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Post-ISIS: Mapping Mosul's Challenges

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Post-ISIS: Mapping Mosul's Challenges

Introduction

Speaking in Mosul on July 10th 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, declared victory against the so-called Islamic State group announcing the termination of the 'terrorist state of falsehood'. It was symbolic that Abadi chose to announce the defeat of the Islamic State, from the northern Iraqi city from which the group infamously declared its professed 'caliphate'.

However, challenges continue to grip Mosul, a city that has borne the heavy consequences of the Islamic State's occupation and the aftermath of its devastating liberation. Many of Mosul's neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble, and restoring and rebuilding efforts in Iraq's second largest city will be no easy task. In August 2017, the United Nations' Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Lisa Grande, stated that Mosul signifies 'the biggest stabilisation challenge the United Nations has ever faced – the scale, the complexity, the scope of it.'¹ The long road to recovery for the city is still in its infancy, even almost a year after the military defeat of Islamic State and its ejection from Mosul. Moreover, the uneven development between East and West is clear. The East has to a small extent begun to rehabilitate as an economic hub whereas the West remains a barren land showcasing the signs of intense fighting. Connecting both sides remains a challenge.

Despite the military fight to eradicate the Islamic State's territorial rule in Iraq, Baghdad has yet to address root causes of the rise of the Salafi-Jihadi group, namely the weakness of the post-2003 Iraqi state. Mosul's fate is imperative given that it is Iraq's largest Sunni-majority, yet heterogenous city, and would be a symbol of the reintegration of marginalised Sunni and non-dominant groups back into the wider Iraqi fold.

All over Iraq, intra-group cleavages and contestations have become as prominent as inter-group, or ethno-sectarian, conflict, in what some have called the beginning of a shift from identity-based to issue-based politics.² Similarly, to many residents in Mosul, the gap between elite and citizen has become a greater challenge than cleavages along ethnic or sectarian lines.

¹ Agence France Presse, "Iraq faces vast challenges securing, rebuilding Mosul," August 3, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2017/08/iraq-conflict-reconstruction-mosul.html#ixzz5A73nzuCq>

² Faleh A Jabar, "From Identity Politics to Issue Politics – The Iraqi Protest Movement. The End of Conformity, the Beginning of Accountability," 28 January 2017, <http://iraqieconomists.net/en/2017/01/28/from-identity-politics-to-issue-politics-the-iraqi-protest-movement-the-end-of-conformity-the-beginning-of-accountability-by-faleh-a-jabar/>.

In this context, this paper argues that securing a lasting victory over the Islamic State in Mosul requires tackling short and long-term challenges. The short-term challenges include reconstruction, rehousing, the return of IDPs, and the establishment of security, whilst the long-term challenges encompass political representation, corruption, the fragmentation of the Iraqi security sector and reconciliation of Mosul's population from its ethno-sectarian divides.³ Ultimately, these factors represent some of the major obstacles that the local and federal governments must simultaneously overcome to begin rebuilding the Iraqi state. This research is primarily based on meetings in the Iraqi cities of Mosul, Erbil, and Baghdad in March 2018 and subsequent telephone and e-mail correspondence with different political, security, economic, and civil-society actors in the city.

Rebuilding and Reconstructing After the Islamic State

Stabilisation

The eight-month battle to liberate Mosul almost destroyed the city in its entirety, damaging its major infrastructure including its airport, main bridges, government buildings, hospitals, university, schools and many of its residential areas. For example, of its 54 housing quarters, 15 were completely destroyed whilst 23 were moderately damaged, and only 16 managed to hold up against the shelling and were only slightly affected.⁴ A lasting peace in Iraq is contingent upon Baghdad's ability to rebuild cities and rapidly restore basic and vital services in areas that have been liberated from the Islamic State, especially Mosul.

Mosul was a symbol of interethnic and interreligious coexistence, but the damage caused by Islamic State and the surrounding areas of the Ninewah governorate have complicated that dynamic. According to one UN official, an initial estimate they conducted of the number of residents who were affected and whose homes were either totally destroyed or damaged was found to be around 320,000 people.⁵

UN estimates put the amount of debris in Mosul at 10 million tons, with West Mosul having been hardest hit as the site of the heaviest battles and where around 40,000 homes are believed to have been destroyed.⁶ This is aside from the problem of the removal of dead bodies, mainly of Islamic State militants, from the streets of Mosul where many had retreated

Renad Mansour, "Iraq After the Fall of ISIS: The Struggle for the State," 4 July 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/iraq-after-fall-isis-struggle-state>.

³ For a wider discussion on stabilisation in liberated areas, see: Renad Mansour, "Rebuilding the Iraqi State: Stabilisation, Governance, and Reconciliation," European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, 15 December 2017, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU\(2017\)603859_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU(2017)603859_EN.pdf).

⁴ *AFP*, "Iraq faces vast challenges."

⁵ Author's phone interview with UN official in Mosul, March 2018.

⁶ Jalabi and Georgy, "Special Report."

to the densely packed quarter of the Old City. Local residents believe that corpses scattered in the city are not only spreading disease but are also a daily reminder of the trauma Maslawi's lived through. This has caused tension with Baghdad's Shia-led government and local civilian authorities who have, thus far, failed to remove these corpses but also deny local residents claims that there are thousands of civilian bodies still under the rubble. Local authorities argue that they have collected 2,585 unidentified corpses and do not want to exert efforts and resources on dead militants.⁷ Baghdad has had around 9000 requests from locals regarding missing persons and, although the government has formed a committee to examine how many people lost their lives, Maslawi's have very little confidence that it will deliver fair or accurate outcomes.⁸ A lengthy investigation by the Associated Press found that around 9,000-11,000 civilians lost their lives during the nine-month battle to liberate the city, and about a third due to coalition airstrikes.⁹ This figure is disputed by the Iraqi army and US military officials who claim that only 300 allegations of coalition-airstrikes related-deaths were 'credible' but for the surviving families the acknowledgement of the loss and price they paid due to the war is more important than numbers.¹⁰

The gap between East and West Mosul is significant. The Eastern half of the city has fared much better and has been somewhat revived with businesses and restaurants having resumed life, to some extent. The Western half, however, remains almost totally devastated and requires major rebuilding efforts. In the West's Old City, which has suffered the most damage, 1,000 families have returned to what is essentially rubble whilst others that have been displaced have either remained in camps or have gone to East Mosul to stay with relatives placing additional strain on resources and infrastructure there.¹¹

To some extent, basic services have improved but remain unevenly distributed. One humanitarian worker claimed that most of Mosul's residents are now back on the city grid and can access electricity and water, if not continuously, and there is visible improvement and development in the city.¹² According to sources who spoke to the authors, almost 80 percent of neighbourhoods have running water in the East whilst water provision has been scarce in West Mosul.¹³ As for electricity, although it is not fully restored in East Mosul, it comes on

⁷ Raya Jalabi, "Battle over bodies rages quietly in Iraq's Mosul long after Islamic State defeat," *Reuters*, February 5, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-mosul-bodies-insight/battle-over-bodies-rages-quietly-in-iraqs-mosul-long-after-islamic-state-defeat-idUKKBN1FP12H>

⁸ Salma Abdelaziz, Arwa Damon and Muwafaq Mohammed, "'The only ones who lost': Mosul is still digging out its dead six months after ISIS' defeat," *CNN*, January 22, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/22/middleeast/mosul-survivors-intl/index.html>

⁹ Abdelaziz et al, "'The only ones who lost.'"

¹⁰ Abdelaziz et al, "'The only ones who lost.'"

¹¹ Michael Georgy, Ahmed Rasheed and Raya Jalabi, "Special report: In Mosul's Fall Informants Played Vital Role Against Islamic State," *Reuters*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-mosul-specialrepo/special-report-in-mosuls-fall-informers-played-vital-role-against-islamic-state-idUSKCN1C916U>

¹² Author's interview with humanitarian worker in Mosul, March 2018.

¹³ Author's interview with resident in Mosul, March 2018.

around three times a day for about eight hours and is available to a lesser extent in West Mosul.

Although health services declined after secondary and tertiary hospitals were damaged or completely destroyed during the liberation campaign, the amount of health consultations that are undertaken in health clinics has increased eightfold.¹⁴ It is estimated that Mosul needs around \$75 million US dollars to maintain basic services in the city. For example, UNICEF reports suggest that basic health service provision is difficult for an estimated 750,000 children in Mosul and surrounding areas and, even now, less than 10% of health facilities in the Ninewah governorate, of which Mosul is the capital, are functioning at full operational capacity.¹⁵ Since 2014 as many as 60 health facilities have reportedly been attacked disrupting access to basic health needs for many families.¹⁶ The humanitarian situation in Iraq remains one of the most complex and volatile in the world especially due to the pace and scale of displacement.

Rebuilding homes in Mosul is a priority and challenge for Baghdad in the central government's efforts to restore and revive the city. According to one UN official, a major impediment to the resumption of normal life in Mosul is the rebuilding of personal housing and accommodation. Thousands of personal homes were destroyed in the battle to liberate Mosul and over 300,000 people were affected, which has resulted in a greater financial cost as the Iraqi government compensation scheme does not cover or compensate personal homes destroyed. The UN official contends that the urban landscape has been so devastated that it is no longer easy to navigate the housing terrain, which is compounded by problems related to the loss or destruction of records of titles and deeds in addition to that of squatters.¹⁷ Additionally, the lack of housing and opportunities to rebuild devastated personal residences hinders the ability IDP's to return from camps and has affected the most vulnerable in society especially those who resided in the West of the city.

Moreover, the condition of critical infrastructure remains a problem in Mosul, where today only one bridge connects the West to the East, causing significant congestion. The international community has been involved in assisting efforts to restore major infrastructure and public buildings. For example, the World Bank has been supporting the Baghdad government to restore basic services, instilling trust within communities and stimulating the return of displaced people back to Mosul.¹⁸ As part of the Iraq Emergency Operation for Development Project and at a cost of \$750 million US dollars, the World Bank has helped with the restoration of three vital Mosul bridges including Mosul al-Hadid, Mosul's Fourth

¹⁴ WHO, "Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2017," <http://www.who.int/emergencies/response-plans/2017/iraq/en/>

¹⁵ UNICEF, "Violence leave 75,000 children in Mosul struggling to access basic health services," February 7, 2018, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102568.html

¹⁶ UNICEF, "Violence leave 75,000 children in Mosul."

¹⁷ Author's phone interview with UN official in Mosul, March 2018.

¹⁸ *World Bank*, "Rehabilitation of three vital bridges in the heart of Mosul improves livelihoods for more than 1 million Iraqis," March 20, 2018, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/03/20/rehabilitation-of-three-vital-bridges-in-the-heart-of-mosul-improves-livelihoods-for-more-than-1-million-iraqis>

Bridge and the Al-Muthana Second Bridge.¹⁹ These bridges are critical in connecting Mosul's Eastern and Western banks injecting a much needed economic boost to the city.²⁰ However, as of the time of writing, only the Fourth Bridge remained in use.

