



European Asylum Support Office

EASO Country of Origin Information Report

Iraq

Security situation



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March 2019

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Cover photo: © European Union (Peter Biro), The ruins of the Great Mosque of al-Nuri
in Mosul's Old Town on the western banks of the Tigris. From here ISIL leader Abu Bakr
al-Baghdadi proclaimed the IS Caliphate in June 2014. Mosul's Old Town was retaken in July
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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012).¹ The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised 7 February 2019 and covers events up to 31 December 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

¹ The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://www.easo.europa.eu>.

Glossary and abbreviations

AAI	Ansar Al-Islam, meaning ‘supporters of Islam’; Al Qaeda/ISIL affiliate group
AAH	Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (The League of the Righteous);
<i>al-Hashd al-Asha’iri</i>	Sunni tribal militia units composed mainly of Sunni tribes; some affiliated with the PMUs
<i>al-Hashd al-Marji’i</i>	PMU militias formed to protect Hawza religious sites of the Shia
<i>al-Hashd al Shaabi</i>	Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)
AQ	Al Qaeda
AQ-I	Al Qaeda in Iraq
<i>Asayish</i>	Intelligence services of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Babil/Babylon	Babil is sometimes spelled Babel, Babylon, Babil
Baath party	The Arab Socialist Baath Party; party of Saddam Hussein who governed Iraq until the US invasion in 2003 removed him from power
Badr Organization	Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilization Units
CoR	Council of Representatives, the Iraqi parliament
CTS	Counter-Terrorism Service; also called ISOF (Iraqi Special Operations Forces); elite-trained special forces.
Daesh	Arabic abbreviation for ISIL, ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi ‘l-‘Iraq wa-sh-Sham;
Dawa party	Political party formed in opposition to Saddam Hussein; many members exiled in Iran and returned after the US invasion in 2003
Dohuk	Dohuk is sometimes spelled Dahuk
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
ERD	Emergency Response Division
<i>fatwa</i>	Ruling or decree based on Islamic law issued by a recognised authority
FEDPOL or FP	Federal Police
Grand Ayatollah al Sistani	The highest Shia cleric in Iraq
Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba	Also called the Movement of the Noble Ones of the Party of God. Shia militia
HPE	Ezidkhan Protection Force; Yazidi militia based in Sinjar
IA	Iraqi Army
IBC	Iraq Body Count
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IRGC	Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps

ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq; precursor group to ISIL
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh.
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
Jaysh al Mahdi	Mahdi army
JCC	Joint Crisis Coordination Centre; agency of the KRG dealing with crisis management
JOC	Joint Operations Command
JRTN	Jayish Riyal al Tariq al-Naqshabandi
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KH	Kataib Hezbollah (Battalions of the Party of God); Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilization Units.
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Ministry of Interior
<i>mukhtar</i>	Local community leader
Nasr alliance	Victory Alliance; Political list of PM Haider al Abadi in the 2018 elections
NSS	National Security Service
OC	Operational Commands of the ISF
Peshmerga	Military forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMF or PMU	Popular Mobilization Forces or Popular Mobilization Units, also called <i>al-Hashd al Shaabi</i> in Arabic.
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RULAC	Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project
Sairoon Alliance	Toward Reform; Shia-led political bloc formed by populist Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr.
Saraya al Salaam	Also known as the Peace Brigades. Shia militia linked to cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.
SVEST	Suicide vest
<i>Takfiri</i> or <i>Takfir</i>	An Arabic word meaning 'unbeliever'; Extremist Islamist ideology employed by ISIL to declare individuals as apostates or impure; used against those who do not pledge allegiance.
Thi-Qar	Thi-Qar is sometimes spelled Dhi Qar
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

USDOD	US Department of Defense
USDOS	US Department of State
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
YBS	Sinjar Resistance Unit; Yezidi militia considered part of the PKK

Introduction

This report was drafted by Country of Origin Information (COI) specialists from COI units in the asylum authorities listed under the [Acknowledgements](#) section, together with the EASO COI sector.

The purpose of this security situation report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination (refugee status and subsidiary protection). The terms of reference of this report were defined by EASO based on discussions held and input received from COI experts and policy experts from EU+ countries² within the framework of a Country Guidance Network exercise to develop a Country Guidance Note on Iraq. The report was drafted for the purpose of developing a chapter on the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive. Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex III](#).

In order to assess Article 15(c) QD: serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report examines the nature of armed conflicts taking place in the territory, the nature of the violence and presence of armed actors in different areas, the civilian impacts in terms of casualties/fatalities and conflict-linked displacement.

As a general indication, the time frame for the report was intended to provide an overview of the main issues in Iraqi security situation since the armed conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its territorial conquests of 2014-2017, with a focus on 2018.

Methodology

This report is the first security situation report produced by EASO on Iraq and contains information on the conflict in Iraq since 2014, with a focus on 2018.

The information is a result of desk research of public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 31 December 2018. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 7 February 2019. Several expert oral sources were consulted via email and with interviews in addition to the paper-based and electronic sources that were consulted. Those sources are described in the bibliography.

Civilians killed and injured

The two main sources on civilian casualties and civilians killed in Iraq used in this report are the UN Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)³ and Iraq Body Count (IBC). Information referenced to IBC is published and available from the EASO supplementary COI source on Iraq produced to accompany this report.

[Iraq Body Count](#) (IBC) is a not-for-profit project that maintains the world's largest public database of violent civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003. For this report, IBC data on security incidents involving civilian deaths was provided in an accompanying report which provides data on civilian deaths in Iraq in 2012, and 2017-2018. IBC's methods are explained in the above publication and should be carefully considered in addition to this report. IBC provided its data on civilian deaths (only deaths, not injuries) in Iraq from 2012 (for comparative purposes), and 2017-2018 up until 31 December 2018.

IBC's 2017-2018 data on civilian deaths is available in the following separate document and should be read in conjunction with the report at hand:

EASO (European Asylum Support Office), Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-

² All EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland

³ For information on UNAMI's casualty counting methodology, see: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of November 2018, the Lowest in 6 years, 3 December 2018, [url](#)

2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

UNAMI figures are available for only six governorates (killed and injured). Up until January 2019, UNAMI posted monthly casualty reports on its website for the six worst-affected governorates impacted by the conflict with ISIL. The UK Home Office compiled the data from these UNAMI reports and shared these with EASO, which are included in this report. UNAMI data on casualties (killed and injured) does not include southern or KRI areas. UNAMI provides detailed caveats to the completeness of its figures and the limits of its methodology on its website about civilian casualties.⁴

There are differences in the civilian casualties recorded by different organisations. As IBC has explained on their website, UNAMI figures⁵ and official Iraqi government figures⁶ have typically been lower than IBC figures. IBC data is based on openly available lists of recorded incidents. Neither UNAMI's underlying data nor the data of official Iraqi Ministries provide a publicly available disaggregated incident-by-incident total.⁷

Structure and use of the report

The report is divided in two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the general security situation in Iraq by providing first a general background of recent conflicts in Iraq, the current political situation, and information on the main armed actors in Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq and their territorial presence and role. A general overview of the current security situation in 2018, as it relates to the nature of the violence and civilian impacts then follows.

The second chapter provides a governorate-level description of the security situation. Each governorate chapter includes a map, brief description of the governorate, background conflict dynamics and armed actors present in the area, 2018 security trends, including information on civilian deaths, security incidents and trends, armed confrontations (etc.), and information on displacement and return, and civilian infrastructure impacted such as road security. For governorates where the ISIL conflict has been less relevant, it was decided to make a single chapter for the region: Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and the Southern governorates.

The governorate chapters of the report follow the order:

Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah), Southern governorates. For organisational purposes only, this report groups together several governorates under 'southern' chapter: Babil, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, and Wassit.

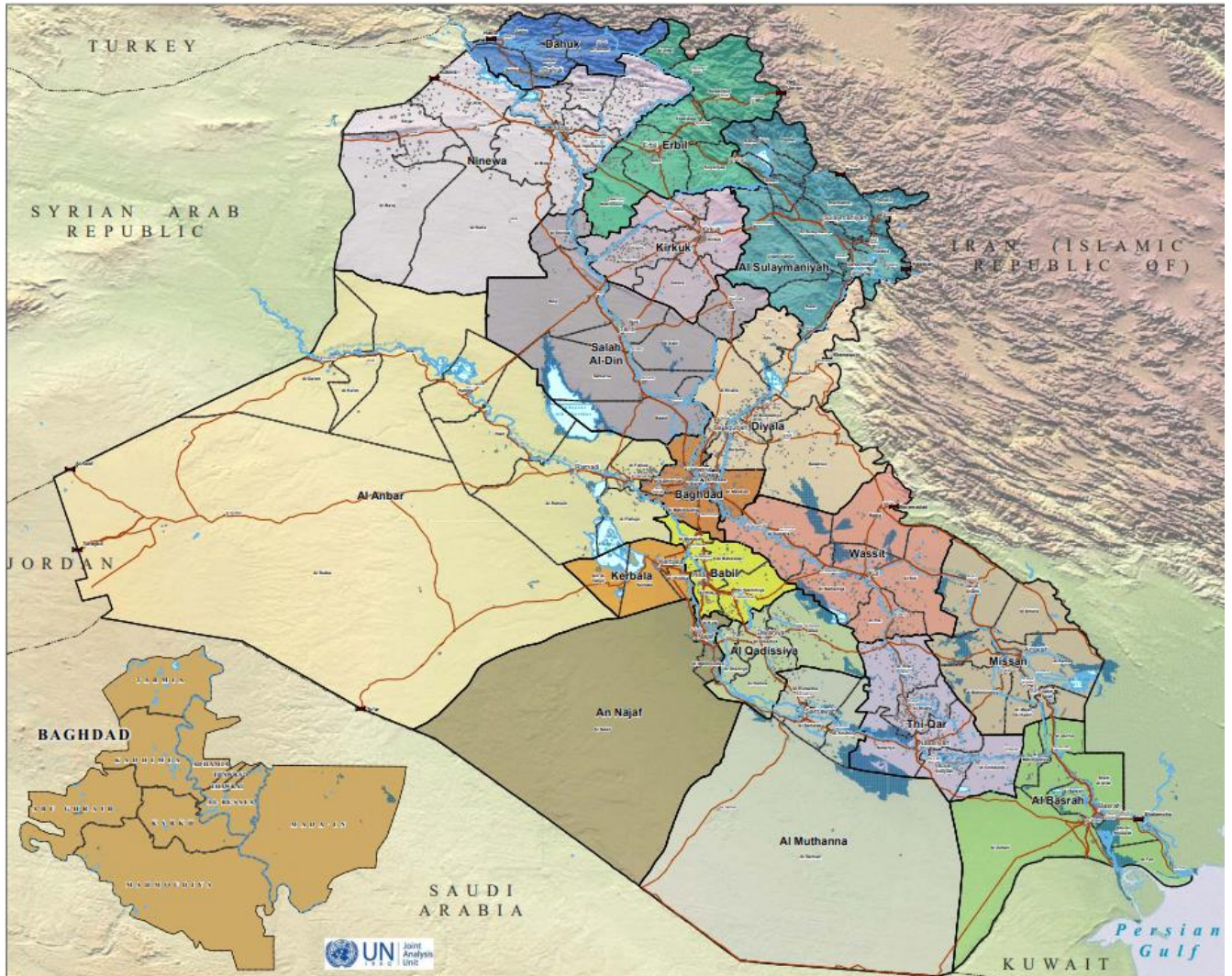
⁴ For information on UNAMI's casualty counting methodology, see: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of November 2018, the Lowest in 6 years, 3 December 2018, [url](#)

⁵ IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#)

⁶ IBC, Iraqi deaths from violence in 2012, [url](#)

⁷ IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#)

Map



Map 1: Iraq, © United Nations⁸

⁸ UN Iraq – District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

1. General description of the security situation in Iraq

1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Iraq

There are multiple overlapping non-international conflicts in Iraq, as of 2018, according to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project (RULAC).⁹

The UN stated that Iraq was in a non-international armed conflict as of January 2014.¹⁰ RULAC stated that the Iraqi government was in an ongoing ‘non-international armed conflict’ against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (and its associated groups). The Iraqi government and its armed forces are supported by a range of actors, the forces of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Peshmerga), a range of Popular Mobilization Units and other militia armed groups, and an international coalition led by the United States.¹¹

According to RULAC, Iraq is also involved in an ‘international armed conflict’ with Turkey¹², having been affected by conflict inside Turkey between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which extends into northern Iraqi territory. In July 2015, Turkey began air-striking PKK targets in northern Iraq.¹³ RULAC gave the assessment that Turkey’s use of force on Iraqi territory ‘without consent’ by the Iraqi government constitutes ‘an international armed conflict’.¹⁴

Information on the security actors and on dimensions of these conflicts is described in further sections of this report, as well as in the governorate-level chapters.

1.1.1 Historical context

Iraq has experienced numerous periods of conflict and violent upheaval. Through a series of coups in the 1958 and 1963, the pan-Arab nationalist Arab Socialist Baath Party took power in Iraq, and in 1979, Saddam Hussein became President in the one-party Baathist system.¹⁵ From 1968 to the mid-1970s, Saddam Hussein consolidated control and jailed, assassinated, and executed his opponents in the ruling party.¹⁶ The Baath government committed ‘widespread and gross human rights violations’ in the years following; targeting political opponents in Iraq and Kurdistan.¹⁷ Power became concentrated in the security forces and tribal and Tikriti family circle around Saddam Hussein.¹⁸ Saddam Hussein, in the aftermath of the Shia Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, attacked Iran in 1980 and from 1980 to 1988

⁹ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#); RULAC is an online portal that identifies and classified situations of armed conflict based on an independent assessment based on open source information; it is based at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#), Summary

¹¹ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹² RULAC, International armed conflict in Iraq [Last updated: 15 February 2018], [url](#)

¹³ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#); RULAC, Non-international armed conflict in Turkey [Last updated: 28 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴ RULAC, International armed conflict in Iraq [updated 15 February 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵ NPR, Timeline: Saddam’s Violent Road to Execution, 29 December 2006, [url](#)

¹⁶ Wing, J., Saddam’s Early Years (1979-80), Musings on Iraq [Blog], n.d., [url](#); Wing, J., Pres Bakr Govt – Baath Era (1968-79), Musings on Iraq [Blog], n.d., [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, 25 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷ HRW, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan – 2002, [url](#)

¹⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002 – Iraq, 31 March 2003, [url](#)

fought them in an international armed conflict.¹⁹ The total number of casualties on both sides can only be estimated at 1 to 2 million, with 500 000 to estimated to have been killed.²⁰ According to the UN, Baath Party under Saddam Hussein systematically persecuted perceived political opponents through torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, executions, disappearances, mutilations for ordinary crimes.²¹ The Anfal campaign carried out in 1988 was a major repressive campaign against the Kurds in the north which involved widespread killings and possible crimes against humanity; ‘Arabisation’ campaigns by the government were aimed at removing ethnic minorities systematically from certain areas.²² There were 182 000 Kurds estimated to have been ‘disappeared’ in de-population campaigns in Kurdish areas²³ and the chemical weapons attack on Halabja is thought to have killed 5 000 Kurdish civilians.²⁴

In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait in an international armed conflict condemned by the UN and prompting the US to launch the First Gulf War to push government forces out of Kuwait.²⁵ In February 1991, Iraqi forces were driven from Kuwait in less than a week.²⁶ After the First Gulf War, Saddam Hussein’s government engaged in violent suppression of uprisings that caused mass displacement to Iran/Turkey and was considered a threat to international peace and security under UN Security Council Resolution 688 (1991).²⁷ Between two to three million Iraqis fled from Iraq into neighbouring countries.²⁸ Thousands of civilians were killed in indiscriminate attacks by the military against rebellious areas during 1991 using heavy weapons, tanks, air attacks, artillery, followed by ground assaults and executions.²⁹ Suppression of Shia and Kurdish uprisings led to the detention and disappearance of thousands of Iraqi political opponents.³⁰ In the south, up to 200 000 Shia Marsh Arabs were killed between March and October 1991 and the marshlands between Euphrates and Tigris were drained to eliminate the hiding places for many Shia during and after the uprising.³¹

Saddam Hussein continued to rule Iraq until a US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 over allegations of him stockpiling ‘weapons of mass destruction’. This marked another period of international armed conflict, until the handover of sovereignty to the Interim Iraq government in June 2004.³² Iraq’s recent history since the fall of the Baath Party regime of Saddam Hussein has been characterised by a series of conflicts unfolding with political and sectarian dimensions, and involving domestic and foreign entities, the impacts of which still resound.³³ Sectarianism rapidly increased in violent waves after the

¹⁹ BBC News, Iraq profile – timeline [Updated: 3 October 2018], 3 October 2018, [url](#); UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 54

²⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Iran-Iraq War, 15 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 50a

²² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002 – Iraq, 31 March 2003, [url](#)

²³ HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992, [url](#)

²⁴ HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992, [url](#)

²⁵ Wing, J., Gulf War (1990-92), Musings on Iraq [Blog], n.d. [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Persian Gulf War, 25 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁶ Wing, J., Gulf War (1990-92), Musings on Iraq [Blog], n.d. [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Persian Gulf War, 25 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁷ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 71

²⁸ Galbraith, Peter W., Refugees from War in Iraq, What Happened in 1991 and What May Happen in 2003, MPI, February 2003, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁹ HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992, [url](#)

³⁰ HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992, [url](#)

³¹ Vox, 27 maps that explain the crisis in Iraq, 8 August 2014, [url](#), point 12; Galbraith, P., Refugees from War in Iraq, What Happened in 1991 and What May Happen in 2003, MPI, February 2003, [url](#), pp. 1-3

³² UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 56, including footnote 60; New York Time (The), Timeline of Major Events in the Iraq War, 15 December 2011, [url](#)

³³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to Iraq, 14 to 23 November 2017 (A/HRC/38/44/Add.1), 5 June 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-4

2003 US invasion.³⁴ Thousands of Iraqis have been killed in suicide attacks since 2003.³⁵ Armed Sunni insurgent violence and rising Shia militias became destabilising factors in the post-2003 security environment. According to the UN this period was deemed as a non-international armed conflict.³⁶ During the period of 2006-2007, Sunni extremist groups aligned with Al Qaeda carried out attacks and widespread human rights violations; while Shia paramilitary and militia groups, some of whom were part of the Iraqi security forces, frequently killed Sunnis and forced them from their homes. Death squads and extremist groups during this period were carrying out attacks on ordinary civilians, often due to sectarianism.³⁷

UNHCR stated that the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), AQ and other armed groups such as Ansar Al Islam, Naqshbandi Army, Jaysh Al-Mahdi/Promised Day Brigades, Asaib ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kataib Hezbollah (KH) and others may have participated in serious rights violations.³⁸ Ethno-Sectarian conflict in the period 2006-2007 has been referred to as a civil war³⁹ and was the period with the highest number of civilians killed other than in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2014-2017 ISIL period.⁴⁰ Also during this time, the US funded and backed tribal Sunni militias called the *sahwa*; the tribal *sahwa* were described as ‘violent militias’ from Sunni tribal areas who received training and support from the US and politically empowered Sheikhs, who were prominent in fighting AQ-I and other insurgents in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninewa and Diyala.⁴¹ In 2010-2011, civilian casualties were estimated to be about 4 000 per year, with no significant downward trend since 2009, the UNHCR reported in 2012, stating that a ‘persistent low level conflict’ was ongoing.⁴² Then, in 2013, Sunni insurgent groups formed together under the Islamic State of Iraq and also with AQ and affiliates.⁴³ At the end of 2012, a Sunni protest movement against the government grew in the governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninewa and Diyala. Also in Baghdad, Sunnis protested against their perceived political and social marginalisation.⁴⁴ On 23 April 2013, the Iraqi army violently suppressed a demonstration in Hawija, leading to some forty deaths among the protesters. In the following weeks and months, violence escalated. A revived AQI - successively renamed Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Islamic State (IS) – frequently carried out large-scale, coordinated attacks. The Shia population was especially targeted in order to foment sectarian divisions.⁴⁵ From spring 2013 onwards, this led to a significant increase in violence that undermined the fragile stability that already characterised Iraq.⁴⁶

Sunni insurgents linked to ISI began increasing attacks in 2013 – with civilian death tolls rising that year to the highest they have been since 2008.⁴⁷ This finally culminated in 2014, when the Salafi jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq in Syria and Levant (ISIL), transformed from its predecessor groups,

³⁴ US, USCIRF, Annual Report 2018 – Iraq, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), p. 5

³⁶ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 60

³⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 – Iraq, 11 March 2008, [url](#)

³⁸ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 58

³⁹ The New York Times, U.N. Secretary Says Iraq Is Engulfed in Deadly Civil War, 03 December 2006, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge, 07 February 2008, [url](#), pp. i, 2

⁴⁰ IBC, Documented civilian deaths from violence, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹ Guardian (The), The Iraq legacy: the awakening, 21 March 2008, [url](#); Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPi, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

⁴² UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 44

⁴³ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq, [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴ UN Security Council, Third report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2061 (2012), 11 July 2013, [url](#); The New York Times, Iraq: Maliki Demands That Protesters Stand Down, 2 January 2013, [url](#)

⁴⁵ US, CRS, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights, 22 August 2013, [url](#), pp. 13, 16

⁴⁶ US, CRS, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights 22 August 2013, [url](#), pp. 4, 13-16

⁴⁷ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq, Last updated 29 January 2018, [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

conquered one third of Iraq's territory and forced the sudden collapse of Iraq's state security forces.⁴⁸ Between June 2014 and December 2017, in the territories it attacked and controlled, ISIL applied a 'sustained and deliberate policy of executing civilians' as a means of exerting control and instilling fear. The group committed mass killings, targeted civilians, imposed strict codes of social behaviour, killing those not in conformity with their Islamic *Takfiri* doctrines.⁴⁹

For a timeline of key events in conflicts in Iraq's history up to 2018, see [Annex I](#).

