EXPLORING US INVOLVEMENT IN POST-ISIL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

Author: Stefanie Mitchell

American Military University, Graduate International Relations and Conflict Resolution

Graduate Student, veteran US military counterterrorism practitioner, and Research Fellow with the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, with deployment and field work experience in the Middle East and Africa. She is also the Co-Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of United Humanitarian Solutions- an Iraq based local non-governmental organization, focusing on post-conflict rehabilitation and development.

Abstract

This winter, the US is escalating its involvement in Iraq in order to assist in the retaking of the city of Mosul, Iraq from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The US will be supporting Iraqi and Kurdish forces, in the vicinity of Shia militia and Turkish forces. This blend of nations and opposing agendas converging during this critical intervention creates concerns about the impact this offensive will have on the region. There are several critical concerns: the humanitarian crisis and support for displaced persons, strain on local security and infrastructure, sectarian violence, intracommunity violence, and sectarian political conflict regarding control of areas retaken. As this situation unfolds, the future is somewhat unknown and there is no concrete decision regarding what US involvement will be or should be after the offensive. Maintaining stability, encouraging conflict resolution and promoting justice in the region will be likely priorities for US policy. This research will explore the aforementioned issues, and use current data to develop policy perspectives for near-term US involvement in the region.

The research will combine field work and secondary data, and use a qualitative, descriptive approach to develop policy perspectives and recommendations. The field work will take place on the ground in the Kurdistan region of Northern Iraq, throughout the winter of 2016 and will consist of observations, semi-structured interviews, and publicly available data in the local news and communities. A semi-ethnographic approach will be used to annotate regional developments and changes which take place in the Iraqi Kurdistan region as a result of the Mosul offensive. Interviews and observations will record the diverse local sentiment regarding the status of the offensive, US involvement, and long-term hopes and aspirations for the region. A conflict resolution lens will be used to frame and inform this research, and data will be analyzed for targets of opportunity for peace and resolution of historical grievances. The research will strive to provide the most accurate current data and public perspective available on this urgent crisis, in order to inform dynamic US political solutions.

Key Words: Iraq, Kurdistan, sectarian conflict, Middle East conflict resolution, US intervention in Iraq, ISIL, ISIS, Mosul offensive