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The Aleppo/Mosul Riddle

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There's no question Baghdad needs to take back Mosul from ISIS/ISIL/Daesh. It could not do it before. In theory, the time is now.

The real question is the conflicting motivations of the large “who's who” doing it; the Iraqi Army's 9th Division; the Kurdish Peshmerga, under the baton of wily, corrupt opportunist

Barzani; Sunni tribal lords; tens of thousands of Shi'ite militias from southern Iraq; operational “support” from US Special Forces; “targeted” bombing by the US Air Force; and lurking in the background, Turkish Special Forces and air power.

Now that’s a certified recipe for trouble.

Much like Aleppo, Mosul is – literally – the stuff of legend. The successor of ancient Nineveh, settled 8000 years ago; former capital of the Assyrian Empire under Sennacherib in the 7th century B.C.; conquered by Babylon in the 6th century B.C.; a thousand years later, annexed to the Muslim empire and ruled by the Umayyads and the Abbasids; the key hub, from the 11th to the 12th century, of the Atabegs medieval state; a key Ottoman hub in a 16th century post-Silk Road spanning the Indian Ocean all the way to the Persian Gulf, the Tigris valley, Aleppo and Tripoli in the Mediterranean.

After WWI, everyone craved Mosul – from Turkey to France. But it was the Brits who managed to dupe France into letting Mosul be annexed to the British Empire’s brand new colony: Iraq. Then came the long Arab nationalist Ba’ath party domination. And afterwards, Shock and Awe and hell; the US invasion and occupation; the tumultuous Shi’ite-majority government of Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad; and the ISIS/ISIL/Daesh takeover in the summer of 2014.

Mosul’s historic parallels could not but have a special flavor. That 11th/12th century medieval state happened to have roughly the same borders of Daesh’s phony “Caliphate” – incorporating both Aleppo and Mosul. In 2004, Mosul was de facto ruled by disgraced, failed “presidential material” Gen. David Petraeus. Ten years later, after Petraeus’s phony “surge”, Mosul was ruled by a phony Caliphate born in a US prison near the Kuwaiti border.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of residents fled Mosul. The population may be as much as halved compared to the original 2 million. That’s a mighty lot to be properly “liberated”.

Aleppo “falls”

The hegemonic narrative about the ongoing Battle of (East) Aleppo is that an “axis of evil” (as coined by Hillary Clinton) of Russia, Iran and “the Syrian regime” is relentlessly bombing innocent civilians and “moderate rebels” while causing a horrendous humanitarian crisis.

In fact, the absolute majority of these several thousand-strong “moderate rebels” is in fact incorporated and/or affiliated with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Conquest of Syria Front), which happens to be none other than Jabhat al-Nusra, a.k.a. al-Qaeda in Syria, alongside a smatter of other jihadi groups such as Ahrar al-Sham (Al-Nusra’s goals – and who supports them – are fully documented here).

Meanwhile, few civilians remain trapped in eastern Aleppo - arguably no more than 30,000 or 40,000 out of an initial population of 300,000.

And that brings us to the crux of the matter explaining the Pentagon sabotage of the Russia-US ceasefire; those fits of rage by Samantha Batshit Crazy Power; the non-stop spin that Russia is committing “war crimes”.

If Damascus controls, apart from the capital, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Latakia, it controls the Syria that matters; 70% of the population and all the important industrial/business centers. It’s practically game over. The rest is a rural, nearly empty back of beyond.

For the headless chicken school of foreign policy currently practiced by the lame duck Obama administration, the ceasefire was a means to buy ☑ time and rearm what the Beltway describes as “moderate rebels”. Yet even that was too much for the Pentagon, which faces a determined Syria/Iran/Russia alliance fighting all declinations of demented Salafi-jihadis, whatever their terminology, and committed to keep a unitary Syria.

So reconquering the whole of Aleppo has to be the top priority for Damascus, Tehran and Moscow. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) will never have enough military to reconquer the rural, ultra hardcore Sunni back of beyond. Damascus may also never reconquer the Kurdish northeast, the embryonic Rojava; after all the YPG is directly backed by the Pentagon. Whether an independent Rojava will ever see the light of day is an interminable future issue to be solved.

