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Mosul Captured: Turkey' Involvement in Iraqi Events

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6/20/2014

The stability of Iraqi statehood is tested again. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (alternatively translated as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and abbreviated as ISIL or ISIS) is an unrecognized state and active Jihadist militant group in Iraq and Syria influenced by the Wahhabi movement. It has attacked the north of Iraq from two directions simultaneously. Some forces have come from the western part of Anbar province while other units have attacked from Syria. The ISIS formations have not violated the borders of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The offensive was not a complete surprise for government forces. The clashes had been taking place in the northern governorate of Nineveh. But when the push came to shove the Iraqi army failed to resist the Islamists thrust towards Mosul. The security forces dissolved without staging major resistance. Regular army soldiers left the battlefield to flee together with civilians. Premier Al-Maliki believes the collapse of Iraqi army is explained by top military leaders' betrayal.

The militants never stopped and went beyond the Nineveh borders to seize the city of Tikrit, the capital of Salaheddin province situated 150km (95 miles) north of the capital Baghdad. The city surrendered on June 11. The voices are raised among Islamists calling for going straight to Baghdad. The aim of ISIS is to establish a caliphate in the Sunni majority regions of Iraq, later expanding this to include Syria opening access to the Mediterranean.

Little is known about the ISIS organization and command structure. But the group has collected

rich combat experience as it has waged war in Syria for many years. It has also taken part in the recent hostilities in the Iraqi province of Anbar. Its combat readiness has been enhanced thanks to the instructors coming from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan. Want it or not, the ISIS has become a regional force to reckon with.

The direction of its offensive makes one believe it receives assistance coming from outside. Any mention of Mosul makes think about Turkey. It has never refused the plans to return Mosul under its control. 11 years ago the issue of Turkey's participation in the intervention against Iraq ruled by Saddam Hussein was on the agenda. Back then some Middle East sources often mentioned the possibility of Mosul and adjacent territories going to Turkey as a prize for joining the anti-Saddam coalition. The Mosul region is predominantly populated by Turkmen giving Ankara a pretext for intervention to protect co-nationals. Back in the 2002-2003 the US had plans for the Turkish 3d army to enter northern Iraq in the direction of Mosul and Kirkuk. Ankara was to establish a Turkic autonomy there. In the autumn of 2003 the Erdogan government refused to get directly involved. Moreover the US forces were not allowed to cross the country and enter Iraq from the north. The decision was a shock for Washington. Time has passed and the world saw a different Turkey, the one to seriously weight pros and contra of directly intervening into a military conflict raging in a neighboring state. It's not that easy to answer if Turkey has used its experience of intervention in Syria against Iraq this time.

There is a slight chance that Ankara has a relationship of trust with the ISIS. Talking about the forces operating in Syria, Turkey prefers more moderate groups, like the Free Syrian Army with its headquarters changing the places of location from the town of Reyhanli in Turkish Hatay province to Syria's Idlib. True, the ISIS captured the Turkish consulate in Mosul and took hostage a few dozens of Turkish citizens. But it does not give ground for making conclusions. Turkey is concerned over the events in its south-east populated by Kurds. The situation has worsened there recently. The relations between Ankara and Baghdad have been deteriorated as a result of Iraqi Kurdistan exporting its oil through Turkish Mediterranean ports. But it also does not prove the fact that Turkey had any role in the seizure of Mosul by jihadists.

Turkey has gradually lost the image of a Middle East player implementing a balanced policy as the crisis was unfolding in Syria. Sometimes its NATO partners even had to deter it from outright involvement into the fray. Turkish intelligence services were especially active in Syria. The Turkish territory was used for delivering arms to President Assad's enemies. Jabhat al-Nusra transported sarin to Syria crossing the Turkish border. The gas had probably been captured in Libya before. The channel and the hush-hush operations were covered up by the Turkish National Security Service. Turkey's real intentions were disclosed as an explosive leak of audiotapes appeared in Internet for all to hear Turkish ministers talking about provoking military intervention in Syria. They were discussing a potential attack on the tomb of Suleyman Shah, the grandfather of the founder of the Ottoman Empire. The tomb is in Syrian territory, but protected by Turkish soldiers. On the tape, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is heard to say that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sees any attack as an «opportunity» to increase Turkish presence in Syria, where it has staunchly supported the anti-Assad rebels. Security chief Hakan Fidan then goes one step further, and suggests staging a fake attack to give Turkey a casus belli to intervene in the conflict.

Turkish officials have recently vowed to protect the tomb as its «national soil». So Turkey is pursuing the goal of finding a pretext for intervening into Syria against Bashar Assad.

Talking about the events in Iraq, one should remember that Baghdad never forgot the Turkish claims regarding Mosul. Many a time Baghdad accused Ankara of interference into its internal affairs. Those who are close to Prime Minister al-Maliki have directly accused Turkey of trying to annex Mosul. The sources close to Baghdad government affirm that Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are behind the ISIS operation in the province of Anbar. Baghdad believes that Turkey prepares to reshape the map of the Middle East by destabilizing the western provinces of Iraq that have border lines with Syria...

The seizure of Mosul will result in further deterioration of relations between Baghdad and Ankara. The Iraqi Shiite government has not lost the reins of power as yet and it views the Turkey's activities in Syria and the ISIS operation against Mosul as the links of the same chain.