

The Annihilation of Iraq's Fallujah Is Not Only about Defeating ISIS

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Last week, the Iraqi government began operations to “liberate” Fallujah from Islamic State (IS) fanatics, with Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announcing on Sunday that Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) will be entering the city in “two days”.

His grandiose claims aside, the eventual result of this operation is a foregone conclusion in military terms. IS cannot hold Fallujah as they do not have the manpower to effectively garrison the city, they lack the technological capability to mitigate the devastating impact of US airpower and they are completely surrounded and cut off from resupply by forces that number in the tens of thousands.

As such, those who just want to see IS lose can rest assured as that will happen sooner or later, even with the incompetence of the ISF and its allied *Hashd al-Sha’abi* (Popular Mobilisation Forces – PMF) sectarian Shia militias.

But the battle for Fallujah is about more than just defeating IS, and it cannot be seen as a liberation in the true sense of the word either. A quick look at recent history is instructive in understanding what has been going on for quite some time now with little to no international outcry, and what is likely to happen in Fallujah.

When the Iraqi government announced that it would [retake Tikrit in 72 hours](#) last year, it actually took them almost two months to take a town occupied by around 200 IS fighters, and enthusiastic time estimates were also given for the battles in Baiji, Ramadi and other towns.

What happened after “liberation”? ISF and PMF fighters presided over the sectarian slaughter of Sunni Arabs, and at one point were even filmed slicing up the burnt corpse of a Sunni man with a sword “[like shawarma](#)”.

Fallujah has not even been taken yet, and already the PMF are massacring civilians in field executions that are undoubtedly war crimes. After the town of Karma was taken, just north of Fallujah, the PMF [executed 17 men and boys](#) after accusing them of being IS militants.

Sunni tribal leaders fear dozens of others who were kidnapped by the PMF in Karma will soon face the same fate and called upon the international community and Iraq’s politicians to do something to stop these terrible crimes. Has anyone heard their pleas? Of course not, as Iraqi blood is even cheaper than that of Syrians or Palestinians.

Under siege

Fallujah has an almost legendary history amongst Iraq's Sunni Arabs as it is seen as a city that stood fast against occupation and invasion since 2003. The city was first taken out of government control by a coalition of Iraqi revolutionary fighters in January 2014, including such groups such as the General Military Council for the Iraqi Revolution who were formed after the viciously sectarian former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, ordered peaceful Sunni Arab protesters slaughtered throughout 2013. Fallujah was not, as the media portrays today, held by IS alone until around the time US forces were drawn into the conflict in the summer of 2014.

Since early 2014, Fallujah has been under a near total siege, with [regular shelling of its medical facilities](#) by the Iraqi government, yet another war crime as it is not a legitimate military target.

Prior to the recent effort to recapture the city, the siege has also resulted in Baghdad pursuing a policy of [starving the people](#) of Fallujah as another example of the government equating Sunni Arabs with IS. Horrifying images have surfaced on Iraqi social media recently, showing women and children starved and bombed to death by the government that is supposed to shield them from violence. To make matters worse, the UNHCR recently reported that IS are now [executing males](#) who are unwilling to fight for them.

In short, the people of Fallujah are being smashed between the hammer of the Iran-backed sectarian Shia militias and the anvil of brutal IS savages whose adherence to Islam I have already questioned [elsewhere](#).

Sectarian cleansing

No one should be under any doubt about what will happen once Fallujah is "liberated". Sectarian cleansing is a well-established programme in Iraq, under the aegis and encouragement of the radical mullahs of Iran. In fact, areas around Samarra are being actively [cleansed of any Sunni Arabs](#) in order to create a Sunni-free corridor that stretches from the Iranian border to what the Shia consider to be their holy shrines and sites in the predominantly Sunni city.

The entire world is silent as this goes on, and instead of standing up for the human rights and freedoms they constantly harp on about are turning a blind eye to the crimes against humanity going on in Sunni areas and the continuation of the [Iraqi Holocaust](#) that the West has an enormous role in instigating and perpetuating alongside the Iranians and even Iraq's other neighbours, whether Turk or Arab.

As Fallujah is the last major city to be held by IS apart from Mosul itself, what happens there will be indicative of what will happen when the assault against IS in Mosul begins. As I wrote in my recent research published by [RUSI](#), the Sunni Arabs have close to no faith in the Green Zone government in Baghdad and would fear a "liberation" of Mosul for understandable reasons, including PMF and government brutality against Sunnis stretching back for a decade and more.

An interesting idea that arose was that UN-sanctioned peacekeeping forces that included neighbouring Arab countries and Turkey would increase Mosul's Sunnis' confidence in any operation to dislodge IS, as it would mean that there would be observers and troops on the ground to protect them from sectarian excesses.

It is, however, unlikely that the international community will have the stomach for a boots-on-the-ground peacekeeping mission in Mosul. Although they have stated that they want to rid the world of IS's violence, they seemingly do not care about what violence is inflicted upon the Sunni community, staying silent on Iraqi government and PMF war crimes and crimes against humanity as, it would seem, the ends justify the means.

However, removing IS will not destroy extremism, just as weakening al-Qaeda did nothing to reduce terrorism. In fact, terrorism flourished and evolved to the point that al-Qaeda are barely mentioned in the media these days as they seem almost normal when compared to the newly charted territory of extremism that IS has forged.

Fallujah will fall to the Iraqi government. Fallujah's people will suffer untold misery, death, destruction and violence that will be heaped upon them by the government and its allied militias that are supposed to be protecting them. Fallujah will be a prelude to the recapture of Mosul, and if things continue as they are, IS will either return to asymmetric traditional terrorism that will be both regional and international in nature, or else the horrors inflicted upon the Sunni community will breed an even more terrifying group that will make IS pale in comparison.

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