1.1.2 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): 2014-2017

The conflict with ISIL (and its predecessor groups in Iraq) was identified as a 'non-international armed conflict' by the UN in January 2014.⁵⁰

ISIL's precursor group captured Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar in the months following December 2013.⁵¹ The insurgency then began spreading further from Anbar to other governorates, and the number of displaced families due to violence and intimidation grew, from Anbar, but also from Diyala, Ninewa and Babil.⁵² In January 2014, violence began spreading from Anbar to other areas of Iraq, including large-scale killings, injuries and destruction of property and livelihoods affecting civilians.⁵³ In late June 2014, Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi declared the extremist group Islamic State was a 'Caliphate'.⁵⁴ After a five-day offensive, militants from IS/ISIL/ISIS and supporters of Jayish Riyal al Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN)⁵⁵ succeeded on 10 June 2014 in expelling the Iraqi army and security forces from the city of Mosul.⁵⁶ During the period following, ISIL offensives continued in the governorates of Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Anbar and Kirkuk.⁵⁷ Fighting also occurred in the governorates of Baghdad and Babil.⁵⁸

During the ISIL offensives, the army and police collapsed; 14 Iraqi Army and six Federal Police brigades collapsed entirely.⁵⁹ ISIL reached within 40 km of Erbil in summer 2014; in order to prevent ISIL's further advance as and to protect the Yezidi minority in the Sinjar region the United States formed an international coalition and in September 2014, began air-striking ISIL targets in Iraq and Syria.⁶⁰ In

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to Iraq, 14 to 23 November 2017 (A/HRC/38/44/Add.1), 5 June 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁵⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#), Summary

⁵¹ CSIS, Cordesman, A.H. & Khazai S., Iraq in Crisis, 27 January 2014, [url](#), p. 166; Daily Star Lebanon, Iraq violence kills 37 nationwide, 19 March 2014, [url](#)

⁵² Wing, J., Musings On Iraq 2014 Year In Review, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 7 January 2015, [url](#)

⁵³ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#), Summary

⁵⁴ BBC News, Isis rebels declare 'Islamic state' in Iraq and Syria, 30 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Jayish Riyal al Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) was founded in 2006 in response to the execution of Saddam Hussein. It is a Sufi-inspired, militant organisation made up of ex-Baathists and explicitly opposed to the domination of the Shia majority in Iraq. The leader of the organisation is Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a former top military officer and vice-president under the Saddam regime. USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Jaysh Rijal Al-Tariq Al-Naqshabandi (JRTN), 19 July 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁶ New York Times (The), Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul, 10 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁷ New York Times (The), Iraq Militants, Pushing South, Aim at Capital, 11 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambtsbericht Veiligheidssituatie in Irak, 19 September 2014, [url](#),

p. 19 (Baghdad governorate) and p. 28 (Babil); Guardian (The), Iraq crisis: Isis gains strength near Baghdad as Kurdish forces seize Kirkuk, 12 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Knights, M., The Future of Iraq's Armed Forces, March 2016, [url](#), p. 21

⁶⁰ Guardian (The), Obama: 'We don't have a strategy yet' to combat Isis militants, 28 August 2014, [url](#); US, CRS, The "Islamic State" Crisis and U.S. Policy, 22 October 2014, [url](#), p. 13; New York Times (The), U.S. Jets and Drones Attack Militants in Iraq, Hoping to Stop Advance, 8 August 2014, [url](#)

August 2014, ISIL systematically killed, captured and enslaved thousands of Yazidis in villages of the Ninewa governorate; 200 000 Yazidis fled Sinjar, their traditional region.⁶¹

The successive catastrophic defeats of the Iraqi army led to the re-mobilisation of Shia militias in Baghdad and in the Iraqi south, and to a battle to stop the advance of ISIL.⁶² In addition, the Iraqi forces received assistance by US advisors⁶³ and Iranian military personnel.⁶⁴ Between June 2014 and December 2017, ISIL overran and took territorial control of vast areas of Iraq, designating itself a state and ‘leading a campaign of widespread violence and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law – acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide under international criminal law’, according to the UN.⁶⁵ ISIL’s control in conquered territories was particularly harsh towards religious and ethnic minorities.⁶⁶ Murder, kidnapping, sexual assault, forced conversion were reported to be perpetrated by ISIL on the populations it took over. An estimated 35 000 Yazidis fled Sinjar fearing execution by ISIL.⁶⁷ UNAMI described the activities as ISIL as in 2014 as follows:

‘systematic and egregious violations perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and associated armed groups against civilians, including instances of direct, deliberate targeting of civilians in the conduct of armed operations; disregard of the principles of distinction or proportionality in the context of armed operations; killings and executions of civilians, captured Iraq Security Forces (ISF) personnel, and persons associated with the Government of Iraq; sexual violence and rape against women and girls; kidnappings; targeted assassinations/killings of political, community and religious figures; killings, abductions and other violations of members of ethnic, religious and other minorities; killing and physical violence against children; forced recruitment of children; wanton destruction of civilian property; robbery of civilian property; targeting and destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure (including hospitals and schools); attacks on protected installations (such as attacks on dams); and attacks on places of cultural significance and places of religious worship.’⁶⁸

In areas sieged by ISIL in 2014, such as Mosul, in addition to the regime established by ISIL and the bombing campaigns by the US and international coalition, the civilian population in area the area under siege was cut off from access to water and medical care.⁶⁹ The military campaign for the takeover of the city of Mosul, ISIL’s main stronghold, started on 17 October 2016.⁷⁰ It was the largest and most difficult confrontation between ISIL and Iraqi forces from 2014 until present⁷¹ and thousands of civilians were killed and wounded.⁷²

⁶¹ UNAMI/OHCHR, A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yazidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL, August 2016, [url](#), p. 4

⁶² US, CRS, The “Islamic State” Crisis and U.S. Policy, 12 November 2014, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³ BBC News, Iraq crisis: US to send ‘military advisers’, 20 June 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Jamestown Foundation, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and Iraq’s Security Breakdown; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 12 Issue: 14, 10 July 2014, [url](#); BBC News, General Qasem Soleimani: Iran’s rising star, 6 March 2015, [url](#)

⁶⁵ UNAMI/OHCHR, “Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL,” 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶ UNHCR - UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Position On Returns To Iraq, October 2014, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁷ US, CRS, The “Islamic State” Crisis and U.S. Policy, 22 October 2014, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁸ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#), Summary

⁶⁹ AFP, Water-borne disease plagues IS-held city in Iraq, 1 December 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁰ ISW, Iraq Launches the Campaign for Mosul, 17 October 2017, [url](#)

⁷¹ BBC News, Major General: Battle for Mosul is ‘toughest since WWII’, 26 June 2017, [url](#); PBS, Frontline, “The Toughest Battle I’ve Ever Covered”: A Q&A With “Mosul” Director Olivier Sarbil, 18 October 2017, [url](#); Defense One, Watson, B., What the Largest Battle of the Decade Says About the Future of War, 28 June 2017, [url](#)

⁷² UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016 – 10 July 2017, 2 November 2018, [url](#), p. 9

By the end of 2017, the Iraqi security forces succeeded in taking back control of the territories which had been seized by ISIL in 2014.⁷³ After three years of military campaigns against ISIL in different areas of Iraq, in December 2017, PM al-Abadi declared that ISIL was militarily defeated.⁷⁴ Between June 2014 and the end of 2017, 85 123 civilian casualties were recorded by UNAMI due to the conflict.⁷⁵

As of November 2018, the UN reported that 202 mass graves have been discovered across former ISIL-held areas, mainly in Ninewa, containing the human remains of thousands of people; unverified estimates published said that there were unverified estimates 6 000 to 12 000 people found in the 202 graves, suspected to be ISIL victims.⁷⁶

Since the declared military victory against ISIL a significant decline in violence has been noted.⁷⁷ In addition to the Iraqi government's inability to establish firm control over rural areas⁷⁸, ISIL is regrouping to launch attacks again, switching to insurgent tactics.⁷⁹ ISIL is described in December 2018 by analyst Michael Knights as still being a 'highly active and aggressive insurgent movement', though following its territorial defeat in 2017, it was operating at its 'lowest operational tempo' nationally since 2010.⁸⁰

1.2 Political situation in 2018

1.2.1 General elections

Iraq held national elections on 12 May 2018. The elections - the fifth nationwide election to take place after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 - were marked by a record low turnout.⁸¹ The Independent High Electoral Commission placed turnout at 44.52 %, which was lower than previous election in 2014 and 2010 (both at 60 %).⁸² Turnout in the capital Baghdad was 33 %, which according to some experts was higher than expected.⁸³ Many Iraqis, particularly in Sunni areas, opted to boycott the elections because they did not believe it would make a difference to the political system. Curfews and vehicle bans (including public transports) imposed in several governorates are also believed to lie behind the low turnout.⁸⁴ Only a segment (around 285 000 persons⁸⁵) of Iraq's almost 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were given access to electronic voting cards, enabling them to cast their votes at the ballots.⁸⁶

⁷³ Knights, M., *The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?*, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to Iraq, 14 to 23 November 2017 (A/HRC/38/44/Add.1)*, 5 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; US, *USCIRF, Annual Report 2018 – Iraq*, April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁵ UNAMI/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017*, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

⁷⁶ UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL," 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁷ US, *Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines*, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20

⁷⁸ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., *GPPi, Iraq After ISIL*, March 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹ FP, *ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS*, 3 April 2018 [url](#); Knights, M., *The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?*, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁰ Knights, M., *The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?*, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸¹ ISW, *Breaking down Iraq's Election*, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸² Al Jazeera, *Iraq: Election result within two days, turnout at record low*, 13 May 2018, [url](#); Al Monitor, *Eager to vote, Iraq's displaced faced obstacles on election day*, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸³ Mansour, R, van den Toorn, C., *The 2018 Iraq Federal Elections: A Population in Transition*, July 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁸⁴ Al Jazeera, *Iraq: Election result within two days, turnout at record low*, 13 May 2018, [url](#); Patel, S., *How Oil and Demography Shape Post-Saddam Iraq*, September 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, *Iraq: Election result within two days, turnout at record low*, 13 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Al Monitor, *Eager to vote, Iraq's displaced faced obstacles on election day*, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

The Sairoun (Forward) alliance, led by the populist Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, in alliance with the Communist party, got the larger part of the vote. Together they were able to secure 54 of the Council of Representatives' (CoR) 329 seats. Al-Sadr retains considerable support amongst the poorer segment of the Shia population, and has long launched attacks against the government for its failure to address corruption and other social misgivings that shape much of Iraq's grievances today.⁸⁷ The Iran-backed Fatah (Conquest) alliance, led by the Badr Organisation's Secretary Hadi al-Ameri, came in second, securing 47 seats, while the Nasr (Victory) alliance led by incumbent Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi came in third, securing 42 seats. None of the electoral lists were able to secure the 165-seat majority required to form the next government.⁸⁸ Many political parties and the politicians elected in past and recent 2018 Iraqi elections have their own militias and are closely aligned with the Shia Popular Mobilization Units⁸⁹; for information see [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Targeting of individuals \(2019\)](#) and [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

The struggle to create a new cabinet in Baghdad has proven extensive and cumbersome. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq adopted a proportional power sharing political system – so-called consensual democracy - whereby the post of prime minister is held by a member of the Shia community, the post of speaker of the parliament is held by a Sunni and the presidency by a member of the Kurdish community, giving the three dominant ethnic/sectarian groups a stake in the country's affairs.⁹⁰ Newly elected parliamentarians could not determine which alliance of parties holds most seats following the May 2018 elections. The various Shia political blocks, competing over the post of prime minister, are divided into two factions; a pro-Iranian bloc⁹¹ and those with a nationalist approach focused on strengthening Iraq's independence and sovereignty.⁹² The violent protests that broke out in the southern regions in July 2018 further added to the stalemate in forming a new government.⁹³

In June 2018, the parliament ordered a recount of 11 million votes⁹⁴, after allegations of electoral fraud. Iraq's Board of Supreme Audit (BSA) had earlier warned of discrepancies in the count of votes by the newly introduced voting machines. This was particularly the case in the Kurdish governorate of Sulaymaniyah and the ethnically mixed governorate of Kirkuk.⁹⁵ However, within hours of the parliament vote, a fire broke out in the warehouse where the ballots were kept, destroying half the ballot boxes in the capital.⁹⁶ As a result, the parliament voted to dismiss the nine-member electoral commission - IHEC - for not heeding warnings by the BSA concerning the reliability of the voting machines. The IHEC was replaced with nine judges.⁹⁷ The recount, completed in August⁹⁸, confirmed the initial results in May's parliamentary elections, subsequently allowing Muqtada al-Sadr's al-Sairoun alliance a role in forming the country's next government. The Iranian-backed Shiite Fatah alliance also held second place, gaining an extra seat, followed by the incumbent Prime Minister Abadi's Nasr alliance coming in third. The disputed results in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk did not show any considerable changes.⁹⁹

After months of deadlock, the newly elected CoR nominated Mohammed al-Halbousi as speaker for the parliament in September, successively marking the first step towards forming a new government. Al-Halbousi, age 37, former governor of Anbar province, is the youngest ever elected speaker of

⁸⁷ Young, M., Does Muqtada al-Sadr Pose a Threat to Iran's Influence in Iraq?, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Open Democracy, The outcomes of Iraq's 2018 elections, 6 June 2018, [url](#); ISW, Breaking down Iraq's Election, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹ War on the Rocks, Mansour, R. More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here To Stay, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Middle East Eye, Iraq parliament elects Sunni MP al-Halbousi as speaker, breaking deadlock, 15 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹ Al Monitor, Shiite split heats up as Iraqi lawmakers fail to elect speaker, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹² Young, M., Does Muqtada al-Sadr Pose a Threat to Iran's Influence in Iraq?, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹³ Guardian (The), Protests spread through cities in Iraq's oil-rich Shia south, 18 July 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Iraq cleric Moqtada al-Sadr calls for delay in formation of government as he backs protests sweeping south, 20 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraqi Parliament orders election recount, sacks electoral commission, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Reuters, Exclusive: Iraq election commission ignored warnings over voting machines-document, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Reuters, Iraq says election recount complete but cut short in capital over fire, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Kurdistan24, Iraq names nine judges to take over electoral commission's work over fraud allegations, June 10 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Reuters, Iraq says election recount complete but cut short in capital over fire, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Reuters, Recount shows Iraq's Sadr retains election victory, no major changes, 10 August 2018, [url](#)

parliament in the history of the country.¹⁰⁰ Following al-Halbousi's nomination, parliament went ahead to appoint the Kurdish politician Barham Saleh, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) as the new president of the republic. Within hours of his appointment, Saleh, in an unexpected step, chose Adel Abdul Mahdi as prime minister, giving him the assignment to form a new government. It would normally have taken days, if not weeks to reach a decision.¹⁰¹ Although the appointment of Saleh was backed by the overwhelming majority of parliament members (219 out of 329 voted in support of Saleh), the nomination has marked tensions between the two dominant Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PUK, as the KDP had nominated its own candidate. Both parties are already at odds with each other over the governing of the Kurdish Region in Iraq (KRI), and the prevailing socio-economic grievances ailing the region. The nomination of the presidential candidate proved contentious, because of the disagreement, making it the first time that the selection of the president was to be decided by a direct vote in parliament.¹⁰²

Adel Abdul Mahdi, who ran as independent in this year's elections, maintains a neutral position which makes him an acceptable candidate to balance all competing parties. He is seen to be on good terms with the rivalling Shia blocs, as well as with Sunni politicians, which could help bridge sectarian strife. Abdul Mahdi further retains historical relations with the KRI¹⁰³, which could contribute to improving the relationship between the central government and the KRI. In fact he has in the past been supportive of the Kurdish referendum on bringing the oil-rich city of Kirkuk under Kurdish jurisdiction.¹⁰⁴ Abdul Mahdi's nomination therefore brings hope in lessening some of the tensions in the wake of the September referendum.¹⁰⁵

However, it should be noted that Adel Abdul Mehdi lacks a political base. Constitutionally, elections are supposed to be followed by the nomination of a speaker of parliament. Thereafter the president asks the largest electoral bloc (i.e. the largest post electoral parliamentary coalition) to nominate a prime minister who then forms a government. This was not the case after the 2018 elections, as none of the coalitions could build the largest bloc. This resulted in a prime minister without a political base, making the prime minister more beholden to the major political parties.¹⁰⁶

