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By: Mohamed Abu Saada

Introduction:

The operation to retake the city of Mosul has begun with massive bombardment of Daesh targets inside the city by the Iraqi forces and the international coalition. Meanwhile, military sources indicated that the Iraqi forces and the Peshmerga have regained villages to the south and east of Mosul after achieving progress on several axes toward the city.

The importance of the battle:

Mosul is considered one of the two centers of gravity for the Islamic State in both Syria and Iraq, where al-Baghdadi announced the birth of the Islamic Caliphate. The city occupies a strategic and unique location as it is the link between Turkey, Syria and Iraq, including the Kurdistan region. The city of Mosul lies in Nineveh Province, in the northwest part of Iraq, on an area of 32.308 square kilometers, 400 km north of Baghdad. It is also located on the new Silk Road that Iran has been seeking to create for decades to connect it with the Mediterranean Sea. So, all parties affected by the outcome of the battle of Mosul seek to participate in the battle to secure their interests. The forces participating in the battle of Mosul from Daesh are estimated at 3,000 foreign fighters and 7000 thousands of local fighters inside the city of Mosul, as well as 600 foreign fighters and 6,500 local fighters in the city's outskirts. The Islamic State organization has begun digging trenches, establishing sand fences, preparing the combat sites, and burning some oil wells in preparation for fighting the battle of Mosul.



The troops that are ready to break into Mosul:

1. The Iraqi Forces:

Divisions 15 and 16, the fourth brigade of the eighth division, the federal police forces and the counter-terrorism forces, as well as the forces of Nineveh operations (which consist of the seventh division) were prepared for the battle, with support from the Iraqi Air Force.

2. The Popular Mobilization Militias:

The popular mobilization militias are theoretically part of the Iraqi military and security institutions according to orders issued by the Iraqi prime minister. Many Shiite factions are engaged within these troops, including the Badr Brigade, the League of the Righteous and al-Nujaba. The US military spokesman has estimated the number of the popular mobilization militias at about one hundred thousand fighters, while the facts on the ground indicate that the actual number is estimated from 30 to 40 thousand. The Shiite militias are trained and armed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Qods Force.

3. The Kurdish Peshmerga Forces:

Three brigades in addition to the artillery unit and engineering teams are involved in the battle.

4. The National Sunni Mobilization Forces:

The primary number of the national Sunni mobilization forces is estimated at four thousand fighters, in addition to the tribal mobilization; and both seek to play a prominent role in the battle of Mosul and beyond.

5. The International Coalition Forces:

The international coalition forces oversee the operations of preparation and training, and provide military consultations as well as the aerial and artillery attribution for the forces involved.



Axes of operations:

The nature of the battlefield allows the provision of three main entrances, namely:

- I. The southern entrance: It starts from Qayyarah in the south and extends along the river to the city of Mosul. The southern entrance will be used by the Iraqi army and security forces.
- II. The eastern entrance: It starts from the depth of the territory of the Kurdistan region and will be used by the Peshmerga forces and part of the Sunni national mobilization forces.
- III. The western entrance: It starts from Tel Afar and may be used by the popular mobilization forces; and possibly the military planner would prefer to retain some of its regions unoccupied by forces to lure the ISIS forces to withdraw toward the Syrian border.
- IV. The northwest entrance: It starts from the areas surrounding the Mosul Dam, and will be used by the popular mobilization forces.

The course of the military operation:

With the start of the first day of the military operation in Mosul, a spokesman for the US Department of Defense, Peter Cook, made clear that the military operation to retake Mosul, "proceeded as expected on the first day," and that the Iraqi aircraft will throw seven million leaflets to inform city residents how to protect themselves. He also announced that the Iraqi forces advanced from the east, warning at the same time that the attack "is difficult and can take time." At the same time, there is an exodus of the citizens of Mosul for fear of the shelling of warplanes or recruitment by Daesh, witnesses reported. Nearly three thousand refugees from the city went to the Hol camp which is controlled by Kurdish protection units, to the east of Hasaka.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has recently appeared in public in Mosul to raise the morale of the citizens. In light of this, the "Save the Children" organization warned that more than half a million children in Mosul are at risk. Also, the United Nations warned that



1.5 million people in the city are threatened because of the fighting, demanding to grant them freedom of movement. On the other hand, the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi said he stressed during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on the need to protect civilians in Mosul battles, adding that he called for granting freedom of movement to the people of the city and allowing them to stay or move to other regions, according to their desire. In turn, Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs in the United Nations Lise Grande said at a news conference in Baghdad that a comprehensive contingency plan was prepared for Mosul, expecting the exodus of a million people.