Rebuilding thus requires a significant injection of aid and funds. According to the Iraqi government, this process must be supported by international donors and investors who, to date, have not provided adequate resources. Iraq's Ministry of Planning announced in January 2018 that an estimated and ambitious \$100 billion US dollars was needed for Iraq's ten-year reconstruction plan country-wide and of which \$47 billion would be assigned for rebuilding vital infrastructure and government facilities. In 2017, the United Nations called for \$985 million US dollars to be allocated for the urgent humanitarian situation unfolding in Iraq alone rather than the funding of reconstruction.²¹ But at the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq in February 2018, a meeting of donors to Iraq, only \$30 billion US dollars were pledged. The funds pledged include a combination of grants, loans and investments with neighbouring countries including Kuwait, Turkey, Saudi Arabia among the biggest contributors, as well as Qatar, whilst the US was noticeably absent, having announced earlier that it would not be contributing to Iraq's coffers.²²

Another short-term challenge to reconstruction in Mosul is the gap between government pledges of aid and the sums that it sends. The Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terroristic Operations ReFAATO was set up by the central government to assist cities such as Mosul and was allocated \$400 million US dollars in 2017 from the federal budget. However, in actuality, only a portion of that amount was given to the fund which were also expected to provide for all liberated areas of Iraq and not just Mosul.²³ Municipality Chief of Mosul, Abdel-Sattar al-Hibbu, asserts that Mosul only received \$252,000 US dollars thus far, which he reportedly claims was about the amount Mosul needed to spend 'every hour'.²⁴ Furthermore, the municipality has been accruing debts and relying on the patience of municipality workers whose salaries are often delayed. Reportedly, the municipality needs about 10,000 more employees rather than the current 1500 and much of its machinery was either ruined or

¹⁹ *World Bank*, "Rehabilitation of three vital bridges."

²⁰ *World Bank*, "Rehabilitation of three vital bridges."

²¹ *UN News*, "In Mosul and beyond, sustained efforts needed to support millions of displaced Iraqis – UN official," March 6, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/07/562312-mosul-and-beyond-sustained-efforts-needed-support-millions-displaced-iraqis-un>

²² Emma Graham-Harrison, "Donor conference pledges \$30 billion to help Iraq rebuild after ISIS," *Guardian*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/15/donor-conference-pledges-30bn-to-help-iraq-rebuild-after-isis>

²³ Raya Jalabi and Michael Georgy, "Special Report: This man is trying to rebuild Mosul, he needs help-lots of it," *Reuters*, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-mosul-official-specialreport/special-report-this-man-is-trying-to-rebuild-mosul-he-needs-help-lots-of-it-idUKKBN1GX16G>

²⁴ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-mosul-official-specialreport/special-report-this-man-is-trying-to-rebuild-mosul-he-needs-help-lots-of-it-idUKKBN1GX16G>

stolen by Islamic State and the municipality only has very few bulldozers left, which have only managed to clear the side streets in Mosul.²⁵

Another main obstacle to Mosul's reconstruction efforts is the immediate security situation. For instance, the deadly trail of tens of thousands of explosive hazards and improvised explosive devices, which Islamic State fighters dispersed throughout cities as they fled, hinders both rebuilding efforts as well as the return and rehousing of displaced Iraqi's from temporary camps. According to the UN Mine Action Service, many cities that were liberated from Islamic State governance continue to be plagued with significant amounts of explosive hazards, improvised explosive devices as well as other deadly weapons, which hinder the safe return of many IDP's to their homes.²⁶ This is especially the case in West Mosul which, consequently, remains extremely dangerous and UN officials state that no rehabilitation or reconstruction can safely occur without the clearing of these hazards, which are reportedly found in 'every street, every house, every alley, [and] every piece of infrastructure'.²⁷ Baghdad, the UN as well as other stakeholders have deemed the clearance of the contamination of these IEDs and UXOs as an absolute priority and precursor to any rehabilitation or reconstruction efforts.²⁸ All stakeholders are aware that the situation is not only complex but compounded because of the lack of available resources.²⁹

Security stabilisation in Mosul is further complicated by the number of armed groups that have remained in the city following the fight against Islamic State. This mix of armies includes the state's Nineveh Operations Command, local police, the Popular Mobilization Forces (*al-hashd al-shaabi*, or PMF), tribal fighters, and Kurdish peshmerga. These groups fought against a common enemy – the Islamic State – but now compete against each other for power and influence over territory and checkpoints. At times, they fight each other. For instance, in March 2018, fighters from the PMF's Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada exchanged fire with the Iraqi army's Eighth Regiment after a dispute over the checkpoint leading to the Fourth Bridge.³⁰ A senior official from the Ninewah Operations Command told the author that the mix of security forces without a unified command chain complicates his efforts to provide patrol of the city.³¹

²⁵ Jalabi and Georgy, "Special Report."

²⁶ Lisa Schlein, "IS Leaves Deadly Legacy of Explosive Hazards in Iraq," *Voice of America*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/iraq-landmines-improvised-explosives/4254507.html>

²⁷ Schlein, "IS Leaves Explosive Hazards in Iraq."

²⁸ UNMAS, "Supported by the European Union, UNMAS continues to address explosive threats to enable stabilization in liberated areas of Iraq," February 20, 2018, <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes/iraq>

²⁹ UNMAS, "UNMAS continues to address explosive threats."

³⁰ "Popular Mobilization Units Clash with the Army", *Sot al-Iraq*, 14 February 2018: <https://www.sotaliraq.com/2018/02/14/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%83-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A/>.

³¹ Author interview with senior official from Ninewah Operations Command, Mosul, March 2018.

Humanitarian Challenges

Today, many Maslawi Sunnis feel neglected and abandoned in a humanitarian sense. Although some Mosul sources told the authors there is some positivity in that they felt that the defeat of Islamic State brought them together and there is a communal spirit,³² feelings of initial gratitude towards the Iraqi forces have given way to bitterness as basic services remain poor and indicative of more worrying signs as they claim that former Islamic State strongholds that are more Shia-dominated have been given preference in the reconstruction efforts.³³ Some even reminisce of the days of Islamic State governance, as one woman put it, 'At least under Daesh' - an Arabic acronym for Islamic State – 'we were treated better and weren't reduced to picking garbage.'³⁴

All these factors complicate and hinder the ability of thousands of Maslawi IDPs to return to their city and residences. An estimated 5.8 million Iraqis have been displaced according to UN figures, and since 2014, although many have returned to their homes, around 2.6 million Iraqis remain displaced.³⁵ Before Mosul's occupation by Islamic State it had an estimated population of around 2 million but during the battle to liberate the city the population had decreased to 948,000 people, whilst 320,000 still reside in camps and 384,000 took refuge with relatives or in mosques and are dependent on aid.³⁶

Efforts continue to be made to incentivise and facilitate the return of many of the displaced to their homes by the central government and Kurdistan Regional Government yet many remain vulnerable and cannot return without assistance.³⁷ Yet, it is critical that there is continued humanitarian advocacy efforts against premature or involuntary returns which may pose a wider risk to these vulnerable communities.³⁸

Despite widespread suffering by Sunnis at the hands of Islamic State, members of other identity groups also feel betrayed that some of their Sunni Arab neighbours compromised

32 Interview with anonymous source in Mosul.

33 Jane Arraf, "Months After ISIS Much of Iraq's Mosul is Still Rubble," NPR, March 2, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/03/03/587726649/months-after-isis-much-of-iraqs-mosul-is-still-rubble>

34 Jalabi and Georgy, "Special Report."

35 UNHCR, "Iraq Situation: Flash Update – 8 March 2018," March 8, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180308%20UNHCR%20Iraq%20Flash%20Update.pdf>

36 AFP, "Iraq faces vast challenges securing, rebuilding Mosu," August 3, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2017/08/iraq-conflict-reconstruction-mosul.html#ixzz5A7gYQf6Q>

37 OCHA, "Iraq: US\$569M urgently needed to respond to the needs of 3.4M of the most vulnerable people," March 6, 2018, <http://www.unocha.org/story/iraq-us569m-urgently-needed-respond-needs-34m-most-vulnerable-people>

38 OCHA, "Iraq: US\$569M urgently needed."

with the extremist group. This has bred resentment amongst minority groups including Yezidi's and Christians who fear returning to Mosul. Within the Sunni community the focus now is on the 'settling of scores' according to one tribal leader as many want to avenge the killing of their sons by Islamic State.³⁹ Tribal leaders have set up diwans to settle disputes and help in the reconciliation process alongside the government according to a UN official⁴⁰. Furthermore, other Sunnis believe that they are being unfairly accused of being collaborators just because they did not leave during Islamic States rule.⁴¹ Addressing the principle concerns of Sunnis is key to helping heal divisions that were exasperated by the occupation by Islamic State and devastation of Mosul, mitigating the likelihood of the resurfacing of the group or other similar extremist formations and another outbreak of violent extremism.

Tribal leaders have sought to differentiate between those who truly adhered to the beliefs of the extremist group from those who were either forced to back Islamic State and its actions whether through coercion or economic necessity. For example, an agreement was signed by over 100 tribal notables to prevent the punishment of certain families because of their links to the Islamic State.⁴² The future of Mosul will depend heavily on the efforts and mechanisms to heal the trauma, both physical and psychological, that plague the city. Thus another social fissure within Mosul's complex multi-religious and ethnic society is the fate of Islamic State families or those who are seen to be affiliated with the extremist Sunni group. There is resentment towards those families especially towards their wives and children, often those who are left behind and have not necessarily actively participated in crimes. The actual numbers of Iraqi and especially Maslawi families that aligned with Islamic State is very difficult to determine, as there is no percentage to be exact but according to a humanitarian source they are estimated to number a few thousand.⁴³ Most of the wives of IS fighters, who have either been captured or killed, deny their involvement in supporting the extremist group yet many in Mosul are skeptical. According to one humanitarian worker, there are those families of Islamic State affiliates men who said they kicked out their sons who had joined IS, whilst others said they had no choice but to allow them to stay.⁴⁴ Others claim they had no choice but to obey their husbands who fought with the extremist group but did not support it. But in the grand scheme of things this does not help the fate of these women who have been held in separate camps from other IDPs with their children. They are rejected and isolated and treated as outcasts by their communities. Many of them do not have the necessary documentation and are either not recognised by the Iraqi government, as their papers were issued by Islamic State, or were destroyed complicating their legal status in the country.

³⁹ Scott Peterson, "How Sunnis post-ISIS crisis is leading some to a new Iraqi Nationalism," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 27, 2017, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2017/1227/How-sunnis-post-ISIS-crisis-is-leading-some-to-a-new-Iraqi-nationalism>

⁴⁰ Author's phone interview with UN official in Mosul, March 2018.

⁴¹ Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "How the people of Mosul subverted Isis 'apartheid'," *Guardian*, January 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/jan/30/mosul-isis-apartheid>

⁴² Peterson, "How Sunnis post-ISIS crisis."

⁴³ Author phone interview with NGO worker in Mosul, March 2018.

⁴⁴ Author phone interview with NGO worker in Mosul, March 2018.

Furthermore, they are socially isolated. As one woman put it she did not have employment opportunities as she not only lacked the job skills and states that on top of that she had no husband and says though some men may take on a wife with children no one would marry the wife of a former IS fighter.⁴⁵ A recent Amnesty report has also highlighted the widespread sexual abuse many of these women are suffering at the hands of security forces and some militias who are guarding or running camps that house IS-affiliated families.

