



February 28, 2017

# Iraq After Mosul

Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred  
Fifteenth Congress, First Session

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## The “End of the Beginning”: The Stabilization of Mosul & Future U.S. Strategic Objectives in Iraq.

Dr Michael Knights

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Testimony Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

February 28, 2017

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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and the distinguished committee members: Thank you for inviting me to testify at today’s hearing on Mosul and the campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). I’m particularly proud to be appearing before you for the first time as a new American citizen, an immigrant and an adopted son of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

At heart, we’re here today because Iraq is important.

ISIL has known this all along. Their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is an Iraqi. Their main base is Iraq and may remain in Iraq in the future. The territory of Iraq is connected to six of the Middle East’s major states and represents a keystone that buttresses the region’s geography. The population of Iraq includes the largest body of Sunni Arabs in the world living under a Shia-led government. As ISIL degenerates back into a terrorist group unable to hold major towns or cities it will view Iraq as a safe haven and later as fertile ground for a comeback.

Iran also knows that Iraq is important. The regime in the Tehran, the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism, has an ambitious agenda inside Iraq. Tehran seeks to exploit the justifiable fear of ISIL that is felt by Iraqi Shia majority in Iraq. Iran is trying to convince the Iraqi Shia that they are alone in their fight

against ISIL, and that only Iranian-backed Shia militias can protect Iraq from ISIL's resurgence in the future.

We in this room know Iraq is important, and that America's role in Iraq is equally important. Just two and a half years after the U.S. military left the country, ISIL took over Mosul and a third of Iraq. ISIL's success and the complete and hasty withdrawal of U.S. military support to Iraq was no coincidence.

Three years ago I was testifying to Congress on the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), something I had been warning about since 2011<sup>1</sup> when the movement rebooted stronger after we killed their leaders the year before.

Back in 2013 it was hard to focus attention on Iraq, and it will be hard to focus attention on Iraq in a year's time, so we need to make smart choices now while we are still keenly focused on the threats to U.S. interests that are present in Iraq. These threats include not only ISIL but also Shia militias groups that parasitically exploit ISIL's presence and which make up part of the Iranian threat network discussed in this committee earlier this month.<sup>2</sup>

I've been focused on Iraq my whole career. I'm starting to see the cyclical nature of our policies.

We wake up to the nature of an urgent threat that has been allowed to grow unchecked. We make mistakes, then we do the right thing, but then we lose interest. The cycle starts again.

This is very clear in the case of Mosul and fight against ISIL and its forerunners. In early 2017, the Iraqi security forces are likely to liberate Mosul from ISIL control. But given the dramatic comebacks staged by ISIL and its predecessors in the city in 2004, 2007, and 2014, one can justifiably ask what will stop ISIL or a similar movement from lying low, regenerating, and wiping away the costly gains of the current war. What can we learn from history?

### **Stabilizing Mosul: lessons from 2008-2014**

In a recent Washington Institute policy paper on Mosul,<sup>3</sup> I took a close look at the underexplored issue of security arrangements for the city after its liberation, in particular how security forces should be structured and controlled to prevent an ISIL recurrence. The paper draws on my interviews with Mosul

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2012 I assessed that the resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq had been underway since the spring of 2011. See Michael Knights, *Back with a vengeance: Al-Qaeda in Iraq rebounds*, in IHS Defense, Security & Risk Consulting, February 24, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Defeating the Iranian Threat Network: Options for Countering Iranian Proxies*, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, December 6, 2016, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/defeating-the-iranian-threat-network-options-for-countering-iranian-proxies-120616p>

<sup>3</sup> Michael Knights, *How to Secure Mosul: Lessons from 2008—2014* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016), available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote38-Knights.pdf>

security forces in the pre-2011 period, and extensive travel in Ninawa governorate both before and after ISIL.

Though “big picture” political deals over Mosul’s future may ultimately be decisive, the first priority of the Iraqi-international coalition is to secure Mosul in very practical ways.