At the end of December 2018, Adel Abdul Mahdi had yet to complete his cabinet, three months after being tasked to form a government.¹⁰⁷ Five ministerial posts await parliament's approval: justice, education, interior, defence and migration. The most controversial is the appointment of the ministries of Interior and defence, since the political blocs do not agree.¹⁰⁸ The prime minister has proposed the former chairman of the PMU, Faleh al-Fayad as minister of interior. The nomination has been rejected by Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoun Alliance.¹⁰⁹ Other ministerial nominations have been subject to scrutiny, for example the minister of youth and sports is accused of 'terrorism' and the minister of communication for being a former member of the Baath party.¹¹⁰ Abdul Mahdi's government has also faced pressure from political blocks, who have attempted to classify the government as 'illegitimate' in accordance to Article 76 of the Iraqi constitution. The named article stipulates that the largest political bloc in the CoR is charged with the formation of the cabinet (Council of Ministers) within 15 days after the election of the president, subsequently rendering Abdul Mahdi's government as illegitimate, as he does not belong to the largest political bloc.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁰ Middle East Eye, Iraq parliament elects Sunni MP al-Halbousi as speaker, breaking deadlock, 15 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Middle East Eye, Why Barham Saleh's appointment as president is good news for Iraq, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰² Al Monitor, Iraq's new president taps Adel Abdul Mahdi to form government, 3 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, Adel Abdul Mahdi and the challenges of Iraq, 13 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Al Jazeera, Can Iraq's new prime minister solve its old problems, 8 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, Adel Abdul Mahdi and the challenges of Iraq, 13 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Haddad, F., comment made during the review of this report, 14 January 2019

¹⁰⁷ Al Monitor, Will Iraq's prime minister fail to complete his cabinet, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Al Monitor, Will Iraq's prime minister fail to complete his cabinet, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Middle East Monitor, Sadr's alliance rejects candidacy of former chairman of the Popular Mobilization Forces to interior minister, 5 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Al Monitor, Will Iraq's prime minister fail to complete his cabinet, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Al Monitor, Will Iraq's prime minister fail to complete his cabinet, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

1.2.2 Challenges for the new national government

The armed campaign against ISIL may have brought an end to the organisation's territorial control in Iraq, but it has not fully secured the situation in the country. The security situation remains fragile, particularly in areas earlier controlled by ISIL, where remnants of ISIL insurgency continue to operate.¹¹² Sectarian tensions continue to prevail as a result of the growing Iranian influence, secured through various proxy militia groups that make up part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).¹¹³

Successive governments have failed to address enduring issues in the past years as the armed forces battled large-scale insurgency by ISIL.¹¹⁴ One such issue is tackling corruption that has spread at levels within the administration as a result of mismanagement and lack of accountability for those amongst the political elite that have prospered, while living standards continue to plummet. The new government has also got to grapple with reconstructing infrastructure damaged by the successive military offensives against ISIL.¹¹⁵ Falling oil prices in the past years and the costs of reconstruction after ISIL has battered the country's finances. In 2018, the state budget indicated a deficit of an estimated USD 10.5 billion.¹¹⁶ The damage and needs assessment carried out by the Iraqi Ministry of planning, jointly with the World Bank, estimated the overall damage worth around USD 45 billion, and reconstruction needs for the various sectors to over USD 88 billion. The country received around USD 30 billion worth of commitments at the Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, held in Kuwait in February 2018.¹¹⁷ Notably, there are indications suggesting an improvement in the economic situation in 2018 as a result of improvement of the security situation, as well as due to a rise in oil prices, and an increase in public and private investment.¹¹⁸

According to Rawabet Center, this government is seen as the last chance for politicians to show their good intentions in dealing with issues concerning public grievances and providing employment opportunities, which was the reason behind citizens' reluctance to participate in the elections.¹¹⁹ Iraqis have taken to calling this government 'the last chance government' - *hukumat al-Fursa Alakhira*.¹²⁰

1.2.3 Parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Elections were also held in the KRI on 30 September 2018, to elect 111 members of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. The elections come a year after the controversial referendum for independence. The backlash following the referendum led to the seizure of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk by Iraqi forces in October 2017, subsequently instigating a withdrawal of Kurdish forces (Peshmerga) from the governorate, but also from the so-called disputed areas¹²¹, which had been under KRG control since 2014. The aftermath of the referendum deepened divisions among rivaling elites and parties.¹²² The events following the aftermath of the referendum added to the political discord between the leading

¹¹² Atlantic (The), ISIS never went away in Iraq, 31 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³ USIP, The Iran Primer, and Part 2: Pro-Iran Militias in Iraq, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Guardian (The), Iraqi president named Adel Abdul-Mahdi as next prime minister, 3 October 2018, [url](#).

¹¹⁵ Asharq Al-Awsat, 5 serious challenges facing Iraq in 2018, 1 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Reuters, Iraqi parliament approves budget, Kurdish lawmakers boycott vote, 3 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ World Bank Group, Iraq Economic Monitor; Toward Reconstruction, Economic Recovery and Fostering Social Cohesion, Fall 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁸ World Bank Group, Iraq Economic Monitor; Toward Reconstruction, Economic Recovery and Fostering Social Cohesion, Fall 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁹ Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, Adel Abdul Mahdi and the Challenges of Iraq, 13 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰ F. Haddad, Comment made during the review of this report, 14 January 2019

¹²¹ The disputed territories are located in northern Iraq, primarily in Erbil governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and in the Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates in northern Iraq. The areas have been contested by the Kurdish and Iraqi sides since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, when Kurdish forces gain control of territory outside the official recognised KRI. The question of the future control of the disputed areas was written into the Iraqi Constitution, but it was never implemented. See Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 12

¹²² Mccaffaray Van Den Toorn, C., Internal Divides behind the Kurdistan Referendum, 11 October 2017, [url](#)

parties, KDP and PUK. KDP leader, Masoud Barzani, who resigned as president shortly after the referendum, accused the PUK for treason over the withdrawal from Kirkuk.¹²³ In addition, the region is facing widespread corruption and a faltering economy, which ranges from cuts in public salaries, inadequate services, a dysfunctional bureaucracy, and more. This has left many Kurds disillusioned by the political institutions.¹²⁴

The national elections in May 2018 did not bring about any significant changes to the political landscape in the KRI. The KDP kept its 25 seats, whilst the PUK, which came in second only secured 18 seats¹²⁵ (down from 21 seats in the previous election¹²⁶).

After weeks of delay the Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission (IHERC) announced the final results of the regional parliamentary election on 21 October, in which the two major parties, KDP and PUK won most seats. The KDP came first, winning 45 seats of the 111 seats in the Kurdish parliament, followed by PUK which won 21 seats. The Goran Movement, the largest opposition party, gained only 12 seats (compared to 24 in the 2013 elections). Four of nine KRG commissioners, all of which are affiliated with different opposition groups, rejected the results. The opposing commissioners blamed the IHERC for ignoring individual complaints of irregularities and electoral fraud.¹²⁷

The opposition parties' rejection of the vote results could lead to further political, social and economic turmoil, which could fuel up public anger. The current Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, has called all parties for calm and patience in anticipation of the forming of a new government.¹²⁸

1.2.4 International context

International partners and countries participating in a February 2018 conference in Kuwait on Iraq's reconstruction needs were USD 88 billion to rebuild the country; however, countries offered 30 billion in loans.¹²⁹ The US has also requested USD 199 million in funds from Congress to support Iraq's stabilisation and non-military assistance programs, as well as providing more than USD 1.7 billion in humanitarian support to Iraq since 2014.¹³⁰ The EU continues to support financial and project support for human rights, security, and the rule of law in Iraq, supporting EU partners with EUR 82.5 million in 2017.¹³¹

US and international forces continue to support the Iraqi government at their request, in the fight against ISIL, and they continue to fund the US Train and Equip program though there has been a reduction in US presence and capabilities in Iraq since 2017 under President Trump.¹³² The drawdown of US forces in Iraq and Syria in 2018 has reportedly caused US military commanders to fear that the Iraqi government will not be able to defend itself against a 'renewed Sunni insurgency' as the remnants of ISIL that continue to be active.¹³³ A security analyst based in Iraq commented that with the US and Coalition withdrawal expected at some point following the end of military operations against ISIL, Iraq will be placed back in a similar situation as it was in 2012-2013 following the US troop withdrawal in 2011 (ending the 2003 operations there), which saw a clear resurgence of ISI/AQ operations leading up to the ISIL conflict. The analyst remarked that the root causes of Sunni insurgencies have not yet

¹²³ New Arab (The), Unease brews as Iraqi Kurds brace for crucial election, 28 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁴ DW, Iraqi Kurds vote for new parliament, 30 September 2018, [url](#); Aziz, S., Fikra Forum, Strength in Dialogue, A Case for the KRG Parliament, 12 September 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵ New Arab (The), Unease brews as Iraqi Kurds brace for crucial election, 28 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁶ IFES, Election Guide - Republic of Iraq, 30 April 2014, [url](#)

¹²⁷ Al Monitor, Iraqi Kurdistan opposition parties reject election results, 24 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Al Monitor, Iraqi Kurdistan opposition parties reject election results, 24 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹³⁰ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹³¹ EU, Delegation of the EU to Iraq, Human Rights and democracy in Iraq, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³² US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹³³ Washington Post (The), U.S. disbands command overseeing American ground forces in Iraq, as major combat against ISIS ends, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

been addressed, and the environment still exists where extremists can gain popular support and acceptance among the population in predominantly Sunni areas.¹³⁴

Iran, Turkey, and Syria continue to play a role in the Iraqi security situation. Syria, sharing an extensive border with Iraq, is an area providing ‘safe havens’ for ISIL to infiltrate Iraq.¹³⁵ Iran has long supported a number of Shia militias, politicians and armed groups in Iraq.¹³⁶ Many Iraqi leaders, Shia militia leaders and politicians were exiled to Iran during the Saddam Hussein period, and Iran has retained influence and close ties with these figures since the fall of the Baath and since 2014 in particular in the fight against ISIL.¹³⁷ More information on these actors is provided in [Section 1.3](#).

1.3 Armed actors

This section provides information on the main armed actors in Iraq and KRI and their territorial presence and role. There are a number of state armed groups supporting the government of Iraq against ISIL and other non-state armed groups.

According to the UNHCR, throughout Iraq’s numerous periods of conflict, many of the state security forces, armed opposition groups (pre-2003) and armed groups and criminal militias (post-2003) in Iraq have committed acts such as assassinations, abductions, and torture.¹³⁸ Detailed information on state actors of protection and their capacity to protect, including integrity issues such as alleged abuses, is available in the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

1.3.1 Forces supporting the Iraqi government

State forces in Iraq consist of the Iraqi Security forces (ISF), the Kurdish forces, known as the Peshmerga, and the so-called Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), which include Shia-led militias, Sunni tribal militias, and various minority militias. They are supported in some aspects by international forces in the fight against ISIL, as described below.¹³⁹ More information on the state response to ISIL can be found in [Section 1.4](#) and governorate chapters.

1.3.1.1 Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

According to the US Department of Defense (USDOD), with the end of major combat operations against ISIL in 2018, US support has shifted to training Iraqi forces; the source remarked that as of June 2018, ‘90 percent of the ISF were engaged in “hold” operations designed to prevent ISIS from re-emerging’.¹⁴⁰ The same source reported that due to US support, the ISF had improved its capacity to undertake complex military operations, but ‘continued to struggle’ with effectively managing logistics and intelligence gathering and application.¹⁴¹

The ISF consists of formal military and security forces that report both to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI). The forces are organised within the framework of Operational Commands (OC) that have been in place since the fall of Mosul in 2014. The OCs work as

¹³⁴ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

¹³⁵ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹³⁶ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹³⁷ USIP, The Iran Primer, Part 2: Pro-Iran Militias in Iraq, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1398)

¹³⁹ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴¹ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 38

Corps-level headquarters for units deployed within the area of operations. The Joint Operations Command (JOC) has oversight of all OCs and its subordinate units.¹⁴² All OCs report to the JOC.¹⁴³

The Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) is a force that is attached to the Council of Ministers. It reports directly to the Prime Minister and coordinates operations with the JOC. The force is subsequently separate from the MOI and the MOD. ISF utilise the CTS as an elite light infantry force to spearhead most of its important operations.¹⁴⁴ Reportedly, East Mosul was taken mostly by CTC forces, backed by coalition airpower. The force suffered heavy losses. By the end of the battle for East Mosul, as much as 75 % of CTC forces had been injured or killed.¹⁴⁵

The Federal Police (FP) is a deployable gendarmerie force under the MOI. Its capabilities fall on the spectrum between an Iraqi army unit and the local police. Members of the FPs are recruited locally, but can be deployed to other governorates. The force possesses anti-tank rockets, Humvees, Infantry Fighting Vehicles. They also include a Sniper Battalion.¹⁴⁶

The Border Guard Command is an infantry force attached to the MOI. The force oversees Iraq's ports of entry¹⁴⁷ and is divided into five border regions:

- 1st Region: covers Iraqi Kurdistan's border with Iran and Turkey.
- 2nd Region: covers western Anbar's border with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This region has the most resources deployed to it.
- 3rd Region: covers the Diyala-Wassit border with Iran.
- 4th Region: covers the Basrah and Missan border with Iran and Kuwait.
- 5th Region: covers the Najaf and Muthanna border with the Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁸

1.3.1.2 Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) (al-Hashd al-Sha'ibi) and other armed groups

For further background information on the PMUs, including integrity issues, see the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

The PMUs were established after the defeat, and subsequent withdrawal of the ISF from Mosul in June 2014; however, the original militias long predate the creation of the PMU. After the collapse of the ISF in the face of ISIL in 2014, the PMUs were reinforced following the religious ruling (*fatwa*) declared by the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, in which he called on volunteers to exercise their 'duty to fight' (*Wajib al- Kifah*) in the offensive against ISIL. The PMUs continue to play a pivotal role in the fight against the remnants of ISIL.¹⁴⁹ They retain broad political support from Iraqis and high popularity among the population.¹⁵⁰ The links between the government forces and the PMUs and associated militia groups are frequently blurred.¹⁵¹

According to Fanar Haddad, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, the PMU are a spectrum of an estimated 140 000 fighters, belonging to over 40 different units, who vary in their relationship with various Iraqi political actors, with Iran and with each other.¹⁵²

¹⁴² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴³ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁴⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁴⁵ New Yorker (The), Iraq's post-ISIS campaign of revenge, December 24 & 31 2018 issue, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁴⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁴⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵⁰ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20

¹⁵¹ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵² Haddad, F., Understanding Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'bi, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

Subsequently, the term PMU incorporates a variety of militias that includes, predominantly Iran-supported Shia militias, Sunni and other minority-based armed forces.¹⁵³

Shia PMU Forces

The Shia PMUs forces are mainly led by senior Iranian proxy leaders, responding to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force. The Shia PMUs respond to directives from an unofficial executive commission, or Shura Council, dominated by senior pro-Iranian leaders, like the Badr organisation, AAH, KH and other pro-Iranian figures.¹⁵⁴ These forces have in general a separate chain of command than the ISF. Subsequently, they decide as to whether they will implement orders issued by the prime minister, or ISF, or whether to take a different approach. The Iranian backed forces do not respond to the Prime Minister, but do coordinate many activities with the ISF.¹⁵⁵ There were isolated gun battles between the PMUs and the ISF during the 2018 period which illustrates the power struggles between these forces and the 'inability of the Iraqi government to exert control over these forces'.¹⁵⁶ KH is a US designated terrorist group.¹⁵⁷

The FP accompanies the PMUs on 'every major PMF-led operation' and the previous two head commanders of the FP were also Badr members. According to ISW, FP commanders who are not sympathetic to the PMU are likely to be 'intimidated into cooperating', and those who do not comply may be forced into retirement, or re-assignment or into administrative positions to make space for Badr or militia members.¹⁵⁸ The PMUs that are aligned with Iran, especially Badr, have considerable influence and alignment over the Iraqi Ministry of Interior.¹⁵⁹ Renad Mansour (Iraq analyst, Research Fellow at Chatham House) stated that Badr actually took over the Ministry of Interior (MoI).¹⁶⁰ Fanar Haddad noted that the relation between the MoI and Badr is much older and predates the creation of the PMU, and that Badr became enmeshed in the MoI after 2005.¹⁶¹ PMUs have been seen as 'blatantly partisan' in relation to their political party connections, and behaving in a lawless manner, and competing with ISF forces in territories liberated from ISIL.¹⁶² They have been involved in a range of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, killings, and physical abuses against civilians in ISIL-controlled areas in the past context of the conflict, as reported by UNAMI.¹⁶³ In the past during the height of the ISIL period, they have been accused of involvement in abuses and killings of civilians and Sunnis, in the context of anti-ISIL operations.¹⁶⁴

The Shia PMUs are divided into three main categories:

1. The Iranian-backed militias which have strong relations with Iran and its security apparatus, particularly the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The militias mainly include influential groups like the Badr Organisation¹⁶⁵, AAH, KH¹⁶⁶, and Saraya Talia al-Khorasan¹⁶⁷,

¹⁵³ Haddad, F., Understanding Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'bi, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁵⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁵⁶ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁵⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Iraq, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁵⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018; Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁰ Mansour, R., More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here To Stay, War on the Rocks, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 January 2019

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018 [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶³ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 November 2015 – 30 September 2016, 19 January 2017, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁶⁴ HRW, Iraq: Pro-Government Militias' Trail of Death, 31 July 2014, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Militias Escalate Abuses, Possibly War Crimes, 15 February 2015, [url](#);

¹⁶⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 36-45

¹⁶⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 40- 41

¹⁶⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 45

which proliferated in the areas liberated by ISIL. The Iranian backed militias are also considered the most active and most capable militias inside Iraq.¹⁶⁸ According to ISW, these militias appear to have control over some army units (especially in Diyala), and have freedom of action in areas of responsibility of several other Ministry of Defence Operations Commands (especially in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk).¹⁶⁹

2. The Hawza militias (also called *al-Hashd al-Marji'i*): are smaller groups affiliated to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. They are linked to a shrine complex (*utbah*). They are not connected to political parties.¹⁷⁰
3. Other politically affiliated militias: refers to armed groups not aligned with Iran, but also linked with Shia political parties. Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam (Peace Brigades), and the Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI) militias are considered the most capable of these groups.¹⁷¹

Sunni tribal militias or Tribal Mobilisation Forces/Units (al-Hashd al-Asha'iri)

Many of the areas seized by ISIL were predominantly Sunni areas. Efforts were therefore undertaken by the Iraqi government to mobilise members of the Sunni population - primarily tribal actors - to join in the fight against ISIL. The biggest recruitment undertaking in this regard was a US-sponsored initiative, which came to be known as the Tribal Mobilization Force (TMF).¹⁷² In December 2015 Prime Minister Abadi took the decision to integrate 40 000 Sunni fighter in the PMU.¹⁷³ The majority are believed to be in Anbar and Ninewa, whilst others exist in Salah al-Din and other liberated areas.¹⁷⁴ Given their local knowledge and past success in defeating Islamic extremists (as part of the *sahwa* movement) these forces have come to play an important role in recapturing ISIL-controlled areas, and continue to do so after ISIL's territorial defeat.¹⁷⁵ Many of the tribal mobilisation units were tribally affiliated and work independently¹⁷⁶, or are incorporated within some Shia-led formations, like the Abbas Combat Division and the Ali al-Akbar Brigades.¹⁷⁷

