Iraq at War (Again)

Perspectives and options for
a long-term counter-terrorism
and counter violent extremism
strategy in Iraq

Clingendael Report

Grégory Chauzal
Sofia Zavagli

Clingendael
Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Clingendael
Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Iraq at War (Again)

Perspectives and options for a long-term counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism strategy in Iraq

Grégory Chauzal
Sofia Zavagli

Clingendael Report
March 2016

About the authors

Grégory Chauzal is a Senior Research Fellow in the Security and Terrorism division of the Clingendael Institute with a special emphasis on the Maghreb-Sahel and the Middle East.

Sofia Zavagli works as Research Assistant in the Security and Terrorism division of the Clingendael Institute with special emphasis on the MENA region.

The Clingendael Institute
P.O. Box 93080
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

Email: info@clingendael.nl
Website: http://www.clingendael.nl/

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

While the United States' (US) involvement was officially over in 2011, the raise of the Islamic State (ISIL) in Iraq has redrawn attention and prompted a new US-led operation in Iraq (operation 'Inherent Resolve'). After more than a year of targeted air-strikes on the group and a coalition encompassing over 60 countries around the globe, including the Netherlands, this report casts a light on the state of the conflict and what can be achieved in terms of Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programmes within the current military efforts. The authors examine the available entry points and the local scenarios likely to be impacted in the medium/long term. Among the plethora of possible solutions, this report highlights the following provisions as being paramount: Measures of confidence and bottom-up trust building between communties and representatives and between the centre and periphery; Security Sector Reform (SSR) with a special emphasis on the Peshmerga forces, control over international assistance; discussion over a political roadmap; reinforcement of the state apparatus, both in Baghdad (PM Abadi's government) and Erbil (support to the Ministry of the Peshmerga and to the effort to free the Peshmerga forces from political interferences), investment in education and monitoring the post-conflict reconstruction process. The international efforts have to take into account regional political agendas and the diplomatic deal at play in the country (regarding, for instance, the Russian pro-activism and the Iran-Turkey's long-standing divergent interests).

1 Introduction

In response to the continuing insecurity in Iraq (and Syria) and the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an international coalition was set up at the invitation of the Iraqi governement in December 2014 to support the Iraqi forces in their mission to halt ISIL advances and defeat the organization, as well as to restore stability in the region. The operation's mandate was defined as an effort by the United States and partner nations in the region and around the globe 'to eliminate the terrorist group ISIL and the threat they pose to Iraq, the region and the wider international community'.[1] The focus on 'degrading and destroying'[2] ISIL might, however, be too narrow and may not address the breeding-ground conditions that ISIL and related movements exploit. This issue, making a military intervention part of a broader approach, is not new. Hence the focus of this report – moving beyond the immediate military threats posed by ISIL – addresses the broader aspect of a sustainable stabilization of Iraq and the potential role of and for any longer-term counter-terrorism (CT) and counter violent extremism (CVE) strategy. It is clear that the U.S.-led military operation '*Inherent Resolve*' does not currently contain these objectives and elements.

In order to provide a deeper insight into this challenge, this Clingendael Report first explores the current situation in Iraq and the Kurdish province. It then focuses on the foreign military efforts deployed in Iraq and in the Kurdistan region, where the international community strongly supports the fight of the Peshmerga (the military forces of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan) against ISIL. In a medium-term perspective, the report goes on to explore options for transitioning from a military campaign to a stabilization strategy that concurrently encompasses CT tools and CVE programmes. As the situation in Iraq is volatile at both the political and security levels, the report goes on to list the scenarios and main obstacles that could question, at local and regional levels, the implementation of a long-term stabilization strategy. Finally, the report's conclusions highlight the major entry points and recommendations for a sustainable stabilization involvement in Iraq.

---

1   'Iraq and Syria Operation Against ISIL Designated as Operation Inherent Resolve', US Central Command, 15 October 2014, available online at http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/iraq-and-syria-ops-against-isil-designated-as-operation-inherent-resolve.
2   The expression was used by US President Barack Obama in September 2014.

2 The Iraqi Political and Security Quandary: Behind the Scenes of a Renewed International Involvement

After eight years of Shiite-led government in Baghdad from 2006 to 2014, Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki stepped down in 2014 in favour of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, from the same State of Law Coalition (SLC).[3] Although a Shiite, Abadi's political profile differs from that of his predecessor. The new prime minister has a nationalistic and pro-West posture, which detaches him from the Iran-supported parties, which are fairly influential in Baghdad today, and makes him a minority within the SLC majority. As the new leader, Abadi was immediately confronted with two main challenges: on the one hand by a new radical Islamist group, ISIL, which officially split from al-Qaeda in February 2014, and on the other by socio-political distress, which translated into various protests all over Iraq. Prime Minister Abadi aimed for major political reforms (including a fight against corruption and the elimination of excess government positions), the introduction of economic austerity measures and the creation of a National Guard.[4] These promises could not be implemented because of opposition in the Iraqi Parliament and overall political deadlock, which limited the political coalition and in particular Prime Minister Abadi's ability to make changes.[5]

Iraqi diplomacy has furthermore also been put to the test by the handling of various – at many times conflicting – interests of occasional allies and opponents. In September 2015, Russia decided, for instance, to establish an Intelligence Unit in Baghdad to share

---

[3] The SLC, of which both current Prime Minister Abadi and former Prime Minister Maliki are members, was created in 2009 by Nouri al-Maliki. It has not attracted any of the most significant Shiite organizations (for example, the Sadr Movement), but it has managed to include the historic Dawa Party, which was founded in 1957.

[4] The creation of a National Guard faces opposition from both Shiite factions (which will see their grip on the Shiite militias diminished) and from Sunni factions, protesting the inclusion of a de-Ba'athification clause in the draft law approving the creation of the National Guard. See R. Sprich, 'Iraqi Cabinet Approves Draft Law to Set Up National Guard', Reuters, 3 February 2015, available online at http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-guard-idUSKBN0L70ZT20150203.

