Assessing the situation in Iraq

As we approach April 30, 2014, the date of parliamentary elections in Iraq, the military and political situation in the country continues to deteriorate more and more. Its main feature – the growing wave of terrorist attacks, especially in Baghdad and the western Al-Anbar Province, a stronghold of the Sunni resistance, as well as the central and northern provinces of Salah ad-Din, Nineveh and the eastern province of Diyala. The terrorist attacks in these regions are a daily reality. Only in the capital city, 12-15 terrorist attacks occur every day, mostly by car bomb explosions in residential neighborhoods and on the streets during processions of armed guards. In Mosul and its suburbs, the most “popular” explosions are during funeral processions near the Shiite mosques, which lead to the deaths of several dozen people. Then there is the strafing of vehicles with machine guns and RPGs, and attacks on checkpoints of the Iraqi army and security forces.

In Al-Anbar Province, de facto, there are no authorities representing the Shiite government of Baghdad, as the real power belongs to the Sunni tribal leaders, relying on strong support from Sunni armed groups. The autonomy regime is installed there when the internal affairs of local clans being decided by the local sheikhs and not by the central government. Foreigners can come here only being accompanied by large army units with armored vehicles.

However, Baghdad authorities are not seeking conciliation or compromise with the Sunnis, preferring to deal with them by means of periodic military operations against militants and armed groups, or through air attacks via helicopters. Thus, these are not attempts to begin the process of internal reconciliation. There is a tendency observed that this western part of Iraq will follow the path of separation from the country, and the formation of own state enclave, followed by a declaration of independence. Moreover, it is possible that mainly Sunni provinces of Salah ad-Din and Nineveh will become part of this state. This will lead to the disintegration of Iraq as a unified state, especially given that the Kurds, who have their autonomy in the north, are eager to proclaim their independence, and are only waiting for the right moment to do it.

Of course, all these centrifugal processes are not as simple as they seem at first glance. Especially because Baghdad is facing a serious problem, which historically was a Sunni city, but later, with the outbreak of war with Iran, and then under international sanctions after Saddam's occupation of Kuwait in 1991, Shiite refugees flooded into the capital, and it is now difficult to say what denomination prevails – Sunni or Shiite. In any case, the Shiites do not intend to give it up, and the Sunnis will not concede.

This is the reason of the fierce terrorist war in the Iraqi capital, where every day dozens of people, mostly civilians, are killed by terrorist attacks. A single Baghdad, as such, does not exist. Almost all government agencies, members of the Government House and other senior officials, the diplomatic mission of many foreign countries are situated in the “Green Zone” in the heart of the city, where the entrance is possible only by special cards after a thorough inspection. Life is relatively calm there, except for the regular mortar attacks. The rest of the city is the so-called “Red Zone”, where safety is practically not guaranteed. This gap between the two parts of the Iraqi capital keeps growing.

The residents of the “Red Zone” simply hate the inhabitants of the “Green Zone” for their relatively prosperous existence. Ultimately, this can lead to an explosion, when the bulk of the population of Baghdad will simply destroy the boundary between zones by resorting to armed attack.
Situation in the south of the country is significantly quieter as the Shiites dominate there. Here there are certain difficulties associated with the presence of a dozen disparate political parties. Today in Iraq, there are about 270 different parties, regardless of affiliation to a particular faith. Shiites are divided into more than 150 supporters of different parties. Even the largest three of them cannot find a common language, although they belong to a single ruling coalition.

Recently, supporters of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) led by Hakim and Muqtada Sadr's movement, with his Mahdi Army, began to depart from those who actively support the current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the representative of the Shiite party Dawa. All of these do not have so much differences in political views or ideological orientation, but rather the desire to get more power and important positions, which give access to the financial resources of the state, primarily, the income from oil exports and distribution of profitable orders and contracts for the recovery of the economy and the supply of food. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Prime Minister al-Maliki goes to Basra to attend an important event, when the governor of the second largest city of Iraq, belonging to the same ruling coalition, is away on a trip. Thus, if these three basic forces do not reach an agreement among themselves before April 30, the Shiite alliance will fall apart, and then, after the parliamentary elections, it will be impossible to form a Shiite coalition government. This has already happened once before, when al-Maliki for almost one year worked on the distribution of ministerial posts in order to announce the composition of his cabinet. Then the Sunni and secular parties and organizations will certainly take advantage of this situation, and try to make an alliance with the Kurds and Shiites. Subsequently, another political chaos will arise in Iraq, which could lead to a new civil war – especially, when we consider that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE are actively funding the Sunnis, including militants and terrorists, pushing them to the maximum resistance against the Shiites, the latter being pro-Iranian. Iran is the main rival of the GCC countries in the Persian Gulf. It is worth mentioning that the country is an ally of Syria and Iraq, and is preventing the Arabian monarchies from completing the process of establishing their rule over the Arab world by means of the “color revolutions”.

In Kurdistan also, although externally it seems stable, a real unity is not observed. While the main political parties – the KDP and PUK argued among themselves for influence, the Kurdish Islamists moved to first place, reversing the balance of power. Especially, since the PUK is on the verge of splitting up, and its leader, the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani is dying from a serious illness.

A difficult period is in store for Iraq and the new military and political upheavals have placed the country on the brink of collapse. If this happens, the whole region will receive a major shock, which can change its entire political map and the alignment of forces. In this context, Iran is an island of stability, especially, given that Tehran has agreed in Geneva on its nuclear program with the international “Six”, and started the process of political normalization with the United States.

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