Iraq and the Situation in the Middle East

Iraq has become yet another burning trouble spot in the Middle East that weighs on everyone and is a threat to both regional and global security.

Today in Iraq a number of different axes of confrontation meet, those axes that can easily be observed both in the Middle East and in the world. The first axis is the confrontation between the jihadist Sunni forces and the moderate Shites and Sunnis, the latter favor a modernized society and peaceful coexistence with other religions. They do not impose their viewpoint on others around them, as opposed to the bloody terrorist of ISIL that make people live under a rigid set of rules that was unimaginable even in the Middle Ages.

Medieval Islam was by far more tolerant than the one acquired by the militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, since the Middle East has never witnessed such an unprecedented level of violence against both the Muslims and the followers of other religions before. ISIL militants use a set of religious misconceptions of Islam and the nature of an Islamic state. These views are in a sharp conflict with the national priorities of the Arabs.

These priorities are more in tune with Arab nationalism, patriotism and moderate Islam. The main concern among them - is to provide support to the Palestinian people. When events in Gaza took a bloody turn ISIL militants were not seen going to support the Palestinians, instead they were burning Palestinian flags. This situation occurred due to the fact that the Palestinians are planning to create a nation-state, instead of fighting for the establishment of a universal caliphate. Hence the supporters of the caliphate concept consider them traitors of the faith, that is why ISIL is acting against the national Palestinian struggle. It is ironic that such a force as ISIL, which is fighting against the West and, therefore, would have to join the movement against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, in fact helps this occupation.

The second axis of confrontation in Iraq - is the renewed military confrontation between the United States and the Islamists. Obama based his policy on the concept that the US was going to leave the region, he was going to abandon the policy of military activism so the United States wouldn’t intervene in Middle Eastern affairs any longer. But today Obama is presented with a number of attractive and humanistic pretexts for assisting minorities, such as the Yezidi Kurds who have suffered from the persecution of ISIL militants, and saving the Christian minorities, that is why he is interfering in the affairs of Iraq again. And although he promises that there will be no boots on the ground, the bombing is still a military intervention, even if he obtained official consent from Baghdad.

On the one hand, this may seem acceptable, since the fight against a common enemy is beneficial for all the parties involved. On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that there are some geopolitical interests behind these actions and that these interests are somehow related to oil production. A renowned British journalist Robert Fisk that has been living in Beirut for a quarter of a century stated that the level of oil production in Kurdistan, if ISIL militants don’t affect it, will reach 250 thousand barrels per day next year. Consequently, Kurdistan, whether is independent or as a part of Iraq, will enter the top ten richest oil states in the world. It seems that this piece of cake is worth defending.
Fisk asks a rhetorical question: has anybody told Barack Obama that this military operation is based on oil interests and why the United States has ultimately failed in protecting Iraqi Christians? Until 2003, just before the NATO invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi Christian community was as large as 1.4 million people. On the eve of the ISIL invasion there were only 350 Christians left in Iraq. During this decade the NATO coalition and the United States did nothing to protect the Christians who were fleeing Iraq in large numbers. Therefore if American politicians are going to pretend that humanitarian considerations are put at the forefront, this won’t actually be true. Of course, if the forces of ISIL are going to suffer a serious blow, this would be beneficial for everyone. However, Washington recognizes that the fight against ISIL will take time. And it is clear that aerial bombardment alone cannot destroy a movement like ISIL, and the National Army of Iraq and the Kurdish units of Peshmerga are not prepared for such a fight. At the same time, the primary weakness of ISIL is the absence of aerial support.

Now there is information that the citizens of certain Middle Eastern states have been sympathizing with ISIL. Yet Saudi Arabia official authorities oppose ISIL, there can be no second opinion about that. Moreover, the ruling elite of Saudi Arabia is fairly afraid of these militants. However, among the Saudi population there’s strong public support for the ISIL movement. The are no fools among the leaders of ISIL, they know how to manipulate national feelings of certain Muslims, when there’s a religious basis underneath. In particular, the Muslim minority of Rohingya that has been has been persecuted by the majority in Burma was mentioned in one sermon of the ISIL leaders. It’s not surprising that Rohingya are now sympathizing with ISIL since they now have a power that supports and protects them.

What is not really confusing in this situation is that the US forces that are now waging war on ISIL are refusing to notice the obvious. Why is the leader of the ISIL Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was pronouncing a sermon for an hour and a half in the biggest mosque of Mosul, not targeted by the US Air Force? We all know how other militants were killed, whether bin Laden or Dudayev, every step of which is carefully tracked. Did Western intelligence fail to provide the report or was there was no way of striking the target? Hence, a question arises: can ISIL be be beneficial to someone's forces that are pretending to fight against it?

The third axis of confrontation – a confrontation between a number of states in the Middle East and Syria. What would happen if the Americans or any other force decided to strike ISIL in Syria? It’s a cross-border organization, hence such attacks on this pseudo-caliphate will be merely a continuation of the military operation in Iraq. However, it is worth noting that the Iraqi officials are supporting these strikes, and the Syrian ones would hardly agree to do so – no. You can ask yet another logical question, given the pathological desire of the White House to see the government of Bashar al-Assad go: Will the US officials be tempted to strike the positions of the Syrian army instead of those of the ISIL? This would be a direct intervention in the Syrian conflict and an open attempt at a regime change.

The Iraqi government has been changed, Nouri al-Maliki was forced to leave under strong pressure from the West and the Sunni regimes in the Arab world. The new government, according to the plan of those who had forced Maliki to step down, must unite Sunnis, Shites and Kurds to create preconditions for the unification of all patriotic forces in Iraq. Regional Sunni Arabs would like the new Iraqi government to change the official Iraqi position on Syria. Russia strongly favors Iraq as a unified state and, of course, it will support all steps to preserve the unity of Iraq. Will these steps be successful, and to what extent will Iraq go to change its position on Syria – those are the big questions.

In this regard, the Kurds can be a unifying force. However, it should be remembered that above all they care about their own interests. Kurds live in a region that has already been enjoying broad rights, but the Kurds will seek even greater autonomy. They can get more representation in the central executive government in Iraq (by the way, most of them are Sunni Muslim), which provide them an additional reason to defend the unity of Iraq. Besides, the war with ISIL is the unifying factor, because Kurds alone will have a hard time resisting this enemy. Kurds – are a force that will both in Iraq and in Syria be fighting consistently against jihadists, but they need external support.

I think that Russia will continue to support the unity of Iraq, but it has long-standing connections with the Kurdish movement, since the days of Mustafa Barzani. Russia, as one might expect, will continue to work in these two fields, supporting the official Iraqi government, including military contracts, and on the other hand – promoting its relations with the Kurds.

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