[5] K.H. Sowell, 'Abadi's Failed Reforms', Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 November 2015, available online at http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=62004.

information with Moscow's allies in the region, Iran and Syria.[6] As a consequence, the Shiite factions[7] asked for Russian direct intervention in the war against ISIL, overtly criticizing a year-long US-led airstrikes' campaign and Prime Minister Abadi's Western-oriented strategy. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has intensely expanded its foreign influence, especially to neighbouring countries with Shiite populations. Not surprisingly, Iranian presence in the region is paralleled by Sunni Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates,[8] which poorly support some factions within the Iraqi government but are also suspected for their connections with some of the armed groups on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, another prominent actor in Iraq, Turkey, has deployed military troops near Mosul as part of the Coalition training efforts, in Kurdistan Province. Turkey, wary of Kurdish developments that may lead to a *de facto* Kurdistan, has to choose between different agendas for its involvement: the defense of Turkish national interests, the defeating of ISIL – for which Kurdish support is essential, or the need to prevent the establishment of a independent Kurdish State in its immediate 'backyard'. Despite the official reaction to its deployment,[9] Turkey's move has increased tensions with Tehran-supported actors in Baghdad.

Together with Iraq's internal political tensions, Turkey's and Iran's competing agendas in Kurdistan are one obstacle to the easing of relations, both within Kurdistan and between Kurdistan Province's capital Erbil and Baghdad. For Western partners active in the region, these proxy interferences mainly prevent the building of an accepted strategy that is able to address the region's ballooning security threats. In the short-term, Turkey–Iran proxy competition could exacerbate the already divided efforts among anti-ISIL contributing members.

---

6   The development of the Intelligence Unit cell has stalled because of political differences; see 'Iraq Situation Report, December 8–14, 2015', Institute for the Study of War, available online at http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-5U2PRy3CsHc/Vm9d9MKhxNI/AAAAAAAAFCQ/QXZZP7RgdXM/s1600/iraq%2BSITREP%2B2015-12-14%2Bhigh.png.

7   Major Shiite parties are the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the Sadrist Movement and the Dawa Party.

8   See for instance: S. Mabon, Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and rivalry in the Middle East, IB Tauris: London, 2015.

9   Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, however, said that the troops were there as part of an on-going training mission at the request of Mosul's governor and in coordination with Iraq's Defence Ministry: 'No one should arrive at wrong conclusions from our support. Turkey is not after any country's soil'. See 'Iraq Summons Turkey Ambassador over Troop "Incursion"', *Al Jazeera*, 5 December 2015, available online at http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/iraq-demands-withdrawal-turkish-troops-mosul-151205061510572.html.

In the Kurdistan region, and after almost a decade of partisan arrangements, the two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), have strongly contested each other and now face the organized opposition of the new *Gorran* party.[10] KDP President Masoud Barzani's hold on power of the Iraqi Kurdistan region beyond the expiration date of his presidential mandate has already led to violent protests in the region which could undermine the forthcoming 2017 parliamentary elections.

At the military level, even if the Peshmerga are now under the official authority of the Kurdish government and the *Gorran*-led Ministry of the Peshmerga, some brigades remain largely dependent on the KDP's and PUK's political agenda (and money). Albeit strongly supported by the international community, the Kurdish militias[11] also follow their own strategic agendas in the region (that is, pursuing their respective parties' interests), as the recent events in Sinjar illustrated (Kurdish territorial expansion and inter-community fights between Yazidis and Arabs). These self-interested tactics are one major source of tensions with the authorities in Baghdad, who criticize challenges to the *status quo ante* in the disputed territories.[12]

Kurdistan is a desirable territory because of its geographic location and apparent economic prosperity. Indeed, Turkey and Iran each support one of the two main political parties (the KDP and PUK, respectively) and invest a lot of resources in the region's economy. These competing interferences could affect Iraq's unity and deliberations on long-term stabilization.

---

10   An opposition party born in 2009 to support the popular protests against the two historic political parties.

11   Apart from the Peshmerga forces, which are both government-controlled and party-controlled, it is remarkable that there are extra-Peshmerga forces, such as, for instance, Kosrat Rasoul's militia and Dhiza Tiror militia led by Jalal Talabani's eldest son.

12   Erbil and Baghdad are arguing over the so-called 'disputed territories', which were inherited from the 2003 US invasion (Green Line). With the exception of Kirkuk (the only Iraqi city to be officially mentioned in the Constitution as a disputed territory), other areas are not specifically defined, as the Iraqi government always refused to define the boundaries of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and vice versa.

3 International Military Cooperation in Iraq/ Kurdistan

Foreign cooperation is today characterized by a concentration of means to support (i.e., to train, equip and assist) the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Kurdish militias (Peshmerga) actively involved on the ground. The long-term CT and CVE goals, however, imply more than a 'simple' kinetic approach.[13]

a) *Kurdistan and the international community: The winner takes all*
The Kurdish region is at the frontline of the fight against ISIL in the Middle East (as shown by Highway 47, which connects Iraq to the Syrian city of Raqqa, ISIL's *de facto* capital). Moreover, contrary to the divided ISF, the Peshmerga are a better-trained and greater united corps.

The initial choice made by the United States and the international coalition to fight ISIL without committing boots on the ground, but instead by empowering local forces and letting them fight concretely on the battlefield, had the direct

---

13 In general, CVE emphasizes prevention rather than reaction. When adopting a CVE approach, appropriate prevention strategies are essential, since this reduces the necessity to resort to both intervention and reaction strategies. Adequate prevention can be realized through the empowerment of civil societies by means of local initiatives that incorporate dialogues between and among civil-society actors, such as activists, survivors and victims' groups. In doing this, 'communities [are able] to engage each other in a free and open atmosphere'. This could be done, for instance, by allowing them to formulate narratives on violent extremism and to participate in the security apparatus. Ultimately, by incorporating civil-society actors into policy-making processes on CVE, it increases the legitimacy of such policies through the facilitation of dialogues. See A. Aly, A.M. Balbi and C. Jacques, 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Implementing the Role of Civil Society', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2015), pp. 58–59. More recently, as emphasized in the February 2015 Summit in Washington on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and, later, in December 2015 with the adoption of a UN-sponsored CVE Action Plan, 'there is a need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only on-going, essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism that have given rise to the emergence of these new and more virulent groups'. In the context of the current proliferation of extremist organizations in the Middle East region, the United Nations recommends that each member state develops 'a National Plan of Action to prevent Violent Extremism, which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism', 'in a multidisciplinary manner' where foreign expertise could be of great assistance to local authorities.

