

Ever since the city of Mosul was taken over by the ISIS in June 2014, the Iraqi army along with Turkish and Kurdish Peshmerga forces, assisted by the Coalition forces have made substantial inroads into recapturing Mosul from the ISIS. Reports as late as June 27th, 2017 from the Iraqi Military state that the ISIS have been ousted from 50% of the old city¹. According to a map published by the Military media office around the 3rd of July, 2017, ISIS militants were cornered to a 300 by 500 feet region near the River Tigris². On the 9th of July, Prime minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory after the 8th month old offensive. ISIS' domain in Iraq has reportedly been reduced to rural and desert areas.³

Background on the Battle for Mosul

On the 10th of June, 2014, self proclaimed leader of the ISIS Abu-Bakr-Al-Baghdadhi declared a global caliphate from the great mosque, Al-Nuri in Mosul, after ISIS militants seized control over Iraq's second largest city⁴. This marked the beginning of an ISIS stronghold in Iraq, with Mosul as its commanding center.

However, US led offensives, troops from the Iraqi armed forces, efforts from the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and several others as part of the anti-ISIS coalition has finally led to the recapturing of Mosul.

¹ "Iraqi army says half of Mosul's old city freed from IS - Xinhua | English"
http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/28/c_136399574.htm.

² "Islamic State cornered in Mosul as Iraq prepares victory ... - Reuters." 3 Jul. 2017,
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-mosul-idUSKBN19O185..>

³ "ISIS Mosul defeat: Mass celebrations erupt as Iraqi army finally ends" 9 Jul. 2017,
<http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/628302/ISIS-defeated-victory-Iraq-Mosul-siege-battle-jihadis-fight-ends>.

⁴ "Isis insurgents seize control of Iraqi city of Mosul | World news | The" 10 Jun. 2014,
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/10/iraq-sunni-insurgents-islamic-militants-seize-control-mosul>.

The offensive began in October 2016, when Iraqi Prime Minister Haider-Al-Abadi declared the beginning of the offensive to recapture Mosul ⁵. The reported strategy was for the coalition to surround Mosul from all directions, following which the Iraqi Military would enter Mosul ⁶. Initially, the United States stationed around 4500 troops, perceivably for assistance and training, and also conducted air strikes on the City ⁷. The ISIS were relentless and used civilians as human shields ⁸. This was attributed as one of the reasons for widespread civilian deaths in the wake of multiple airstrikes conducted by the coalition.

By the 30th of December 2016, the Iraqi forces had advanced from three directions into eastern Mosul Districts, and successfully captured a part of the Karama District, and near control over the Intissar and Siha districts by the 1st of January ⁹.

While the Iraqi forces continued to advance into Mosul, recapturing several important districts towards the east and north of Mosul, the US-coalition led airstrikes were starting to come under heavy criticism for the loss of civilian life ¹⁰. However, the presence of ISIS militants amongst the civilians paved the way for the necessity of the airstrikes in the eyes of the Pentagon, coupled by the belief that ISIS militants were dressing like civilians.

⁵ "Battle for Mosul begins with gunfire and car bombs - CNN.com." 17 Oct. 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/17/middleeast/mosul-isis-operation-begins-iraq/index.html>.

⁶ "Mosul battle: EU 'should prepare for returning jihadists' - BBC.com." 18 Oct. 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37689210>.

⁷ "U.S. Strategy and the War in Iraq and Syria | Center for Strategic and" 13 May. 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-strategy-and-war-iraq-and-syria>.

⁸ "ISIS Using Mosul Civilians as Human Shields Amid Offensive | Time.com." 29 Mar. 2017, <http://time.com/4717319/mosul-iraq-offensive-civilians-human-shields/>.

⁹ "Islamic State attacks Iraqi police near Najaf, kills seven | Reuters." 1 Jan. 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-attack-idUSKBN14L0X3>.

¹⁰ "Possible civilian casualties in Mosul air strike: Pentagon | Reuters." 29 Dec. 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-mosul-idUSKBN14I1SR>.

