

# The battle for Mosul

We have been told regularly by the BBC that Mosul has been recaptured from ISIL. They did that story again over the week-end.

Like most people I condemn ISIL for the tyranny it exerts on communities it infiltrates or conquers, for its brutality and its treatment of subject peoples. If they are now defeated in Mosul that could be a precondition for something better. Mosul rests at the northern top of Iraq, near the head of the Tigris valley to the south with its richer agricultural lands. The issues now are what price victory, and what political settlement will follow?

The pictures from near the front line show that most buildings are either damaged or demolished by the heavy firepower used to kill or clear ISIL fighters from the city. The economic work of the city has been destroyed for the time being, and many people have fled the violence and the lack of basic services needed for a normal life. Restoration will require immediate recovery to put in an electricity and water supply and start to recreate functioning shops, food supply and the other urgent needs. It will take time to tempt people back and help them rebuild.

Assuming the government of Iraq has both the capacity and the will power to initiate this work there can be some recovery. The central question is how can they ensure in future that ISIL or similar terrorist and extremists groups do not start up all over again? Can they settle a population back in Mosul and find a way of governing which gains sufficient consent to work? The Iraqi civil war has proved to be deep seated, with irreconcilable communities feeling the central government does not speak for them. It has proved to be a polity that allows or nurtures extremism in places where the central government loses control. How that government now behaves as it surveys the rubble of its military victory will determine whether something better can emerge from the bitter fighting.