consequence of channelling huge flows of unmonitored money and weapons.[14] This is particularly true for the Peshmerga, who, notwithstanding the efforts of the Ministry of Peshmerga to coordinate these flows, have received large quantities of unmonitored resources. The Peshmerga forces' empowerment, as a result of the received resources, could in turn lead to unintended consequences: further power imbalance in Iraq and a stronger bid for Kurdish independence (see below). The United States tends to favour their military relationships with the Peshmerga forces, partly because of the difficulties they regularly encountered in their cooperation with Baghdad, where Shiite factions in both the government and the Iraqi Parliament currently oppose US robust intervention.[15]

b) *The Netherlands' contribution to international military efforts*
As part of the international coalition for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the Netherlands has been militarily involved in Iraq since October 2014, with 130 operatives training the Peshmerga forces in Erbil and the ISF in Baghdad. Demand-driven programmes led by the Dutch military include a basic training course and a train-the-trainer class for the Peshmerga.

In Baghdad, where 30 Dutch trainers are deployed together with other Western partners as part of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Iraq, the Netherlands is playing a leading role in commando training for the special forces. Dutch actions also include an 'equip' dimension, with non-lethal assistance such as anti-improvised explosive device (IED) materiel and medical supplies.

---

14   See 'Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict', International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report no. 158*, 12 May 2015, available online at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf.

15   For one example of U.S.'s difficulties to work with Baghdad, see for instance M.R. Gordon, 'Iraq Declines Offer of US Helicopters for Fight Against ISIS, Pentagon Chief Says', *New York Times*, 16 December 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/world/middleeast/ashton-carter-iraqi-officials-isis.html.

4 The Need and Opportunity for a Long-Term Stabilization Strategy: The Grounds for a CT and a CVE Approach

The fight against ISIL is pivotal to Iraq's current security and future stability. In a hypothetical ISIL-weakened scenario, a first step to building confidence would be for the defence forces and local governments to agree on a joint starting point for further steps as regards political and military strategies.

The following sections will briefly present the actions undertaken by the international community in Iraq, especially in the Kurdistan region, and then discuss those areas and niches where there is possible room for intervention, along the lines of a long-term stabilization approach with elements of CVE and CT, by the international community in general and by Dutch components in particular. Whilst the authors are aware of the fact that several of the recommended steps are quite comprehensive and will require substantial progress, it is important to take them into account and to assess when, where and how elements of such strategies can be adopted in the process of moving from the military approach to an approach that focuses more strongly on the political process.

In the Iraqi context, a 'soft power campaign against the Islamic State'[16] would benefit from a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach, that encompasses key aspects of long-term stabilization. Among those aspects for long-term stabilization and in particular in view of the level of impact the conflict has had – job creation, education, medical diplomacy and infrastructure redevelopment are important components. To do so, the main stakeholders (that is, the government, local authorities and the civil organizations involved) would have to agree on a joint understanding of the problems they are facing and on prioritizing the main issues that need to be addressed and how. A joint understanding of these issues and steps is a key requirement for any politically grounded approach that will guide the way forward. National and local authorities will have to play a role in this, and ideally take the lead, in order to initiate a broadly accepted political roadmap that is able to implement effectively a CVE strategy, which indeed

---

16   J. Stavridis, 'Killing the Islamic State Softly', *Foreign Policy*, 28 December 2015, available online at
     http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/28/killing-the-islamic-state-softly/.

needs the full support of the local authorities and all of the relevant actors, nationally and locally. International support would ideally further strengthen this locally owned trajectory. This scenario could act as the first step of an engagement strategy towards effective implementation of an agreed CVE plan.

Building on experience elsewhere, the following principles would also have to be taken into account in a long-term CT–CVE strategy for contemporary Iraq:

a) *The fundamental prerequisite of a long-term CT–CVE programme relies on building trust among the actors who will be the protagonists of the future stabilization of Iraq.* Theoretically speaking, the main domains to be addressed in the context of a CVE campaign revolve around specific areas to be addressed in a multilateral and multi-stakeholder way. In Iraq, as well as in most other scenarios, the main pillar of an effective CVE strategy is building trust between communities and between the communities and the state. Trust-building measures should be generally able: (i) to restore the people's confidence in their political representatives at both the national and the local levels; (ii) to foster inclusiveness of all the political, military and community-relevant parties; (iii) to pave the way to a real and viable national reconciliation process as part of a transitional justice system.

In the Iraqi context, local, regional and national political leaders, religious representatives, youth, women, civil-society organizations and minorities (including Kurds, Yazidis, Turkmen and Sunni/Shia/Christian Arabs, etc.) should be part of a preliminary dialogue with the long-term objective of adopting a consensual and broad-based stabilization strategy.

One method envisages the sponsoring of a transitional justice process, engaging both the central authorities and the war-affected communities. Building on their experience and lessons learned in Afghanistan (in Kunduz and in Uruzgan province), the Dutch authorities – within the U.S.-led International Coalition – could make a valuable input here to give some practical guidelines and to contribute to an inclusive and effective process, although this is a long, politically sensitive and uncertain process that requires the buy-in from all parties.

In an ISIL-free scenario, the cities will have to be reconstructed.[17] This reconstruction phase represents the first step to gain the trust of the population and persuade them to return to their homesteads. The international community's support of the

---

17   1,500,000 internally displaced persons and 850,000 Iraqi refugees from Ninewe are currently in the KRI; see '2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Iraq', UNHCR, available online at http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html; and J. Zarlingo, 'Iraq. Sinjar, quale liberazione?', *Osservatorio Iraq*, 5 December 2015, available online at http://www.osservatorioiraq.it/approfondimenti/iraq-sinjar-quale-liberazione.

the Iraqi armed forces is essential in that context, not only to achieve the liberation of the cities and harmonize the general conduct of the operations (including convoy escorts for internally displaced persons (IDPs), but also to help with the reallocation of funds. Members of the International Coalition might have a moderating and advisory role to play here in facilitating better dialogue among Baghdad, Erbil and civil-society actors (including religious leaders, youth associations, elders and women, etc.).[18] The International Coalition could also play a role in addressing other issues related to equal access to services (e.g. health, education, etc.) that experienced a breakdown during the conflict and promote collaboration among Iraqi organizations.

