
Resurgence of ISIS attacks

17-05-2021

Authors

Rudaw RC

By Ziryar Rohelati |

In less than a month the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) launched three attacks against Peshmerga forces. The Kurdish officials' believes that ISIS exploits the security gap between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces and launch attacks. It's been for 4 years that these security gaps were made as result of October 2017 events in the disputed territories and have not solved between KRG and Baghdad yet. And the International Community initiative to create 4 joint military centers between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces are uncompleted. But resurgence of ISIS is not only related to these security gaps!

Now we are in front of new emergence of ISIS. There is new generation and strategy of ISIS. Officially the organization no longer holds any territory but still along 400km size from northwest of Iraq until east is active and in some areas can operate in more than 200km. there are factors behind increase of ISIS attacks in the disputed areas. Lack of collaboration and trust among anti-ISIS forces. Political agenda and pressure on the International community are among most important factors in creating opportunity for ISIS to resurge.

Revival of ISIS?

After nearly 4 years of relative security from ISIS attacks, since beginning of 2021 the group has become more active. Through Explosions, launching attacks on the security forces and other different actions, raises that question whether ISIS is about to re-emergence or not? The direction of 2020 events and early this year prove that number of ISIS attacks have increased.

Since 2020 until first month of this year, the global coalition against ISIS in Iraq and Syria carried out 505 targets. Including 138 airstrikes in Iraq and 86 in Syria.[\[1\]](#) This show that since 2020 ISIS has been more active in Iraq more than Syria. According to the global coalition data in the attacks at least 59 hideouts, 7 outposts, 12 tunnels, 14 warehouses, and 3 camps of ISIS were destroyed. These are indicators that ISIS is preparing ground to resurge even if does not hold any territory anymore.

One of the concerns that all anti-ISIS forces admit that the organization is still capable in attracting people and even did recruitment in those camps are under control of anti-ISIS forces. It's surprising that how the second ISIS generation is about to emerge under anti-ISIS authorities! This tell us that anti-ISIS powers have cared more about the military and security side of the fight against ISIS, and did not care about other aspects especially fighting the extremism ideology of the organization and this might be the weak point of the fight against ISIS.

Broken trust between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces

There is big trust issue between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces. Although the pretext of this broken trust linked to October 2017 events but in reality this issue has deeper roots. The issue of Peshmerga budget and Iraq does not share weapons with Peshmerga that receive as support or buy them these are other examples of broken trust which can have deeper root. From Shela to Khanaqeen there are many security gaps between Peshmerga, Iraqi and other forces, which in some places in the north part of those borders these gaps are up to 100km length and from south to 50km length and some places is less than that. Such gap give an opportunity to ISIS. Although even if these gaps filled ISIS attacks notably will decrease but still due to topography and social structure of those areas ISIS has chance to infiltrate. Issue of creating joint centers, return Peshmerga to the disputed areas or create joint forces are still in discussion and not reached practical outcome yet.

The international community under pressure

Making pressure on the international community through the militias attacks which from time to time been carried out will impact the war on ISIS. The political intention to expel US and press on the international community led to hand over Gayyara west airfield, Nineveh-west operation center[2] and K1 air base in Kirkuk to Iraqi forces. And these are in disputed areas and we have witnessed after this move how the situation of these areas got worse. Although some spread the idea that Iraq alone can defeat ISIS but in reality most of the military commanders admits that still very much in need for global support.

Efforts to weaken the Iraqi air force

Due to the ISIS presence in the desert areas of west Iraq and mountainous areas in the middle, role of air force is important to fight with this group. The global coalition since August 2014 until January 2021 carried out 34956 attacks on ISIS[3] despite that still we cannot say ISIS been destroyed, but Iraq does not have strong air force. It's astonishing to see most important Iraqi air base in Saladin to support the ground operations in Saladin, south Kirkuk, even Anbar and Diyala but always get bombarded!

Since February until present at least 6 rocket attacks carried out over Balad air base which according to the Iraqi national security advisor Qasim Aaraji there is no foreign troops in that base.[4] Eventually due to these attacks the Lockheed Martin Company decided to remove its contractors working on the maintenance of F-16 fighter jets at an Iraqi military base over security concerns .[5] This was something that the Iraqi joint operation command was worried about and happened.[6] The continuous attacks on the Balad air base raises that question that is there force and group out there do not want Iraqi air force to stand? They want Iraq to buy aircrafts and drones from other countries? These are all unanswered questions and not clear yet, but what's clear is that if leave the balad air base as ineffective base in the long term will have impact on the war on ISIS. The important question is that who is profiting from this?

[1] <https://www.inherentresolve.mil>

[2] https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/13/2002298979/-1/-1/1/LIG_OIR_Q2_MAR2020_GOLD_508_0513.PDF

[3] <https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/CJTF-OIR%20PR-20210416-01-CIVCAS%20%28January%202021%20Data%209.pdf>

[4] https://www.ina.iq/125387_.html

[5] <https://www.france24.com/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A9/20210511-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%83%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A9>

[6] https://www.ina.iq/125637_f16.html