The most important international stances and statements

➤ First, the Turkish Stance:

With the start of the battle of Mosul, Turkey continues to show a strong desire to participate in this battle. Erdogan has warned of dire consequences if his country's forces were not involved in the operation to retake the city of Mosul. He pointed out that Turkey is obliged to enter Mosul, because it is under threat." The Turkish desire is based on a number of historical, geographical, political and security factors, but they provoke a backlash, especially from Baghdad and Iran, the state that competes with Turkey historically in the Arab Mashriq (including the Levant) region. The great sensitivity toward the Turkish role is related to the importance of the battle of Mosul in determining the future of Iraq and Syria, and the nature of the forces that will govern the two regions after their liberation.

The foundations of the Turkish stance:

We cannot look at the role that Turkey aspires to play in the battle of Mosul away from the historical dimension, known as the Issue of Mosul, after the Ankara Agreement in 1926 with Iraq and Britain which settled the sovereignty over the Mosul Vilayet (which then meant all of northern Iraq) in favor of the Iraqi state. In this agreement, there is a number of items, which Turkey sees as guaranteeing it the right of military intervention in Mosul, including those related to the protection of the Turkmen



minority, and those regarding the preservation of the unity of the Iraqi territory. Ankara says that Iraq is practically divided today, and that what is going on there is a threat to the Turkish national security.

Perhaps this document formed a source for Turkish calls - since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 - toward Mosul. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk promised the Ankara Agreement opponents in the House of Representatives to restore it at the appropriate time. This was later repeated -albeit in different ways- by the presidents Turgut Ozal, Suleyman Demirel, Abdul Gul, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Meanwhile, there was more than one statement from the leaders of the international coalition led by the United States, saying that the Turkish troops in Iraq are not in the framework of the forces of the coalition countries supporting the Iraqi forces in the war against Daesh.

There are great obstacles facing the Turkish role in the battles of Mosul and Raqqa, but it is clear that Turkey is betting on the nature of the battle of Mosul as a fateful battle does not accept failure, as it is related to the elimination of the most powerful military organization in the region, and that such a thing could make it impossible for the US administration to fight this battle without Turkey, especially that this administration is preparing for the US presidential elections after a few weeks; and the outcome of this battle will have the greatest impact on the ballot box.

➤ **Second: The Iraqi Stance:**

Contrary to the Turkish vision, Baghdad believes that the Ankara Agreement resolved the issue of Iraqi sovereignty on Mosul, and that Ankara recognized the current borders, and therefore, any talk of a Turkish role in Mosul away from the agreement with Baghdad, is an attack on Iraqi sovereignty, and that any Turkish military presence there is an occupation of Iraqi lands. Although the Turkish-Iraqi controversy on this agreement is conducted publicly, but it reflects the agreement in one way or another.



Mosul is of great importance in the strategy of Turkey, which signed agreements with the leadership of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and the forces of the national mobilization (that includes Sunni tribes), and established what it looks like a military base in Baishqh to train these forces. However, the issue of the Turkish military intervention to re-annex Mosul is excluded, but Turkey believes that the post-Mosul liberation will devote regional roles and quotas, under the US emphasis on granting a key role for the Sunni Arabs in the liberation of the city and the determination of its future.

The Iraqi stance is one of the major obstacles facing the Turkish intervention in Mosul after Turkey faced decisive rejection from Baghdad. The controversy between the two capitals in this regard turned into a media war and the exchange of summoning ambassadors amid warnings from the Iraqi government that any Turkish military intervention would lead to a regional war, demanding the withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Baishqh. The Iraqi government also said the Iraqi parties which call for a Turkish role in the battle of Mosul will be punished. However, the Iraqi rejection of a Turkish role is not the only obstacle in the face of Ankara's bid; as Turkey believes that the ambiguity of the US stance is the primary reason for the emergence of such a controversy. Although Turkey sent a mission to Iraq for discussing the military operation in Mosul with the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, however, the Iraqi official response by Ahmed Gamal, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesman, "that the Turkish delegation, who arrived in Baghdad gave ideas that have not lived up to the withdrawal of their forces from Iraq".