Minority militias

A number of minority militias have developed in the fight against ISIL. These militias include locally recruited fighters in areas previously seized or threatened by ISIL that joined the fighting in the wake of ISIL's territorial control.¹⁷⁸ The Shia Turkmen Forces are comparatively smaller in numbers than the Sunni militias. They have however had a considerable impact on the security dynamics, mainly in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk. The Shia Turkmen Forces are initially recruited by the larger PMU-forces, such as the Badr Brigade. This has also contributed to extending the PMU's influence in the areas of their control. This is the case in southern parts of Kirkuk and the Tuz district in Salah al-Din. The militia forces are also known to have committed human rights violations in areas that fell under their control.¹⁷⁹

Relevant minority militias are explored in the relevant governorate chapters, particularly in [Ninewa](#). More information is also available in the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

¹⁶⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 36-45

¹⁶⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

¹⁷⁰ The ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 47-48

¹⁷¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 49-54

¹⁷² Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 24-25

¹⁷³ Haddad, F., Understanding Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'bi, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Haddad, F., Understanding Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'bi, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁷⁹ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 26

1.3.1.3 Kurdistan Regional Government forces

Article 117 of the Iraqi constitution stipulates that federal regions are responsible for ‘the establishment and organisation of the internal security forces for the region such as police, security forces and guards of the region’. Since the adoption of the constitution in 2005, the KRG has upheld the sole responsibility for the protection of the Kurdish region, and by doing so recognised the Peshmerga forces as a state security force.¹⁸⁰ The Peshmerga forces command structure operates at a regional level and has remained completely separated from the national security institutions. The Iraqi Ministry of Defence has no authority or control over the Peshmerga’s operations.¹⁸¹ The Peshmerga forces were merged under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs in 2010. Despite the merger the forces continue to uphold party loyalties toward the KDP and PUK respectively.¹⁸²

The forces were deployed on KRI’s frontline when ISIL captured the city of Mosul in 2014. The Peshmergas participation was also a vital turning point that ultimately contributed to the Iraqi security forces’ victory in the battle against ISIL.¹⁸³ In doing so the Peshmergas also seized the opportunity to occupy a string of territories along the disputed areas, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. The Peshmerga forces withdrew from Kirkuk, and the other parts of the disputed areas after the controversial referendum in September 2017, when the Iraqi army took over.¹⁸⁴

The politicisation of the Peshmerga poses a challenge for the KRG to reform and professionalise the institution. The Ministry of Peshmerga affairs commands over 14 integrated Brigades. However, the command structure of the ministry remains structured in accordance with party affiliation as each brigade is equipped with a commander from one party and a deputy from another. There are an estimated 40 000 fighters serving under the Ministry, in addition to another 100 000 fighters roughly distributed amongst the two major parties, KDP (80s Force) and PUK (70s Force).¹⁸⁵

The Asayish are the intelligence services of the KRG who have also participated in activities regarding the conflict with ISIL, conducting arrests and investigations¹⁸⁶; they are also divided along political lines between the PUK and the KDP.¹⁸⁷

1.3.1.4 US-led coalition forces

Following Iraqi military forces’ collapse and failure to protect the population from ISIL in 2014, Iraq slowly began to rebuild its security forces with Western support.¹⁸⁸ A 73-nation Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL, led by the US, supported the Iraqi efforts against ISIL.¹⁸⁹ In August 2014, the Iraqi government requested US support to provide air strike support in the fight against ISIL; this also involved forces from Australia, Belgium, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the UK; while Germany and Canada have provided reconnaissance and logistical support.¹⁹⁰

US ground forces served to advise, train and equip Iraqi forces in the fight against ISIL, operate drone support, and provide battlefield logistical support. This has drawn down since December 2017, with US forces focused on training Iraqi forces in intelligence and policing. The US military disbanded its

¹⁸⁰ Fliervoet, F., *Fighting for Kurdistan? The Peshmerga in Iraq*, Clingendael, March 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁸¹ Fliervoet, F., *Fighting for Kurdistan? The Peshmerga in Iraq*, Clingendael, March 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁸² Van Wilgenburg, W. and Fumerton, M., *Kurdistan’s Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshmerga Forces*, 16 December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸³ Fliervoet, F., *Fighting for Kurdistan? The Peshmerga in Iraq*, Clingendael, March 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸⁴ Fliervoet, F., *Fighting for Kurdistan? The Peshmerga in Iraq*, Clingendael, March 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸⁵ Fliervoet, F., *Fighting for Kurdistan? The Peshmerga in Iraq*, Clingendael, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 15-16

¹⁸⁶ HRW, “Life Without a Father is Meaningless” Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances in Iraq 2014-2017, 27 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ USDOS, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 – Iraq*, 20 April 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁸ International Crisis Group, *Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State*, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁸⁹ US, USCIRF, *Annual Report 2018 – Iraq*, April 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁰ RULAC, *Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq* [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

command overseeing US ground forces in Iraq in April 2018. As of April 2018 it was reported that there were 5 200 US forces in Iraq, though the exact number is not entirely clear.¹⁹¹

1.3.2 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and associated groups

There are numerous groups fighting against the government of Iraq, primarily ISIL (ISIL, IS, ISIS, or Daesh), which grew from the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) umbrella group of Sunni insurgency groups created in 2006 and supported by AQ.¹⁹² ISIL, AQ and associated groups are designated on the UN Security Council's sanctions list.¹⁹³

Between June 2014 and December 2017, in the territories it attacked and controlled, ISIL applied a 'sustained and deliberate policy of executing civilians' as a means of exerting control and instilling fear. The group committed mass killings, targeted civilians, imposed strict codes of social behaviour, killing those not in conformity with their Islamic *Takfiri*¹⁹⁴ doctrines.¹⁹⁵

ISIL has relied extensively on criminality to fund its activities, and also recruited members of criminal groups to its ranks. ISIL was amassing wealth from extortion and taxation, as well as looting, property confiscation, and petty criminality, smuggling, kidnapping, robbery, trafficking, levying fines, and selling oil on the black market.¹⁹⁶

ISIL no longer held territory after December 2017, though the situation remains unstable and they continue to carry out targeted attacks against civilians in 2018.¹⁹⁷ Asymmetric attacks by ISIL are reported across Iraq.¹⁹⁸ A longer-term insurgency situation is developing.¹⁹⁹ ISIL also continues to focus targeted attacks on members of the Iraqi police, security forces and PMUs.²⁰⁰ ISIL will continue to 'exploit Sunni grievances' and societal instability with the intention to regain territory in Iraq, according to US intelligence assessments.²⁰¹

Regarding the estimated number of fighters in Iraq and Syria together, sources report that the number of fighters peaked in 2016, ranging from 10 000 to 25 000 fighters.²⁰² The Pentagon stated it was nearly 30 000 fighters.²⁰³ ISW reports that ISIL is waging an effective campaign to re-establish support zones while raising funds and rebuilding command-and-control of remnant forces.²⁰⁴

In Iraq alone, the estimated numbers vary.²⁰⁵ The UN Security Council stated in its July 2018 report that 'some Member States estimate that the total current ISIL membership in Iraq and [Syria] to be

¹⁹¹ Washington Post (The), U.S. disbands command overseeing American ground forces in Iraq, as major combat against ISIS ends, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹² RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹³ UN Security Council, Resolution 2252 (2015) [S/RES/2253 (2015)], 17 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ Takfir is an Arabic word meaning 'unbeliever' and was an extremist ideology employed by ISIL to declare individuals as apostates or impure and used against those who do not pledge allegiance.

¹⁹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to Iraq, 14 to 23 November 2017 (A/HRC/38/44/Add.1), 5 June 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

¹⁹⁶ RAND, An Overview of Current Trends in Terrorism and Illicit Finance – Lessons from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and Other Emerging Threats, 7 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 4, 5

¹⁹⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 – Iraq, 20 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018,, [url](#), para. 18

¹⁹⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; ISW, ISIS's Second Resurgence, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), para. 44; US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 20

²⁰¹ US, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, 29 January 2019, [url](#), p. 31

²⁰² Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰³ ISW, ISIS second resurgence, 2 October, 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ ISW, ISIS second resurgence, 2 October, 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General's Report to U.S. Congress. Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas

between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals.²⁰⁶ As of August 2018, the USDOD estimated that there were 15 500 to 17 100 ISIL fighters still in Iraq.²⁰⁷ Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on Islamic State and advisor to the Iraqi government, estimated the numbers to around 1 000, of which 500 operate in the desert areas²⁰⁸, whilst the rest have regrouped in the Hamreen Mountain range in the north-eastern parts of the country, which extends from the governorate of Diyala, crossing the northern part of Salah al-Din governorate and into the southern parts of the governorate of Kirkuk.²⁰⁹

1.3.3 White Flags

Groups of ISIL remnants appear to be building new militant fractions in the Hamreen Mountains. Media sources report that one such group goes under the name of White Flags. Armed with weapons accumulated from years of fighting along ISIL, these fighters are also finding shelter in the mountain ridge.²¹⁰ The group is reportedly an alliance of former ISIL militants and disgruntled Kurdish militants who were pushed out of the multi-ethnic (Kurdish-Turkmen) town of Tuz Khurmatu.²¹¹

1.3.4 Other militant groups

Aside from ISIL, other smaller militant jihadist armed groups were also present in Iraq. They form part of what the BBC called the ‘Sunni insurgency’ in 2014. The main ones, mentioned by BBC in 2014 were Jamaat Ansar Al-Islam (JAI) (mainly based in Ninewa), the Naqshbandi Order (Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandia, JTRN), Jaysh Al-Mujahideen (JAM) (mainly near Hawija), Islamic Army of Iraq (mainly in Diyala and Salah al-Din).²¹² JTRN was in 2014, the second largest insurgent group after ISIL; its ideology ‘espouses a blend of the banned Baathist Party’s ideology (...) and Naqshbandi Sufi Islam’ while emphasising jihadist language.²¹³ It has created front groups of Baathists and has operated in parts of Anbar and Falluja.²¹⁴ No information could be found whether the groups are still active in Iraq. According to Fanar Hadad, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, events since 2014 have rendered these groups insignificant-for the time being.²¹⁵

Ansar Al-Islam (AAI), meaning ‘supporters of Islam’ is a jihadist group with ties to Al Qaeda and is a US-declared terrorist organisation. The group was based along the north-east border of Iraq/Iran with an estimated 700 members in 2003.²¹⁶ AAI²¹⁷ was established in the KRI and tracing roots to the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan. AAI has conducted attacks against ‘a wide range of targets including Iraqi government and security forces’ as well as US/Coalition forces and has carried out kidnappings, murders, and assassinations of Iraqi citizens. In 2014 it pledged allegiance to ISIL and continued to operate in Syria in 2016-2017. The USDOS reported it was ‘active in northern Iraq’ and has a ‘presence

Contingency Operations, April 1, 2018 – June 30, 2018, 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

²⁰⁶ UN Security Council: Letter dated 16 July 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2018/705], 27 July 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁷ ISW, ISIS second resurgence, 2 October, 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰ BuzzFeed News, The new face of ISIS in Iraq calls itself the White Flags, 1 April 2018, [url](#); Middle East Eye, No surrender: ‘White Flags’ group rises as new threat in northern Iraq, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

²¹¹ Middle East Eye, No surrender: ‘White Flags’ group rises as new threat in northern Iraq, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

²¹² BBC News, Iraq crisis: Key players in Sunni rebellion, 14 July 2014, [url](#)

²¹³ BBC News, Iraq crisis: Key players in Sunni rebellion, 14 July 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁴ BBC News, Iraq crisis: Key players in Sunni rebellion, 14 July 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁵ F. Haddad, comment made during the review of this report, 14 January 2019.

²¹⁶ NBC, Alleged Iraqi terror group ‘finished’, 30 March 2003, [url](#)

²¹⁷ Also known as Ansar al-Sunna; Ansar al-Sunna Army; Devotees of Islam; Followers of Islam in Kurdistan; Helpers of Islam; Jaish Ansar al-Sunna; Jund al-Islam; Kurdish Taliban; Kurdistan Supporters of Islam; Partisans of Islam; Soldiers of God; Soldiers of Islam; Supporters of Islam in Kurdistan. See United States Department of State (USDOS), Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Ansar al-Islam, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

in western and central Iraq' in its 2017-2018 report on terrorism.²¹⁸ AAI is mainly made up of Iraqi Kurds and has previously conducted operations there until 2014 when its fighters were 'swept up' by the ISIL caliphate. Today, AAI mainly operates in Syria.²¹⁹ During 2014, it carried out a number of attacks targeting police and military forces in Kirkuk, Tikrit, and north of Baghdad. At that time it was a rival organisation of ISIL.²²⁰ The Kurdish government deemed it 'militarily defeated' in 2018, though it may continue to take refuge in mountainous border areas.²²¹

A new group called the Khawbaksh emerged in 2018, calling itself a 'Kurdish volunteer' group active against PMUs in the areas around Tuz Khurmatu and Kirkuk with links to Naqshbandi, and aimed at generating instability and 'liberating Kirkuk' from the PMU and Iraqi forces. These groups did not pose as much of a threat of resurgence as ISIL, according to security analysts interviewed in 2018 by Al Monitor.²²² Abbas al-Adrawi, a researcher in the Hamorabi Center for Strategic Studies, told Al Monitor that the Khawbaksh, and similar groups, included remnants of the Saddam Hussein-era army and drug smugglers.²²³ Other sources say they are 'citizen-fighters' who emerged after the withdrawal of Kurdish fighters and have alleged links to Kurdish parties. The group was accused of shelling houses in December 2018 while targeting security forces.²²⁴

There are also other militant Kurdish groups operating in the KRI, which are described in relevant governorate chapters where they are active; as described in [Section 2.7](#).

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a non-state armed group involved in armed struggle for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey. It was designated as a 'terrorist group' by the EU in 2002. The PKK's conflict with Turkey spills over into Syria and Iraq, according to RULAC.²²⁵

1.3.5 Tribes

Tribal dynamics have played an important role in Iraqi politics. Saddam Hussein empowered the tribes in the 1990s to protect his regime. The tribes' political influences continued to grow after 2003, as consecutive governments turned to tribal leaders to secure votes. Some tribal leaders took part in the parliamentary elections and won seats.²²⁶ According to a CRS 2007 report some of the major tribal confederations and groups in southern Iraq were the Zubaydi, Ubayd, Khaza'il-al, Anizah and Kindi.²²⁷

Contemporary rural-urban hybrids in Iraq are held together by traditional tribal characteristics of solidarity (asabiyya), true kinship ties, patron-client relationships and tribal customs and laws. Although much of the tribe's traditional structure has disappeared in today's urban setting, modern tribes still uphold the basis of tribal culture and most importantly, the ability to mobilise politically and militarily. Tribalism lives in symbiosis with contemporary ideology and social and political movements. Around 80 % of Iraq's population maintain some degree of tribal identity.²²⁸ Tribes are often armed with heavy weapons and are involved in conflicts. Tribal transgressions can result in violence.²²⁹ Tribes have also become entangled as actors in the ISIL conflict.²³⁰

²¹⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Ansar al-Islam, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁹ LWJ, Ansar al-Islam raids Assad regime position in Latakia, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

²²⁰ LWJ, Ansar al Islam releases propaganda photos showing operations in Iraq, 23 June 2014, [url](#)

²²¹ NBC, Alleged Iraqi terror group 'finished', 30 March 2013, [url](#)

²²² Al Monitor, Armed Kurdish groups want disputed territory back in Iraq, 11 January 2018, [url](#)

²²³ Al Monitor, Armed Kurdish groups want disputed territory back in Iraq, 11 January 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴ Al Monitor, Armed Kurdish groups want disputed territory back in Iraq, 11 January 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵ RULAC, Non-international armed conflict in Turkey [Last updated: 28 January 2018], n.d., [url](#)

²²⁶ Raseef22, South Iraq's armed clans outmuscling the state, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

²²⁷ US, CRS, Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social and Political Activities, 15 March 2007, [url](#) p. 6

²²⁸ Asfura-Heim, P., CNA-Anaysis & Solutions, No Security Without US: Tribes and Tribalism in al-Anbar Province Iraq, June 2014, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²²⁹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 48

²³⁰ AFP, Tribal Justice Awaits Returning Iraqis who Joined Daesh, 14 November 2017, [url](#)

Tribes are further explained in governorate chapters where relevant, and also in [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

1.3.6 Unknown actors

A range of armed actors are involved in criminality and violence in Iraq.²³¹ Actors and perpetrators who are involved in attacks and violence through extortions, robbery, racketeering, small arms and explosives, as well as targeted killings may not always be identifiable and it can be difficult to be conclusive because of lack of attribution and lack of reporting by victims; often it may involve militias and gangs.²³² Violence by unknown perpetrators is often used to intimidate opponents, drive people out, make money, or target people due to their lifestyle.²³³

1.4 Recent security trends and armed confrontations in 2018

1.4.1 Geographical overview of the security situation

This section provides a brief explanation of different security issues in different geographical areas. Some areas of Iraq have been affected by ISIL more than others, while some areas have specific security issues, which are briefly described below. These contextual issues are further elaborated in the governorate level chapters.