Moreover, the concerted action of Iraqi authorities and international partners could also prevent or dampen any attempt by some Iraqi and/or Kurdish forces to exploit the situation for their own particular gains. The Kurdish military, for instance, is likely to promote its own interests in areas with Sunni Arab populations, such as Ninewa, Salaheddin, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces.[19]

The next section will focus on Kurdistan, where the Peshmerga forces are considered by the international community to be a viable entry point for the CVE strategy, if dealt with appropriately.

b) *Long-term CT and CVE missions imply better-trained and better-controlled military and security forces, particularly in the case of Kurdistan.*
A CVE strategy may also foresee a transformation of the military apparatus. Although long and complex, such a process remains essential in the Iraqi context where militias are still strongly dependent on political agendas.

The continuing war scenario bears the risk of the formation of '*warring statelets*' or 'para-sovereignty' systems where security brigades control territories and assert their authority over the population. One alternative, the creation of a National Guard under the supervision of a concerted command that unifies the fragmented entities on the ground, has been considered by Iraq's Prime Minister Abadi. However, the creation of a National Guard along sectarian lines, albeit unified, might lead to the

---

18 J. Yarwood, *Urban Planning after War, Disaster and Disintegration: Case Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

19 For instance, they recently made sure to liberate Sunni Arab-populated areas only after reaching deals with local leaders; see 'Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict', International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report no. 158*, 12 May 2015, p. 24, available online at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/ Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf.

'Hezbollahization' of Iraq,[20] where not only politics but also the army would be strictly linked to religious/ethnic rivalries.[21]

The challenges in the case of Iraq are the need for better trained and equipped brigades and for a more unified chain of command (i.e. less dependent from foreign political agendas). A risk for international support in the absence of measures as suggested, is the negative diversion of Western supplies. A first step for improving the impact of international support could be to focus only on those brigades that are under the command of the Ministry of the Peshmerga, so as to prompt political willingness to cooperate on a political roadmap.[22] This is likely to be a major challenge, especially since the Peshmerga are one of the strongest anti-ISIL forces in Iraq, but they are not the only one. Shiite militias also represent powerful counter-ISIL forces, but the international partners have more room for manoeuvre with the Peshmerga than with Iran-supported militias.

As already noted, Kurdistan is not extraneous for foreign interferences. Historically, geographical proximity and Kurdish human continuum with Turkey are core factors in Ankara's interest in the northern Iraqi region.[23] For domestic reasons, especially related to Turkey's fight against the Kurdish Workers' Party's (PKK), Ankara significantly strengthened its ties with President Barzani's Turkish-friendly KDP. Now, more than ever, this strategic alliance is essential for Turkey, that seeks to prevent by all mean the creation of a unified Kurdish state stretching from Erbil to the Syrian Kurdish stronghold of Rojava.

---

20 The National Guard project recently met with fierce opposition from the Shiite factions in Baghdad, who officially fear the empowerment of Sunni militias (and the return of another Saddam era), but informally refuse to share the power that they have gained in recent years since the 2003 US invasion (including a majority in the Iraqi Parliament, overt support from Iran, and control over the rentier system and over the militias). Recent discussion also revolved around the reimplementation of the Arab Awakening in the current situation. However, this appears highly unlikely because of several factors: the protracted state of war; the increased complexity of the situation on the ground (including the rise of the Shiite militias, empowerment of the Peshmerga and regionalization of the Iraqi conflict); and an irreversible trust deficit between the Sunni tribes and Maliki's inherited polarized government.

21 M. Knights, 'The Long Haul: Rebooting US Security Cooperation in Iraq', The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2015, p. 56, available online at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus137_Knights4.pdf.

22 'Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict', International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report no. 158*, 12 May 2015, p. 30, available online at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf.

23 See for instance: A. Balci, Energized Neighborliness: Relations between Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government, Seta: Istanbul, 2014.

Iran's choice to support the Kurdish PUK was dictated by its strategic interest in positioning itself as an alternative to the KDP's ideologically-based proximity to Ankara. In this way, Iran has made a powerful ally that is also in direct contact with the Syrian fighting group, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). In doing so, Iran is also harnessing Turkey in Syria and consolidating its Iraqi base within the mostly Shiite south, through which Tehran can channel men and weapons to Damascus, the Syrian capital. Notwithstanding community tensions in the region, the Peshmerga also need to aim at including local populations in their mission and in their recruitment process, in order: (i) to reflect the diversity of the northern region; (ii) to enlarge their local base; and (iii) to prevent ethnic tensions that might lead to local grievances and the rise of discontent and radical behaviours.

c) *CT and CVE strategies implie a post-conflict security sector reform*
While progressively disarming the militias and selecting those that might be part of a unified regional or Iraqi defence and security apparatus, efforts should focus on the Iraqi 'culture of war' and the need to establish alternative messages with the support of the main representative groups. Although the political process is paramount, it should not be forgotten that the current situation is empowering some actors over others. As noted by James Cockayne, armed groups and other harmful organizations 'use gaps in states' capacity to create competitive advantage'.[24] This point was already raised in the Libyan case, where the armed groups 'are shaping the transition […], generating conflicts that may be hard to end decisively, and weakening the central State by limiting its reach and corrupting its key institutions – at a time when a key requirement is to consolidate institutions of statehood'.[25]

As part of a broader post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding process, giving CT and CVE functions to reformatted security and military forces can become an objective of its own. To reach this stage, the overall process first needs a political agreement among the main (political and security) actors involved on: (i) the groups and units that are eligible; (ii) the steps and timeline of the transition; and (iii) the agreed 'exit options' for all of the actors involved in the process. In the Iraqi context, this entails the support of the Iraqi Parliament, the neutrality of regional allies, and effective resource allocation by international partners (that is, not only those

---

24 J. Cockayne, 'Chasing Shadows: Strategic Responses to Organized Crime in Conflict-Affected Situations', *RUSI Journal* no. 158, 28 April 2013, p. 13, available online at http://www.globalinitiative.net/download/general/global/Cockayne%20-%20Chasing%20Shadows%20May%202013.pdf.