➤ **Third: the Stance of the Arab League:**

The stance of the Arab League came through a telephone call from Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari with Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit. For his part, Aboul Gheit confirmed that the Arab League rejects the Turkish intervention in Iraqi territory, pointing out that the Arab League supports the security, stability and unity of Iraq, and the prevention of any foreign interference in the Iraqi internal affairs, adding that the Arab League will intensify its efforts, and dialogues



with various countries around the world, and international organizations to put pressure on the Turkish government to end the Turkish violation of the Iraqi territory.

➤ Fourth: The Saudi Stance:

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir stressed soon after the start of the battle to retake Mosul that Daesh will lose the war. He expressed his fear that extremist militias will enter Mosul, saying: "We fear that the entering of the popular mobilization militias to Mosul could result in a bloodbath. However, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said – in response to Jubeir's remarks – that such statements "are worthless, and we are not concerned about these voices that cry on Daesh."

➤ Fifth: the stance of the Kurdistan region:

The statement of Maj. Gen. Jabbar Yawar, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Peshmerga in Iraq's Kurdistan region, said that the liberation of Mosul may take a few weeks, but it will end with defeating Daesh. He stressed that the government of Kurdistan region does not covet Mosul, and that the Turkish fears are legitimate.

➤ Sixth: Egypt's stance:

The Egyptian government confirmed its "full" solidarity with the government and people of Iraq at the start of the battle to retake Mosul. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said that the IS organization and those that support it or adopt its ideology cannot stand a chance, or find a safe haven against the will of the people. Sisi also confirmed to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi his country's pro-Iraq stance in the battle of Mosul. He also stressed his support for Iraq's unity and sovereignty over all its territory. Iraqi Foreign Minister al-Jaafari discussed through a telephone conversation with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, the security and political situation in the region, and the violation of the Turkish forces of the Iraqi sovereignty. The two sides stressed the need for Turkey's commitment to good-neighborliness and the principles stipulated by international agreements, and called for withdrawing its troops from Iraqi territory.



➤ Seventh: The stance of the United States:

The US administration decision to go to the battle of Mosul before the end of President Obama's term was perhaps due to several reasons, including: a military victory against ISIS will be recorded for him personally, and will support the candidate of the Democratic Party and increase the opportunity for her access to the White House. The decision also includes a direct message to Russia that the US president is able to make strategic decisions even during the last days of his presidency term.

The expected results

The battle of Mosul will vary from previous battles in Tikrit, Ramadi and Fallujah because of the importance of Mosul, its size, and the number of civilians living there. Therefore, the battle will be more violent and bloody and will need double the time that was needed in the previous battles. We can monitor the most important expectations regarding the battle of Mosul on two tracks:

First, on the ground:

- It is expected that the numbers of civilians killed will reach thousands.
- A mass exodus of civilians is expected to reach hundreds of thousands, and will be accompanied by violations that may reach the level of crimes against humanity.
- Demographic change operations are expected to take place in Mosul, likely through the Kurdish forces and the popular mobilization militias, against the Sunni population.
- It is expected that the battle will be prolonged because of the large number of international players, to become similar to the battle of Aleppo, Syria (Aleppo 2).

Second, on the level of international relations:

- The Popular Mobilization militias will try to create an Iranian foothold to the south and west of Mosul, starting from "Tal Afar" to secure a corridor that Iran intends to establish.



- It is expected that the Iraqi-Turkish relations will be severed in the event of any Turkish military intervention in Mosul. It is expected that the Turkish Air Force will interfere as a first step, to carry out air strikes in some areas; with the possibility of a limited Turkish ground incursion in order to maintain Turkey's military base in Bashiqa.
- It expected that the Turkish-Iranian relations will witness some tension on the diplomatic level in the event of a conflict between the military movements of the Turkish forces and the popular mobilization militias.
- It is expected that the US-Turkish relations will be strained on a public level in the event of America's continuing to refuse a Turkish intervention in the battle of Mosul. The tension may reach Turkey's closing of the "Incirlik" air base, which is used by coalition forces, as well as non-participation with the US troops in the battle of Raqqa in Syria.
- The Egyptian stance toward the military operations in Mosul would increase the division between the Turkish and the Egyptian regimes on the one hand and the Egyptian and the Saudi regimes on the other.