Additionally, Human Rights Watch reports suggest that around 1400 foreign IS families, mainly comprised of women and children, have surrendered to the authorities. It states that the Iraqi courts have sentenced many of these women to prison and reportedly some even to death for non-violent crimes.⁴⁶ The fate of the children of these women, many who have been indoctrinated and traumatised, is another heavy social burden on society. Baghdad, as well as the Kurdistan Regional government, are working to facilitate the return of many of these vulnerable families, many of whom are unable to return without assistance given the explosive hazard contamination in some areas as well as ethnic tensions.⁴⁷ Maslawi Sunni sources contend that Maslawi society is different from surrounding areas in that they do not believe in revenge but that society can heal if there is proper application of the law and justice.⁴⁸ Additionally, there is corruption within the judicial system, and those that control the city may hinder efforts to heal. They assert that the light at the end of the tunnel remains distant despite optimism after the fall of Islamic State because of the sectarianism that has gripped Iraq since 2003.

⁴⁵ Heather Murdock, "Iraq's Shunned Islamic State Families," *Voice of America*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/iraq-shunned-islamic-state-families/4224626.html?src=voa-editor-picks>

⁴⁶ Belkis Wille, "Unfair ISIS Trial in Iraq Hands Women Harshes Sentences," *Human Rights Watch*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/21/unfair-isis-trial-iraq-hands-women-harshes-sentences>

⁴⁷ OCHA, "Iraq: US\$569M urgently needed."

⁴⁸ Author interview with resident in Mosul, March 2018.

Economic Challenges

Prior to 2014, Mosul was one of the most developed economies in Iraq, with strong manufacturing and industrial sectors. It served as a central trading hub for medium size industries and businesses prior to its fall under IS in 2014. The city had many pharmaceutical businesses and factories and there were a plethora of different trades and craftsmen including carpenters, tanners as well as textile manufacturers. However, many of those smaller factories and workshops were converted by Islamic State to produce IEDs⁴⁹ or, consequently, destroyed during the fighting to liberate the city, including one of Mosul's most modern pharmaceuticals factory. Restoring these industries is vital for the city to flourish economically. Yet, according to sources in Mosul, many of these businesses are struggling to even rebuild their premises and are using their own personal finances as the government has not provided them with any support.⁵⁰ In fact, many businesses are trying to rebuild the central business district but have not received compensation from the government and are having to pay to restore their work places from their own pockets.⁵¹ One way Baghdad is seeking to ameliorate the situation in Mosul is through encouraging private investment in order to revive its economy and enable local traders to establish long-term relations with foreign investors who will be keen to ensure that their investments are utilised properly.

Privatisation is therefore necessary for the economic revitalisation of Mosul and would boost local businesses and improve employment opportunities, as well as economic reform, which in the current circumstances remains a significant challenge. This is so it can widen its tax base as well as diversify its economy that is primarily dominated by the oil and gas industry, private investment. High unemployment rates also remain a significant barrier to the city's recovery. The estimated unemployment rate in Mosul is 56% and amongst youth an even higher number.⁵² Unemployment coupled with delays to government worker salaries has also impacted the economy and affected trade in the city.⁵³ Another issue is the infiltration of Iranian products into the Mosul market, according to a UN official, due to the decline of Turkish goods which had dominated imports into the city.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Watling, "How can Iraq Rebuild?"

⁵⁰ Author interview with resident in Mosul, March 2018.

⁵¹ Author interview with resident in Mosul, March 2018.

⁵² *International Rescue Committee*, "Creating opportunities and jobs for young people in Mosul after ISIS," January 24, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/creating-opportunities-and-jobs-young-people-mosul-after-isis>

⁵³ *Arab24*, "Iraq: Salaries and Unemployment Crises Threatens The Economic Movement In Mosul," December 18, 2017, <https://arab24.com/portal/index.php/en/component/k2/item/9277-iraq-salaries-and-unemployment-crises-threatens-the-economic-movement-in-mosul>

⁵⁴ Author's phone interview with UN official in Mosul, March 2018.

But the major hurdle and hindrance to the improvement of Mosul's economy, is corruption, a problem affecting all regions of the country. In order for Iraq to become more attractive to investors, it must enhance and prove the integrity of its institutions and legal channels so investors can be reassured of a healthy business environment as well as the potential viability of these new businesses. The United Kingdom, for example, has supported private Iraqi infrastructure by allocating \$12 billion US dollars through UK Export Finance, an export credit agency, but making a return on their investment may prove problematic in the current Iraqi economic context.⁵⁵

Entrenched corruption is thus a key factor hindering Iraq's stability and political progression and Mosul is no exception. At a conference in March 2018, the Iraqi prime minister stated that corruption had become more dangerous than terrorism in Iraq as it was an 'unseen enemy'⁵⁶ underscoring how entrenched corruption had become in the conflict-ridden country. Transparency International ranks Iraq as one of the most corrupt countries in the world placing it at 169 out of 180 with theft, widespread fraud and mismanagement of government resources detrimental to the economy but crucially damaging people's confidence in the government. For example, one UN official states that since 2003 there has been an abject failure to re-establish a continuous electricity supply to most of the country where electricity provision remains intermittent.⁵⁷ It has become one indicator showcasing the inability and corruption of official bodies to implement and provide basic services.⁵⁸

It is almost impossible to navigate the business environment and conduct it in Iraq without having to resort to bribery. Furthermore, those who are able to provide supporters with 'lucrative government contracts' are able to rise politically more easily and consequently remain in power.⁵⁹ Small and medium size businesses suffer significantly from corruption, whether it is to obtain the necessary paperwork to set up a business from a local official who has a client that could be a competitor, or the cost of bribery whilst larger companies, especially those in the oil and gas sector, do not have to face the same kind of obstacles.⁶⁰ But it is those small and medium size companies who will be able to provide employment opportunities in liberated cities which need it most and enhance local economies. This places corruption at the very top of the hierarchy that complicates the revival of Iraq and Mosul as a former trading hub. Corruption is therefore a significant obstacle to reconstruction and the revival of the economy and is one reason for the reluctance of international donors to pledge direct cash into the country

⁵⁵ Watling, "How can Iraq Rebuild?"

⁵⁶ *Middle East Monitor*, "Iraq PM says corruption more dangerous than terrorism," March 18, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180315-iraq-pm-says-corruption-more-dangerous-than-terrorism/>

⁵⁷ Author's phone interview with UN official in Mosul, March 2018.

⁵⁸ Michael Young and Mohanad Hage Ali, "What Impact Will the Recent Iraq Fundraising Conference in Kuwait Have on the Country's Future?," *Diwan-Carnegie*, March 1, 2018, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/75650?lang=en>

⁵⁹ Watling, "How can Iraq Rebuild?" *The Atlantic*

⁶⁰ Watling, "How can Iraq Rebuild?" *The Atlantic*

Mosul's Political Challenges

Although the Islamic State has been territorially defeated, the wider structural roots that led to its rise continue to exist in Iraq. These roots are linked to the weakness of the post-2003 Iraqi state, which has been unable to respond to the needs or legitimately represent its citizens. This failure is present at the federal and local levels. In terms of reconstruction, one reason posited for the lack of funding is skepticism on the part of the international community over the Iraqi governments' ability to appropriately allocate funds due to political contestations and endemic state weakness.

Since 2003, much of the narrative has surrounded the problem of sectarianism in Iraq. Under the logic of identity-based politics, the new state was built by a Shia and Kurdish arrangement with minimal accommodation for the Sunnis. Eventually, the state was then captured by the Shia leadership, as the Kurds looked inward at their own autonomous project. For much of this period, Sunni Maslawis expressed a deep concern over their continued political marginalisation and exclusion vis-à-vis the central government in Baghdad.

The politicization and militarization of sect was evident in the policies of Nouri al-Maliki, who as prime minister (2006-2014) used de-Ba'athification and counter-terrorism laws to marginalize Sunni political opposition. Many Sunnis felt subjected to exclusionary practices and accused the Shia-dominated central government of treating them like second class citizens and denying them decent jobs and prominent positions within the security forces. In 2011, in protest to Maliki's hyper-centralization policies, and in the spirit of the Arab Spring taking over many countries in the region, Sunnis in Mosul and elsewhere began a protest movement, known as *al-hirak al-shaabi*. However, rather than acknowledging the demands of the protesters, Maliki equated protesters with terrorists and turned towards hostility. The sectarian tensions that engulfed Iraq during those years precipitated the transition from the 2012-2013 protests amongst Sunnis across Iraq towards violent insurgency. To some extent, that bitterness coupled with the abandonment by the Iraqi army of key provinces when Islamic State swept across Iraq, led some communities to welcome and sympathize with the Salafi-Jihadi Sunni group in 2014.

However, the Sunni predicament is not only a consequence of inter-sect conflict, but is also a symptom of the failures of Sunni leadership. Since 2003, the Sunnis have lacked strong institutional political representation that can mobilize or unify the community. This is a different story than the Kurds or Shia. In the past, for instance, the Kurds invoked nationalism and the Shia turned to their religious authorities in Najaf for mobilization and unification tactics. Moreover, both the Kurds and the Shia have long-standing political parties. The Sunnis,

however, have lacked a long-standing political party, which has proven critical for mobilization in post-2003 Iraq.⁶¹

Today, many residents in Mosul believe that Sunni leaders have not done enough for their own since 2003. They blame their leadership for failing to represent their interests. As such, today, the gap between citizen and elite is at times more of driver of grievance than the gap between Sunni and Shia or Kurd. Over the past few years, internal ethno-sectarian struggles have defined politics throughout Iraq. Civil society actors have been involved in protests, presenting a more inclusive framework for the country. Iraqi protesters demand reform to tackle corruption, address power inequalities, rebuild trust and help with collective trauma. Similar to the fragmentations that have erupted in the Shia and Kurdish areas of Iraq, the Sunni political scene is divided between different leaders competing against each other for power and influence – proving that the Sunnis are not a monolithic bloc.

To rebuild their city, many Maslawis hold a deep lack of trust in these local powers, who they regard as incompetent and only in positions of authority due to corruption and nepotism.⁶² As a result, many want neither the central government nor their local leaders to take part in reconstruction. Instead, they look to external independent NGOs and international actors that do not have religious, sectarian or external agendas to directly provide aid to cities in collaboration with ‘clean’ local partners untarnished by corruption. In an NDI poll conducted in early 2017, 44 percent of Sunnis believed that the UN should be in charge of reconstruction, and not their political leaders at the central or local governments, or their tribal sheikhs or religious clerics.⁶³

In Mosul, local figures have taken the initiative to fill gaps left by federal government services on issues as wide as reconstruction, to waste collection. There is a wealth of potential leadership; driven by teachers, councilors, doctors, and soldiers, all of whom lived under the dark days of the Islamic State. According to one humanitarian worker who spoke to the authors, those who have gravitas in Mosul are those who stayed on to fight Islamic State and attempt to defeat them.⁶⁴ Moreover, the tribes seek a future role in stabilisation, whether it be regarding reconciliation efforts or otherwise. One sheikh of the prominent Sunni tribe of al-Shammar, Talib al-Shammar has demanded more autonomy for Sunnis stating that ‘Mosul residents should have a say in how to administrate their own city without being treated as second class citizens. We will have zero tolerance for any attempt from Baghdad to return

⁶¹ The Islamic Party (an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood) is elusive and is not a strong political party.