As John Paul Vann, a U.S. military advisor in Vietnam, noted decades ago: “Security may be ten percent of the problem, or it may be ninety percent, but whichever it is, it’s the first ten percent or the first ninety percent. Without security, nothing else we do will last.”<sup>4</sup>

We can learn a lot about the vital next steps in Mosul if we look at two distinct periods of Mosul’s recent history.

- Partial success when the U.S. paid close attention. In 2007–2011, the U.S.-backed Iraqi security forces (ISF) achieved significant success, reducing security incidents in the city from a high point of 666 per month in the first quarter of 2008 to an average of 32 incidents in the first quarter of 2011.<sup>5</sup>
- Catastrophic failure when the U.S. turned away. In 2011–2014, the trend reversed, until monthly security incidents had risen to an average of 297 in the first quarter of 2014. Shortly afterwards ISIL seized Mosul and a third of Iraq in June 2014.

#### **Drivers of successful stabilization in Mosul in 2007-2011**

Explanations for both the 2007–11 successes and the failures of 2011–14 are easily identified. In the earlier span, Baghdad committed to Mosul’s stabilization and Iraq’s prime minister (then Nouri al-Maliki) focused on the issue, authorizing compromises such as partial amnesty and a reopening of security recruitment to former regime officers. Elections produced a provincial council and governor with whom urban Sunni Arab Moslawis, as Mosul residents are known, could identify.

While the U.S. military was embedded in Mosul until 2011, the ISF achieved a basic “unity of command,” and key command positions were allocated to respected officers, including Sunni Arab Moslawis, in part as a result of U.S. urging. Available government troops in Mosul were increased, including through significant local recruitment of Moslawis from poorer Sunni Arab neighborhoods.

#### **The roots of failed stabilization in Mosul during 2011-2014**

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> All incident data is drawn from the author’s geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) data set, which brings together declassified coalition SIGACT data plus private-security-company and open-source SIGACT data used to supplement and extend the data set as coalition incident collection degraded in 2009–11 and disappeared in 2012–14.

During the 2011–14 stretch, by contrast, ISIL’s victory was assured by chronically deficient unity of effort and unity of command among Iraqi government, Kurdish, and Ninawa factions. Baghdad and the Kurdish-backed Ninawa provincial leaders worked at cross-proposes throughout the three-year period.

Indeed, the military “command climate” set by Baghdad’s politically appointed commanders resulted in security forces conducting operations intended to humiliate and punish the predominately Sunni Arab Moslawis. From the outset of Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki’s second term in 2010, Baghdad tinkered with command and control in Mosul, undoing the reasonably depoliticized security structure that existed until that point. The constant shuffling of commanders destroyed the ISF’s remaining cohesion.

### **A rare second chance: the strategic opportunity in Mosul in 2017**

Given the strategic opportunity posed by the future liberation of Mosul—an opportunity that may not come again—digesting and making use of these lessons is vitally important.

Assuming neither Kurdish Peshmerga nor Shiite militias flood the city, an outcome the coalition seems to have prevented, Moslawis may initially be more open to working with the ISF, following two and a half years under ISIL, than at any point since 2003. But Mosul residents will also be closely watching their liberators for signs of a return to 2014, with its punitive measures, restrictive curfews, and the widespread specter of arrest.

At the political level, Ninawa requires genuine pragmatic governing consensus, not just a shifting series of “enemy of my enemy is my friend” alliances. It is still early in the process but on this front the U.S.-led coalition has made a good start by bringing together Baghdad and the Kurds, plus the Ninawa provincial leadership for general dialogue.

A compact among these factions should consist of simple ground rules for future political conduct. In such an arrangement, the provincial council and any security coordination committee must be a consensus-based decisionmaking body.

### **How to structure Mosul security forces**

Likewise, the recruitment and management of local government bodies and police should formulaically reflect the pre-ISIL composition of the city’s population. Major recruitment of urban locals to the police force, including returning minorities, is a priority.

At the operational level, requirements include stable nonpoliticized command appointments and much stronger unity and coordination among federal Iraqi, Kurdish, and local Ninawa security forces. The Ninawa Operations Command (NiOC), a three-star joint headquarters active since 2008, remains the most appropriate command-and-control architecture, but the concept needs to be implemented much more effectively than in the pre-2014 years.