25 M. Shaw and F. Mangan, 'Illicit Trafficking and Libya's Profits and Losses', United States Institute for Peace, February 2014, p. 6, available online at http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW96-Illicit-Trafficking-and-Libyas-Transition.pdf.

concentrated in the Kurdistan region) to boost positive incentives for demilitarizing the armed factions, as outlined below:

- Militia confinement: building on widespread experience with DDR processes, and in order to facilitate their disarmament and identify the forms of their possible future reintegration, militias need to be gathered in cantonment sites, under the technical and security supervision of international experts and according to a clear roadmap agreed upon by all of the groups (dealing with the issues of their preliminary disarmament, the material conditions of the gathering, and the security of their families and of their affiliates). The need for comprehensiveness and equal treatment is essential here in order to avoid the risk for some groups to opt out and to perpetuate the security quandary. For instance, reforming the Peshmerga without addressing the presence of extra-Peshmerga militias will undermine the whole transition effort. However, the existential link between these militias and politically/economically powerful factions could make the dialogue with them much easier than expected and lead to an affordable residual threat.

   In parallel, joint patrols could help to ensure security in the liberated areas (including the safe return of the 1,500,000 internally displaced persons[26] or 850,000 Iraqi refugees from Ninewe currently in the Kurdistan region)[27] and to prevent any attempt by the militias to regroup.

- Disarmament: In a post-conflict phase, the disarmament of factions is essential in order to either facilitate their reintegration within the state's apparatus (in both the military and the civil services), or in civilian life. This process needs, first and foremost, mutual agreement among all the interested parties (that is, the militias and the public authorities in Erbil and in Baghdad) on the number of militiamen to disarm and the future of the disarmed militias within the security forces, state services and the private sector.

- Reintegration of the militiamen: in contrast to past failed reintegration initiatives (for example, the so-called 'Awakening')[28], Prime Minister Abadi's less sectarian posture could be beneficial for initiating a more inclusive process of reintegration, as well as for raising awareness of the risks of an incomplete disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process on

---

26 '2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Iraq', UNHCR, available online at http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html.

27 J. Zarlingo, 'Iraq. Sinjar, quale liberazione?', *Osservatorio Iraq*, 5 December 2015, available online at http://www.osservatorioiraq.it/approfondimenti/iraq-sinjar-quale-liberazione.

28 For instance, the main reason why the 'Awakening' process did not work on a long-term basis was the refusal by al-Maliki's government to integrate the Sunni fighters that helped the United States to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2007–2008 into the public apparatus. See A. Khedery, 'Why We Stuck with Maliki — and Lost Iraq', *Washington Post*, 3 July 2014, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-stuck-with-maliki--and-lost-iraq/2014/07/03/0dd6a8a4-f7ec-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html.

future stability. The diplomatic momentum represented by the improvement in Iran–US relations could also have a positive boost. Notwithstanding the absence of figures (which will have to be first approved by all of the parties involved), the reintegration process should be realistic and take into account: (i) the absorptive capacity of the defence and security forces; and (ii) the long-standing need for Iraqi representative forces (that is, ethnically plural and geographically diversified). The economic dynamism and attractiveness of Iraq's northern region can provide some relief, but will not be sufficient to support the civil redeployment of some of the disarmed militiamen and the rise of a new non-warring culture. As pointed out by General James Stavridis, a retired four-star US Navy admiral and NATO supreme allied commander, the cost of a soft-power campaign has been assessed at US$ 200 billion, but, 'shared among a global coalition of 60-plus nations, it's not an unmanageable cost'.[29] The involvement of all of the interested parties, from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to religious leaders, is an essential precondition for the acceptance of the whole process, especially when one considers that Iraq, contrary to Afghanistan, is not a resource-less country and is thus able to produce its own wealth and not depend solely on foreign support.

d) *Strengthening the state by boosting its inclusive actors and the education system.* As part of a longer-term post-conflict strategy, a security sector reform process should go hand in hand with political support for the Iraqi central government and local authorities. Developing effective and efficient ministries under legitimate political leadership is 'foundational to other forms of capacities'.[30] In the Kurdistan case, the Peshmerga minister – currently a member of the *Gorran* party – should be granted the means to be the unique legitimate (that is, impartial and viable) interlocutor to: (i) arbitrate the tensions within and between the brigades (including those still under the *de facto* authority of both the KDP and PUK); and (ii) to be able to act as the focal point for the design of the military strategy, including in its CT and CVE dimensions, and for coordination with the ISF headquarters in Baghdad.

Attempts to strengthen the process of stabilization and reconstruction cannot build on top-down efforts only. There is also an important role for civil-society actors (including universities, NGOs and local representatives such as religious leaders and public figures) in discussions on stabilization and reconstruction. A comprehensive CVE strategy should strengthen civil society's pillars, such as conflict prevention,

---

29 J. Stavridis, 'Killing the Islamic State Softly', *Foreign Policy*, 28 December 2015, available online at http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/28/killing-the-islamic-state-softly/.

30 C. Paul *et al.*, 'What Works Best when Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?', Rand Corporation, 2013, p. 5, available online at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1200/MG1253z1/RAND_MG1253z1.pdf.

the development and promotion of human rights, the education system, and the protection of the most vulnerable groups, especially women, youth and minorities. Engaging with civil-society actors, however, implies a change of posture by the local authorities in order to make these actors useful partners for the political authorities.[31] This is part of a longer-term approach that capitalizes on development cooperation and/or the support of the UN.

In that sense, the Netherlands might be particularly useful in financing programmes on, for instance, religious dialogue, especially when one considers the Dutch experience in the West African region, where the Netherlands supports inter-religious dialogue initiatives.[32] With minor adjustments, such support could also be undertaken in Iraq, where one of the major reasons for the current security situation is the lack of religious tolerance, but where it is also possible to identify religious interlocutors, such as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who share the same nationalistic posture as Prime Minister Abadi.[33]

However, and beyond immediate opportunities and objectives, a long-term CVE strategy also needs to invest in the Iraqi education system.[34] Today, the Iraqi

---

31 As noted in a 2012 ICCT research paper, civil-society organizations are often considered with mistrust at best, and as enemies or even 'labelled extremists and terrorist organizations' at worst, whereas they can generate positive powers for peaceful change and contribute to the resilience of society. See B. van Ginkel, 'Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism: Experiences with the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy', ICCT Research Paper, 2012, p. 4, available online at http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Van-Ginkel-Civil-Society-in-CVE-August-2012.pdf.

