

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in the spring of 2003, Iraq has been unstable. It will remain unstable for years to come irrespective of what happens in Mosul, believes Nehad Ismail.

The main source of instability is the sectarian struggle inside Iraq itself. The meddling of Iran in Iraqi affairs has made a bad situation much worse and the regional rivalry between Shi'a Iran on one side and the Sunni states of Saudi Arabia and Turkey contributed to Iraq's instability. Unless the three powers agree to work together to resolve all their differences, Iraq will continue to be a victim.

The Iraqi military offensive against Daesh/ISIS in Mosul began on October 17th and is expected to last several weeks. All the indications are that ISIS will eventually be driven out of Mosul and escape to Syria which is considered a safe haven given that neither the Assad regime nor the Russians are interested in fighting ISIS. On the contrary they are colluding with it.

The immediate consequences of the Mosul offensive are already making news headline: Exodus of refugees of cataclysmic proportions. The possibility of a desperate ISIS using chemical weapons. Also stories of a Third World War appeared in the Press. A World War Three is most unlikely for the simple reason that the security of USA and Russia is not threatened by what is happening in Mosul.

The Mosul issue is too complicated. There are too many players involved with conflicting agendas. The latest participant to enter the fray is Turkey which has kept a tank battalion in Ba'ashiqqa, a nearby town, from where it says it directed artillery fire at jihadist positions today. At the behest of Iran, the Iraqis have objected to Turkey's role in the battle of Mosul.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly said that Turkish forces will participate in the liberation of Mosul. Various actors involved in the fight for Mosul including the Kurdish Peshmerga, the Sunni Hashd-al-Watani militia, the Turkish army, the Shia popular mobilization units, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the PKK complicate coordination and subsequent co-operation. Inevitably a conflict of a different kind will follow between the disparate groups fighting Daesh. Once liberated, the hard work begins in Mosul.

Defeating ISIS in Mosul does not automatically mean an end to the Muslim radical movements. These will continue to flourish as long as they are fed with hatred of Western civilization. We can defeat them militarily but we cannot eliminate the extremist ideology from the minds of the gullible dupes who joined Daesh since the summer of 2013.

In the Middle East, the media is focusing on a wider anti-Saudi plot by Iran supported by the Obama administration's decision to conclude a nuclear deal with Iran and lift sanctions. This move emboldened Iran to impose its will on the region.

Therefore the main winner will be Iran with hegemony over two of the most important Arab states namely Syria and Iraq, while Saudi Arabia and Turkey will have to lick their political wounds and concede their political defeat facing Iran. Iran's agenda includes strengthening its grip over Iraq and Syria and to keep Turkey and Saudi Arabia out.

The Middle East is in a state of permanent conflict, much of it is caused by the Iranian-Saudi rivalry and Iran's desire to meddle into the affairs of neighbouring Arab states.

The internal competing interests of Baghdad, the Kurdish North, Mosul politicians, the militias loyal to Iran and the Iraqi population will persist for years and escalating tension will continue.

Questions remain how to deal with the various militias loyal to Iraq, Iran, and Kurdistan and so on? Can they be integrated into the political process? Is there a super plan of reconciliation and unification?

Will Turkey and Iran play a constructive role in helping to rebuild Mosul and Iraq?

The loss of Mosul was a severe blow to Iraq. But why and how Mosul was occupied so swiftly by Daesh in June 2014? Why the Iraqi army did not fight Daesh? The answer can be found in an article I

wrote in the Huffington Post in June 2014. This is the link: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nehad-ismail/iraq-military_b_5499258.html

In a nut-shell the collapse of the Iraqi army was swift and shocking. The fall of Mosul was catastrophic. No one expected that the Iraqi army would disintegrate so fast after ISIS launched its offensive

Nouri al-Maliki the former Iraqi Prime Minister was blamed for the all of Mosul into the hands of ISIS. He purged the commanders he suspected of disloyalty, replacing them with officers whose qualifications were not military experience but sectarian affiliations and personal loyalty. The alienation of the Sunni element of Iraqi society, a third of the Iraqi population, has helped anti-government insurgents and made the collection of human intelligence in the Sunni areas extremely difficult

The bottom line is this:

For Iraq, the battle of Mosul is a testing ground for Iraqi factions to find a working formula and consensus for governance after Daesh. Reaching a power-sharing agreement between the different forces fighting for Mosul today, and protecting the local Sunni population will be critical for both the outcome of the battle and Iraq's future.

The real hard battle for Mosul will be in charting its political course after the military operations. If the various Iraqi players and the regional powers don't reach agreement, not only Mosul is doomed but Iraq itself. Iraq could be fragmented into three states; a Shi'a state, a Sunni state and a Kurdish state in the north - something a top Kurdish official suggested recently.

Nehad Ismail is a freelance writer and commentator on the Middle East, based in London