⁶² Author interview with Mosul resident, March 2018.

⁶³ National Democratic Institute, “Improved Security Provides Opening for Cooperation March – April 2017 Survey Findings,” 7 June 2017, <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20April%202017%20Survey%20Public%20Final%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Authors interview with NGO worker, March 2018.

Mosul to being governed by armed force; we will resist and find a million ways to ask for our own autonomy.⁶⁵

Iraqis went to the polls on 12 May 2018. Prior to the vote, the situation and political conditions in Mosul were too premature for elections. Many residents believed that the elections should have been postponed, for a number of reasons, including the inability to make political decisions in the immediate aftermath of the liberation campaign. However, Abadi, supported by his international allies, pushed forward to have elections.

In the elections, the emerging civil society leaders stood little chance against the well-established post-2003 elite, who were easily able mobilize in the short timeframe. Moreover, local civil society actors reportedly faced harassment from local authorities.⁶⁶ Despite their previous failures, the same cast of candidates mobilized electorally and attempted to pick up where they had left off. Iraqi MP from Nineveh, Noura al-Bijari, commented that 'the same political figures are going to participate in elections.'⁶⁷ More generally, the same Sunni leadership at the central government sought to again claim to represent the people of Mosul. These same leaders include Vice President, Osama al-Nujaifi, and members from Ayad Allawi's al-Wataniyya list.

The election results in Nineveh revealed specific dynamics of the political mood in Mosul. The province's voter turnout (53 %) was the highest in the whole country, signaling the lack of a protest movement as the city has recently been liberated from Islamic State rule.⁶⁸ For many residents in Mosul, being free from ISIS was enough for the time being. As a result, the biggest winner was former Defence Minister, Khalid al-Obeidi, who won 72,690 votes. The message of 'victory over ISIS' was best heard in Mosul. Most significantly, Obeidi ran on Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's primarily Shia list, revealing a cross-sectarian trend. Abadi's Victory Alliance could not win in any other province. However, Obeidi and the others were still Sunni Arabs. Nujaifi, on the other hand, only received 11,650 votes – a sign of protest from voters who were fed up with past failures.⁶⁹

This section sheds light on the political disputes and grievances that shape the long-term challenges for Sunni representation at the local and federal government level.

⁶⁵ Michael Georgy, Ahmed Rasheed, Raya Jalabi, "Special report: In Mosul's Fall Informants Played Vital Role Against Islamic State," *Reuters*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-mosul-specialrepo/special-report-in-mosuls-fall-informers-played-vital-role-against-islamic-state-idUSKCN1C916U>

⁶⁶ Author interview with Mosul resident, March 2018.

⁶⁷ Mustafa Habib, "Hoping History Repeats: Sunni Political Alliances For Election Only Offer More Of Same" *Niqash*, 1 February 2018, <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/5827/>.

⁶⁸ <https://twitter.com/HamdiAlkhshali/status/995414808714412032>

⁶⁹ <https://sjiyad.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/d8a7d984d8a7d8b9d984d8a7d986-d8a7d984d986d987d8a7d8a6d98a-2018.pdf>

Sectarian Political Grievances

Maslawi Sunni residents claim that they continue to feel the residue of sectarianism, which peaked in 2014, despite the city's liberation from the Islamic State since July 2017.⁷⁰ The main grievances they cite include sectarian provocations linked to mismanagement by the central government, financial corruption, and allocations based on ethno-sect affiliations (*muhassasa*). According to some residents, sectarian tensions have increased within society and many militias sprouted in the aftermath of Islamic State, including militias composed of Christians, Shabaks, Turkmen and Yezidis.

In Mosul, the emergence of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (*al-hashd al-shaabi*, or PMF), an umbrella organization of some 50 paramilitary groups, raised fears of further sectarianism in the city's near future. Despite being under the token control of the Iraqi Prime Minister and the National Security Council (NSC), the strongest PMF groups have deep links to Iran and remain autonomous, contesting the traditional security command structure. Sunnis view the PMF as both sectarian and anti-Sunni.⁷¹

The PMF have been accused of complicating the post-conflict stage in Mosul. Many residents in Mosul accuse the PMF with looting their city.⁷² Their use of checkpoints, moreover, provides an easy revenue-generating scheme through tolls against local residents as well as intimidation. The PMF group *Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada* has been in a physical altercation with the Iraqi army over checkpoints. Moreover, in May 2017, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* published a report documenting the abuse of hundreds of Sunni men at the hands of the PMF and reports allege that the Badr Organisation and Hizbullah Brigades arrested and beat these men during the battle to retake Mosul.⁷³ More recently, the PMF have been accused of the extra-judicial killings of Sunnis, who allegedly backed the Islamic State.⁷⁴ Furthermore, in Mosul Square in January 2018, several members of a pro-Iranian militia and the federal police carried posters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian revolutionary leader, which caused a stir given the legacy of the Iraq-Iran war.⁷⁵

However, most of the Shia PMF groups are in the process of leaving the city. In their place, and challenging the sectarian narrative, locally-recruited PMF groups man checkpoints and

⁷⁰ Author interview with Mosul resident, March 2018.

⁷¹ Munqith al-Dagher and Karl Kaltenthaler, "A striking positive shift in Sunni opinion in Iraq is underway. Here's what it means," *Washington Post*, September 17, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/14/iraqi-sunnis-are-impressed-by-the-defeat-of-isis-heres-what-that-could-mean/?utm_term=.beefb30a53b6

⁷² Author interviews with residents from Mosul, March 2018.

⁷³ *The New Arab*, "Iraq's Shia militias formally integrated into state's security apparatus," March 9, 2018, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/3/9/iraqs-shia-militias-formally-integrated-into-states-security-apparatus>

⁷⁴ Jalabi and Georgy, "Special Report."

⁷⁵ Jalabi and Georgy, "Special Report."

patrol the streets. In Mosul, for instance, Sunni leader Athil al-Nujaifi's national guards (al-hashd al-Nineveh) receive some support from the PMF commission. Moreover, Shabak, Christian, and Turkman paramilitary groups have joined the PMF in an effort to gain local influence and control. For the PMF leadership, arming local groups is a way to maintain influence without being directly engaged. However, these militias, even if more local, will continue to present a challenge to rebuilding the state and even representing their constituencies.

Another sign that sectarianism has not been eradicated is legal challenges that Sunni political figures face as electoral candidates. For instance, in 2016, Obeidi was impeached from his post as minister of defense due to corruption allegations coming from parliamentarians who share strong relations with former premier Nouri al-Maliki. Although the validity of the accusations is not clear, residents in Mosul believe that the same standard of anti-corruption should also be applied to Baghdad's senior Shia leaders, who until now have yet to be charged with similar offenses despite their clear role in corruption. Maliki has used his power over the parliament and the judiciary, including his relationship with Chief Justice of the Iraqi Supreme Court, Medhat al-Mahmoud, to target Sunni opponents.

In sum, sectarianism has existed in one form or another for much of post-2003 Iraq. Although it is not near its peak levels in 2013 and 2014, sectarianism remains a critical undercurrent that can again be triggered, as long as the state remains weak and unable to provide legitimate representation.

Internal Sunni Political Contests

Unlike its peak in 2014, sectarianism is not the only driver of conflict in recently-liberated Mosul. A bigger challenge to the political future of Mosul is the fragmentation of the Sunni leadership. To work to unite the Sunni leadership, over the past few years, several conferences have been convened in Baghdad, Erbil, Amman, Doha, Beirut, and elsewhere. Most of the time, these conferences have resulted in the failure to draft an agreement. In a conference in Baghdad in 2015, angry participants threw their chairs at each other.⁷⁶ The result has been a disjointed Sunni leadership.

The fragmentation is clear in the upcoming election. In 2010, for instance, Ayad Allawi's al-Iraqiya coalition ran as a single bloc and represented most Sunni parties, including the tribal forces. By 2014, internal rifts became apparent and two blocs emerged: United to Reform, led by Salim al-Jabouri, Osama al-Nujaifi, and Qasim al-Fahdawi and the al-Arabiya Coalition, led by Salih al-Mutlaq.

⁷⁶ Renad Mansour, "The Sunni Predicament in Iraq," Carnegie Middle East Center, March 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_59_Mansour_Sunni_Final.pdf.

In 2018, internal divisions again impede unity. The main contenders include (1) the National Coalition (al-Wataniya), led by Allawi, Jabouri, Mutlaq and (2) the Decision Alliance (al-Qarar), led by Osama and Athil al-Nujaifi.

Today, the fragmented Sunni representation can be divided along the greater intra-Shia struggle for the Iraqi state. The Shia political scene features competition between a conservative Iranian-friendly side, including Nouri al-Maliki and PMF leaders, a critical protest movement side symbolized by popular cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, and a centrist line driven by prime minister Haider al-Abadi. Although Sunni Arab political parties are not likely to impact the choice of prime minister, they will play a role over the distribution of ministries. The Iraq List shares strong relations with Maliki and the PMF whereas the Decision Alliance is closer to Abadi and potentially Sadr.

Beyond personal rivalries and competition for money and influence, the main big-picture issue separating the National Coalition and the Decision Alliance concerns the future of the PMF and the role of Iran in Iraq. Although the sectarian narrative dictates that all Sunnis would remain wary of Iranian's influence, the Iraq List, and its leaders such as Salim al-Jabouri, share close relations with Maliki and senior PMF officials – who are deeply connected with Tehran. Linked to this discussion is the future of the PMF: the Iraq List, which includes PMF fighters, will support the future of the PMF at the federal government and local levels.

Some senior Sunni leaders have moved away from Sunni-centric politics and are running on Shia lists. For instance, Abadi's Victory Alliance includes Qasim al-Fahdawi and Abdul-Latif al-Hameem, who heads the Sunni endowment. According to one Maslawi journalist: 'I will be the first to vote for Abadi, it is not about him being Sunni or Shia - he saved Iraq.'⁷⁷ Furthermore, according to an NDI poll conducted in early 2017, Abadi's favourability among the Sunnis was at 68 percent, and 64 percent believed that the country was heading toward the right direction under the premier.⁷⁸ These numbers were evident in the final election results, which showed Abadi's list as the top list in Ninewah.

Sunni-Gulf Relations

A significant turn of events in the foreign relations of Iraq and the political dynamics of the country was the recent change in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Previously, the identity-based logic of post-2003 Iraq meant that Iran backed the Shia leadership and the Gulf supported the Sunni leadership. Ties between the two countries were severed following the 1991 Gulf War but in 2003, Tehran gained significant power in Iraq and moved to increase

⁷⁷ Gareth Browne, "Iraq's Sunnis and the 2018 elections," the New Arab, 27 November 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/11/27/iraqs-Sunnis-and-the-2018-elections>.

⁷⁸ National Democratic Institute, "Improved Security Provides Opening for Cooperation March – April 2017 Survey Findings," 7 June 2017, <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20April%202017%20Survey%20Public%20Final%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf>.

its influence as Iraq's Shia majority gained power. In the current context, the logic for the Gulf states dictated support for Sunni movements in Mosul and elsewhere as a way to overcome Iran's deep infiltration of the Iraqi state. As such, Riyadh and others have supported various political and military movements, including Ayad Allawi's 2010 electoral bid, which gained the most votes yet was unable to successfully form a government. Ultimately, the Gulf countries' Sunni-focused approach to gaining influence in Iraq paid minimal dividends as the Sunni leadership remained fragmented and unable to maneuver in the post-2003 environment.