1.4.1.1 Conflict with ISIL

ISIL's territorial control, contestation and presence

ISIL is described by Iraq security expert Michael Knights as a 'highly active and aggressive insurgent movement' as of 2018; though he characterised it as being at its 'lowest operational tempo' since late 2010.²³⁴ ISIL has taken advantage of the underlying instability, prevailing corruption and political turmoil in Iraq to exploit local grievances to promote its narrative through on-line propaganda and to operate in ungoverned spaces.²³⁵ Reporting in summer 2018, USDOD stated that ISIL no longer holds control over 'significant territory in Iraq'.²³⁶ According to the Pentagon, although ISIL lost '99 %' of its territory in Iraq since December 2017, it has not been eradicated.²³⁷ ISIL's control has been reduced to operating insurgent cells in remote rural areas, most of which are located in areas previously controlled by ISIL, i.e. Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din; these areas are reportedly the most kinetic in terms of frequency of security incidents and most active, though this alternates with the cycle of insurgent activity.²³⁸

ISW employs a 'rigorous methodology' to assess ISIL's control of terrain which conforms to the US military's doctrinal definitions. ISW defines 'control zones' as areas where ISIL controls and governs the local population by exerting 'physical and psychological pressure to endure that groups and individuals respond as directed'. In a January 2019 email to EASO for this report, ISW stated that 'ISIL only holds doctrinal control of one district of Northern Iraq – Baiji District in Salah al-Din'. Additionally, it controls terrain in the Makhmoul Mountains of rural Baiji where it 'exercises social control over the

²³¹ USDOS, OSAC, Iraq 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 12 February 2018, [url](#); Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

²³² Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

²³³ Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

²³⁴ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²³⁵ Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#)

²³⁶ ISW, ISIS second resurgence, 2 October, 2018, [url](#)

²³⁷ Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#)

²³⁸ Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#)

population’ through observed indicators of social control in the area including prisons, judicial proceedings, training camps, and organised worship.²³⁹

ISW reported that there are numerous districts where ISIL exerts ‘a great deal of psychological pressure over the population’ even if the definition of ‘control’ is not met. In these districts, ISIL cannot hold terrain, but there are a number of indicators showing ISIL is contesting for control with the ISF. These include indicators such as abandonment of villages, destruction of agriculture and infrastructure, repeated ISIL raids, and assassinations of the local social hierarchy. They gave the opinion that in these areas the civilian population cannot rely upon the security forces to provide ‘adequate protection’. These districts that ISW calls ‘contested’ include:

- **Salah al-Din:** Shirqat and Tuz/Tooz (Salah al-Din);
- **Erbil:** Makhmour district (Erbil);
- **Kirkuk:** Hawija and Daquq (Kirkuk);
- **Diyala:** Kifri and Khanaqin (Diyala).²⁴⁰

In July 2018, media reported that former Minister of Interior Baqir Jaber al-Zubeidi stated that ISIL had ‘control’ over 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala.²⁴¹ Corroboration for that statement was not found, but according to Iraq expert Derek Flood, these are areas that were never fully secured by the Iraqi forces after Hawija was liberated in October 2017.²⁴²

Michael Knights, an Iraq security expert, published a study on ISIL attack metrics²⁴³ in December 2018 using his own geo-located dataset of security incidents (declassified and open source), and assessed that, based on ISIL activity and operating patterns, there are 27 areas of Iraq with ‘permanently operating attack cells’. These attack cells were identified as being permanently active in:

- **Anbar province:** Al-Qaim, Wadi Horan/Rutbah and Lake Tharthar/Hit/Ramadi;
- **Salah al-Din:** The southern Jallam Desert (south of Samarra), Baiji, Shirqat, Pulkhana (near Tuz), and Mutabijah/Udaim;
- **Baghdad and belts:** Tarmiyah, Taji, Rashidayah, Jurf al Sakhr [administratively part of Babil governorate²⁴⁴], Latifiyah/ Yussufiyah, Jisr Diyala/Madain, and Radwaniyah/Abu Ghraib in the belts;
- **Kirkuk:** Hawijah, Rasha, Zab, Dibis, Makhmour [administratively part of Erbil governorate²⁴⁵], and Ghaeda in or near Kirkuk governorate;
- **Diyala:** Muqdadiah, Jawlawla, Saadiyah, Qara Tapa, Mandali;
- **Ninewa:** Mosul city, Qayyarah, Hatra, and the Iraq-Turkey pipeline corridor south-west of Mosul, Badush, and Sinjar/Syrian border in Ninewa.²⁴⁶

ISW published a map in December 2018, which indicates ISW’s assessment of the areas of Iraq where ISIL has control, support, and attack capabilities:

²³⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

²⁴⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

²⁴¹ Kurdistan24, IS controls 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Diyala: Former Iraqi Interior Minister, 08 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁴² Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

²⁴³ Knights cautions in this article that his dataset is a partial sample of ISIL attacks in 2018 and a conservative underestimate of ISIL incidents. Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁴ See the chapter on the southern governorates for information on Babil

²⁴⁵ See the chapter on Ninewa and also on the KRI for information on Makhmour

²⁴⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

The Hamreen Mountains, bordering to the governorates of Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk, are probably ISIL's most strategic remaining strongholds in the country today. The rugged terrain of the mountain range is a historically known insurgent stronghold, earlier harbouring other extremist groups like AQI, JRTN and Ansar Al-Sunna.²⁴⁹ The vast desert terrain that makes up most part of the governorate of Anbar is another central hub for ISIL sleeper cells to regroup and plan new attacks. The remote mountain ranges, valleys and caves serve as ideal hideouts for the organisation. Although ISIL no longer holds territorial control in towns and cities, its fighters continue to operate in the desert regions along the Iraq-Syria border.²⁵⁰

Although the KRI was relatively insulated from ISIL activity, ISIL also maintains a support zone in the Halabja Mountains close to the Iranian borders. This area, where groups such as Ansar Al-Islam pledged allegiance to ISIL, is known to have provided ISIL with Kurdish fighters.²⁵¹ According to the ISW, ISIL is currently expanding its influence beyond the Halabja Mountains, notably through these local groups. Kurdish forces have allegedly arrested many ISIL cells within Sulaymaniyah governorate since January 2018.²⁵²

ISIL activity, targets, and tactics

During the period from April to June 2018, the USDOD reported a decline in violence in all governorates of Iraq except the three governorates of Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk where insurgent violence reportedly increased.²⁵³ Most of the violence reportedly occurred along the Green Line, a large swath of territory in northern Iraq disputed by Kurdistan and Iraq; in these areas, ISIL has greater freedom of movement and is able to exploit competing forces in the area.²⁵⁴ According to USDOD, the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad and Ninewa experienced the biggest decline in insurgent incidents in the second quarter of 2018. In Ninewa, security forces concentrated on stability in Mosul and preventing ISIL infiltration from Syria. Baghdad, although calm, continues to be at risk of attacks from ISIL networks operating in the area.²⁵⁵ According to a security analyst based in Iraq, contacted for this report, security incidents that are mainly occurring are asymmetric attacks in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar, Baghdad, and with some spilling over into Babil (Jurf al Sakhr and Iskandariya).²⁵⁶

In July 2018, one of Iraq's leading ISIL experts, security advisor Hisham al-Hashimi, described ISIL's strategy being built on what he refers to as the 'four triangles of death', where militants are believed to hide without support of the local population. In the first triangle ISIL uses the Hamreen Mountains, which for most part is under the control of ISIL, as a base for ambushes and attacks against the ISF. The second triangle according to Hashimi, includes Samarra - in Salah al-Din governorate, which ISIL has been able to use as a fall-back position when attacked, despite lack of cooperation from the local population. The third triangle is located between Baghdad and Damascus, where ISIL is reportedly carrying out kidnappings and bombings, as well as disrupting trade and seizing commercial goods. The last triangle includes the vast desert areas on the border of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.²⁵⁷

ISIL has now shifted to guerrilla tactics, launched from remote rural locations in former ISIL-controlled areas. The caves and tunnel networks, constructed by ISIL militants in the past have merged as a central

²⁴⁹ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#) p. 31

²⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, ISIS fighters still operate around Anbar, 8 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁵¹ Bakawan, A., Three Generations of Jihadism in Iraqi Kurdistan, IFRI, July 2017, [url](#), pp. 19-22

²⁵² ISW, ISIS Second Resurgence, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁵³ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20

²⁵⁴ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20

²⁵⁵ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20

²⁵⁶ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

²⁵⁷ Reuters, Commentary: The reality of Islamic State in Iraq, 10 July 2018, [url](#)

hub from which the group can launch asymmetric attacks against civilians, ISF and affiliated militia groups.²⁵⁸

ISIL is gaining control through its resurgence as a guerrilla network. In August 2018, Michael Knights assessed that an indication of ISIL's growing strength is the increase in the numbers of village elders killed in earlier strongholds; i.e. Anbar Salah al-Din and Diyala. Knights estimated in August 2018 that an average of three and a half village elders were killed per week.²⁵⁹

In Salah al-Din governorate, ISIL militants have also launched harassment tactics aimed at forcibly displacing residents in their areas of operation, in order to clear areas that they can use as bases. ISIL is subsequently threatening residents by confiscating property in order to force residents to leave. In some instances they have resorted to kidnapping and killing as a means of forcing residents off their property.²⁶⁰ Reportedly, militant groups use vehicles, similar to those used by government-affiliated militias operating in the area to enter villages and kidnap residents, under the pretence that they are being taken for questioning. Many of the kidnapped residents were later found dead. They had been blindfolded, handcuffed and shot in the head and the chest.²⁶¹

The setup of fake checkpoints, whereby ISIL militants posing as military personnel engage in kidnapping, killings or robbing vehicles they stop²⁶², is another tactic used by ISIL insurgents to expand territorial control in rural areas. According to Michael Knights, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the strategy is an attempt to re-assert control of rural areas, by containing security forces in urban centres, giving ISIL greater movement throughout the countryside.²⁶³ According to the security analyst contacted for this report, in general, most attacks are targeting security forces in the governorates where ISIL had a presence, noting that some attacks do also directly target civilians. Direct attacks on civilians are usually for intimidation and reprisal purposes – such as assassinations of mukhtars, civil authorities, tribal mobilisation force members, and civilians who are branded as 'collaborators'.²⁶⁴ The same source remarked that in larger urban centres there are threats related to criminal activities (robbery, kidnapping, extortion), but here the lines become blurred with other actors being involved such as militias/PMU and other actors who are between the role of protectors and being involved in criminal activity.²⁶⁵

Michael Knights reported that ISIL launched 1 271 attacks across Iraq in the first 10 months of 2018, the majority of which were explosive attacks (762), attempted mass casualty attacks and roadside bombs; it also carried out overrun attacks against security forces positions and targeted killings and kidnappings (all these types accounted for 54 % of ISIL attacks). Another 46 % of attacks were lower quality 'harassment' attacks which were 'less lethal and less carefully targeted'. This activity took place across Anbar, Baghdad belts, Diyala, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Kirkuk; remarking a 'huge reduction' in operational tempo in these areas in 2018. In 2018, he stated that ISIL averaged 127.1 attacks per month in these governorates, compared with 490.6 per month in 2017 only in 4 of the 6 (Anbar, Baghdad belts, Salah al-Din, and Diyala).²⁶⁶

²⁵⁸ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

²⁵⁹ Atlantic (The), ISIS never went away in Iraq, 31 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁶² Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁶³ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

²⁶⁵ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

²⁶⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2, 7

State response to ISIL

After the ISF's defeat in 2014, and subsequent retreat from north and central Iraq, following ISIL's advance, the Iraqi forces rose again to confront the challenges and managed to recapture the vast areas earlier seized by ISIL by the end of 2017. The recapturing of territory from ISIL was made possible by the collaboration of a wide range of hybrid, and sub-state security forces, which mainly included the PMU, the Peshmerga and local militias. While the northern and central parts of the country may be out of ISIL control, they are not firmly in Iraqi government control either. The vast numbers of mobilised forces, with conflicting allegiances and agendas, pose substantial challenges for the state's ability to uphold the rule of law and governance, as well as overall stability.²⁶⁷

Part of the challenge facing the ISF is to gain the confidence of the local population and community/tribal leaders in the areas under their command. The ISF and the PMU are still working at re-establishing authority in the liberated areas. This means refocusing from battle tactics to counterinsurgency campaigns, which involves training local security forces that can hold areas, and the same time prevent ISIL resurgence.²⁶⁸ The ISF carry out joint operations, together with the PMU, in addition to local militias, for example, Sunni Arab tribal militias. The Sunni militias have good local knowledge of the terrain and are often well allied with regional tribal leaders. They are able to obtain local and credible intelligence, unlike the PMU and the ISF who are often viewed as outsiders.²⁶⁹ ISIL is well aware of the collaboration of the local militias with the ISF, and seeks actively to deter locals from supporting government forces, by kidnapping and killing local militia members. This intimidation extends to civilians.²⁷⁰

ISIL fighters move in small groups that are hard to track. Finding them requires ground intelligence collaboration.²⁷¹ The multitude of security checkpoints, often operated by a variety of security detachments at the same location, often lack coordination, and more often than not they do not necessarily communicate with each other.²⁷² This disarray among the security forces has allowed ISIL to maintain a continuous presence in the area.²⁷³ Poor coordination, insufficient support from the government, and a culture of avoiding responsibility are hindering efforts to contain the insurgents, which continues to stage a steady stream of low-level attacks, kidnappings and killings.²⁷⁴

Iraqi security forces carry out continuous joint security sweeps in pursuit of ISIL insurgents.²⁷⁵ The forces are finding it increasingly difficult to move beyond fortified checkpoints. The army and specialised units, like the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), have limited resources, and cannot maintain continuous presence, which gives ISIL the ability to move freely once the security forces withdraw of the areas of operations. The ISF's inability to ensure sustainable security in the area under their command undermines the forces' credibility and their ability to receive the support needed from the locals, who continue to endure overriding threats of violence from ISIL insurgents, roaming freely in their home communities.²⁷⁶

²⁶⁷ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁶⁸ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 30

²⁷⁰ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁷¹ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁷² PBS, Political instability facilitates resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁷³ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ PBS, Political instability facilitates resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Iraqi News, Iraqi soldier, civilians killed in two bomb blasts, northeast of Diyala, 3 November 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Iraqi troops destroy four IS hotbeds, detonate seven bombs in Diyala, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraqi forces launch raid to clear Diyala of ISIS remnants, 2 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

As part of their tactics to assert control over rural communities, ISIL often targets local PMU fighters, their families, and community leaders who oppose the militants and their families' return to the villages.²⁷⁷ The threats and intimidation campaign extends to those they accuse of collaboration with authorities or security forces.²⁷⁸ Lack of security resources and lack of sustainable presence of the ISF often leave the local population with no choice but to comply with the militants' demands.²⁷⁹ The security analyst contacted for this report also stated that ISIL does not exert conventional military control any longer, but is attempting to re-assert that control, and the government cannot be present across the territory at all times, meaning the insurgency could re-escalate if the conditions allow for this; the local population where ISIL is able to move and execute attacks are likely to be under a constant threat where attacks are a reminder that the security forces are not a safety guarantee.²⁸⁰

1.4.1.2 Disputed territories

The disputed territories of northern Iraq are areas defined in accordance with Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. The territories are predominately inhabited by non-Arab groups, notably Kurds, Christian (Assyrians), Turkmens, Yazidis and Shabak. The areas include parts of the governorates of Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk, which the Kurds claim are theirs. Kurdish forces took over much of the disputed territories after ISIL seizure of the city of Mosul in 2014. The Iraqi Government regained control of the disputed areas in October 2017, following the Kurdish referendum for independence, subsequently forcing the Kurdish forces to back within the boundaries of what is defined as the Iraqi Kurdistan (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah (and Halabja), Dohuk).²⁸¹

The withdrawal of the Kurdish forces in October 2017, gave the central government in Baghdad the opportunity to re-establish its authority in the northern disputed areas, which it did primarily by redeployment of PMU forces the same month. The PMU forces' presence in the disputed areas has brought about a new set of local power dynamics to the area, through the incorporation of various local ethnic/religious militias under PMU command. The new dynamics have also opened the opportunity for local political-militia leaders, who seized on the changes in the power balance, to establish local armed groups, and enhance their authority through repression and racketeering practices, against other competing political elites and militia groups. These armed groups' involvement in parallel criminal activities has had an impact on the demographic balance in the disputed areas.²⁸²

Iraq analysts, Robin Beaumont and Arthur Quesnay, at the Network of Research in International Affairs (NORIA), speak of a growing demographic homogenisation of the local population in the disputed areas. This can be seen in the low rate of return of Sunni Arabs, since they fear arbitrary arrests and extortion. Another development resulting from demographic and political changes is the emergence of criminal economic networks. For example, the new PMU commander of Tuz Khurmatu, who is a local, is one of the Badr Organisation's top commanders. His armed group of Turkmen Shia locals is involved in drugs and arms trafficking networks.²⁸³

According to the US Congressional Research Service, Iraqi and Kurdish security forces 'remain deployed across from each other at various fronts throughout the disputed territories, including deployments near strategically sensitive tri-border areas of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.'²⁸⁴

²⁷⁷ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#); Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

²⁷⁹ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2019

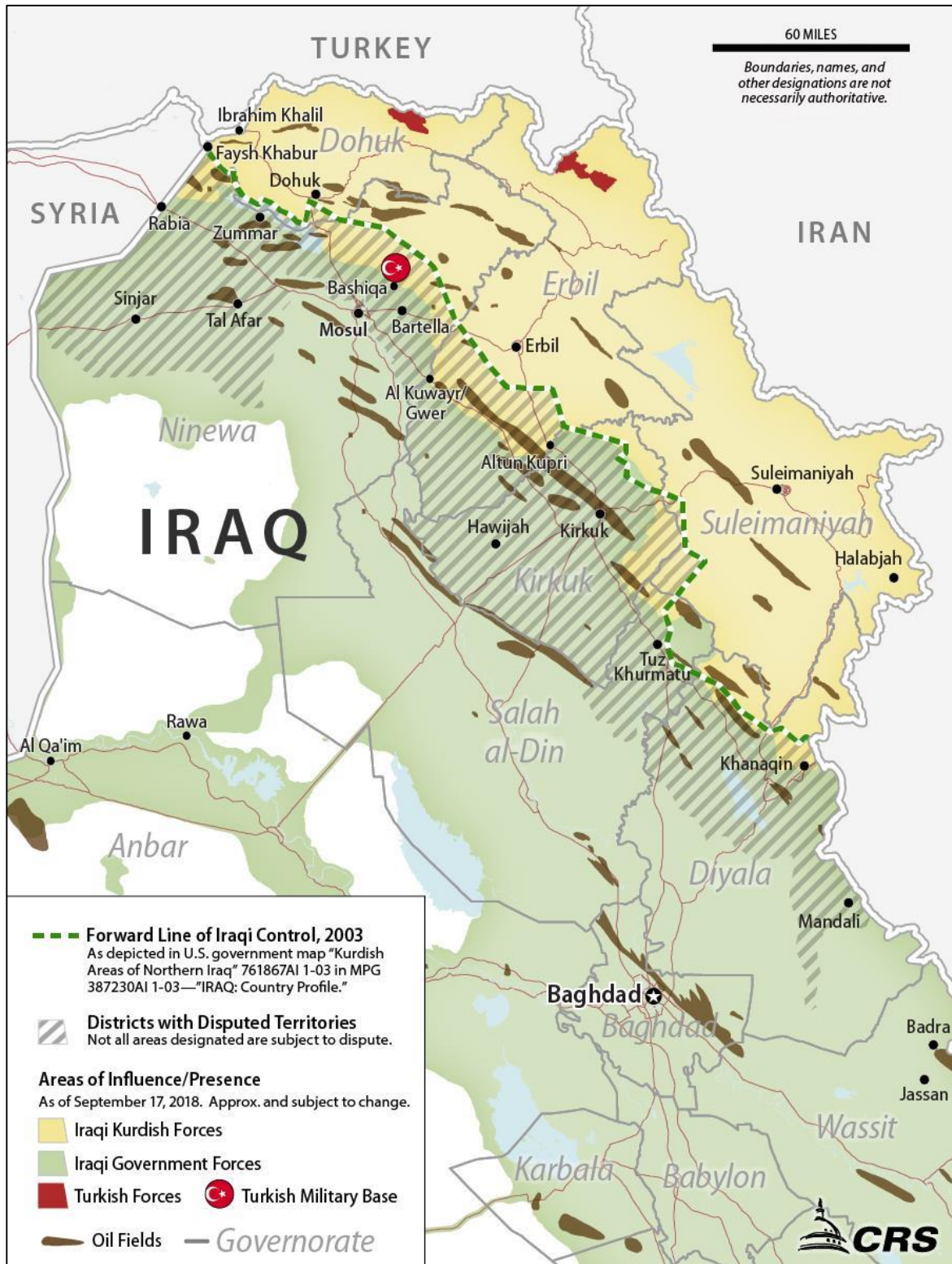
²⁸¹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 12; US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2, 10-11

²⁸² Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁸³ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 12

Further information on the disputed areas including the change of control in October 2017 between the Kurdish and the Iraqi government see [Section 2.4](#) on Kirkuk, and other governorate chapters.