32 T. Bouta, S.A. Kadayifci-Orellana and A.N. Mohammed, 'Faith-Based Peace-Building: Mapping and Analyses of Christian, Muslim and Multi-Faith Actors', CRU Report, Clingendael Institute, November 2005, available online at http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20051100_cru_paper_faith-based%20 peace-building.pdf.

33 In January 2016, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani called on the Iraqi government to rid Iraq of militants operating outside state authority, and he urged unity among Iraqi citizens. See E. Cunningham, 'Sectarian Violence Besets Key Province in Iraq after an Islamic State Attack', *Washington Post*, 18 January 2016, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/sectarian-violence-hits-key-iraqi-province-after-islamic-state-attack/2016/01/18/b2e674e6-bd7a-11e5-98c8-7fab78677d51_story.html.

34 At the national level, according to a report published in September 2013 by the Ministry of Planning and Development, the literacy rate among Iraqi youth of 15 years and younger is 74 per cent. This is a drastic drop from the 100 per cent enrollment that Iraq declared in 1991. After 2003, 84 per cent of Iraq's institutions of higher education were burned, looted or destroyed. See: 'The Iraqi Education System, 2003–2013', Joint Statement submitted to the General Assembly, 27 February 2013, available online at http://www.gicj.org/NOG_REPORTS_HRC_22/educationsystem.pdf. From 1990 to 2011, the number of schools increased from 1,320 to 5,746, students from 534,963 to 1,463,874 and teachers from 21,386 to 95,666. See T.A.N. Sharif, 'Importing Educational Services from Finland to Kurdistan', Bachelor's thesis, Haaga-Helia, University of Applied Sciences, October 2013, p. 16, available online at https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/67805/Sharif_Tajzan.pdf?sequence=1.

education system faces difficulties at all levels: the war destroyed its infrastructure; the de-Ba'athification Law decimated half of Iraq's intelligentsia;[35] the civil war targeted teachers and academics (for example, 331 schoolteachers were slain in the first four months of 2006, 180 teachers were killed between February and November 2006, and 467 Iraqi professors and lecturers have been assassinated since 2003);[36] and the new sectarian order has led to the fragmentation of the entire education system, with deans, heads of department and directors being appointed according to their faction.

---

35   Like in the government and military apparatus, the post-Saddam Law had the purpose of expelling all top university administrators and professors because they were members of the Ba'ath party.

36   'The Iraqi Education System, 2003–2013', Joint Statement submitted to the General Assembly, 27 February 2013, available online at http://www.gicj.org/NOG_REPORTS_HRC_22/educationsystem.pdf.

5 Possible Scenarios, Aggravating Factors and Spoilers

A long-term stabilization process in Iraq will face a number of key challenges. This section will focus on these challenges and will identify possible entry points for international partners.

a) *North–South security divisions*

The situation on the ground appears more volatile than ever, especially since the recent offensive of the Iraqi Security Forces to retake the city of Ramadi and the 'ethnic' difficulties encountered in Sinjar since the Peshmerga retook the city from ISIL.[37] The fact that every military victory is today presented as a Peshmerga victory, even though the Kurdish units are not the only ones fighting the ISIL, could indeed complicate Baghdad's (and international) efforts to foster Iraq's national unity.

While the war against the ISIL could, quite paradoxically, be a unifying factor if it is inherently fought as 'Iraqis for Iraq' and not as members of militias for foreign sponsors, political divisions and the (foreign) hidden agendas at play represent structural obstacles to long-term stability.

b) *Intra-corporatist tensions within the security forces*

At the military level, divisions within the security and defence forces, including among the Peshmerga units, still represent a great obstacle to building an Iraqi unified security force and, as a consequence, to long-term stability. The Iraqi Security Forces are paralleled by a mix of Sunni and Shiite militias that are integrated within the Popular Mobilization Forces and (many) other groups that do not fall under government authority.

On the other hand, and contrary to common belief, the Peshmerga are not a unified army. For instance, PUK brigades have deployed together with the Shiite Badr Corps on the so-called Germian Front (Khanaqin, Saadiya, Jalawla, Qara Tapa, Kifri, Suleiman Beg and Tuz Khurmatu), while PUK brigades have deployed with the PKK

---

37 S. Dagher and Ben Kesling, 'Arabs Accuse Kurds of Exploiting War with Islamic State to Grab Land', *Wall Street Journal*, 25 November 2015, available online at http://www.wsj.com/articles/ethnic-tensions-flare-in-iraqi-city-of-sinjar-after-kurdish-led-offensive-pushes-islamic-state-out-1448361003.

and YPG in Jalawla, Daqouq and Sinjar.[38] This led to tensions, for example in Tuz Khurmatu District in Salah ad-Din Province, where Kurdish Peshmerga and allied Arab tribal fighters clashed with Turkmen members of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization.[39]

Foreign support to some of these groups (if not all of them) created a clear imbalance between Shiites and other Sunni armed movements, undermining the military capabilities of the Iraqi factions to fight the Islamic State.[40] In the medium-term, these divisions and foreign interferences could also represent an obstacle for the Iraqi authorities to develop and implement a common vision and strategy against a self-sustained insecurity scenario in Iraq. On the Peshmerga side, withdrawal by the political parties from the hierarchical chain of command and for the dedicated ministry to regain control over the militias would be fundamental steps towards stability.

c) *Political uncertainties and new diplomatic players in Iraq*
The current deadlock in Baghdad could affect the 2017 parliamentary elections, and further destabilize Iraq by postponing the adoption (and implementation) of a long-term CT and CVE strategy. This is especially true in the current economic situation and with the financial problems that Iraq's government is facing with regard to the oil market's depreciation.

The new diplomatic deal at play in Iraq, especially regarding Russia's possible interference in Baghdad, directly questions the influence of the International Coalition in Iraq. A common understanding among the main international actors involved in Iraq on (1) the level and the nature of the threats and (2) the main priorities to address in order to stabilize Iraq or highly affected regions appear to be two prerequisites for Iraq's security.