As a result, today, Saudi Arabia seeks new alliances and constituencies in Iraq as it has seen the failure of a fractured Iraqi Sunni leadership in Mosul and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia seeks to enhance its relations with the central government and, particularly, the Kurdish Regional Government, who may be able to provide another platform of influence for the Saudis.⁷⁹ Saudi Arabia has reoriented its sights towards Iraq's Shia majority in a bid to gain deeper political influence in the country and, crucially, to temper the influence of its regional rival, Iran whose dominance in Iraq has increased since the US troop withdrawal in 2011. This policy is in line with the beginning of a shift from identity to issue-based politics in Iraq under which, for instance, a Shia leader like Abadi can gain popularity in Sunni areas. In Mosul, where the post-Islamic State devastation in Iraq allows Saudi Arabia a springboard into Baghdad's political stream through contributing to reconstruction efforts, Riyadh is pursuing this new policy. This is especially poignant as the Iraqi government had also accused the Gulf states of being implicated in the funding of extremist Sunni jihadi groups, such as al-Qaeda and even Islamic State in the past.

In June 2017, Abadi made his first visit to the Saudi kingdom signaling a new chapter in relations between the two neighbouring countries. Since then relations have improved and there has been increased cooperation with numerous Saudi officials visiting Iraq, several economic cooperation agreements and visits by delegations as well as the announcement of the reopening of the Arar land border crossing. For Abadi, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies are key actors in assisting with reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts especially in northern Iraq as well as helping to encourage the participation of Sunnis in the political process.⁸⁰ Abadi seeks to diversify Iraq's regional allies and connect Iraq with its Arab core but he is also careful not to alienate Iran and create the impression of a new axis.⁸¹

But it was the visit by popular Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr to Riyadh to meet with the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman, in July 2017 that caused considerable political interest. In Sadr, lies a Shia leader who is Iraq-focused and who has significant influence amongst Iraqi Shias – a constituency that the Saudis are now trying to woo in order to increase their influence and political capital in the country. But the kingdom is also looking to expand its soft

⁷⁹ Author's phone interview with Gulf Foreign Policy expert, March 29, 2018.

⁸⁰ Huthifa Fayyad, "Renewed Saudi-Iraq ties 'to rival Iran's influence,'" *Al-Jazeera*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/renewed-saudi-iraq-ties-rival-iran-influence-171024151411564.html>

⁸¹ Reuters, "Iraqi PM Abadi heads to Saudi Arabia at start of MidEast tour," *Reuters*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-saudi/iraqi-pm-abadi-heads-to-saudi-arabia-at-start-of-mideast-tour-idUSKBN19A0UF>

power across Iraq. To extend its influence in the south, Saudi Arabia hopes to open a consulate in Basra with plans to potentially open one in Najaf as well.⁸² Although plans to establish the consulate have been postponed as protests broke out in the south by Shias weary of Saudi Arabia's creeping influence. Najaf is a key target especially as it houses the Grand Ayatollah Sistani who has wide-ranging influence over Iraqi Shias but is also skeptical of both Riyadh and Tehran's influence in Iraq.⁸³

For his part, Sadr wants to signal a message to both Iran and his Iraqi rivals of his own power and sees Saudi Arabia as one way of potentially assisting in the reconstruction and stabilisation efforts in Iraq whilst healing sectarian fission in order to bolster his own political credentials and underscore his role as the Arab Shia face of Iraq

In Mosul and northern Iraq, the Gulf leadership has also realised it must work with the Kurds, who control territory in the region. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is perceived as a potential area from which to develop 'the pro-Arab Sunni Muslim bloc,' and improve the positioning of Sunnis within Iraq.⁸⁴ An expert on Gulf-Iraq relations indicated that the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, have established interests in northern Iraq, primarily in Erbil, where there is economic development and real opportunities for investment.⁸⁵ Politically, Saudi Arabia remains ambitious and that means it will continue to seek influence amongst and target Iraq's Shia majority in the rest of the country.

Lessons Learned: Sunni Re-Engagement

The Sunni experience in post-2003 Iraq has been one of pressure from the central government and denial of changing realities. A major source of Sunni marginalization in post-2003 Iraq came with the decision to boycott the state-building process – leaving it to the Shia and Kurdish leaders to structure the new Iraq. Today, 15 years following the U.S.-led invasion, has the Sunni predicament changed? Despite the fragmentations and weaknesses that will impede on Sunni representation in the upcoming elections, there have been some lessons learned.

The first lesson learned is that boycotts do not work, and that Sunnis should move on from their denial of the realities of post-2003 Iraq. The Shia will most likely make up the government – but they themselves are split. However, rather than ignoring the problem, the experiences of Salahadeen and Anbar reveal the merits to enhancing the relationship between centre and

⁸² Mohamed Mostafa, "Iraq approves opening Saudi consulate in Basra," *IraqiNews*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/iraq-approves-opening-saudi-consulate-basra/>

⁸³ Erika Solomon, "Sunni Saudi Arabia courts an ally in Iraq's Shia," *Financial Times*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/b4cb47b4-2d1c-11e8-9b4b-bc4b9f08f381>

⁸⁴ Hussein Ibish, "The Gulf Arab Countries and the Kurdish Referendum," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, September 29, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/gulf-arab-countries-and-kurdish-referendum>

⁸⁵ Author's phone interview with Gulf Foreign Policy expert, March 29, 2018.

periphery. A major reason why Tikrit is often referred to as an example of successful stabilisation is due to the working relationship that its mayor Omar Tariq Ismail had with Abadi.⁸⁶ Linked to this point, the Sunnis ideas on federalism have changed. Whereas in 2005, it was rare for a Sunni leader to support decentralization or federalism, today Sunnis have realised that a federal arrangement can grant great autonomy to their provinces and potential regions.⁸⁷

The second lesson learned is that leaders from the same ethnic or sect identities do not necessarily translate to greater modes of representation. Since 2003, Sunni leaders have failed to deliver on fundamental services for their own citizens. As a result, in Mosul, today, the citizens are not only wary of the central government in Baghdad, but also of their own leaders, who used identity-based politics to govern, but who failed to meet the needs and demands of their citizens.

Conclusion

Months following the liberation of both East and West Mosul, the mood in the city of Mosul remained optimistic. In a national election marred by a low voter turnout, the people of Ninewah voted more than any other province. Most of the residents who suffered under the Islamic State were happy to no longer have to deal with salafi-jihadi totalitarian rule. However, the country should proceed with cautious optimism, as the roots that led to the rise of the Islamic State remain unaddressed and have not been tackled. In Mosul, the local state structure remains weak and the local leadership struggles to make claims to legitimately represent their constituents.

The humanitarian situation remains dire, and the local government is unable to fulfil the basic needs of electricity, water, and employment. This reality is particularly true for West Mosul, which remains barren with minimal rehabilitation. As a result, IDPs refuse to come home without economic and security incentives. Furthermore, reconciliation amongst Mosul's diverse ethnicities remains a barrier to social cohesion, one consequence of the collective trauma of the Islamic State's occupation of the city.

Furthermore, a mix of different armed groups patrol the city without a united command structure, leading at times to direct conflict and more generally challenging the government's monopoly over legitimate violence.

In sum, many immediate challenges threaten the long-term victory over the Islamic State. One upshot amidst these grievances are reports of a sense of solidarity amongst Sunni Maslawis to

⁸⁶ Renad Mansour, "Rebuilding the Iraqi State: Stabilisation, Governance, and Reconciliation," EU Directorate-General for External Policies, 15 December 2017,

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU\(2017\)603859_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU(2017)603859_EN.pdf).

⁸⁷ Mansour, "Sunni Predicament".

rebuild their communities and to heal the divides that have ripped this once cohesive civil society.⁸⁸ However, the short-term optimism, driven by a sense of relief to be governed by anything but the Islamic State, will not last long if longer-term challenges are not addressed. Recovering from the total devastation of their city's infrastructure, psychological trauma, economic paralysis and the impact on the social fabric of the city, including the problem of reconciliation, broken families, orphans and widows and the plight of the poorest and most vulnerable in society, will not only take time but requires long-term strategic efforts and engagement. These structural problems threaten to jeopardize the organic changes that have occurred over the past few years. International actors, who seek to rebuild the state at the local level, must therefore remain wary before engaging with the different leaderships and assigning top-down legitimacy.

⁸⁸ Author interview with Mosul resident, March 2018.

