

Global Security Briefing

## The Iraq Crisis: A Note on ISIL Advances and Potential Military Intervention

Paul Rogers

14 June, 2014

Following the capture of the northern Iraqi province of Nineveh and its capital Mosul on 10 June by Sunni jihadist group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Iraq continues to slide into crisis as images come to light of the massacre of large numbers of Iraqi Army personnel by ISIL forces. As the international community begins to weigh in, this update from Paul Rogers provides insight into the current crisis and assesses the impact of potential western military intervention.

1. ISIL already had a substantial presence in western districts of Mosul but the speed of collapse of the Iraqi Army was probably far beyond their immediate expectations. There have been atrocities but ISIL also has support – indeed some refugee movements have been motivated by fear of Iraqi Air Force counter-attacks on Mosul, not the ISIL presence.
2. This means that Iraqi government forces are highly unlikely to be able to regain Mosul in the weeks and months ahead. This applies to Fallujah as well, though the far more economically important Baiji is a different matter.
3. The collapse of Mosul has enabled ISIL to acquire considerable monetary resources (possibly exceeding \$400 million in banknotes) and substantial equipment and munitions.
4. **The rapid transfer of materiel to Syria indicates that ISIL is already planning consolidation.**
5. If Balad air base is over-run in the coming days, the extensive munitions and equipment there will add further to ISIL's stores. **That may well be a priority for ISIL's limited forces, not Baghdad.**
6. Beyond Balad and a few towns, and an increased presence in western Baghdad, major further gains by ISIL are highly unlikely – taking over predominantly Sunni areas is entirely different from gaining predominantly Shi'a areas. Moreover, Iranian support will ensure the security of Baghdad.
7. ISIL planners are among the most experienced paramilitary tacticians anywhere in the world, let alone the region, including years of experience against western counter-insurgency forces.
8. The numbers of paramilitary fighters available to them are small – perhaps 10,000 in all.
9. Their rapid gains in the past week may draw some local clan groups to support them but numbers are unlikely to be significant and will be essentially localised. Moreover, Assad may use their concentration of forces in Iraq to attack some areas they control in Syria.
10. **All this points to consolidation in the weeks ahead.**

11. Over the next six months one of the priorities for ISIL will be to draw in more experienced paramilitaries from across the region. It will also want to attract volunteers from wider diaspora, but they require months of acclimatisation and training to have much impact.
12. ISIL planners are looking to the long-term securing and consolidation of an Islamist Caliphate.
- 13. The greatest short- or medium-term aid to this will be open western military intervention in any form, even if restricted primarily to the use of armed drones.**
14. Any such intervention will aid their propagandising the process as the “far enemy” at work again. Such a process would be greatly aided by any Israeli action in Syria – a return to the effective propaganda of 2003-6 when Israeli aid for the US operations in Iraq (little acknowledged in the West but well-known in the region) made it possible to propagandise the “Crusader-Zionist plot” to great effect.
- 15. ISIL may well act to incite Western military intervention. Any such intervention would be a grave mistake.**

---

**Paul Rogers** is Global Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group (ORG) and Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford. His ‘Monthly Global Security Briefings’ are available from our website at [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk), where visitors can sign -up to receive them via our newsletter each month.

---