---

38 'Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict', International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report no. 158*, 12 May 2015, p. 10, available online at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20 North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf.

39 'Iraq Situation Report: November 10–19, 2015', Institute for the Study of War, available online at http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-KYcyN0QXxoc/Vk49eet05_I/AAAAAAAAE1o/1Dwz5hvQA1Y/s1600/ Iraq%2BSITREP%2B2015-11-19%2Bhigh.png.

40 Sunni Arab tribesmen and their fighters lament the lack of weapons and training: 'The US is not directly involved in training tribal forces. […] We [the US] are working with the government of Iraq in their outreach to and integration of Sunni forces. All equipment we provide is coordinated with, by, and through the sovereign central government of Iraq'; see E. Banco, 'The US Anti-ISIS Strategy in Iraq's Anbar Province is Not Working', *International Business Times*, 19 February 2015, available online at http://www.ibtimes.com/ us-anti-isis-strategy-iraqs-anbar-province-not-working-1822020.

While these recent developments do not question the opportunity for long-term CT–CVE strategies, they could halt the timeline, hence postponing the implementation of such programmes and the range of challenges to be addressed. Greater coordination and a better sense of 'ownership' by the local authorities are important in that context.

For the international community, however, local evolutions in the Kurdistan region – where the international community develops the core of its military cooperation with Iraq – will directly impact upon the efficiency of training and assistance programmes in the long run, as well as the security of international personnel. For Iraqi authorities, the situation in the northern region also determines the adoption and the implementation of long-term CT and CVE strategies.

d) *In the Kurdish region: a political system that has already run out of steam*
Political tensions in the Kurdish region will most probably complicate the work of international partners in the province, but will also directly influence the diplomatic deal that is currently at play, especially with the prospect of the PUK coming to power. Considering the PUK's links with Iran, a PUK victory would probably weaken Turkish influence in the region, with a direct impact on local development and economic growth. The aggravation of an already deteriorated economic situation could foster tensions, with each Kurdish party fighting for the biggest piece of the pie. A Kurdish 'civil war' scenario therefore cannot be excluded, especially when one considers: (i) the protracted state of war that could damage the middle-term economic deliverables and (ii) the strong will of the parties to grab power and the use that these leaders could make of the militias to repress any popular movement.[41]

More generally, political tensions in the province – between the two historic parties and between these parties and the newcomer *Gorran* – could put into question the inclusivity and trust-building between the parties and the 'communities' that they represent, and could thus prevent an agreement on the nature of the threat and the elaboration of a shared CT–CVE strategy.

The international actors who are active in the Kurdish region cannot lead the reconciliation process, nor dictate their strategy to the local actors. However, international actors can solicit dialogue with appropriate incentives and provide the political/security/economic safety nets to foster local responsibility.

---

41   The precedents – repressions of protests in 2011 – or the arrest of Haider Shasho, leader of the Sinjar Mobilization Units (HBS, a Yazidi militia) in April 2015 are clear signals of current tensions within the Kurdish authorities. See J. Krohn and R. Spencer, 'Yazidi Leader "Arrested" by Kurdish Authorities', *The Telegraph*, 6 April 2015, available online at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11518394/Yazidi-leader-arrested-by-Kurdish-authorities.html.

e) *The side-effects of international military cooperation in the Kurdistan region*
The international support that is given to the Kurdish forces to fight the Islamic State could, in the mid-term, lead to unforeseen consequences for Iraq's stability and should hence be accompanied by the adoption of a clear political roadmap.[42]

The international military cooperation established with the Kurdistan Province's capital, Erbil, under the 'Inherent Resolve' umbrella could indeed excessively boost the parties that the Peshmerga brigades obey (that is, the KDP and PUK). This is especially true if, at the same time, Western allies do not link this support to a clear demand for coordination and cooperation at the political level. For instance, Baghdad's approval of every weapon transfer appears to be a pure formality, while the KDP is the main beneficiary, since weapons are directly transferred to Erbil airport.[43]

At the local level, unmonitored funds and equipment programmes might increase intra-Kurd differences and allow foreign power to exploit Kurdish rivalries. This, in turn, could lead to a serious bid for Kurdish independence. While the military focus on the Kurdistan region is regularly criticized due to the risks that it supposedly implies for Iraq's national integrity, two series of factors concretely question Kurdistan's path towards independence. First, neighbouring countries' opposition to Kurdish independence (especially opposition from Turkey and Iran). Second, the use made of this political demand by both KDP and PUK leaders as, first and foremost, a card to play with Baghdad rather than a viable political plan.[44]

---

42 This criticism has recently been questioned by Mehmet Gurses and David Romano in a Carnegie article in which the authors state that 'more support for the Kurds, irrespective of Baghdad's wishes, would force Baghdad to acquiesce to a greater number of Kurdish demands regarding decentralization, power sharing, and control of important parts of the oil industry. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as Iraq's problem has always been authoritarianism, excessive centralization of power, and the resulting all-or-nothing struggle for control in Baghdad', in 'Kurds as Peacemakers in the Middle East', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 January 2016, available online at http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=62404&mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRouvaXOZKXonjHpfsX%2F6%2BovXqWg38431 UFwdcjKPmjr1YsFRMp0aPyQAgobGp5I5FElQ7XYTLB2t60MWA%3D%3D.

43 Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict', International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report no. 158*, 12 May 2015, p. 22, available online at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20 North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf.

44 A. Salih and M. Fantappie, 'Kurds Need More than Arms', *New York Times*, 20 October 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/21/opinion/kurds-need-more-than-arms.html?_r=0.

Peshmerga's military 'shopping list' (the Peshmerga forces recently asked for advanced tanks, medical-evacuation helicopters and vehicles that are resistant to roadside bombs)[45] therefore needs to be carefully considered. If this military equipment could indeed represent a valuable input for Peshmerga's capabilities on the ground, the political use that the Peshmerga brigades and the parties related to them could make out of this equipment represents a risk for the future of Iraq's unity and stability.

In the process of moving from military involvement to a viable stabilization strategy that also includes CVE, this risk entails a long-term challenge that the International Coalition (and the Dutch component within it) will also have to consider when deciding upon funds and arms' shipments to the Kurdistan region.