Annexes submitted by the FRS

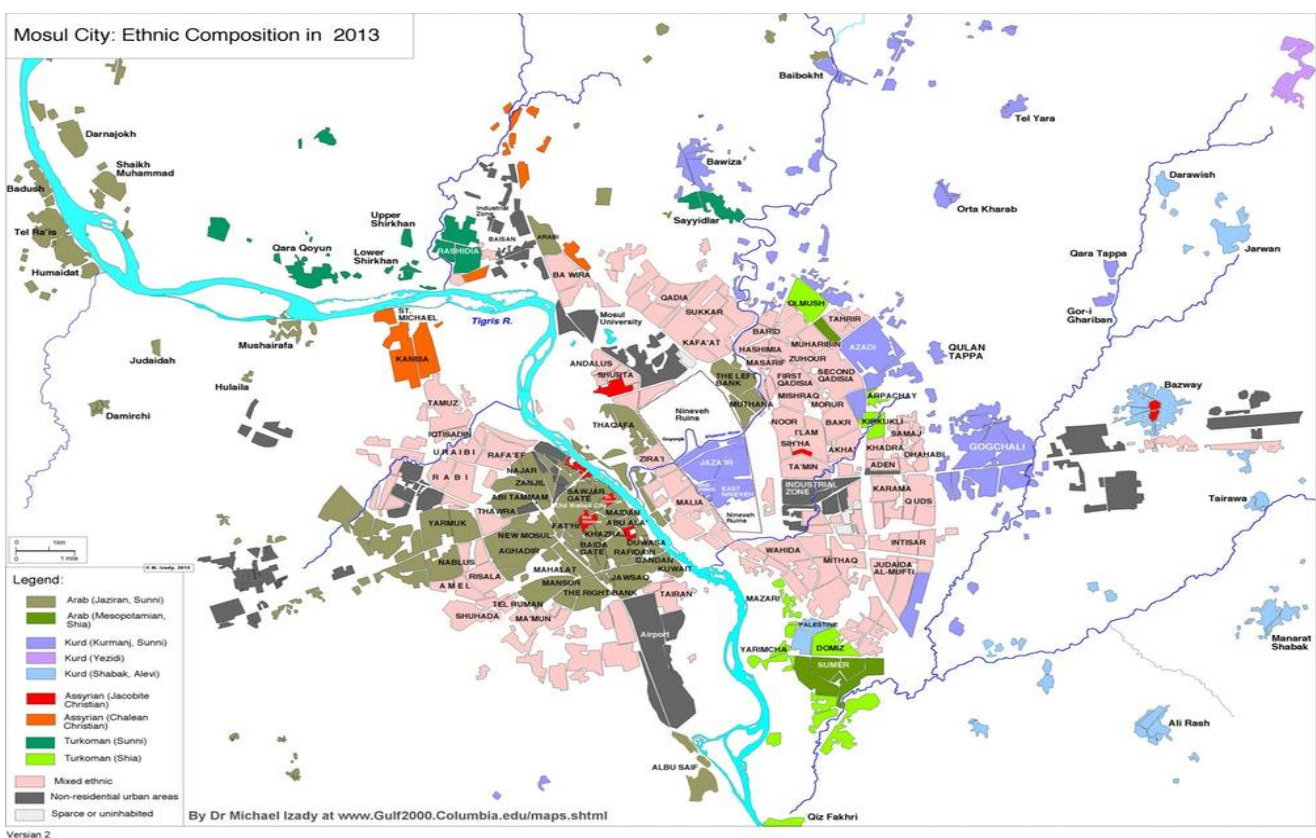
Population of Mosul

Population before ISIS : 3 million people⁸⁹

Population after liberation (2018) : 1.739 million people⁹⁰

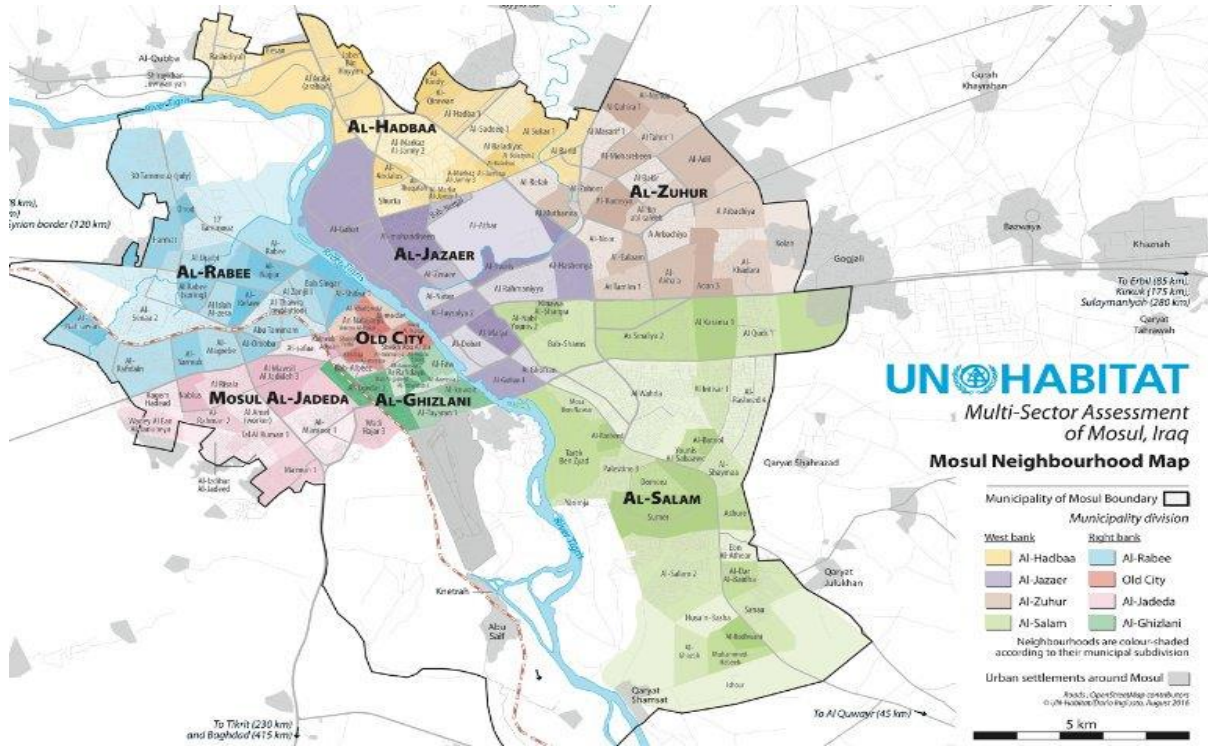
- Ethnographic distribution in Mosul before ISIS

Source : Unitar/UNOSAT



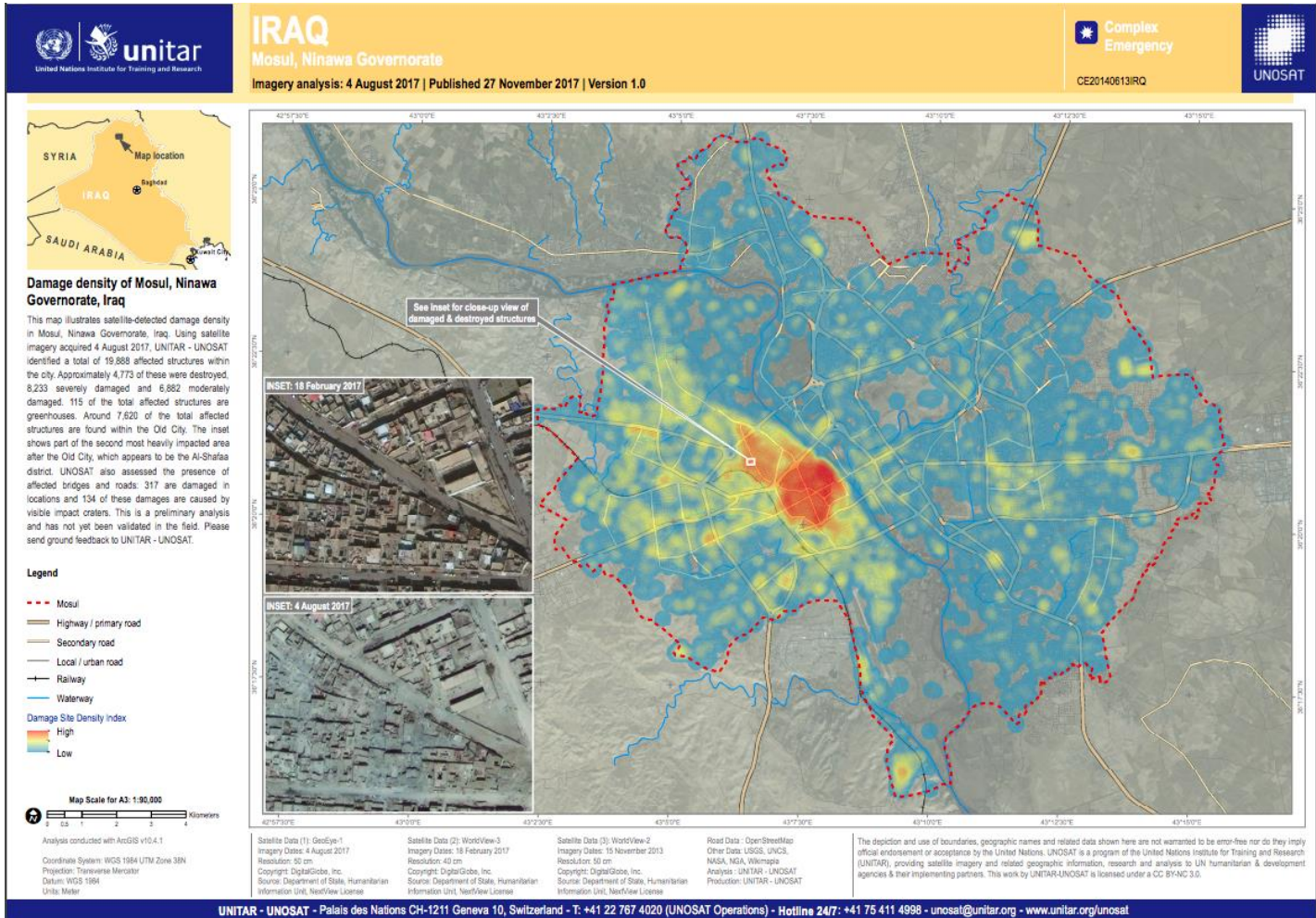
⁸⁹ Lynch, Hannah, « Mosul Factsheet: brief guide to the city and the liberation offensive », *rudaw.net*, Lynch, Hannah, « Mosul Factsheet : brief guide to the city and the liberation offensive », Octobre 2016 *rudaw.net*, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/1610201610>, 14 Avril 2018.

⁹⁰ *World Population Review* <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/iraq-population/cities/>



Map of Mosul neighborhoods (Rast, West, Center)

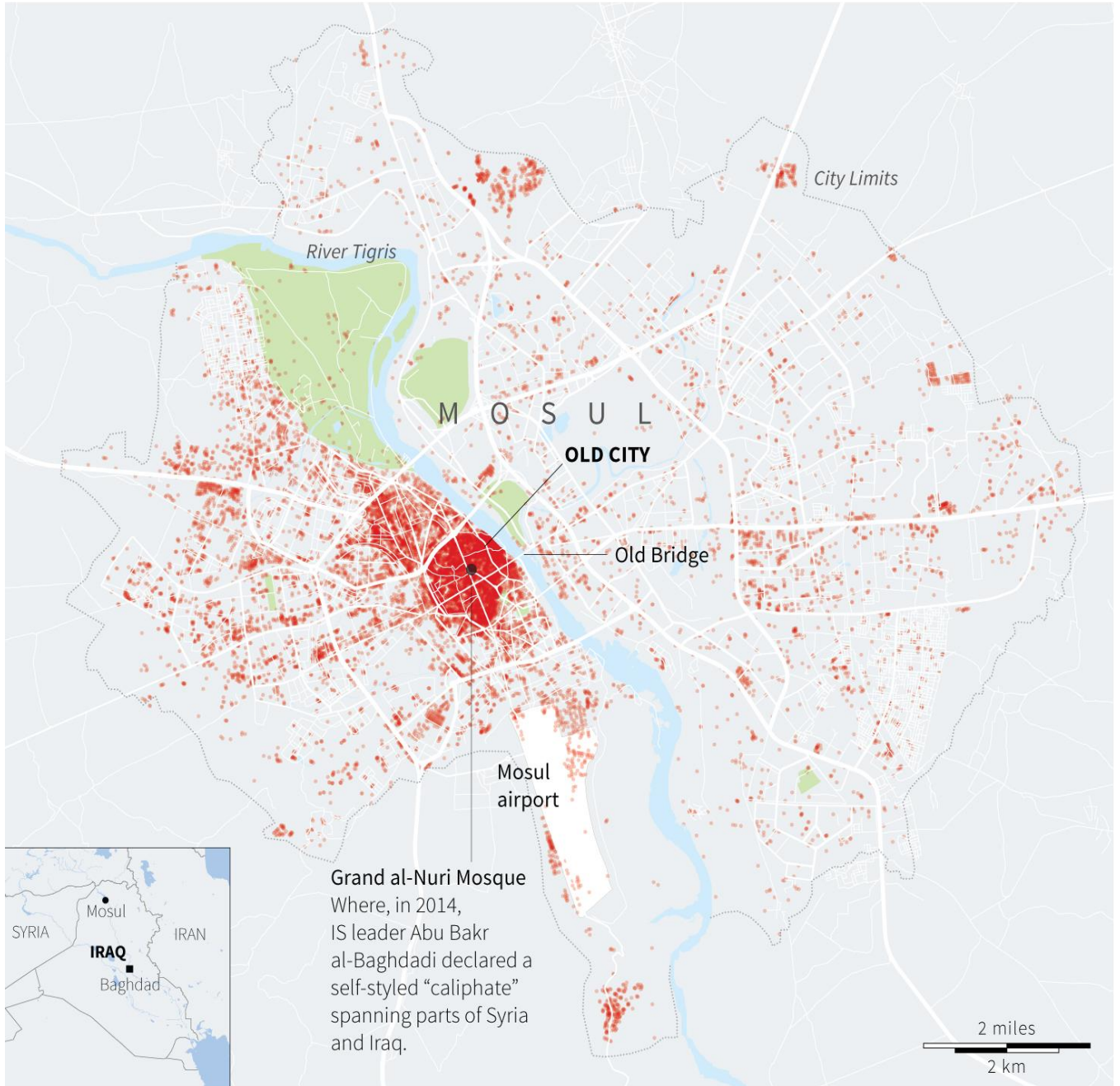
Destruction of buildings in Mosul after liberation - 2017