Just as the U.S.-led coalition has successfully worked since 2014 to encourage Iraqi promotion to high command of talented Counter-Terrorism Service officers, the coalition should now use its influence and advisors to optimize NiOC's leadership and setup.

Such efforts should include the establishment of key coordination bodies on overall security policy, community relations, intelligence sharing, and checkpoint placement. To aid coordination, Iraq should be encouraged to locate NiOC as close as possible to the Ninawa Provincial Council and police headquarters, both in Mosul city.

### **How to prevent ISIL resurgence in Mosul**

The 2007-2014 period provides clear lessons regarding some of the first steps that Iraq and the coalition should take in Mosul:

- Spread reconstruction and economic aid to poorer urban districts. For more than a decade, the city's reconstruction needs have been unmet, and the coalition should encourage Iraq to target reconstruction in the areas most likely to present havens for ISIL and other militant actors. This means greater focus on the poor Arab neighborhoods at the city's outer northwest, southwest, and southeast edges. These areas were consistently overlooked in the past and ISIL used them as incubators for its previous recoveries, employing an economic "class warfare" approach to recruit the poor.
- Don't overlook rural areas. Moreover, urban security must be linked to stabilization of rural militant "hotspots" like Badush, Ash Shura, and Tal Afar, from which a disproportionate number of ISIL fighters have come. ISIL's takeover of Mosul in 2014 was partly a rural versus urban backlash. This social schism needs to be minimized to deny ISIL space to re-grow.
- Treat ISIL as a major organized crime threat. Iraq needs to help develop strong capabilities in countering organized crime and for local governments in fighting corruption, given that ISIL will first reemerge in Mosul's criminal underbelly, as it did after the decimation of its predecessor, the Islamic State of Iraq, in 2010. The resurgence of ISIL in Mosul will either succeed or fail in the markets, the offices and the government departments where the terrorists will try to threaten, kidnap and kill their way back to prominence.

### **The future role of the U.S.-led coalition in Mosul and Iraq**

The U.S.-led coalition can play a critical positive role in encouraging Iraq to place good leaders in charge of Ninawa security policies, support those leaders, and build a combined effort to prevent ISIL resurgence.

First, the U.S.-led coalition needs to itself act in a coordinated manner. The current coalition against the Islamic State is far more useful than a unilateral U.S. mission, drawing on key contributors such as Britain, Australia and New Zealand, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Canada, to name just a handful.

Such an alliance, including some of the world's largest economies and security-assistance partners, can help amplify diplomatic pressure in stressing the need for consensus approaches to Ninawa in discussions in Mosul, Erbil, Baghdad, Ankara, and even Tehran.

The alliance also ensures the fair burden sharing between the United States and other partners, many of whom are making very substantive efforts to do things that the U.S. cannot easily do (for instance, Italian Carabinieri support to Iraq's Federal Police).

### **Extending Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve**

If the mandate of Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) were extended, the coalition's leverage could be expanded beyond the liberation of Mosul. The coalition should commit the United States to at least three further years of extraordinary security cooperation, subject to review and extension.

The aim would be to provide a bridge for this enhanced security-cooperation relationship into the new Iraqi government in 2018–22.

The message should be clear: the United States will not disengage from this fight after Mosul is liberated. In contrast to the hasty departure in 2009–11, U.S. officials would be committing to an intensified security-cooperation relationship with Iraq through the multinational framework of CJTF-OIR for the mid-term, in order to permanently defeat IS in Iraq.

Such an effort should entail ongoing contribution to a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Iraq (CJSOFT-I), enhanced intelligence cooperation, continued U.S. presence in the Combined Joint Operations Command (CJOC), and a sturdy Build Partner Capacity (BPC) effort.

### **What the U.S.-led coalition should do in Mosul**

The above steps could greatly increase U.S. and coalition leverage for Ninawa's long-term stabilization. For instance, the coalition could stay directly engaged in the development of Ninawa-based security forces.

