

From Iraq to Afghanistan; Lessons from Collapsed Armies!

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The Afghanistan of 2021 from one side is similar to Iraq in 2014, when the Islamic State (ISIS) militants had retaken large areas from the hand of thousands well equipped Iraqi soldiers. The scene of rapid collapse of state in Afghanistan and army's inability to fight back Taliban was similar scene of the fall of Mosul in Iraq. US has announced that spent billions of dollars in creating Afghan army and they thought it will take 90 days until Taliban reaches Kabul, but quickly made moves only took few days to takeover! The Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki at that time (in 2014) said what ISIS did in Mosul it was not winning war but it was an international conspiracy. Afghan leader Ashraf Ghani also said that to prevent bloodshed he left the country. Whatever officials say in the end ISIS won the war at that time and now Taliban won. The question is that why the trained, and well equipped armies of Iraq and Afghanistan could not fight? In fact the fall of Mosul and Afghanistan tell us that in the Middle East money, training and weapons are not enough to win the battle!

Second phase of Taliban

The second phase of Taliban's authority before any other actor for Iran is quite questionable which shares 1000km borders with Afghanistan. The US withdrawal and return Taliban in a way is the return balance of power in the Middle East! And this will directly will impact the south Asia, and what links that region to Iraq is the issue of American presence whether will stay or leave. Many in Iraq are concerned that whether what happened in Kabul, will repeat in Iraq or not? Some of these people are concerned that after America the Shia militia groups may take over the country and some are afraid of the return of ISIS.

In the short term, as the Shia armed groups are not united so cannot take over like Taliban over the country. In addition this is not going to work due to the balance of power in the region.

The common concern of Shia and Kurds is about the likely revival of Sunni radical group. Whether ISIS or any other organization. Despite the disagreement of some of the Shia political-military officials, but most of the Iraq and KRG military commanders believes that still we need the air and intelligence support of US and coalition to fight ISIS or any other extremist groups.

The rapid return of Taliban to Afghanistan make some of the Shia forces concerned because this may encourage and create more opportunities for Sunni radical groups in Iraq, and this is based on some factors such the second generation of ISIS slowly now about to emerge in the camps that are under control of the forces fighting against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. And the political and security instability in the Sunni regions continue, the armed actors are making troubles for the Iraqi government efforts to return IDPs . And many of Sunni population in Iraq are displaced and in uncertain condition, if this not going to be solved will lead to another wave of Sunni rebellion.

Lessons from Mosul and Kabul

The issue of second US withdrawal from Iraq whether will lead to revival of ISIS or any other organization and destabilize Iraq is an important topic, but here lets talk about lessons from stories of collapsed armies:

First: You cannot establish strong army for any country only with money, if there is no will from the society to have an army. According to some sources after 2003 US spent about 26 billion dollars [\[1\]](#) in training, creating Iraqi army and security, but with the arrival of ISIS in 2014 this money was like most of it wasted. In the past 20 years US spent 83 billion dollars in the creation of Afghanistan army but in a few days they fell to Taliban. [\[2\]](#)

Rebuilding army and state are linked, those societies that could not have united strong army , they could not have state or

strong institutions.

For Iraqi Kurdistan, it is clear that the reform project at the Ministry of Peshmerga and coalition forces support in equipping Peshmerga cannot alone lay down foundation of strong army for the Kurds, if there is no real Kurdish leaders political will for this project. Fall of Afghanistan and army as dominos is a warning for any army unit with divided multi-heads and commanders!

Second: Any country that is not self-dependent by the end will face trouble. The alliances are important pillars of world politics and International relations, but these will change and are not permanent. Therefore each one has to rescue itself. Now when there are ongoing discussions about the US withdrawal from Iraq, the common view is heading that direction Iraq needs to depend on Iran and Turkey to mitigate disadvantages from conflicts at home! This is one of the options but is not the real solution. Iraq and Kurdistan region ahead of any alliances they need to reorganize their internal situation.

Third: More than two centuries ago Jomini said "weapons alone do not win wars." And this statement was true for the fall of Mosul and Kabul.

Fourth: Former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski said that US's big problem is that how to confront an enemy that is weak but has strong motivation. Now this is not only America's problem but all the world. And its Iraq and Kurdistan region's too. The experiment of wars in the recent years in the Middle East have proven that the ideology factor is important in the wars. And this is not about how much these ideologies are true but the importance is that there are people they fight for a faith that if you do not have strong goal you cannot only depend on allies, weapons and face them with force!

Fifth: Iraq and Afghanistan in the past 40 years, they always have been in big and small battles, so fight becomes part of their societies. Therefore it is difficult to say that collapse of armies in Mosul and Kabul related to cowardice, and not having courage to fight. But history is full of those collapsed armies that due to faithless and demoralized fighters they lost. The goal and courage are two important ideological and psychological pillars of war. John Keegan said that war for the fighters is a real event that they feel it in their life, but might be is not that sensible for commanders and leaders. So when there is more gap between (soldier and commander) then the army cannot fight. This happened in Afghanistan in 2021 and during ISIS attacks on Iraq and Kurdistan region in 2014. It's been more than 2000 years Sun Tzu said that one of the conditions to win war that people and leaders should follow the same path and goal!

[1] -

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/12/88-point-2-billion-us-dollar-price-tag-for-rebuilding-iraq-after-islamic-state-war.html#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20alone%20spent%20%2460,of%20a%2DQaida%20in%20Iraq>.

² - <https://time.com/6090830/us-spending-afghan-army-billions/>