The SAA, once again, is tremendously overextended. Thus, the method to reconquer East Aleppo is indeed hardcore. There is a humanitarian crisis. There is collateral damage. And this is only the beginning. Because sooner or later the SAA, supported by Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi’ite militias, will have to reconquer East Aleppo with boots ☑ on the ground as well – supported by Russian fighter jets.

The heart of the matter is that the former “Free Syrian Army”, absorbed by al-Qaeda in Syria and other Salafi-jihadis, is about to lose East Aleppo. Regime change and/or “Assad must go” – the military way – in Damascus is now impossible. Thus the utter desperation exhibited by the Pentagon’s Ash “Empire of Whining” Carter, neocon cells implanted all across lame duck Team Obama, and their hordes of media shills.

Enter Plan B; the Battle of Mosul.

Fallujah remixed?

The Pentagon plan is deceptively simple; erase any signs of Damascus and the SAA east of Palmyra. And this is where the Battle of Mosul converges with the recent Pentagon attack on Deir Ezzor. Even if we have an offensive in the next few months against Raqqa – by the YPG Kurds or even by Turkish forces - we still have a “Salafist principality” from eastern Syria to western Iraq all mapped up, exactly as the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was planning (dreaming?) in 2012.

London-based Syrian historian Nizar Nayouf, as well as unnamed diplomatic sources, have confirmed that Washington and Riyadh closed a deal to let thousands of phony Caliphate jihadis escape Mosul from the west, as long as they head straight to Syria. A look at the battle map tells us that Mosul is encircled from all directions, except west.

But what about Sultan Erdogan in all this? He's been spinning that Turkish Special Forces will enter Mosul just as they entered Jarablus in the Turkish-Syrian border; without firing a shot, when the city will be cleaned of jihadis.

Meanwhile, Ankara is preparing its spectacular entrance in the battlefield, with Erdogan in full regalia shooting at random. For him, "Baghdad" is no more than "an administrator of an army composed of Shi'ites"; and the YPG Kurds "will be removed from the Syrian town of Manbij" after the Mosul operation. Not to mention that Ankara and Washington are actively discussing the offensive against Raqqa, as Erdogan has not abandoned his dream of a "safe zone" of 5,000 km in northern Syria.

In a nutshell; for Erdogan, Mosul is a sideshow. His priorities remain a fractured, fragmented Syria, "safe zone" included; and to smash the YPG Kurds (while working side by side with the Peshmerga in Iraq).

As far as the US Plan B is concerned, Hezbollah's Sheikh Nasrallah has clearly seen through the whole scheme; "The Americans intend to repeat the Fallujah plot when they opened a way for ISIL to escape towards eastern Syria before the Iraqi warplanes targeted the terrorists' convoy." He added that "the Iraqi army and popular forces" must defeat ISIS/ISIL/Daesh in Mosul; otherwise, they will have to chase them out across eastern Syria.

It's also no wonder that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has also clearly seen The Big Picture: "As far as I know, the city is not fully encircled. I hope it's because they simply couldn't do it, not because they wouldn't do it. But this corridor poses a risk that Islamic State fighters could flee from Mosul and go to Syria."

It's clear Moscow won't sit idly by if that's the case; "I hope the US-led coalition, which is actively engaged in the operation to take Mosul, will take it into account."

Of course Mosul – even more than Aleppo – poses a serious humanitarian question.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimates as many as 1 million people may be affected. Lavrov goes straight to the point when he insists "neither Iraq nor its neighbors currently have the capacity to accommodate such a large number of refugees, and this should have been a factor in the planning of the Mosul operation."

It may not have been. After all, for the "US-led" (from behind?) coalition, the number one priority is to ensure the phony Caliphate survives, somewhere in eastern Syria. Over 15 years

after 9/11, the song remains the same, with the *war on terra* the perennial gift🎁 that keeps on giving.