If the coalition continues to train and equip Iraqi army forces at the large bases near Baghdad, Taji and Besmaya, then Western governments will be better positioned to ensure Moslawi and Ninawa recruits are brought into the army in appropriate numbers, a key reconciliation metric. Similarly, the Italian Carabinieri training for the Iraqi Federal Police allows monitoring and influence over the development of new locally recruited Federal Police forces for Ninawa.

Specialized training initiatives could not only sustain coalition leverage but also directly assist in Ninawa's stabilization. Examples might include

- special forces and intelligence training for counterterrorism and counter-organized-crime operations;

- development of a “Counterinsurgency Center of Excellence for the Iraqi Army and Federal Police”; and
- development of border security and logistical capacities to support operations in ungoverned spaces far from existing logistical infrastructure, such as the Ninawa-Syria border.

### **Keep paying attention to Mosul, Ninawa and Iraq**

The coalition’s attention is simultaneously the cheapest and the most important investment that can be made in Mosul. Keeping the Baghdad, Kurdistan Region, and Ninawa leaderships focused on stabilization, and keeping them communicating and coordinating, is the greatest contribution the coalition can make.

# SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING

FEBRUARY 28, 2017

Iraq After Mosul

Written Testimony by Hardin Lang

Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you for the honor and the opportunity to discuss the situation in Iraq. The battle to retake the country from ISIS is one of the most dynamic foreign policy challenges confronting the new administration. Iraqi and coalition forces have already liberated most of their country and are now engaged in a fierce fight to recapture the western half of Mosul.

But major questions remain regarding what comes next. Indeed, we stand at an inflection point in our policy on Iraq. Much of the military task will soon be accomplished. The next phase will be more complicated – to help Iraqis recover, reconcile and seek solutions to what at its root has always been a political problem. As we enter this phase, I want to touch on four urgent priorities and two enduring challenges the US will now face in Iraq.

The four urgent priorities are:

- 1) The humanitarian situation
- 2) Post-liberation governance of Mosul
- 3) Stabilization in liberated communities
- 4) Negotiating a follow-on military mission

The two enduring challenges include:

- 1) National reconciliation
- 2) The future of Shia militia in Iraq

## **Why Iraq Matters**

First, let me be clear on one point. My remarks are premised on the assumption that the United States maintains a significant interest in the future of Iraq – one that merits continuing U.S. leadership and investment. As of last year, the U.S. had spent over \$10

billion to combat the ISIS in Iraq and Syria and deployed over 5,000 troops in Iraq alone to support that effort.<sup>i</sup> We made this investment because of the terrorist threat posed by ISIS to the United States and our allies. Once ISIS has been defeated militarily, a key objective should be to foster the degree of stability in Iraq necessary to prevent the reemergence of similar transnational terrorist threats. In this case, an ounce of prevention truly is worth a pound of cure.

A second US objective in Iraq should be to balance Iranian influence. The 2003 invasion of Iraq ended the US policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran. It is not possible to return to the status quo ante. Iran will maintain significant sway inside Iraq for the foreseeable future, however, we can take steps to reinforce Iraqi sovereignty and independence and minimize the opportunity for Iraq to disintegrate or serve as a proxy in the regional competition for power. Working with long-standing partners in the Middle East to ensure that we are developing regional support for efforts to reinforce Iraq's sovereignty is vital for long-term U.S. interests.

None of this requires the U.S. to nation build or reconstruct Iraq, but it does mean that we should be prepared to protect the significant investment of the last two years through a continued military presence and targeted civilian assistance. We should share this burden by leveraging the resources of extensive membership of the counter-ISIS coalition and our partners in the region. This will only be possible if the US remains engaged and willing to lead.

### **Four Urgent Priorities**

**1) The humanitarian situation:** While the number of those displaced by the Mosul operation has not been as high as many feared, the humanitarian situation remains serious. To date, roughly 160,000 civilians have been displaced due to fighting to retake the eastern half of Mosul and surrounding villages. Some 700,000-750,000 civilians remain trapped in areas still controlled by IS. The UN estimates that as many as 250,000 people could flee escalating fighting in the west of the city.<sup>ii</sup>

Two weeks ago, UN relief operations were temporarily paused to the liberated eastern half of Mosul because of a deterioration in the security situation. Significant shortages of drinking water remain a primary humanitarian concern in eastern Mosul. The UN has also announced that food, fuel, and other humanitarian supplies are unable to reach western Mosul and ongoing military operations have closed off possible access points for aid.

