia proxies to try to secure logistic and supply pathways from Iran to Assad regime-controlled areas in Syria through parts of Iraq, including the area west of Mosul and south east of Sinjar. See Martin Chulov, "Amid Syrian chaos, Iran's game plan emerges: a path to the Mediterranean," *Guardian*, October 8, 2016 and "Information about Iran's plan to connect Mosul to Syria," *Al-Arabiya*, October 9, 2016.
- 127 Turkey has asserted that it will maintain its forces in Bashiqa and will participate in the Mosul operation if the PKK or the pro-Iranian Shi'a militia participate. PMF and Iraqi security officials such as Muhammad al-Askari, advisor to Iraq's Defense Ministry, have emphasized if the Turkish forces approach Mosul, they will treat them as enemies. "Muhammad al-Askari rejects al-Nujaifi's statements about Mosul," *Al-Hurra Iraq*, October 9, 2016. The author agrees with analysis by Michael Knights and Aaron Stein that Turkey is unlikely to play a direct role. At the most, Turkey will play a supportive role to the Hashd al-Watani. Paul Iddon, "What role does Turkey seek to play in Mosul operation?" *Rudaw*, October 10, 2016.
- 128 For example, Prime Minister Abadi stated in a meeting with Nineveh's governor, MPs, and Provincial Council members that the government's policy is the decentralization of power and giving irreversible local authority to the province. Prime Minister Dr. Haider al-Abadi's Media Office, "The PM Haider al-Abadi's meeting with governor of Nineveh, Nineveh's MPs, Nineveh's Provincial Council members," July 25, 2016. Abadi's proposals have not been detailed or clarified. The Sunnis are divided. Mutahiddeen (a Sunni political coalition) led by Usama al-Nujaifi, Atheel al-Nujaifi, and a number of tribal leaders propose dividing Nineveh into four to eight provinces based on religious and ethnic backgrounds, creating an Arab Sunni federal region. "The Battle for Mosul pushed the idea of regionalisation of Iraq," *Al-Arab*, August 25, 2016; "Atheel al-Nujaifi tries to divide Nineveh into four provinces and establish a Sunni region," *Al-Etejah TV*, August 24, 2016. The KRG's leaders have relatively similar views. However, Hamid al-Mutlaq told the author, "I would favor Mosul staying the same ... the division would result in fracturing the country and causing conflict ... the locals can decide." The KRG, particularly the KDP, proposes to divide Nineveh into three provinces: Arabs in Mosul, Kurds in Sinjar, and minorities in Nineveh Plain. The KRG proposes a referendum for locals to choose to be part of the KRG or not. Dalshad Abdullah, "Barzani to divide Mosul post-ISIS into three provinces," *Asharq al-Awsat*, September 7, 2016; "Barzani encourages the Christians to establish a province in Nineveh," *Al-Hayat*, July 18, 2016. Abdul Bari Zebari, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the ICR, told the author, "The Kurds' first proposal was to divide Mosul into three provinces, west Nineveh, east or Nineveh Plain, and the city of Mosul and its south. Now the idea has developed to create more [than three provinces]... it became accepted that dividing Nineveh into more than one province would be better for providing services and locals' participation in administration." Author interview, Abdul Bari Zebari, September 2016.
- 129 "France 24 Arabic Interview with Masoud Barzani," *France 24*, September 9, 2016.
- 130 Some factions in the PMF have already announced they will attack Peshmerga if they remain in areas they have liberated from the Islamic State outside of Kurdistan. Author interview, Fared al-Ibrahimi, an Arab Shi'a MP from southern Iraq and member of the Tribes Committee in the ICR, August 4, 2016 [in which al-Ibrahimi said, "If the Peshmerga will not withdraw from the liberated areas including Kirkuk we will force them out."]; "Peshmerga commander warns Shiite militias a threat to Kurds," *Rudaw*, August 9, 2016; "Kurdish commander dismisses Shiite militias threats on Peshmerga advances," *Rudaw*, September 11, 2016. One possible flashpoint is the Sinjar region to the west of Mosul, where there is concern about Yazidi infighting between those loyal to the KRG (KDP) and to the PKK.

- 131 Michael Knights, "How to secure Mosul: lessons from 2008-2014," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 38, October 2016.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 Only half of the United Nations' \$284 million appeal for Mosul has been funded. Erika Solomon, "Iraqi forces in confident mood as they prepare for Mosul battle," *Financial Times*, September 13, 2016. The United States estimates between 500,000 to 800,000 to be displaced from the Mosul area. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq;" Andrew Tilghman, "No U.S. combat advisors for Fallujah invasion," *Military Times*, May 23, 2016.
- 134 Derek Flood, "The Hard March to Mosul: A Frontline Report," *CTC Sentinel* 9:8 (2016).