Map 3: Disputed Territories in Iraq – Areas of Influence as of 17 September 2018, © US CRS²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 11

1.4.1.3 Southern Iraq

Similar to the KRI, the southern governorates were not directly affected by the counter-ISIL operations. However, some of the governorates, such as Babil, Kerbala and Basrah, have been subject to infiltration by ISIL militants, where IED attacks and shootings were reported during July 2016 and November 2017. For updated information is provided in the governorate chapters.²⁸⁶

A wave of violent demonstrations swept across the Shia heartland of southern Iraq in the beginning of July 2018. Protesters demonstrated in anger over electricity cuts, water shortages, poor public services, unemployment and widespread corruption.²⁸⁷ New demonstrations broke out in September²⁸⁸, this time targeting political parties, offices of the Iranian-backed PMU and the Iranian consulate.²⁸⁹ Several demonstrators were killed and injured when police opened fire and attacked the protesting masses.²⁹⁰ Public outcry over lack of public services and failing governance is part of the local grievances, caused by years of neglect by the central government.²⁹¹

More information is provided in the governorate chapters in [Section 2.8](#)

1.4.1.4 Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The KRI was not directly affected by the battle against ISIL. Security incidents are mostly attributed to clashes in the border areas of the Qandil Mountains in the Kurdistan region, between the PKK and the Turkish Forces. The operation that began in March 2018, dubbed Tigris Shield, is the most significant operation launched by Turkey in over a decade.²⁹² Turkey has also been airstriking the Kurdish region and has some military presence there, as explained in [Section 2.7](#) on the KRI and in the previous section.

Other Kurdish insurgency groups are also active in the KRI's mountainous areas, such as the PKK's Iranian offshoot, the Kurdistan Free Life Party, (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK), as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (Hîzbî Dêmuokratî Kurdistanî Êran, PDKI). Both are active in the KRI, and have used the region to launch attacks against Iran. Iranian forces scaled up their operations against these groups in 2018, attacking Kurdish rebel locations inside KRI, described by Iran as a serious security threat.²⁹³

1.4.2 Nature of security incidents

1.4.2.1 Improvised explosive devices and suicide bombing attacks/suicide vest

According to UNAMI, 'terrorism, violence, and armed conflict' were the causes of Iraqi civilian deaths.²⁹⁴ In 2017, UNAMI reported that the majority of civilian casualties (deaths and injuries) that it recorded involved improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks.²⁹⁵ IBC data on civilians killed show that IEDs remained in the top causes of civilian deaths from 2017 and 2018, declining from 28.6 % of incidents (attacks) causing civilian deaths in 2017, to 20.3 % of such incidents in 2018.²⁹⁶ Recorded separately, IBC noted that suicide attacks were accounting for 3.5 % to 0.9 % of incidents, marking a

²⁸⁶ Sweden, Lifos, The Security Situation in Iraq July 2016-November 2017, 18 December 2017, [url](#), pp. 32-33

²⁸⁷ Guardian (The), Protests spread through cities in Iraq's oil-rich Shia South, 18 July 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Police clash with protestors in Basra as unrests sweeps neglected southern cities in Iraq, 15 July 2018 [url](#),

²⁸⁸ BBC News, In Pictures: Fresh protests rock Basra in Iraq, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ BBC News, Basra protests: Rioters attack Iran consulate, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ Al, Iraq: Security forces deliberately attack peaceful protesters while internet is disabled, 19 July 2018 [url](#)

²⁹¹ Al Monitor, Dozens of Basra activists arrested, 25 September 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Police clash with protestors in Basra as unrests sweeps neglected southern cities in Iraq, 15 July 2018 [url](#)

²⁹² Middle East Eye, How far will Turkey's anti-PKK operation in northern Iraq go?, 8 May 2018, [url](#)

²⁹³ Al Monitor, IRGC masses troops on Iraq border amid rising tensions with Kurdish groups, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of November 2018, the Lowest in 6 years, 3 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

²⁹⁶ See the definitions and more information provided in EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

drop from 67 incidents down to 12 in 2018.²⁹⁷ Michael Knights also indicated that the vast majority (59 %) of ISIL attacks involve explosive IEDs. He noted that the use of military grade explosives has declined, and that ‘jerry-can’ homemade explosive production has increased across ISIL cells in Iraq. Suicide vests were regularly discovered, but suicide attacks were not so frequently seen in the 2018 attack data compared to 2017.²⁹⁸

ISIL resurgence in various parts of the country has also brought about a change in its operational tactics, which focus less on large-scale indiscriminate bombings and more on targeted attacks²⁹⁹, with the goal of creating chaos and challenging the ISF’s credibility.³⁰⁰ This differs from ISIL’s 2014-2017 strategy when it upheld territorial control and carried out simultaneous and coordinated attacks, targeting civilians and armed forces.³⁰¹ ISIL roadside IEDs were ‘making a comeback’ in 2018 though not yet in large numbers; these are usually ‘victim-initiated’ pressure-plate IEDs which do not require a ‘triggerman’.³⁰² Dr Knights also explained that bombing with small explosives is also often used in targeted attacks for intimidation purposes.³⁰³

There have been bombings with large numbers of casualties in 2018:

- On 15 January, two suicide bombers carried out an attack in a predominately Shia area, Tayran Square, close to Sadr City, killing 38 and wounding more than 100 civilians. The attack was followed by two blasts the following day in Tarmiyah 50 km north of Baghdad, and al-Madain, 40 km south of Baghdad.³⁰⁴ The area targeted is where day-labourers gather in large crowds to wait for work. It was attributed to ISIL though no group claimed responsibility.³⁰⁵
- On the 24 May, a suicide bomber killed 15, and wounded 19 persons in a crowded park in Baghdad, in the Shia neighbourhood of Shoala. The incident took place shortly after the start of the holy month of Ramadan.³⁰⁶
- An explosion in a weapons depot in Sadr City on 6 June killed 18 persons and injured over 90.³⁰⁷
- A bomb blast hit the Shia neighbourhood of Sadr City, Baghdad, on 4 November, killing eight persons and injuring four. Another blast hit the neighbourhood of Shoala, the same day, killing three persons.³⁰⁸
- On 8 November, a car bomb explosion near a popular restaurant on Abu Layla street in Mosul killed four people and injured 12 others, reportedly, all were civilians.³⁰⁹

According to iMMAP, the number of IEDs remains one of the main security risks for civilians returning to their area of origin.³¹⁰ It reported between 100 and 200 ‘explosive hazard incidents’ each month since December 2017; and in November 2018, for example, 82 IEDs were found and cleared and 17

²⁹⁷ See the definitions and more information provided in EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

²⁹⁸ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹⁹ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ Reuters, Commentary: The reality of Islamic State in Iraq, 10 July 2018, [url](#)

³⁰¹ UN Security Council, Fourth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2169 (2014), 13 July 2015, [url](#), para. 2, 18-22

³⁰² Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

³⁰³ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

³⁰⁴ EPIC, ISHM: January 5 – 18, 2018, 18 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ BBC News, Baghdad suicide bombers kill dozens in attack on labourers, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ AP, Iraq says suicide bomber kills 7 in northern Baghdad Park, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ National (The), Iraq issues more than 20 arrest warrants over blast in Sadr’s Baghdad Stronghold, June 13 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ Iraqi News, Eight people killed, wounded in second bomb blast, east of Baghdad, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM 184, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁰ iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

IEDs from ISIL were exploded.³¹¹ Most incidents mapped have been the liberated areas of the governorates of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din.³¹²

1.4.2.2 Targeted attacks, abduction, and killings

As explained, UNAMI noted that civilians continued to be targeted by ‘small scale attacks by unknown gunmen believed to be ISIL militants, resulting in additional casualties’.³¹³ IBC data found that the two most often recorded causes of civilian deaths in Iraq in 2018 were gunfire (from various situations such as clashes, but also shootings and general small arms/machine guns, etc) (44.1 % of incidents), as well as ‘executions’ (killing after capture and summary killing), which accounted for 29.8 % of incidents linked to civilian deaths it recorded in 2018.³¹⁴

Sources indicate that ISIL is reverting to insurgent-like tactics, targeting members of the ISF and government allied forces as well as civilians.³¹⁵ Attacks are also carried out against checkpoints controlled by government forces or during clearing operations. The tactics involve hostage taking at fake checkpoints, in which civilians and military are kidnapped and executed by ISIL fighters, or while disguised as Shia militia members.³¹⁶ These attacks have centred on the organisation’s former strongholds.³¹⁷ Michael Knights, from the Washington institute for Near East Policy, asserted that ISIL’s focus is less on indiscriminate bombings and more on targeted attacks against opposition targets in 2018.³¹⁸ ISIL targeted village *mukhtars* and tribal leaders, district council members, and security forces leaders, for which Knights recorded 148 precise killings in the first 10 months of 2018.³¹⁹ Sunni tribal militias affiliated with the PMU were also a target.³²⁰ Night-time assassinations, targeted killings for intimidation purposes and murder campaigns have been a significant and efficient tactic used by ISIL; Knights’ data indicates that 75 % of the assassinations he tracked occurred in southern Ninewa, rural Kirkuk, and northern Diyala in the first 10 months of 2018.³²¹

Michael Knights also indicated that targeting killings can frequently involve actors who are not identified or difficult to identify because there is not a high degree of attribution or responsibility taken by the attackers. He explained that targeted killings in Baghdad in particular, frequently involve gangs and militias.³²²

Examples of targeted killings reportedly by ISIL during 2018. include:

- In February, ISIL militants ambushed and killed 27 PMU members between the villages of Sadounyah and Sharia in Hawija district, south-west of Kirkuk.³²³
- On 2 May, ISIL militants, dressed in Iraqi military uniforms, launched an attack in Tarmiya killing 21 local tribesmen from the Albu Faraj tribe. The tribe is known for its staunch

³¹¹ iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³¹² See map on p. 5, 6: iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6

³¹³ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

³¹⁴ See the definitions and more information provided in EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

³¹⁵ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#); Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), accessed 9 January 2019, p. 2

³¹⁶ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁷ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁸ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³²⁰ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

³²¹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

³²² Knights, M, Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

³²³ Rudaw, Updated: 27 Hashd killed after clashes with ISIS in Hawija pocket, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

opposition to Sunni extremism. Reportedly, several prominent members from the tribe work for the local Sunni militias, cooperating with the PMU.³²⁴

- In June, ISIL militants kidnapped and killed eight persons, including members of the ISF, at a fake checkpoint set along the Kirkuk-Baghdad highway.³²⁵
- In June, ISIL militants kidnapped 30 members of the Shammar tribe in Diyala. The bodies of eight were found the following day, tied and blindfolded.³²⁶
- Three gunmen attacked the offices of Erbil governorate on 23 July, taking hostages. All three gunmen were killed in a gunfire exchange with the Kurdish security forces. One hostage was killed and four members of the security forces were injured. The gunmen, all residents from Erbil, were allegedly affiliated to ISIL.³²⁷

On 6 November, the UN stated that more than 200 mass graves had been discovered allegedly resulting mainly from atrocities perpetrated by ISIL between 2014 and 2017; the graves are believed to contain the remains of thousands of civilians.³²⁸ According to a UN-report, the dead include women, children, elderly and disabled, as well as members of the ISF. The largest numbers are located in the governorates of Ninewa (95), followed by Kirkuk (37), Salah al-Din (34) and Anbar (24), in addition to others found in Baghdad and Babil.³²⁹

1.4.2.3 Armed clashes, assaults, ground engagements

UNAMI noted that in 2017 that in addition to IEDs (the main weapon killing civilians), ‘civilians were ... being targeted in small scale attacks by unknown gunmen believed to be ISIL militants, resulting in additional casualties.’³³⁰ IBC recorded ‘gunfire’ as one of the main types of incidents involved in civilian deaths in 2017 and 2018.³³¹ This issue may also cross-link with [Section 1.5.1](#) in relation to targeted killings.

Michael Knights recorded 120 attempts by ISIL to overrun and take over Iraqi security forces’ checkpoints or outposts in the first 10 months of 2018, mainly in Salah al-Din, Ninewa, Anbar, and Diyala.³³² In 2018 ISIL rarely attempted to attack ‘hardened facilities’ like police or military headquarters, but targeted instead vulnerable infrastructure like highways, electricity and pipelines as well as fake checkpoints as described in the section on targeted attacks below.³³³

According to iMMAP, reporting on December 2017-November 2018, they recorded 265 armed clashes, which accounted for the majority of the armed clashes (only 3 % were liberation operations related).³³⁴ According to iMMAP’s information, most of the armed clashes occurred in Hawiga, Khanaqin, Kirkuk, Kifri, and districts of the former ISIL-held areas.³³⁵

³²⁴ New York Times (The), These Iraqi farmers said no to ISIS. When night came they paid the price, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

³²⁵ Intercept (The), The underground caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁶ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

³²⁷ Rudaw, Update: 3 gunmen who attacked Erbil governor’s building named, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

³²⁸ UNAMI/OHCHR, “Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in Territory Formerly Controlled by ISIL”, 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 3;

Reuters, More than 200 mass graves of Islamic State victims found in Iraq-U.N. report, 6 November 2018, [url](#)

³²⁹ UNAMI/OHCHR, “Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in Territory Formerly Controlled by ISIL”, 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³³⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

³³¹ See the definitions and more information provided in EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

³³² Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³³³ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

³³⁴ See graphics on p. 8 (1.3): iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³³⁵ See table on p. 3 (1.1): iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

In July 2018 Prime Minister Abadi launched an operation dubbed Revenge of the Martyrs in the governorates of Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk. The operation, lasted two weeks, involving a range of security forces, including Iraq's elite trained units, the federal police and members of the PMF.³³⁶

Further information on armed attacks and clashes are provided in the governorate level chapters of this report.

1.4.2.4 Airstrikes and shelling

UNAMI reported that through 2017 'air strikes decreased during the reporting period, [however] they still continued to kill and wound civilians.'³³⁷ IBC documented a decrease in the number of civilian deaths due to air strikes compared to 2017, with 187 incidents in 2017 dropping to 14 in 2018 (from 9.9 % to 1.1 % of all incidents causing civilian death).³³⁸

According to the USDOD, between August 2014 and the end of November 2018, the US-led Combined Joint Task Force (Operation Inherent Resolve), carried out 31 406 air strikes in Syria and Iraq between August 2014 and November 2018, unintentionally killing 1 139 civilians in both countries.³³⁹ Airstrikes are still carried in 2018 by the ISF and the US-led Coalition Military Forces (CMF) under Operation Inherent Resolve.³⁴⁰ Before November 2018, approximately 60 % of the airstrikes were carried out by the CMF. In November 2018 ISF carried out 76 % of the airstrikes. The number of monthly airstrikes carried out by the joint forces between December 2017 and November 2018, ranged between 5 and 26 operations.³⁴¹ Air strike operations in November 2018 occurred in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. Since December 2017 to November 2018, there were 226 air strikes by coalition and Iraqi forces, with the highest concentration being in Mosul, Khanaqin, Hawija, Rutba, and Daquq through that period.³⁴² In May 2018, the Coalition announced that they would be reducing their operations in Iraq and instead focus on operations inside Syria.³⁴³

Mortar fire and rocket attacks were also part of ISIL's 'low quality' 'harassment attacks' in areas such as Salah al-Din and Anbar, though it was unable to launch as many attacks in 2018 as in 2017.³⁴⁴

Shelling accounted for 1.3 % of all the attacks causing civilian deaths recorded by IBC during 2018, a decrease from 5.6 % of attacks in 2017. Shelling was recorded in 2018 with civilian deaths mainly in Diyala and Kirkuk.³⁴⁵

1.4.3 State ability to secure law and order

More information on the capacities of the Iraqi and Kurdish states as actors of protection, including the ability to secure law and order, as well as information on the integrity of armed forces, please refer to the report [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

Throughout 2014-2017, 74 cases of enforced disappearances perpetrated allegedly by Iraqi security forces, Kurdish forces, and the PMUs were documented by Human Rights Watch; almost all cases involved forcible disappearances of Sunni male Arabs during 2017 in the context of clashes between

³³⁶ Intercept (The), The underground caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

³³⁷ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

³³⁸ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

³³⁹ USDOS, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve Monthly Civilian Casualty Report, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ Rudaw, Coalition airstrikes kill 6 ISIS near Tigris: Peshmerga, 6 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁴¹ iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁴² See table on p. 3 (1.1): iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁴³ VOA, US-Led Coalition to Reduce Forces in Iraq, 4 May 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁴⁵ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

ISIL and security forces, leading to arrests and detention, and disappearance.³⁴⁶ Corruption and ISF abuses continued to be persistent, according to the USDOD, reporting in August 2018, which risked undermining anti-ISIL efforts.³⁴⁷

The battle against ISIL has hit the country's economy hard. Street and organised crime has increased and continues to pose as a threat to security. Crime statistics and reporting mechanisms are insufficient.³⁴⁸ Iraq has a thriving illicit market for arms. The proliferation of arms dates back to the Iran – Iraq war. Many of these arms are now in hands of the PMUs, who possess illicit arms caches. According to AI, the ISF are aware of 20 different militia depots in Baghdad alone, all belonging to the PMUs. These depots are often stashed in residential neighbourhoods or in abandoned schools and mosques.³⁴⁹ For instance, an explosion in a depot in Sadr City, in June 2018, killed 7 persons and wounded 22 others.³⁵⁰ The explosion caused substantial damage to homes and other building in the neighbourhood³⁵¹, displacing civilians and forcing them relocate after their homes were destroyed by the blast.³⁵² The Supreme Judicial Council issued 20 arrests warrants against persons connected to the explosion. Several depots were also destroyed shortly thereafter in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kerbala, Babil and Dohuk.³⁵³ No information has been found as to the identity of the perpetrators and the motives behind the explosions.

