

Iraq Alert II: Support Iraq's call for good governance and accountable leadership

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The latest popular protests in central Iraq point to a general trend of crisis in political leadership. One year since the start of the military campaign by the International Coalition against ISIS (the International Coalition), national consensus and effective central governance in Iraq have become increasingly difficult due to the fragmentation of the Iraqi state and the dominance of regional players at the national level.

In this context, PAX calls for a localised approach on consensus-building and reconciliation in Iraq. A context-tailored approach towards good governance and accountable leadership is particularly relevant in the areas recently recaptured from ISIS. It is vital that local authorities are able to build responsive and inclusive governance structures in order to regain the trust of all communities affected by the struggle against ISIS. International actors can build on this momentum of national demands for change and restructuring of local governance in areas recaptured from ISIS by investing in efforts to plan for recovery and local reconciliation. This will facilitate the effective reintegration of the ISIS-affected governorates in Iraq's state model. Moreover, support of local governance can also provide useful examples for peace and security in other parts of Iraq that have been affected by the national mobilisation against ISIS and the displacement crisis. This Alert stresses the need for inclusive peacebuilding as an essential part of any political strategy, building on the previous PAX Iraq Alert¹ and the report After ISIS² in the context of the current popular protests in Iraq.

The EU, UNAMI, UN agencies, particularly UNDP, should engage with Iraqi civil society on demands for reforms by:

- Supporting popular demands for good governance and Prime Minister Al Abadi reform programs by demanding that proposed and promised reforms and replacement of corrupt politicians are put into action;
- Supporting the creation of local structures monitoring accountability, transparency and responsiveness;
- Assuring systematic inclusion of civil society and national actors in policy making; and
- Investing in local reconciliation efforts complementing national reconciliation policies.

The EU, UNAMI, UN agencies and the Working Group on Stabilisation of the International Coalition against ISIS should develop a peacebuilding plan, as part of a consistent political strategy, in areas recaptured from ISIS by:

- Using their leverage in Erbil and Baghdad to mitigate obstruction of provincial governing bodies, such as the provincial councils and governors, in particular the provincial councils in exile, in order to facilitate the rebuilding of strong and inclusive local governance representing communities of both Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those currently under ISIS control;
- Facilitating the rehabilitation of local governance structures, such as the Mosul Provincial Council, and empower these structures by allowing them to take a leading role in reconstruction efforts;
- Supporting and challenging local authorities to develop their own local, inclusive post-ISIS reconstruction plans in consultation with local civil society leaders and leaders of each of the local communities, which should ensure local ownership and increase effectiveness for successful and inclusive reconstruction;

¹ <http://www.paxvoorvrede.nl/media/files/iraq-alert-i-final.pdf>

² <http://www.paxvoorvrede.nl/media/files/pax-iraq-report--after-isis.pdf>

- Preparing with local and national civil authorities programs for future demobilization or integration of the numerous militias in the regular army or local security structures.
- Actively and systematically including civil society in policy consultations to facilitate mediation between militias, tribes and returning communities on the ground to avoid revenge, forced or denied return and renewed displacement; and
- Supporting humanitarian agencies to plan for a transition from humanitarian programming to recovery programming, not only focusing on reconstruction but also on reconciliation, compensation, social cohesion and truth finding.

REFORMS AND POPULAR PROTESTS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH IRAQ

The ongoing popular protests in various cities in central and south Iraq resemble the demonstrations in 2011 in Anbar and Baghdad calling for reform of the sectarian system. Although protests currently take place mainly in Shia-majority regions, the demonstrations have a remarkable non-sectarian character. The demands are the same as in 2011: a change of the post-2003 political elite and a call for political accountability. Iraqi civil society, initiating and strategizing the protests, has now received additional support from ordinary citizens who have lost patience with the rampant corruption and lack of services during the summer heat. The Al Abadi government's response to the demonstrations is different from that of former Prime Minister Al Maliki, who ordered the military to violently disperse the demonstrations. Al Abadi instead has announced reforms, generating support from the protestors.

The 11 August reforms approved by the Iraqi Parliament on eliminating certain government offices, anti-corruption measures and an end to the sectarian quota system are promising, but until now clear measures or concrete action on how to achieve these objectives are lacking. As shown in previous reform programs in 2006 and 2010, elimination of government offices does not necessarily end sectarian distribution or guarantee the protection of all segments of Iraqi society. Meanwhile, many Iraqi civil activists, organized as a 'civil movement', continue to demand a clear plan for a more accountable Iraqi leadership and a transparent judiciary system to address impunity in the country. Although these protests have remained peaceful, they are increasingly infiltrated and targeted by some of the militias and related political forces, particularly in the southern governorates of Basra and Babil, where the security situation has been deteriorating recently.