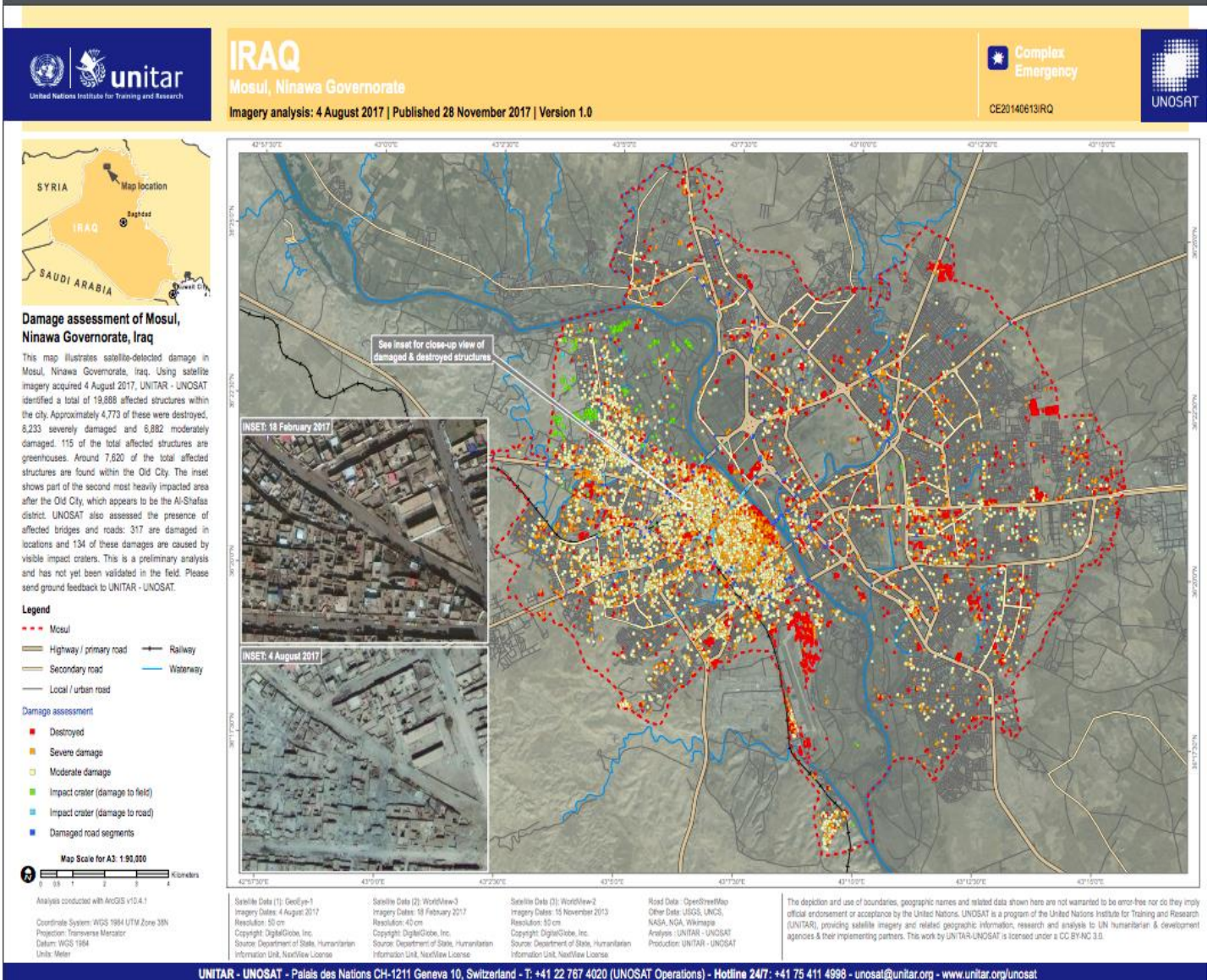
Devastated Mosul

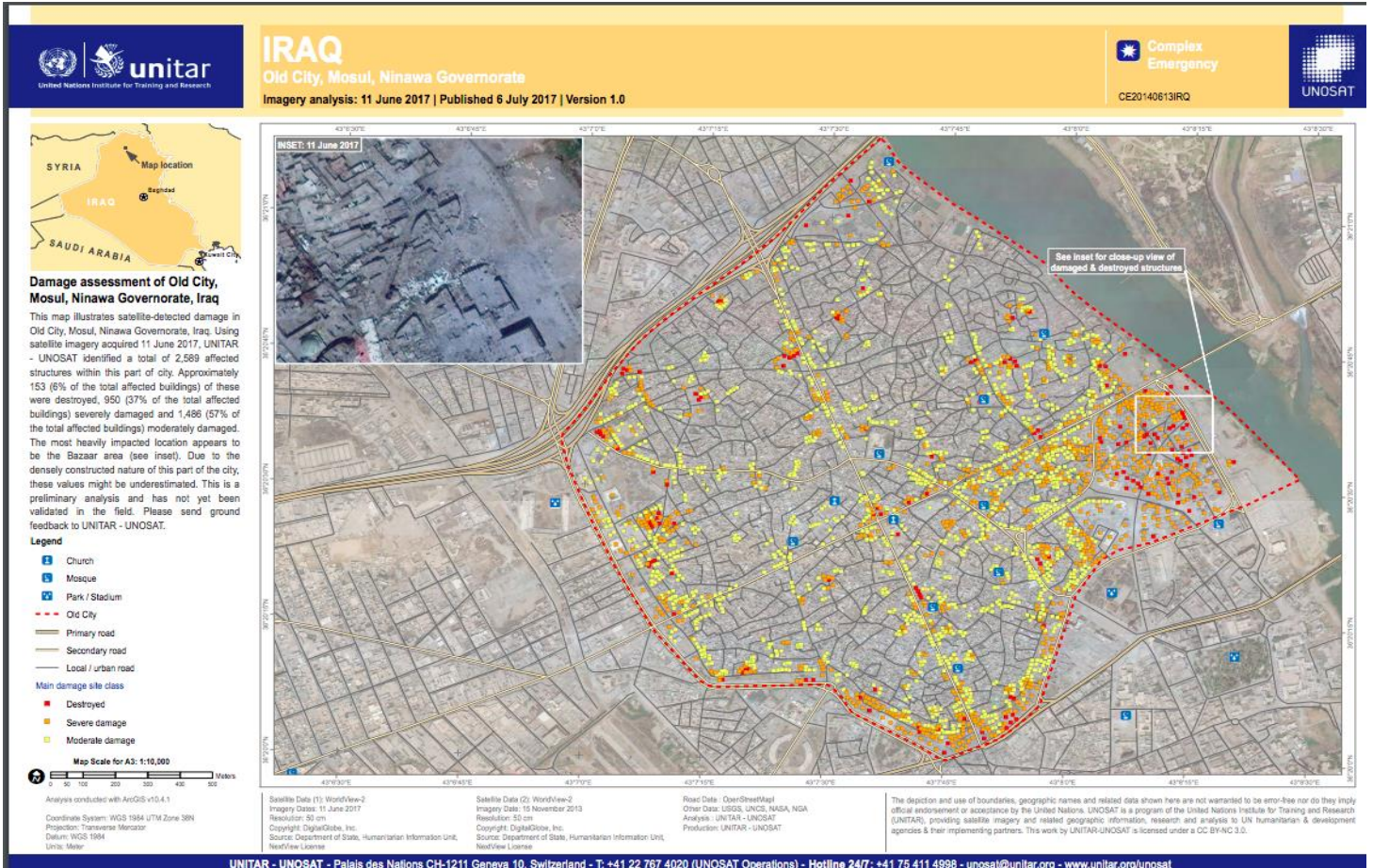
In the battle to oust Islamic State, the fighting was fiercest in the warren of small streets to the west of the Tigris River.

● **Damaged buildings, as of August 4, 2017**



Sources: UNOSAT; Maps4News







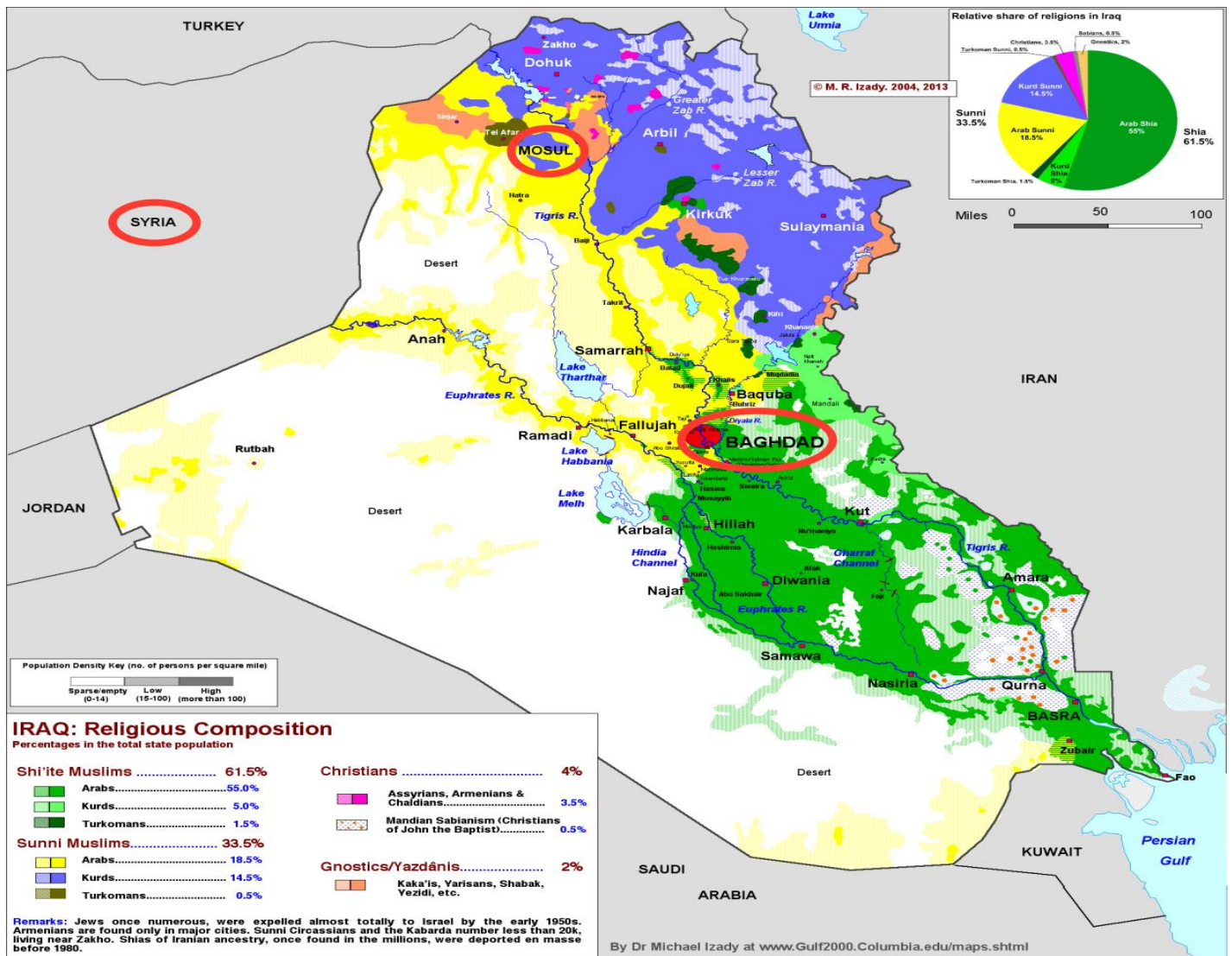
The ruins of Mosul's Old City on July 9, 2017. (Ahmad Al-Rubaye / AFP/Getty Images)