Speaking at a news conference, UN spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said the hostage-taking was aimed at making certain parts of Mosul “immune from military action”.

“ISIS’s depraved, cowardly strategy is to try to use the presence of civilian hostages to render certain points, areas or military forces immune from military action, essentially using tens of thousands of men, women and children as human shields,” Shamdasani said, using a different term for the group. These actions were severely condemned worldwide ¹¹.

A string of successful military operations towards the west of Mosul led to the Iraqi Military advancing into West Mosul by February 2017, and the ISIS were being cornered into diminishing territory ¹². On the 23rd of February, the Iraqi forces retook Mosul airport. Recapturing the airport allowed for the forces to have an airbase close to the city and to facilitate airstrikes ¹³.

Between March and June, the Iraqi forces targeted Southern and North-Western Mosul and managed to advance towards the center of Mosul. The ISIS were on the brink of defeat in Mosul. On the 21st of June, the Great Mosque of al-Nuri was destroyed. The ISIS claimed that it was destroyed by an airstrike by the United States, however the United States refuted such claims and there were suggestions that the Mosque was destroyed by explosives placed at its base.

¹¹ "Islamic State using hostages as human shields in Mosul - UN | World" 28 Oct. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/28/islamic-state-uses-hostages-as-human-shields-mosul-says-un>.

¹² "PMUs recapture western Mosul villages, army holds off ... - Iraqi News." <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/pmus-recapture-western-mosul-villages-army-holds-off-sneaking-members/>.

¹³ "Iraq begins offensive to free western Mosul from Daesh." <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iraq-begins-offensive-to-free-western-mosul-from-daesh/753551>.

The Iraqi prime minister said that the destruction of the Mosque was a declaration of defeat by the ISIS ¹⁴.

On the 9th of July 2017, Iraqi Prime minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over the ISIS in Mosul.

Strategy adopted by the United States of America in Iraq

Initially, the United States had restricted their support to training of Iraqi and Kurdish Forces by the US special forces, along with backing by the US Air force in the form of targeted airstrikes. The Department of Defense in June 2017, published a brief budget ¹⁵ request from which certain implications can be drawn with regard to the plan of the United States in the following years to come. There has been a common understanding that the defeat of the ISIS in Mosul will not lead to their extermination, considering the various existing sectarian and ethnic conflicts.

Several implications could be drawn from the budget request:

- The US would train and equip Iraqi and Kurdish troops for around three years
- US military advisors will remain deployed near or with the combat forces
- Extension of the July 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Ministry of Peshmarga. (The MoU facilitates the provision of weapons, ammunition, food, etc).
- Oversee the transition of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service from an elite conventional force to a traditional special operations role.

¹⁴ "Destroying Great Mosque of al-Nuri 'is Isis declaring defeat' | World" 22 Jun. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/21/mosuls-grand-al-nouri-mosque-blown-up-by-isis-fighters>.

¹⁵ "(ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) - Under Secretary of Defense" http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_CTEF_J-Book_Final_Embargoed.pdf.

The primary motive of the United States moving forward seems to be the continued assistance of the Kurdish Peshmarga Forces (KRG), the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS), the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and in general the Government of Iraq, in the form of training of troops in border control and combat operations, provision of food, arms, the supplementation of combat power that suffered up to 40% losses in the battle of Mosul with NATO standard weapons, etc.¹⁶

The motives haven't changed from those adopted as the "Five lines of efforts" by the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS¹⁷.

The initial birth of the ISIS is sometimes attributed to the power vacuum left when the US troops withdrew from Iraq post 2007. The United States is cognizant of the fact that other radical and extremist groups might fill the void created by the decline of the ISIS and in such a scenario it would be necessary to ensure and assist the Iraqi Security Forces in establishing border security, critical infrastructure and to address and assess the possibility of further threats.

¹⁶ "New Details on U.S. Strategy in Iraq and Syria | Center for Strategic" 1 Jun. 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/new-details-us-strategy-iraq-and-syria>.

¹⁷ "The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS" <https://www.state.gov/s/seci/>.