Despite the clear intentions of the protestors, it is feared that the protests and reforms will be subject to the ongoing power struggle among Shia political circles. Importantly, Iraqi Shia authority Sistani has shown support for the demonstrations, but so have many other stakeholders in order to be on the right side of popular demand. Many of the corrupt officials targeted by the protestors are members of Al Abadis governing Dawa party, affecting his power to effectively implement the reforms. As a result, he might be too weak to effectively implement the demands as his Dawa party remains in control of most Ministries and the Judiciary. Moreover, former PM Al Maliki has the assured support of the Iran-aligned militias, who are particularly strong in south Iraq. The various militias could use the popular protests by profiling their important role in the fight against ISIS as an alternative to corrupt politics. It is essential that the EU, UNAMI, and UN agencies remain in contact Iraq's various civil society actors to build on the genuine call of the demonstrators in order to prevent further escalation and to call upon the Iraqi authorities to guarantee the security and protection of its citizens during demonstrations.

NEWLY-ACCESSIBLE AREAS PREVIOUSLY UNDER CONTROL OF ISIS

Inclusive governance

It should be noted that national consensus and effective central reforms, although necessary, become increasingly difficult given the fragmentation of the Iraqi State and the presence of regional players at the national level. Security and political contexts differ greatly per region or governorate, with specific dynamics in the Kurdish region, the South, Baghdad or the ISIS-held areas, resulting in the fact that centralized political processes are not feasible and have little, or even counter-productive, impact on the ground. Therefore, PAX underscores the critical importance of reconciliation and reform at the local level to prevent the further weakening of social cohesion in Iraq and to ensure protection of civilians. Local authorities, in the governorates where ISIS has gained control, have been displaced for a year now and have recovered from the initial shock of the enormous ISIS assault in the summer of 2014. PAX has identified positive examples of local governance structures working from exile in other areas, including elements of IDP consultation, on peace and inclusivity once ISIS no longer controls their region.

For instance, the Mosul Provincial Council, with support from PAX and Iraqi Kurdish partner Al Mesalla, presented a post-ISIS reconstruction plan³ last June. This body is involved in consultations with IDP communities on their requirements for safe return to newly accessible areas. The statements of the head of the Provincial Council, Al Kiki, on reconciliation between Sunni Arab communities and communities targeted by ISIS are hopeful and deserve support.

Many affected communities, IDPs, communities returning to newly-accessible areas and communities under ISIS rule are now demanding an inclusive, representative and accountable leadership facilitating peace, security and development upon return. Consequently, local government representatives seek to rebuild trust and accountability towards their constituencies. It is exactly the lack of inclusive government and poor political representation that has enabled the growth of extremist groups such as ISIS. Messages and clear steps towards reconciliation and the prevention of revenge in areas recaptured on ISIS are vital to regain the trust of the Sunni Arab communities in particular. The international community should support the reconstruction and peacebuilding plans of these local authorities in areas recaptured from ISIS.

Policies for peaceful return

In this light, the Stabilization Working Group, established by the International Coalition, is an important tool for developing a political strategy, but this requires further cooperation with the EU and UN. The Stabilization Working Group can profit from consultations with local authorities and Iraqi and Kurdish civil society on the ground to develop locally-owned policies. Conflict hotspots in Sinjar, Kirkuk, Diyala and Salaheddin in particular require locally-tailored political strategies. Here, mitigation between Peshmerga, Shia and various other militias is vital to prevent renewed conflict and ensure the safe return of all affected communities. Members of the Stabilization Working Group can use their leverage in Erbil and Baghdad to ensure strong and effective leadership of local authorities in the newly accessible areas. An experience of particular importance is the mediation effort for peaceful return in Tikrit, Salaheddin. Tribal mediation with support of Iraqi civil society, supported by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), has resulted in the peaceful return of more than 12,000 families to Tikrit over the past few months⁴. These good practices of peaceful return and reconciliation require good governance and accountable leadership, and that is exactly what Iraq is calling for. The international community must support these efforts to prevent renewed conflict and ensure a peaceful transition.

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³ <http://almesalla.org/english/index.php/news/item/38-results-of-the-draft-plan-of-action-of-nineveh-province-council>

⁴ <http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/07/16/in-the-shadow-of-massacre-peaceful-return-in-iraq-part-i>