More needs to be done to address the immediate humanitarian needs of those impacted by the fighting. First, the Iraqi Security Forces need to secure the distribution of aid in and provide evacuation routes from western Mosul as the offensive continues.<sup>iii</sup> Second, international coalition partners and other donors will need to increase their humanitarian assistance. The good news is that ninety-seven percent of the July 2016 Mosul Flash Appeal has been funded. But the UN estimates it will need another \$570 million for the next phases of the Mosul operation.<sup>iv</sup>

**2) Post-liberation governance of Mosul:** Perhaps the biggest challenge facing a liberated Mosul will be governance. The plan to restore governance is to be led by the current Ninewa governor in exile. This mirrors the process in other liberated cities, but he is not from Mosul and has no indigenous powerbase. Former governor Najafi remains a controversial and possibly disruptive figure. The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government have discussed post-liberation arrangements at length, but have not yet reached a shared understanding, and Turkey's presence has complicated the situation. The lack of an agreed plan creates incentives for those fighting to create facts on the ground from whence they can negotiate on the day after.

The key will be to find an arrangement that gives the people of Mosul confidence, restores the relationship with the government in Baghdad and reassures the KRG that Kurdish equities will be protected. One option would be for the Iraqi government to announce a political transitional period lasting up to 18 months once combat operations have ceased. A high-level committee could then be established to support the governor and help oversee the administration of Mosul and surrounding areas during this period. That committee could include representatives from Baghdad and Erbil. A senior U.S. official – probably of Ambassadorial rank - should support the committee and help serve as a broker.

**3) Stabilization in liberated communities:** ISIS has left much of Iraq in ruins. Iraqis returning home have found their communities destroyed. The Iraqi government is overwhelmed by the task of rebuilding in areas already liberated from ISIS. As Special Envoy Brett McGurk stated last year, “Stabilizing areas after [ISIS] can be even more important than clearing areas from [ISIS].”<sup>v</sup> He's right: After the fighting stops, there will be a crucial window to begin humanitarian aid and establish some basic services and governance. Failure to do so risks squandering battlefield sacrifices.

Coalition diplomats often point to the return of displaced people as the metric of success for stabilization. The total number of people displaced by the ISIS crisis grew to 3.3 million people in 2016 and now hovers at just over three million. While ISIS has lost

over half its territory in Iraq, only one-third of those who fled their homes appear to have returned. This suggests that efforts to stabilize liberated areas lag dangerously behind the military campaign. To date, the UN has led on stabilization, and while its efforts have been commendable, the counter-ISIS coalition should bolster its role in this line of effort.

The first step would be for counter-ISIS coalition to strengthen its leadership for stabilization efforts. Currently, the coalition working group in charge of stabilization has few responsibilities beyond information sharing. One option would be to appoint a Baghdad-based coalition ambassador to serve as the civilian lead for stabilization on the ground. A coalition civilian lead could help integrate stabilization into coalition military campaign plans to ensure that there is a plan for the day after liberation.

Second, the United States should lead by example in supporting stabilization. The administration should deploy civilian contingency assets like the State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) to support UN efforts. OTI, in particular, has extensive experience working next to the military and through local authorities in conflict zones.

**4) Negotiating a follow-on military mission:** Finally, the single most pressing decision will be whether to keep U.S. soldiers in the country for a follow-on mission. The U.S. military presence in Iraq has expanded incrementally since mid-2014, and now includes more than 5,000 personnel at three air bases in Anbar and Ninewa and two Joint Operations Centers in Baghdad and Erbil.<sup>vi</sup> The overall mission has also expanded to include close air support, fire support, logistical assistance, high-value targeting, and embedded U.S. forces behind the frontlines.