---

45 S. Ahmari, 'On the Front Line Against Islamic State', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 December 2015, available online at http://www.wsj.com/articles/on-the-front-line-against-islamic-state-1449273142.

6 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The security volatility and the new diplomatic deal in the region (with Russia, and possibly Iran, acting as potential partners for Western countries) make it highly difficult to predict long-term military/security strategies and local evolutions in Iraq. The forthcoming elections – provincial elections in 2017 and presidential elections in 2018 – and Prime Minister Abadi's current difficulties are factors that will directly impact upon the situation on the ground and international presence in Iraq.

In order to build and implement a proper and effective long-term stabilization strategy, that also includes CVE as an integral part,, three conditions need to be met: (1) a political roadmap setting strategic priorities that will help a better targeting of international assistance; (2) a long-term commitment; (3) an absence or a limitation of negative interference from neighbouring countries.

The international community's priority, in parallel or after achieving the required military level of stability and peace, should be to support the transition from direct military operations to long-term stabilization that also includes counter-terrorism programmes with realistic ambitions (e.g. no rigid timetables, strategic narratives for public support at home – that is, a mission that can be accomplished, a combination with other civilian and/or political aspects – that is, to address the root causes of conflict and instability, such as the lack of education, development and accountability).[46] Coordination with all of the international actors involved in the region is essential, especially in the current context where initiatives and agendas clash.

On the part of the international actors who are more likely to support the stabilization process, this might require a change of mind-set, according to which Iraq should not be seen uniquely as a country in a perennial state of war, but as a country with needs, challenges and aspirations to be addressed. On the one hand, this entails Iraq being

---

46   For more details on this transitioning process, see S. Boeke, *Combining Exit with Strategy: Transitioning from Short-Term Military Interventions to a Long-Term Counter-Terrorism Policy*, ICCT Research Paper, August 2014, available online at http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Boeke-Transitioning-from-Short-Term-Military-Intervention-to-CT-Policy-August2014.pdf.

considered as a resourceful country and not only 'food for donors'.[47] On the other hand, it should not be considered only from a military perspective, but as ground for multidisciplinary and multilateral actions. For Dutch cooperation, this means reinforcing the pluri-dimensional approach – hence, combining efforts on the defence, diplomatic and development levels, which are today gathered under the banner of '3D strategy'.

Considering their experience and possible political will to lighten the military footprint on the ground, the Netherlands should focus its general efforts on cooperating with 'government actors, such as law enforcement, social service providers and ministries of education, youth and religious affairs, as well as non-governmental actors, including youth; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector'.[48]

CVE-Focused Recommendations

In order to better support the Iraqi authorities in their day-to-day military operations against the Islamic State and, at the same time, to pave the way for future stabilization programmes, the Netherlands – together with other local, regional and international actors – the authors suggest the following recommendations:

• **For the Iraqi authorities, with the support of their foreign partners:**
  Develop a roadmap that identifies forthcoming stabilization priorities and that will help with better targeting of international assistance for Iraq.

• **For the international community, with the support of the United Nations:**
  Establish a dedicated CT/CVE working group within already existing diplomatic frameworks (e.g. a 'Group of Friends') able to foster dialogue at the upper and more appropriate level. While some countries might be reluctant to join such a group, there are some advantages that they might acquire from it and thus decide to take part – that is, besides access to information, their participation could enhance their perception of potential spoilers and be used as a political asset in other diplomatic dossiers.

---

47 For example, it has proved crude oil reserves of 144.2 billion barrels (1 January 2015 est.); see
    The World Factbook, CIA, available online at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html.
48 UN General Assembly, 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General',
    A/70/674, 24 December 2015, pp. 11–12.

- **For the international community, with the support of the Kurdish government and in coordination with Baghdad's authorities:**
  1. Better monitor the international military assistance, especially in the Kurdish region, by linking foreign support to the promotion of a clear political roadmap, agreed upon by the main parties;
  2. Assist the central government in Baghdad in designing and, later, implementing – with the support of local authorities, including the Ministry of Peshmerga – security sector reform (SSR) aimed at supporting the establishment of a reformed, reduced and better trained and equipped Iraqi Army;
  3. Support the implementation of a locally-led multi-phase transitional justice process, aiming at healing the trust deficit in Iraqi society, where every step is preliminarily agreed upon, budgeted, monitored and evaluated. The successful accomplishment of each phase must be considered a prerequisite condition for every following step. Such a justice-based process is able to prevent the fragmentation of society by addressing the underlying causes of the trust deficit.

- **For the Dutch contingent, within the International Coalition against the Islamic State:**
  1. Continue to train and equip missions, with better monitoring (in order not to feed the Kurdish bid for independence) and a link to the promotion of a political roadmap in Kurdistan;
  2. Contribute to the army reform process. If Iraq's authorities request it, Dutch assistance can help to establish a uniformly trained and equipped army, independent from Iraq's political parties, accountable to Iraqi government authorities and with a unique military chain of command, representative of the main components of Iraqi society and that obeys to democratic standards and rules of engagement. This further confirms the essential importance of adopting, at the local level, a preliminary political agreement on a roadmap for post-conflict SSR, establishing the main steps and identifying the role of each participant at every stage of the process;
  3. Support the reconstruction and repopulation of conflict-affected areas, and build upon experience in other conflict situations (such as humanitarian convoy escorts and de-mining programmes, etc.). These approaches would benefit from a lessons-learned process that is based on other existing experiences in order to prevent, on the one hand, the rise of future tensions and, on the other, the efforts from being scattered, so as to boost the economic maximization of aid;
  4. Map out those civil-society organizations (especially those targeting youth, women and minority groups directly impacted) and religious representatives that might be valid interlocutors with, as well as reliable representatives of, the religious, cultural and educational spheres. Dutch experience elsewhere (such as in Mali) provides added value in promoting inter-community dialogue and preventing any further destabilization.

List of Abbreviations

CENTCOM	(US) Central Command
COIN	Counter-insurgency
CT	Counter-terrorism
CVU	Counter-violent extremism
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
HBS	Sinjar Mobilization Units
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive device
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	(Self-proclaimed) Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
PKK	Kurdish Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
REX	Return on operating experience
SLC	State of Law Coalition
SSR	Security sector reform
US	United States
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units