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September 2017

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The Fight Against the Islamic State in Iraq After Mosul

KAS AND AL-NAHRAIN CENTER HOLD CONFERENCE IN BAGHDAD ON THE CHALLENGES IN THE POST-TERRITORIAL PHASE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

On 7 July 2017, the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced the liberation of Mosul from the Islamic State (IS). With the expected military defeat of the terror organization in the coming months, the fight against IS is about to enter a new phase. The lasting presence of IS cells in the liberated areas is indicating that from now on, the organization will act as an insurgent group, trying to destabilize Iraq with guerilla strategies and attacks. The challenges for the Iraqi security forces and the state's policies resulting from this development were discussed during a conference of the KAS Syria/Iraq office and the al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies on 13 September in Baghdad. The conference contained three panel discussions and brought together international and Iraqi experts, politicians and government officials.

Ali Bunean, the head of the Al-Nahrain Center, Major General Farqad Joudi of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, and Nils Wörmer, head of the KAS Syria/Iraq office, opened the conference.

The first panel, which was moderated by Nussaibah Younis from Chatham House, dealt with the consequences of the military defeat of the IS in Syria and Iraq for the organization's recruitment potential and the administration of its provinces and global offshoots. The Iraqi terrorism expert Hisham al-Hashimi from the Network of Iraqi Facilitators pointed out that IS recruited more than 3,000 young people in Iraq, and systematically indoctrinated them in its schools with IS propaganda. He argued that even though IS has lost many of its former leaders throughout the past two years, this

brainwashed generation could serve as a basis for the creation of a direct successor organization. Al-Hashimi emphasized the necessity to de-radicalize the youth and to reintegrate them into society. He criticized that in the Sunni Arab dominated provinces, Salafi and Wahhabi ideas, which portray Shi'as as infidels, are still being taught. Without a national awareness campaign, there will therefore still be fertile grounds for the propaganda of IS and its successors in Iraq.

Jasmin El-Gamal from the Atlantic Council argued that through the loss of its operational centers in Mosul and Raqqa has dealt a blow to the IS with regard to the administration of its global branches. However, with the terror organization increasingly growing into a virtual caliphate through social media networks like Twitter and Telegram, IS continues to maintain capable of action. While many armed groups initially joined IS for financial and personal assistance, they now mainly use the organization's branding to gain more media attention to increase recruitment among local fighters. She argued that even if IS only managed to carry out one significant attack a month, this would still mean that the Global Coalition Against Daesh was on a losing streak. Considering the efforts of the international community, El-Gamal is convinced that they need to strongly increase their focus on the elimination of the root causes of radicalization and terrorism in the countries of question. In this context, she also justified the policies of the Obama administration, which had focused more on the civil instruments of conflict management in the Middle East than on military ones.

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Referring to al-Hashimi and El-Gamal, Saeed Nehma al-Jayashi from the al-Nahrain Center highlighted in his closing remarks that after the military defeat of IS in Iraq, it is now necessary to focus on fighting the group's ideologies. Moreover, the Iraqi security forces need to be equipped to counter IS technological warfare and propaganda.

Fight against terrorism: "Tomorrow's IS acts differently than AQI 2005"

The second panel dealt with the future of IS in Syria and Iraq and necessary adjustments inside the Iraqi security forces in order to successfully fight IS. It was moderated by Safaa Hussein al-Sheikh, Deputy National Security Advisor of Iraq. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi from the Middle East Forum elaborated on the structural changes that the IS core organization went through in the past years. Her argued that while facing many military challenges over the last three years, IS has always managed to reinvent itself and to surprise its enemies. Considering its territorial losses, IS has already started to deteriorate back into the insurgency group it initially emerged from. Al-Tamimi argued that IS still has many supporters in the liberated areas, who through legal economic activities are already working towards financing the terror organization in its new phase.