But even after Mosul has been liberated, Iraq will still require U.S. support to ensure enduring security. With help from the American-led anti-ISIS coalition, the Iraqi security forces have made impressive gains against ISIS after suffering a breathtaking collapse in mid-2014. But Iraqi forces will need help to protect both their battlefield and organizational gains for some time to come. Unfortunately, negotiations over a U.S. follow-on force will take place at a time of declining American leverage. Iraqi leaders are already under pressure to reduce the U.S. military footprint. Prime Minister Al-Abadi has signaled his intent to do so immediately after the liberation of Mosul, so we need to start talking to the Iraqis now about the future of a U.S. military presence.

A follow-on mission should continue to train and equip our partners – especially the Counter Terrorism Service. But the final troop number must carefully balance military requirements against political realities in Baghdad. Insistence on a large force with a broad mandate and expansive rules of engagement could trigger Iraqi political backlash.

A force somewhere between 3,000 to 5,000 troops should be sufficient. The key will be to maintain the US footprint in both Anbar and Ninewa to reassure Sunni Arab communities that they will not once again be abandoned. The timeline for agreement is short: Iraq's 2018 elections could produce a prime minister less willing to cooperate with Washington.

## **Two Enduring Challenges**

**1) National reconciliation:** Over the long term, the key to lasting victory over the Islamic State and stability in Iraq will be national reconciliation. We have learned the hard way that American troops cannot provide long-term stability if Iraqi leaders cannot heal their divided politics. Sunni Arab communities must be offered a tangible stake in the future of the country. To date the U.S. strategy has been to nurture reconciliation through support for the devolution of authority to local government, the mobilization of Sunni Arabs into the security force, and legislation like the amnesty law that passed last August.<sup>vii</sup>

Ultimate success or failure for reconciliation will rest with Iraqis. Outside actors like the United States should approach such efforts with humility and measured expectations. And yet the fact that these non-military dimensions are so vital to Iraq's future security and the fight against ISIS means that much more must be done.

First, the administration should consider additional resources to accelerate government decentralization.<sup>viii</sup> Second, it should also accelerate efforts to recruit Sunni Arabs into the security forces through the U.S. Department of Defense's Iraq Train and Equip Fund. Finally, the embassy in Baghdad should encourage recent local attempts at reconciliation. Two Shia leaders and a Sunni Arab political bloc have launched competing reconciliation initiatives. If these efforts are genuine, the United States should be prepared to nurture them where possible through increased diplomatic engagement and presence in Iraq.

For their part, the Kurds have been amongst the most steadfast and effective partners against ISIS. They will want to be rewarded at a time that aspirations for independence are running high. While this ultimate Kurdish objective does not appear realistic at this time, there needs to be a channel of communication with the KRG to discuss how they can be compensated for their sacrifice.

**2) The future of Shia militia in Iraq:** One of the biggest threats to reconciliation remains sectarian Shia militias. Estimates of the total Shiite militiamen in Iraq vary widely from 100,000-120,000 – mostly organized under the banner of the Popular Mobilization Front (PMFs). Roughly half of the PMF units were formed out of pre-

existing Iraqi militias, while the rest are new formations mobilized in response to Grand Ayatollah Sistani's 2014 fatwa.<sup>ix</sup> A large proportion receives direct Iranian backing. Many of the Iranian-backed militia were responsible for killing some 500 U.S. troops from 2003-2011.<sup>x</sup>

U.S. policy towards the PMF has evolved. In 2014, U.S. refused to provide them military support, but since mid-2015, American policy has evolved to include air and other support for those PMF units not beholden to Iran.<sup>xi</sup> On November 26, the Iraqi government passed legislation making the PMF an official component of Iraq's security forces with equal status to the army,<sup>xiii</sup> but there has been little movement by the Iraqi government to implement the November legislation. Iraq's president has indicated that there are several possible options including turning the PMF into a reservist force, or full integration into the existing structure of the Iraqi armed forces.

However, PMF leaders exercise considerable political influence inside Iraq. There is a very real risk that the PMF could take root as a Hezbollah-style Iranian proxy. Such a development would threaten Iraqi sovereignty and undercut attempts at national reconciliation. There are no easy solutions to managing the threat posed by Iranian-backed PMF units, but the U.S. could play a constructive role in facilitating the demobilization or integration of the remaining PMF units into the ISF.

## Endnotes

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