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I would like to start by thanking Representative McGovern for hosting this briefing and Kimberly Stanton for making the effort to include a native from Mosul in the discussion.

Unfortunately, I do not live in U.S. to be present at the briefing, but I am honored to place my article for *The American Interest* before the Commission for a reading of the underlying social complexities of Mosul which should be taken into consideration, in addition to some recommendations on what can be done to help the civilians of Mosul living in the nightmare of the Islamic State for more than two years.

The Islamic State's overt surge in Mosul on June 10th 2014 came as a hybrid result of multiple factors and errors that have characterized much of post-2003 Iraq. Rogue elements had explicitly expressed their rejection of the new political order in Iraq. Extremists exploited the cracks in the nascent democracy which came about as a result of unprecedented corruption in every sector of government, sectarian elements infiltrating security forces, a failure to promote the idea of a united Iraq that does not subjugate certain groups, meddling of neighbor states, and incompetent politicians. A military victory alone without a realistic view of Iraq's political system would only risk recreating the same milieu for radicals to flourish again.

The United States and Coalition can play a decisive role in not only liberating Mosul, but also in protecting the civilian population and restoring stability to the embattled city. The Central Command's efforts are highly regarded and appreciated, but further involvement is necessary to safeguard liberation. Involvement in this case does not necessarily require an increase in deployed U.S. military personal, but rather an active role where the U.S.

does not hesitate to exert its leverage when needed. In this context, I highlight the following points:

1- The Civilian Crisis

Civilians trapped in the center of Mosul are significantly far from the routes to the KRG-controlled cities of Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk. All routes lie in the side east of the Tigris (Al-Janib Al-Aysar), whereas the side west of the river (Al-Janib Al-Ayman) leads to Baghdad or Syria; both contested routes where most of the fighting occurs.¹ Reaching the points safely would require days of discreet walking as using vehicles would subject civilians to possible Coalition airstrikes. In the midst of an armed conflict against a barbaric group like the Islamic State, approaching the KRG checkpoint as pedestrians is gravely dangerous. For these reasons, the numbers leaving Mosul as the campaign begins will be significantly less than the predictions made by several humanitarian organizations.²

2- Lack of Preparation

The Iraqi and KRG government both lack the sufficient plans and resources required to provide relief to the thousands of IDPs expected to leave areas of battle in rural Mosul and other districts in Ninewa.³ Political disputes between different parties and corruption have also hampered relief efforts to for the displaced population.

3- The Participating Military Forces

Another catastrophic scenario would unfold if certain sectarian militias participate in the urban fighting. The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) has been instrumental in assisting the Iraqi Army in the fight against the Islamic States, however, many cases of atrocities have been documented in

¹ A map detailing the neighborhood distribution of Mosul
<http://www1.el-amarat.com/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84-2017/>

² Unlike Fallujah, Mosul is highly urbanized city with most of its population living in relatively modern neighborhoods that resemble those Baghdad.

³ "Humanitarian Organizations Struggle to Prepare for Expected Mosul Exodus", August 13th, 2016, RUDAW
<http://rudaw.net/mobile/english/kurdistan/13082016>

Tikrit and Fallujah⁴ after certain militias within the PMF were given permission to enter the city.

What can be done:

- Humanitarian Efforts:

- 1- Humanitarian and relief efforts should focus on the areas near the current fighting which border the KRG. Refugee camps for thousands of displaced people should be prepared in advance.⁵
- 2- As for the city of Mosul, fleeing as the military campaign begins is a much harder option for the population. With numbers up to 800,000 civilians, a siege would be catastrophic. Securing the safe passage of humanitarian aid and conveying through Mosul and the surrounding areas under direct protection of the Iraqi Army and Coalition forces is necessary.
- 3- Enabling and supporting Iraqi based humanitarian groups such as GHAWTH⁶, Preemptive Love Coalition,⁷ and Iraqi Builders⁸ to play an active role in Ninewa and Mosul. These groups have demonstrated their commitment and heroism in assisting displaced people for over two years without giving into sectarian and political pressure. The independent, non-profit groups rely on donations and avoid the

⁴ "Fallujah Abuses Test Control of Militia", June 9th 2016, Human Rights Watch
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/09/iraq-fallujah-abuses-test-control-militias>

