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Shi'ite Militias Join Iraq's Mosul Attack

By Jason Ditz
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After a week and a half of assuring everyone that their role in the invasion of Mosul would be very limited, and removed from the Sunni population, Iraq's Shi'ite militias have been announced to have launched an offensive west of Mosul, advancing on Tal Afar.

According to officials, the main goal of this offensive is to cut the city of Mosul off from ISIS territory in Syria, preventing the ISIS fighters within the city from fleeing west if the battle begins to turn sour. The offensive is said to start “within a few days or hours.”

The involvement of Shi'ite militias in the “liberation” of Sunni Arab cities in Iraq has been controversial because they often end up carrying out extrajudicial executions, looting and torture of locals they suspect of being secretly in league with ISIS.

An effort to block flight from Mosul to ISIS territory in Syria would be an obvious step, but the militias' involvement again risks targeting of civilians, as the population of Mosul is already overrunning the minimal camps set up for the displaced.

Civilians fleeing these cities are usually not welcomed in Iraqi government-held territory, and wind up fleeing into other ISIS-held territory. With little left in Iraq, this likely means fleeing into Syria, and the militias' presence means the civilians displaced by the attack are likely to be targeted for fleeing “with” ISIS.