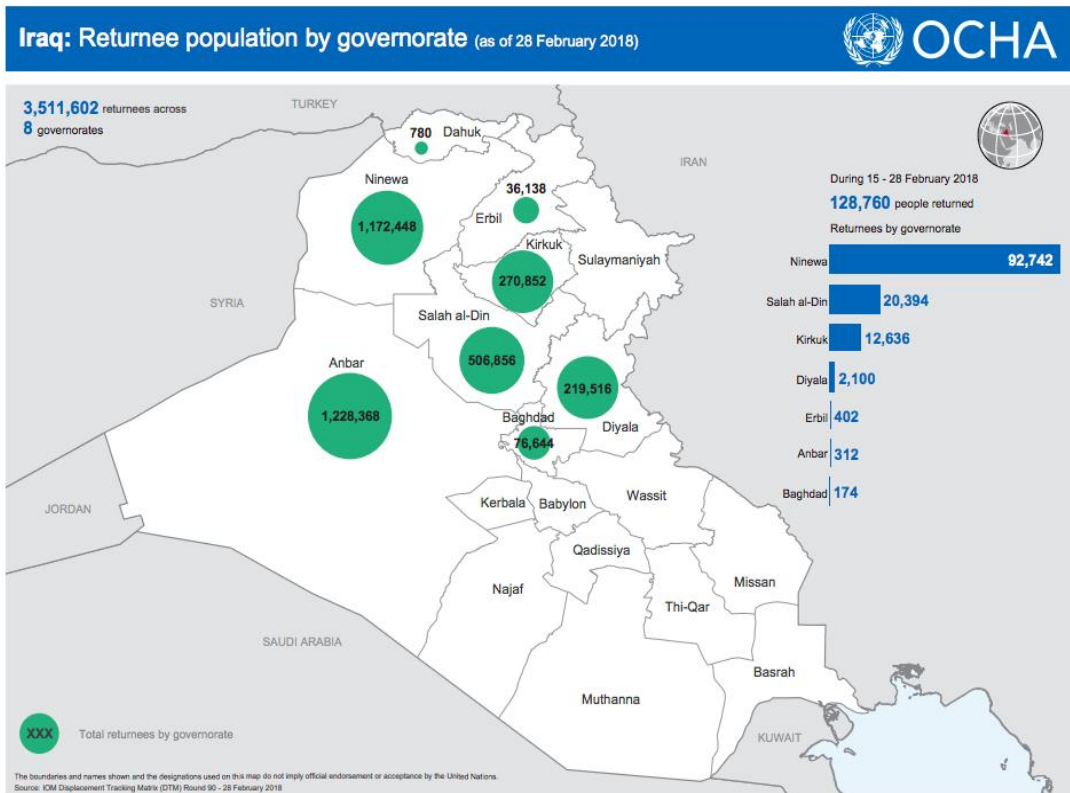
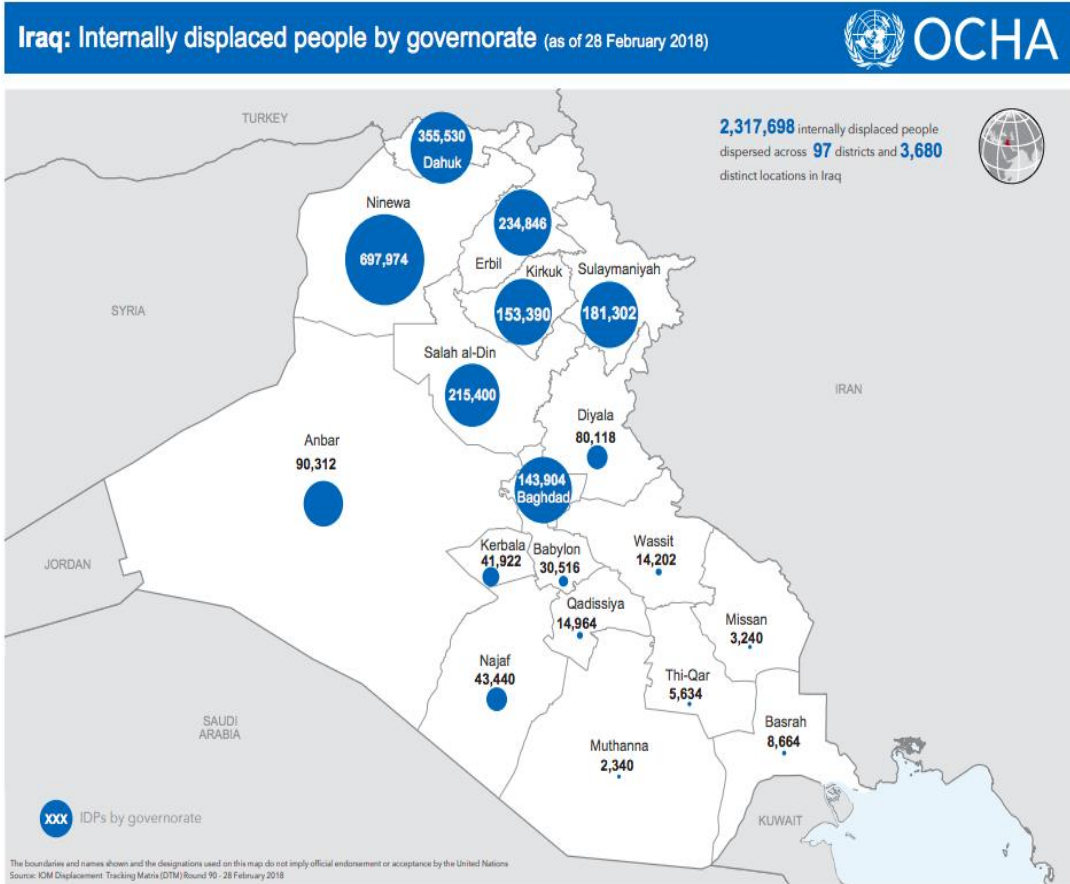
On the Iraqi national scale

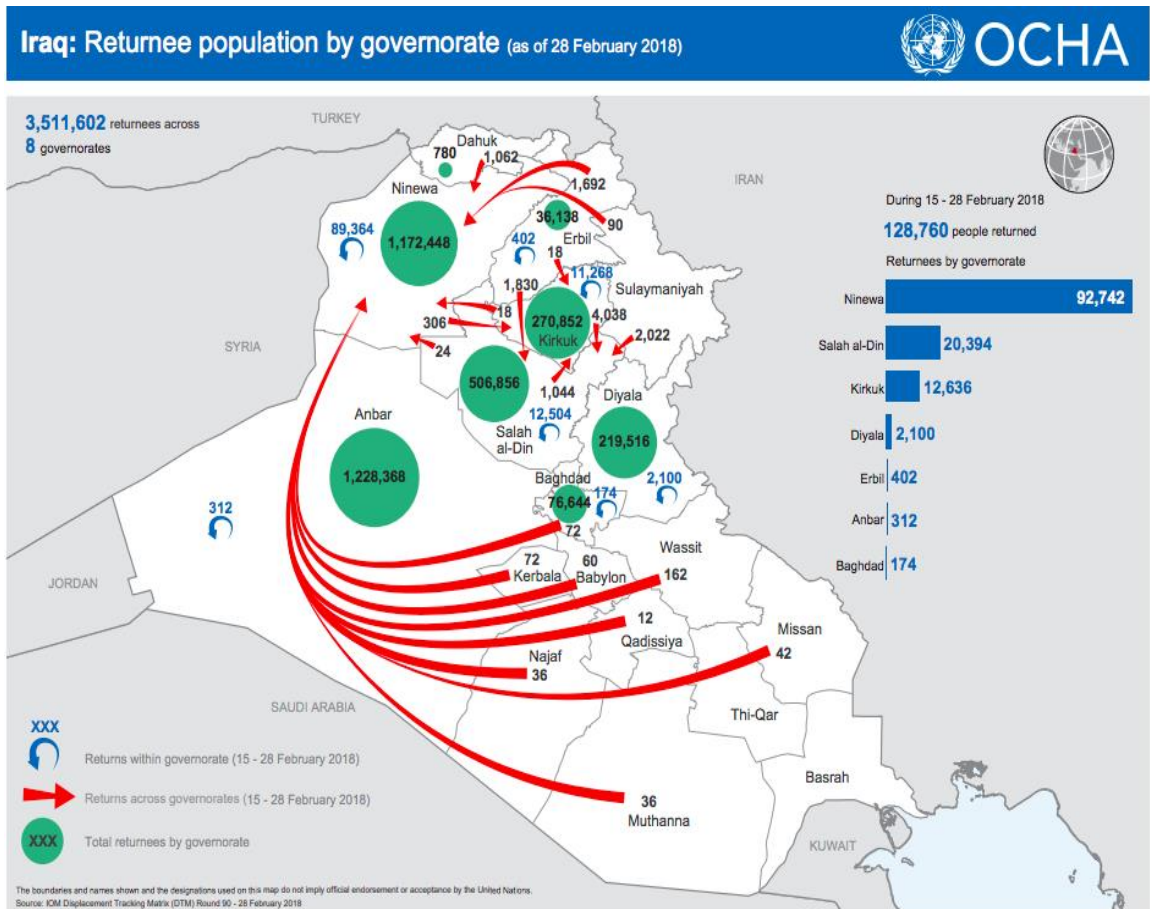
According to *The World Factbook*:

Population (July 2017): 39 192 111 p.

- Arabs : 75-80 %
- Kurds : 15-20 %
- Christians : 1 %
- Others : 5 %
- Muslims : 95-98 %
 - Shia : 64-69 %
 - Sunni : 29-34 %
 - Others : 1-4 %







Assistance and humanitarian aid