⁵ IDP and refugee camp distribution in the KRG
<http://reliefweb.int/map/iraq/iraq-kurdistan-region-iraq-idp-and-refugee-camp-locations-january-2016>

⁶ GHAWTH Relief non-profit organization is based in Baghdad and Erbil. The organization was created by Iraqi volunteers. https://www.facebook.com/Ghawth.iq/?hc_ref=SEARCH

⁷ Not an Iraqi organization, but Preemptive Love Coalition headed by Texan native Jeremy Courtney has been in Iraq since the 2000's. The organization has been from Najaf to Fallujah and possesses a unique understanding of Iraq. Among its greatest achievements is funding heart surgery for underprivileged children in Fallujah during the height of violence, and providing Fallujah, Sinjar and Qayyara with aid and relief as soon as the areas were cleared.
<http://www.preemptivelove.org/>

⁸ Iraqi Builders is an Iraqi organization made of volunteers from different cities in Iraq. They focus on rapprochement through building bridges between the people. <http://www.iraqbuilders.org/>

bureaucratic pitfalls of larger humanitarian organizations. Their presence would serve a humanitarian cause, and help amend the fractures between Mosul and the rest of Iraq.

The American Role in Mosul:

- 1- Continued pressure to keep sectarian militias away from areas of combat. It is important to stress that not all the fighting units within the PMF have committed atrocities, but the ones that have remain indisciplined.⁹ To reassure the civilians in Mosul, the role of the PMF must be restricted to assisting the military in the non-combat operations in the areas far from civilians.
- 2- Political efforts and pressure from the United States on Turkey and the PKK, both non-Iraqi parties, to halt using Iraqi soil to settle scores. Both Turkey¹⁰ and the PKK have entered Ninewa under the pretext of protecting certain groups. Not only is this a violation of Iraqi sovereignty but the tensions between the two parties threaten to ignite another armed dispute in Ninewa which could have a heavy toll on the already exhausted civilian population.¹¹
- 3- Guaranteeing that any Kurdish participation in the military campaign in Mosul does not give the KRG a green light to violate the Iraqi constitution regarding disputed territories. Villages and towns in Ninewa must not be annexed to the KRG under any pretext.¹²

⁹ "Ban Abusive Militias from Mosul Operation", July 31st 2016, Human Rights Watch
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/31/iraq-ban-abusive-militias-mosul-operation>

¹⁰ "Turkey has up to 2000 troops near Mosul despite Baghdad objections", Feb 25th 2016, Middle East Eye
<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-has-2000-troops-near-mosul-despite-baghdad-objections-report-1013837857>

¹¹ "The Wars After the Wars For Sinjar", June 20th 2016, War on the Rocks
<http://warontherocks.com/2016/06/the-wars-after-the-war-for-sinjar-how-washington-can-avert-a-new-civil-war/>

¹² "KRG to Abadi: Peshmerga Will Not Redraw", Aug 17th 2016, Rudaw
http://rudaw.net/mobile/english/kurdistan/170820163?ctl00_phMainContainer_phMain_ControlComments1_gvCommentsChangePage=3_5

- 4- Coordinating efforts to restore basic services such as water and electricity to liberated areas immediately to facilitate the return of the displaced to their home as soon as possible.
- 5- Playing a more direct role in the provincial politics in Ninewa. This may come across as a request to take control of the province, but in reality the political atmosphere in Mosul's local government is congested with personal rivalries and proxy disputes. The corruption within this current provincial government in Ninewa which takes refuge in Erbil has increased the suffering of the displaced population. Salaries have gone missing,¹³ aid has been stolen and sold in markets, and the committees in charge of relief projects in the City Hall (Ninewa Government) have exploited the absence of checks and balances and made personal gains at the expense of the displaced population. The central government in Baghdad is equally corrupt, and an international supervision of the local government is a dire necessity at this point.

After more than two years under the Islamic State, the humanitarian toll on Mosul has been immense. The United States cannot solve Iraq's political crisis, but as a global power and friend to the Iraqi people, it can help greatly in reducing the suffering that is bound to result from the upcoming military campaign.

¹³ "Central Bank of Iraq to Regain Part of Stolen Health Salaries", April 14th 2016, A Community of Reality blog
<http://nenosplace.forumotion.com/t60038-central-bank-to-regain-part-of-nineveh-health-stolen-salaries>