A significant amount of illicit trade is conducted over the internet, making it difficult to track the circulation of illicit arms.³⁵⁴ Drug trade has spiked, particularly in the southern part of the country. The city of Basrah is said to be on the forefront for both drug sales and consumption, with arrests nearly doubling since 2014. The spike in drug trade is due to the security vacuum that emerged when the ISF were deployed to fight against ISIL. Iraq's porous borders, a ban on alcohol and corruption, as well as unemployment are other reasons for the increase in drug-trafficking.³⁵⁵ Drug gangs are also active in the Shia holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, where drug-traffickers, disguised as pilgrims have gained access. Local seizures are reported weekly. Authorities cannot contain drug-trafficking as the authorities lack resources, and the manpower to guard the borders.³⁵⁶

The US Department of State (USDOS) reported in its 2018 Trafficking Persons Report that the Iraqi government does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking³⁵⁷, but that the country has made significant efforts when it comes to prosecuting and convicting traffickers and complicit officials. Although the government has identified victims of trafficking, deficiencies prevail with regard to the referral procedures preventing many victims from receiving protection. The government-run trafficking shelter remained empty throughout 2017. There have been allegations of recruitment of child soldiers, including units of the PMU, but the government has not investigated allegations pertaining to recruitment of child soldiers by armed militias.³⁵⁸

³⁴⁶ HRW, "Life Without a Father is Meaningless" Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances in Iraq 2014-2017, 27 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3

³⁴⁷ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 22

³⁴⁸ OSAC, Iraq 2018 Crime & Safety Report Baghdad [12 February 2018], 12 February 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ AI, Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye, the Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units, 5 January 2017, [url](#), p. 24

³⁵⁰ National (The), Iraq issues more than 20 arrest warrants over blast in Sadr's Baghdad stronghold, June 13 2018, [url](#)

³⁵¹ New Arab (The), Seven dead as arms depot blows up in Baghdad, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

³⁵² Middle East Monitor, Iraq seeks 20 suspects in Sadr City arms depot explosion, 13 June 2018, [url](#)

³⁵³ Kurdistan24, Watch: Shia militia weapon depot explodes in Iraq's Kerbala, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ AI, Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye, the Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units, 5 January 2017, [url](#), pp 23-25

³⁵⁵ New Arab (The), Basra: The epicentre of Iraq's drug problem, 2 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ Middle East Monitor, Iraq's drug habit is a threat to its stability, 6 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ USDOS, Iraq: 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#); Iraqi Children Foundation, Baghdad "Street lawyers" come to the rescue of orphans and vulnerable kids at risk of trafficking, 29 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ USDOS, Iraq: 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

1.5 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.5.1 Civilian casualties

This section provides information on civilian deaths and casualties from Iraq Body Count (IBC) and from UNAMI, as described in the [Methodology](#) section of this report. IBC only counts civilian deaths, while UNAMI records both deaths and injuries. This section is largely drawn from detailed information on civilian deaths and should also be read in conjunction with the EASO supplementary information document on civilian deaths provided by IBC which provides detailed information on the period for 2017-2018, at national, governorate, and district levels.

The document is available here:

EASO: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Civilian deaths (IBC) and casualties (UNAMI)

IBC provides detailed data on the overall documented civilian deaths from violence in Iraq from 2003 to February 2017, with less detailed, preliminary data from March 2017 to December 2018. The US-led invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein occurred in 2003, and in the aftermath of his removal in the 2006-2007 period of sectarian violence, civilian deaths increased significantly.³⁵⁹ The increase in violent civilian deaths in 2013 with the rise of ISIL's predecessor, Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), led to UN to refer to the conflict as a 'non-international armed conflict' in January 2014.³⁶⁰ From 2014 to December 2017, ISIL ran a territorial campaign of violence in its conflict with the Iraqi government.³⁶¹ IBC's casualty data on 2003 to December 2018 is provided in the graphic below, which shows the civilian deaths/incidents through this time period; highlighting the main points in the conflict described above:

³⁵⁹ These events are explained in the source: NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

³⁶⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#)

³⁶¹ UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL," 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

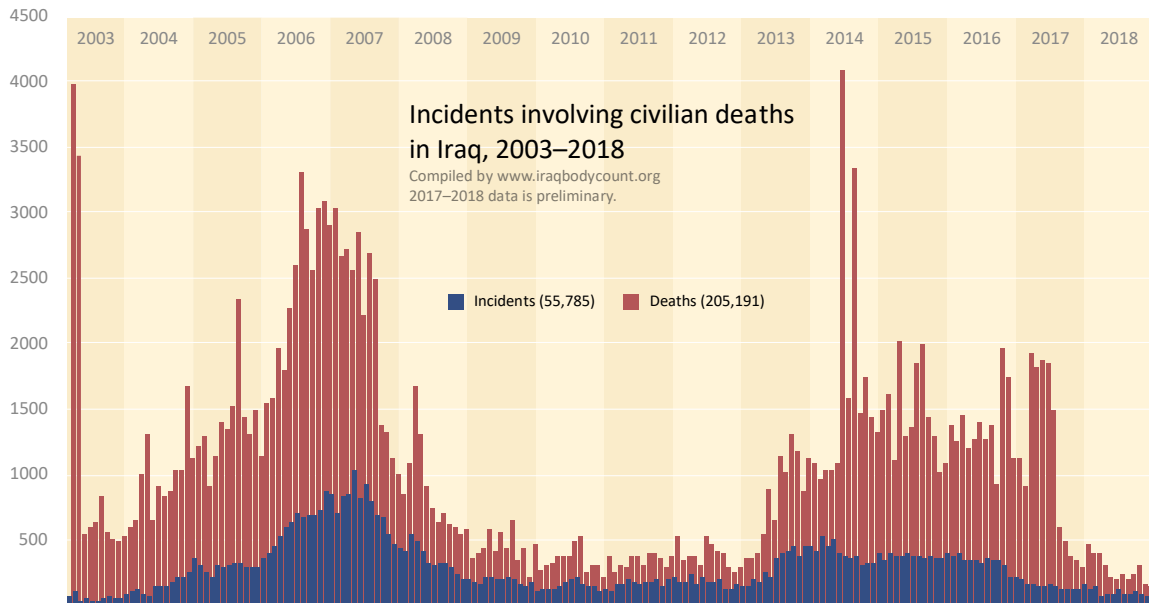


Figure 1: Documented civilian deaths from violence in Iraq (2003-2018), IBC³⁶²

The IBC data for the period from 2003 to 2018 (Figure), illustrates the peak of the ISIL period (2014-2017) and the drop in number of civilian deaths in 2018 to a level similar to 2012.³⁶³ This shows a similar pattern in trends from 2012-2018 to those shown in UNAMI's casualty (killed and injured) data.³⁶⁴

³⁶² IBC, Documented civilian deaths from violence, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶³ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 12-13

³⁶⁴ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 12-13

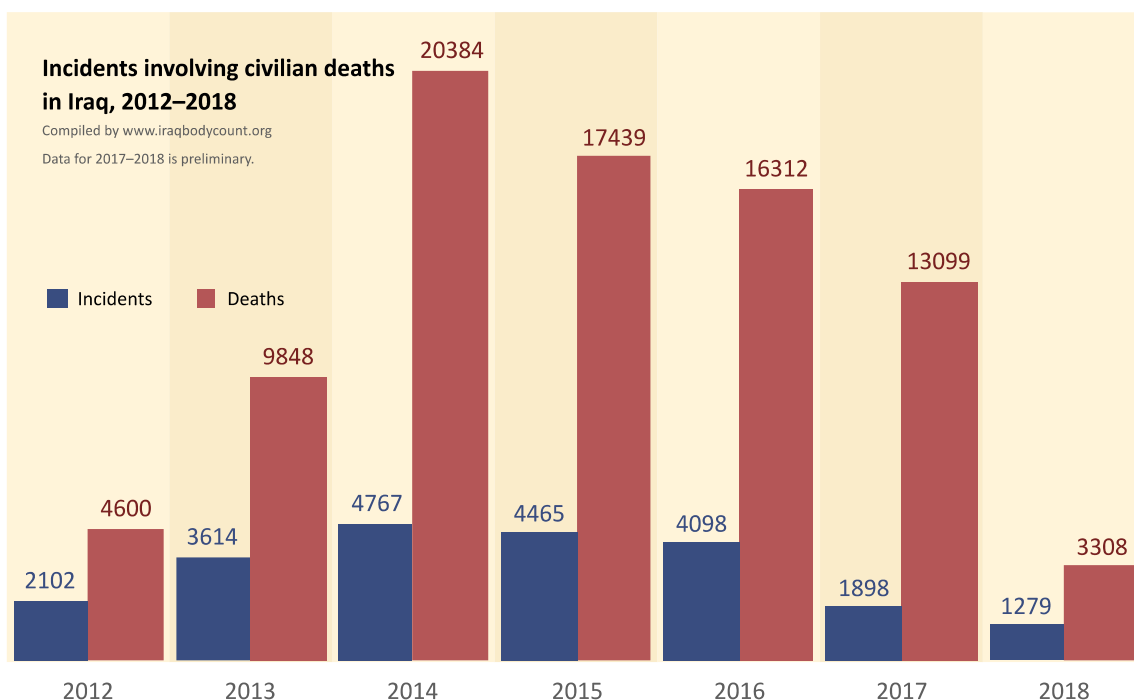


Figure 2: National data on civilians killed in Iraq, 2012–2018, IBC³⁶⁵

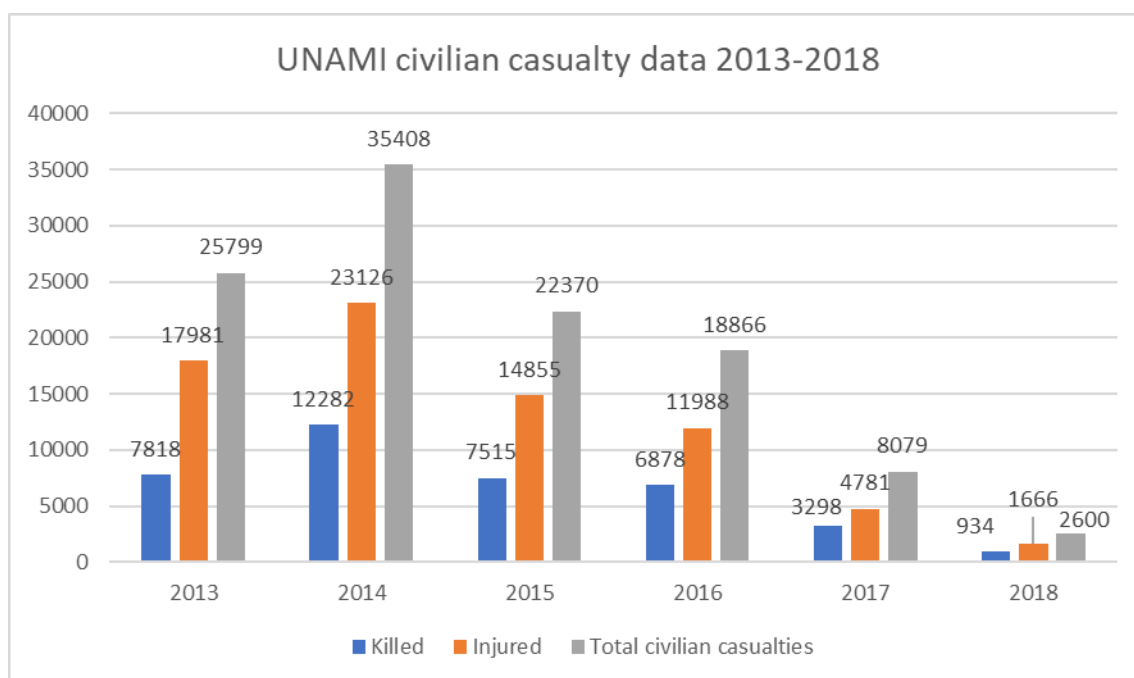


Figure 3³⁶⁶: Civilian casualties (killed/injured) in January 2013 – December 2018 UNAMI³⁶⁷

According to UNAMI, beginning in 2012 civilian casualties increased in 2013-2014, peaked in 2014 and have been falling since the ISIL peak. UNAMI reported that during the main ISIL period from June 2014

³⁶⁵ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

³⁶⁶ UNAMI data extracted from UN monthly casualty updates, compiled and provided by the UK Home Office/EASO.

³⁶⁷ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq, [url](#)

to December 2017 there were an estimated 85 123 civilian casualties.³⁶⁸ In November 2018, UNAMI reported that casualties were the lowest they had been in 6 years, since 2012, when UNAMI began publishing casualty figures.³⁶⁹ In January 2019, UNAMI stated that there had been a ‘steady reduction’ in casualties and it would no longer publicly release monthly casualty figures.³⁷⁰

Governorate trends

UNAMI data on the top affected governorates

The governorates with the highest numbers of civilians killed and injured during the 2013-2018 period have been Anbar, Baghdad, Ninewa, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din.³⁷¹ UNAMI’s data for the top six affected governorates are illustrated below (showing killed and injured) for 2014-2018.³⁷²

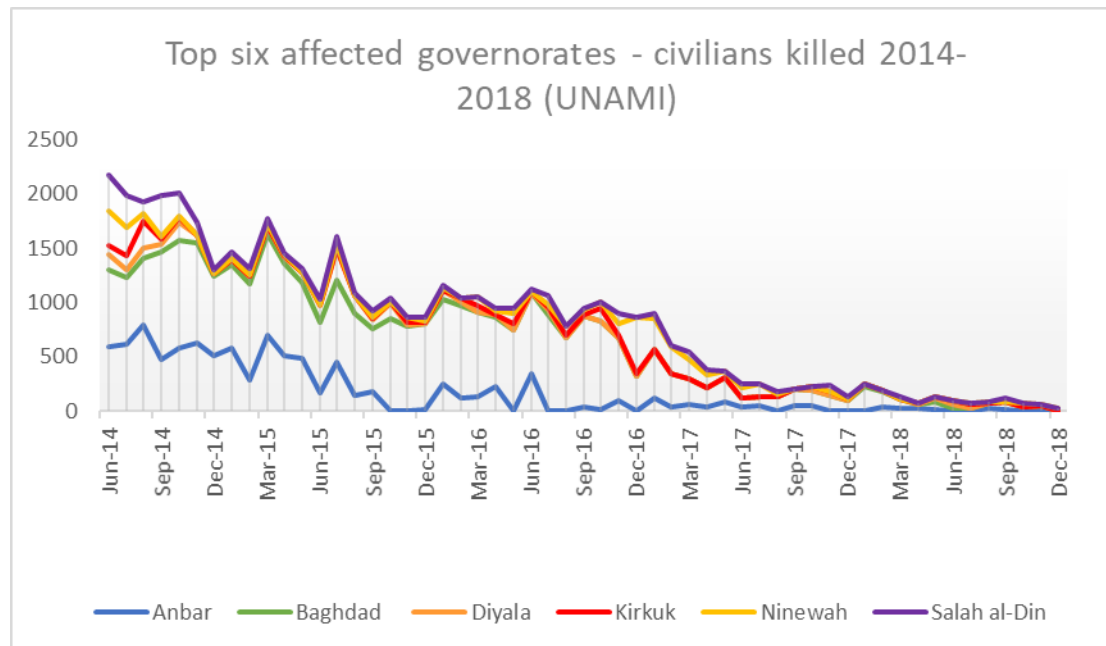


Figure 4: Civilians killed in the top 6 affected governorates 14 June 2014 – November 2018, UNAMI³⁷³

³⁶⁸ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

³⁶⁹ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of November 2018, the Lowest in 6 years, 3 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of December 2018, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁷¹ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq, [url](#)

³⁷² UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq, [url](#)

³⁷³ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq, [url](#)

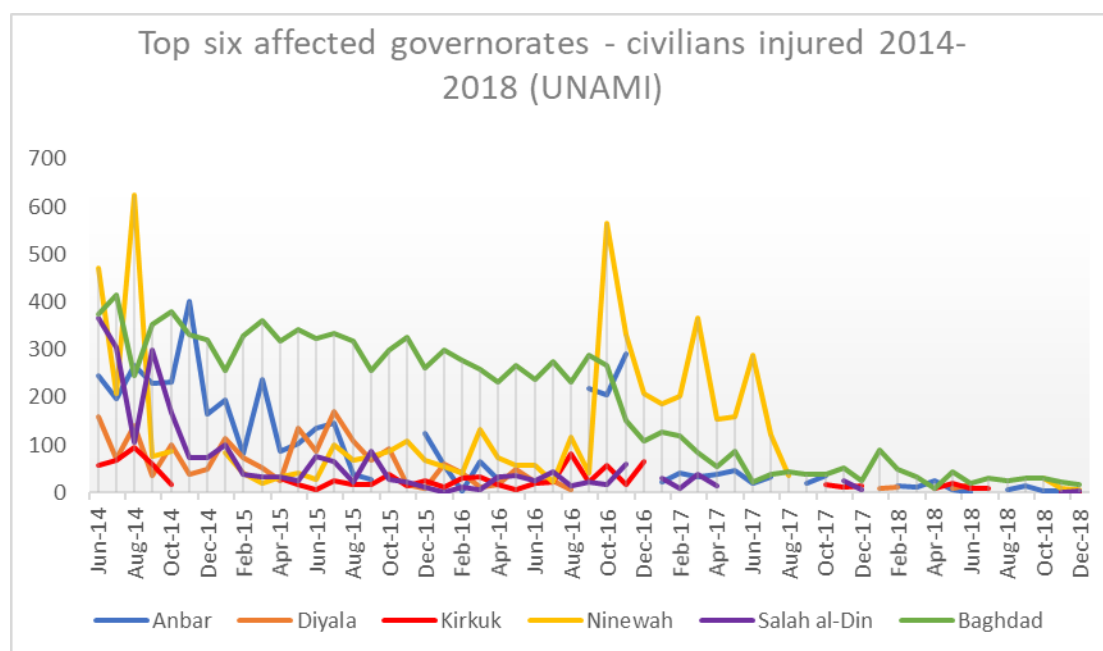


Figure 5: Civilians injured in the top 6 affected governorates 14 June 2014 – November 2018, UNAMI³⁷⁴

IBC data on ‘intensity’ of violence (by civilians killed/100k)

IBC does not track injuries to civilians except where these occur in incidents in which there are also civilian deaths; only civilians violently killed, as explained in the accompanying data document, are considered in this report.³⁷⁵ As well as providing raw (absolute) numbers for deaths and incidents, in this report IBC also calculates the **intensity** of violent civilian deaths in various areas of the country (at governorate and district level) by adjusting for the size of the population in each area. This provides an ‘intensity’ rate which is more meaningful and appropriate for comparing locations against each other, as for this purpose comparing the size of raw numbers alone can be misleading.³⁷⁶ However IBC’s terminology for the derived rate of civilian deaths/100k using the word ‘intensity’ or ‘intensity of violence’ is not intended as a comprehensive reflection of all the factors that may influence or characterise the level or nature of violence in a conflict situation.³⁷⁷

IBC’s data indicate that Ninewa and Kirkuk were the two governorates with the highest intensity level of civilian deaths in 2017 and again in 2018. Diyala’s intensity level stayed relatively similar in both years: 2017 (17.1) and 2018 (16.4). Anbar saw a drop in intensity between 2017 and 2018 from 45.5 killed/100k to 5.1 killed/100k. Salah al-Din also saw a drop from 28 killed/100k to 10.1 killed per 100k. Baghdad’s intensity level also dropped from 2017 (13.42) levels to a lower rate in 2018 (7.36).³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ See guidance notes in: EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ See guidance notes in: EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁷ EASO note regarding terminology. For more detail see guidance notes in: EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

District	Est. pop.	2012 incidents	2012 killed	2012 killed/100k	2017 incidents	2017 killed	2017 killed/100k	2018 incidents	2018 killed	2018 killed/100k
Anbar	1,678,448	272	507	30.21	170	761	45.34	46	86	5.12
Babil	1,956,495	122	340	17.38	49	109	5.57	23	28	1.43
Baghdad	7,692,827	338	1106	14.38	487	1032	13.42	392	566	7.36
Basrah	2,749,492	17	102	3.71	60	92	3.35	88	127	4.62
Dahuk	898,021	3	5	0.56	7	17	1.89	20	28	3.12
Diyala	1,616,485	294	574	35.51	180	276	17.07	170	265	16.39
Erbil	1,948,014	10	11	0.56	10	16	0.82	15	26	1.33
Kerbala	1,153,104	7	33	2.86	10	24	2.08	9	14	1.21
Missan	1,052,361	5	22	2.09	11	13	1.24	13	18	1.71
Muthanna	771,781	1	1	0.13	5	9	1.17	7	10	1.30
Najaf	1,391,905	3	7	0.50	9	27	1.94	4	4	0.29
Ninewa	3,434,988	567	858	24.98	600	9211	268.15	217	1596	46.46
Qadissiya	1,222,403	8	53	4.34	7	11	0.90	10	10	0.82
Salah al-Din	1,511,692	224	521	34.46	83	424	28.05	69	152	10.05
Sulaymaniyah	1,977,859	27	37	1.87	16	24	1.21	26	45	2.28
Tameem (Kirkuk)	1,511,412	157	295	19.52	175	950	62.86	126	276	18.26
Thi-Qar	1,982,917	18	65	3.28	15	99	4.99	39	50	2.52
Wassit	1,216,501	29	63	5.18	4	4	0.33	5	7	0.58