Florence Gaub from the European Union Institute for Security Studies emphasized that even though IS is returning to its initial guerilla tactics, an underground version of IS is not comparable to its predecessor organization al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). According to her, IS has learned to use modern technologies and has proven to be very creative and adaptable over the past years. Gaub argued that the Iraqi security sector needs to implement reforms in three areas in order to stand up to the new dangers. First, Iraq's national security strategy needs to be updated in order to be able to meet the new challenges. Second, the individual roles and responsibilities of the different actors of the security sector need to be clearly defined, based on their abilities. In this context, Gaub referred especially to the Shi'a domi-

nated Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), also known as Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi, whose responsibilities in fighting IS and securing liberated areas are not yet determined. Also, the Iraqi police needs to be involved in the fight against IS more strongly since there is an irrefutable link between IS and organized crime. Gaub believes that fighting organized crime could be an indirect way to weaken IS. According to her, the capacities of the Iraqi intelligence agencies also need to be severely strengthened. Lastly, she argued that there is a need for close civil-military cooperation since IS can only be fought with a comprehensive approach.

Brigadier General Hassan Maknazi from the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) highlighted that the CTS is still working on improving its understanding of IS' asymmetrical warfare. The specific connections between military and civil elements and the clear focus on soft targets are complicating the battle against IS in its post-territorial state. According to Maknazi, especially the use of the cyberspace for communication and recruitment is difficult to tackle for the Iraqi security forces. He argued that modern technologies allowed IS to spread its ideology across Iraq and the Iraqi security forces were not yet able to fight this type of ideological, digital warfare, as they are lacking the required means and strategies.

Reconciliation and de-radicalization strategies to prevent IS 2.0

The third and last panel revolved around the long-term responsibilities that Iraqi politics and society have to prevent a new rise of IS. Sajad Jiyad from the al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies noted that Iraq is currently confronted with eight different challenges. First, Iraq is facing the task of reconciliation between the different ethnic-religious groups as well as the perpetrators and victims of the IS rule. While reconciliation on a national level has proven to be difficult, progress has been made on the local level, especially in Tikrit, which has been liberated in 2015. Here, the Iraqi government managed to find solutions for ethnic-religious conflicts that are now being surveilled and implemented by local police

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forces. Similar solutions also need to be found for other liberated areas, Jiyad argued.

Second, Jiyad emphasized that the democratic right of co-determination of the liberated areas needs to be strengthened through decentralization. This would allow for the local actors and militias to be reintegrated into the Iraqi state. According to him, the local elections scheduled for 2018 represent an important indicator for the future development of the liberated areas. Third, the Iraqi government needs to pass a law which punishes hate speech, since this rhetoric instrument has a strong influence on the radicalization of citizens.

Fourth, corruption must be fought more aggressively and the supply of public services must be guaranteed, said Jiyad. Only the reestablishment of trust in the central government would help to reintegrate local citizens in the liberated areas into the state. Fifth, the influence of foreign actors needs to be restricted in Iraq. Foreign powers are constantly attempting to influence Iraqi politics, e.g. through media reporting by which they support radicalization tendencies. Sixth, Jiyad demanded better protection of the Iraqi borders in order to prevent smuggling and the infiltration of extremist fighters. Seventh, he called to disconnect political disputes from ethnic-religious conflicts. The often harsh rhetoric in Baghdad results into direct confrontation on the ground, which needs to be prevented in the future. Finally, Jiyad argued that all armed groups and militias in Iraq need to be properly integrated into the security sector. The monopoly of force should exclusively be in the hands of the state.

Anne Speckhard from the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism indicated that most of IS recruitment is executed over social media. She presented two video campaigns of her center that are to prevent digital indoctrination. Preparing the campaign, Speckhard had interviewed 60 former IS fighters and supporters from Syria and Iraq. The videos show young people talking about their time living under the cruel reign of IS. She is convinced that radi-

calization can only be prevented by a comprehensive deconstruction of the caliphate, which IS promises his potential recruits to be heaven on earth. Speckhard in this context, promoted the idea of a stronger use of deterrence videos in Iraq.

Dr. Noha Darwish from the al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies advocated a closer cooperation between Iraq and the international community in the fight against IS. Additionally, she said that an Iraqi strategy for the battle against violent extremism is about to be finalized. This would help to coordinate and connect the approaches of the security forces and civil actors and hence strengthen the fight against IS.