Figure 6: Governorate level overview on civilians killed in Iraq in 2012 and 2017-2018: incidents, deaths, intensity derived from deaths normalised per 100 000 of the population, IBC³⁷⁹

Intensity levels calculated for civilian deaths at the **district level** (adjusted to the district level population estimates), are available in the document, including ‘intensity’ maps for 2012, 2017 and 2018:

EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Types of violence/weapons killing civilians (causes of death)

According to UNAMI reporting in 2018, terrorism, violence, and armed conflict were the main causes of conflict-related civilian deaths in Iraq.³⁸⁰ In 2017, UNAMI reported that the majority of civilian casualties were mainly caused by improvised explosive devices, including suicide attacks. UNAMI also noted that ‘civilians were also being targeted in small scale attacks by unknown gunmen believed to be ISIL militants, resulting in additional casualties’.³⁸¹

IBC reported that for the 2018 incidents that it recorded, the most frequently employed weapons or causes of death in security incidents were gunfire, execution/summary killing, and IEDs. Note that these figures indicate how often such weapons were used, not the absolute number of deaths attributed to them: this will vary depending on the precise nature of the weapon and the incident (e.g., an IED targeting an individual in their car versus another targeting a public gathering). 2018 saw a proportional decrease in all methods of violence from 2017 except those involving gunfire or shooting (rising from 26.2 % to 44.1 %) and executions (28.2 % to 29.8 %). The principal causes of death and weapons involved in the killing civilians in 2017 and 2018 (and for comparison, 2012) are found below.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

³⁸⁰ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of November 2018, the Lowest in 6 years, 3 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁸¹ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. vi

³⁸² EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

All Iraq	All types	IED	Suicide attack	Air attack	Shelling	Gunfire	Execution	Other
2012	2102	872 (41.5%)	47 (2.2%)	1 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)	990 (47.1%)	89 (4.2%)	131 (6.2%)
2017	1898	543 (28.6%)	67 (3.5%)	187 (9.9%)	106 (5.6%)	498 (26.2%)	536 (28.2%)	116 (6.1%)
2018	1279	259 (20.3%)	12 (0.9%)	14 (1.1%)	16 (1.3%)	564 (44.1%)	381 (29.8%)	35 (2.7%)

Figure 7: Incidents with weapons(s)/cause of death involved, 2012, 2017–2018, IBC³⁸³

For more expansive definitions of what is included in IBC data capture for each cause of death, please refer to the EASO supplementary report on IBC data.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

³⁸⁴ See the definitions and more information provided in EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#)

1.5.2 IDPs and returnees

For more information on the impact of the conflict on the civilian population, see the governorate level chapters of this report. Additionally, information on aspects of this topic is also addressed in the [EASO COI Report Iraq: Key socio-economic indicators \(Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil\)](#) and the [EASO COI Report Iraq: Internal mobility](#).

The scale of displacement resulting from four years of intensive conflict made the Iraq crisis one of the largest and most volatile in the world. The battle of Mosul is described as the longest urban battle since World War II.³⁸⁵ The battle against ISIL has had a tremendous and protracted impact on displacement of civilians within the country and displacement rose sharply in 2014, remained at a steady peak through 2016-2018 and began to decline in late 2017.³⁸⁶ In 2014 when the crisis sparked, 2.5 million civilians were displaced in Iraq due to the ISIL conflict; in 2015, another million civilians were displaced and the displacement of more than 3 million Iraqis stayed steady until 2017.³⁸⁷ Population movements during these turbulent four years have been described as multi-directional; as hundreds of thousands were displaced, comparable numbers were returning.³⁸⁸ In December 2017 after the announcement of ISIL's military defeat, the number of returnees began to outpace the number of IDPs.³⁸⁹

IOM continues to report on steady increase in the numbers of returnees in 2018. Over 4.1 million persons have returned to areas of origin as of 31 December 2018.³⁹⁰ IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), ranks the five top governorates of return as follows: Ninewa, which had the highest numbers of returnees (1 614 150 individuals), followed by Anbar (1 290 606 individuals), Salah al-Din (590 652 individuals), Kirkuk (319 338 individuals) and Diyala (223 326 individuals).³⁹¹ According to the IOM, the majority of the returnees were previously displaced within their governorate of origin.³⁹² The December 2018 DTM – Round 107 - recorded that around 95 % of the returnees have returned to a habitual residence in a good condition and two percent are living in private settings, like host families or rented accommodation. The remaining three percent (132 774 individuals) were living in critical shelters, that is to say damaged or destroyed accommodation, which according to the DTM is an increase from previous reporting.³⁹³

As of 31 December 2018, IOM recorded 1 806 832 IDPs (300 472 families) remained in displacement across Iraq.³⁹⁴ The top five governorates hosting IDPs were: Ninewa (576 030 individuals), Dohuk (337 596 individuals), Erbil (211 920 individuals), Sulaymaniyah (150 894 individuals) and Salah al-Din (137 652 individuals).³⁹⁵ The majority of the IDPs, some 60 %, are living in private settings, 30 % in camps and 8 % in critical shelters. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Iraq, estimated that there are 482 000 IDPs, living in 135 camps. In its humanitarian need review for 2019³⁹⁶, UNOCHA asserted the need to improve services and infrastructure in the camps to meet minimum standards for the camp population. According to the humanitarian needs review, 155 000 IDPs were reportedly living in critical shelters, without adequate assistance.³⁹⁷

³⁸⁵ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸⁶ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁷ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

³⁸⁸ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸⁹ See graphic on p. 5: UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

³⁹⁰ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan – Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

³⁹¹ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁹² IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁹³ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

³⁹⁴ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³⁹⁵ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

³⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

³⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

During the year of 2018, there were 150 222 individuals who became displaced in 2018, of whom, 121 726 secondarily displacement in 2018 (either being between displacement locations or due to a failed attempt to return home), and 28 446 individuals were newly displaced for the first time in 2018.³⁹⁸

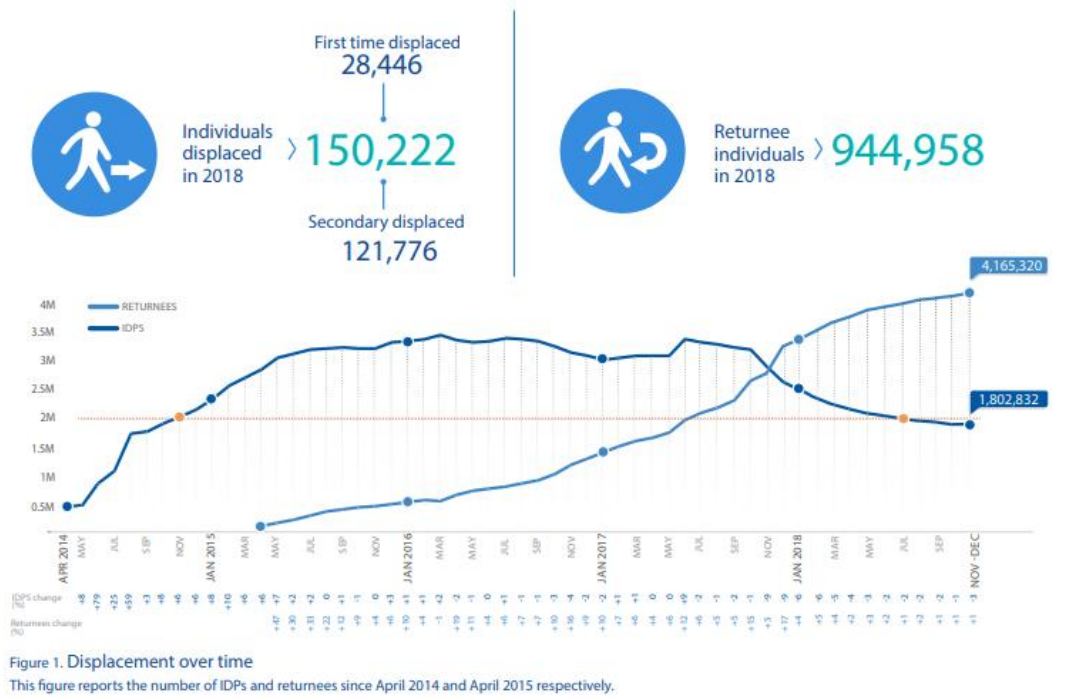


Figure 8: Displacement and return as of December 2018, © IOM³⁹⁹

Despite efforts undertaken by the central government and the KRG to encourage and facilitate returns, many vulnerable families living in camps and substandard accommodation are unable to return.⁴⁰⁰ In addition, displaced persons from volatile areas are likely to delay their return in anticipation for conditions to improve. This is likely to put a strain on host communities, particularly in the KRI, that are already facing widespread socio-economic grievances, like unemployment and deteriorating public services.⁴⁰¹ The majority of IDPs cite damage and destruction to housing (71 %), lack of employment opportunities (54 %); and lack of safety in their place of origin (40 %) as the main obstacles to return.⁴⁰²

In terms of IDPs' perceptions about security as reported by IOM in December 2018, these include issues such as the presence of armed actors, movement restrictions, revenge attacks, kidnapping, armed group clashes, property disputes and destruction, ISIL attacks, and ethno-religious and tribal tensions.⁴⁰³ There were reports that displaced persons with ISIL affiliations were prevented from leaving camps, subjected to sexual harassment against women, denied access to food, medical health and civil documentation.⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that 'many returnees— in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa—who are alleged to be affiliated with extremists have been forcibly evicted from their homes upon return, resulting in their secondary displacement, with their properties destroyed or confiscated'.⁴⁰⁵ Tribal leaders have banned families

³⁹⁸ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³⁹⁹ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁰¹ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5.

⁴⁰² UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁰³ IOM, Iraq: Return Index – Geographical Analysis of Indicators, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 13-26

⁴⁰⁴ AI, The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped and Exploited in Iraq, April 2018, [url](#), pp. 20-28

⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 32

with perceived family links to ISIL from returning, and in some cases issued tribal decrees to this effect as a form of ‘collective punishment’.⁴⁰⁶

According to IOM, families from Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Ninewa, are reportedly more likely to experience obstacles to return, though returns are still not permitted to some areas of Babil, Diyala, and Salah al-Din.⁴⁰⁷ A senior researcher for Human Rights Watch in Iraq who was interviewed for this report, gave a nuanced explanation of the patterns. Babil is the only governorate where there is a ‘blanket’ no-return position applied to the Jurf al Sakhr area. She indicated that returns are occurring, though barriers to returns are also reported, explaining that the returns generally can very much depend on the local dynamics in the area, driven either by the local who live there or the security forces in control, as to whether returns are allowed or not. She explained that in Anbar, for example, people can return home if they get a security clearance, and are not seen as ‘ISIL-affiliated’, or, if they are seen as ‘ISIL-affiliated’ the community might be demanding a compensation payment, which they have to be able to pay. Those now left in camps are often from those communities where most people have been able to go home because they have paid the compensation; and those who could not pay have been remaining in the camps. This tribal payment is additional to the security forces’ clearance requirement; however, she noted that even if a person gets the clearance, the local community might still demand payment and will not allow the return if this is not paid. Furthermore, she said that it is not that the return is not permitted, per se, but that there are stipulations they cannot meet due to poverty, while those who can afford may be able to return; however, in other area the locals just refuse to allow families with a perceived ISIL affiliation to return. There are overlapping reasons for the lack of returns in some areas, relating to security but also social tensions. This dynamic mainly concerns Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Ninewa, and Diyala.⁴⁰⁸ She remarked that there are differences in this dynamic in different areas of Iraq – for example, in Anbar, the tribes are very strong and have more of a desire to allow families to return because they realise the destabilising effect of having families in the camps for the tribal structure; however, in other places, like in Diyala, this is not present; the PMUs there and in some parts of Salah al-Din are a deterrent to returns where they do not want certain people returning.⁴⁰⁹

1.5.3 Humanitarian overview

For more information, on the impact of the conflict on the civilian population, see the governorate level chapters of this report. Additionally, information on aspects of this topic is also addressed in the [EASO COI Report Iraq: Key socio-economic indicators \(Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil\)](#).

UNOCHA described in its 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview plan for Iraq, that the humanitarian situation in Iraq is entering a new phase following the end of large-scale military operations against ISIL, calling the post-conflict situation unpredictable, and with asymmetric attacks continuing along with smaller-scale military operations resulting in some small-scale displacement and impacting returns.⁴¹⁰ The plan remarked that some 4 million people have returned home and may require some form of humanitarian assistance, but nearly 2 million still remain displaced, over half of whom have been displaced for more than three years.⁴¹¹ The KRI governorates hosts around 30 % of all IDPs in Iraq and 226 000 refugees from Syria. Host communities in the region are reported to host over 140 000 vulnerable IDPs requiring humanitarian assistance.⁴¹²

The vast majority of those needing assistance are located in Ninewa, Anbar and Kirkuk governorates. Ninewa continues to be the epicentre of the crisis. The majority of those in need of assistance reside

⁴⁰⁶ NRC et al., *The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁰⁷ IOM, *Integrated Location Assessment Part III*, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 24

⁴⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch, *EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher*, 19 January 2019

⁴⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, *EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher*, 19 January 2019

⁴¹⁰ UNOCHA, *Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019*, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴¹¹ UNOCHA, *Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019*, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

⁴¹² UNOCHA, *2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 10

in Ninewa governorate.⁴¹³ The majority of the 4 million returnees have been to Ninewa (38 %) and Anbar (32 %).⁴¹⁴ UNOCHA remarks that ‘major efforts’ have been made to support the return of IDPs, however, obstacles continue to impede this due to damaged housing, lack of livelihoods, services, and safety in their area of origin.⁴¹⁵ IOM categorised the most ‘high severity hotspots’ (where there is a significant lack of livelihoods, cohesion and security) were concentrated in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Anbar.⁴¹⁶

Overall, UNOCHA estimated in its 2019 plan, that there were 6.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, down from 8.7 in 2018; out of the 6.7 million, 3.3 are women and children.⁴¹⁷ An estimated 2.1 million children may be at serious risk of being unable to access services due to lack of civil documentation; and in terms of children with highest conflict-affected children, again, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Anbar show the highest rates.⁴¹⁸ Among the ‘most vulnerable’ people in need of humanitarian assistance were women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly, along with people with perceived extremist affiliations.⁴¹⁹ There are 482 000 IDPs living in 135 camps in Iraq, while 155 000 are living in critical shelters.⁴²⁰ Displaced people living in camps and outside camps were dependent on humanitarian assistance for basic needs.⁴²¹ UNOCHA remarked that as return numbers begin to level out, protracted displacement of those IDPs who cannot return home remains an issue.⁴²²

‘Nearly 2.4 million people are vulnerable to food insecurity; 5.5 million people require health care; 4.5 million people need protection support; 2.3 million people require water and sanitation assistance; 2.6 million children require access to education and 2.3 million people are in need of shelter and non-food items.’⁴²³

The damage and destruction brought about by the conflict will take years to rebuild. The Ministry of Planning’s damage and loss assessment estimate that reconstruction would take at least 10 years and cost over USD 88 billion.⁴²⁴ The government of Iraq and the World Bank estimated that 138 000 residential buildings have been destroyed beyond repair, affecting approximately 400 000 individuals, as a ‘conservative’ estimate.⁴²⁵

Schools have also been destroyed during the course of the conflict. Many schools are operating on double and triple shifts. Nearly 50 % of children in displaced camps have inadequate access to education. An estimated 3.2 million children attend school irregularly, or not at all.⁴²⁶

There are 5.5 million people in need of healthcare in 2019, down from 7.6 million in 2018, with the highest needs being in Ninewa (94k), Anbar (57k), Salah al-Din (33k), Kirkuk (19k), Dahuk (17k), Erbil (14k), Diyala (14k), Baghdad (9k), and Sulaymaniyah (7k).⁴²⁷ Many health centres in the governorates of Ninewa, Anbar, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk are either damaged or destroyed and are being rehabilitated but the government may not be able to assume service in 2019 and may need humanitarian actors’ support.⁴²⁸ According to the Safeguarding Health group, a civil society organisation which publishes

⁴¹³ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 10

⁴¹⁴ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 10

⁴¹⁶ See the list of districts with highest density and severity of need in: UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 7, 12, 16

⁴¹⁷ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁴¹⁸ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

⁴¹⁹ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁴²⁰ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴²¹ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴²² UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴²³ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴²⁴ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁴²⁵ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²⁶ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁴²⁷ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 34

⁴²⁸ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 34

reports about attacks on healthcare facilities and workers in the context of conflict, in Iraq, in 2017, medical care was impacted by both battles and deliberate attacks on healthcare facilities and workers during the fighting with ISIL, mostly in reference to the fighting to retake Mosul from ISIL in 2017. There were 27 attacks on health facilities, of which 12 incidents used explosives like rockets or car bombs that year. ISIL occupied medical facilities for military purposes, especially in Mosul before its removal from the area. Some facilities were destroyed during attacks to remove ISIL and ISIL also burned down hospitals as government forces moved in.⁴²⁹

Agricultural production declined by an estimated 40 %, as many of the agricultural areas were previously under ISIL control.⁴³⁰ ISIL left the agriculture sector in 'disarray' according to USAID, having looted, destroyed, and sabotaged equipment and lands in areas under their control.⁴³¹ Around two thirds of Iraq's farmers had access to irrigation before ISIL's incursion, which AI states has dropped to 20 %.⁴³² Livestock production has also been hit hard with 80 % of sheep/goats lost, 50 % of cows, and 90 % of poultry in these areas having been lost during the conflict with ISIL.⁴³³

The southern governorates have been impacted by a public health crises due to scarcity of clean and safe water, caused by deteriorating infrastructure and water contamination.⁴³⁴ Only 4 % of the 740 000 people targeted by the HRP of February 2018, to receive assistance have been assisted.⁴³⁵ This could be attributed to the limited number of humanitarian partners operating in these governorates, and also to the lack of funds allocated to the southern region.⁴³⁶

The overall poverty rate is about 22.5 %. Most notable are the areas affected by the conflict, where poverty rates are reported to exceed 40 %. The KRI, has also witnessed a remarkable increase in poverty rate, from 3.5 % to 12.5 %, due to the influx of IDPs starting in 2014.⁴³⁷

⁴²⁹ Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, Violence on the Front Lines: Attacks on Health Care in 2017, 21 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 22-23

⁴³⁰ USAID, et al., The Impact of ISIS on Iraq's Agricultural Sector, December 2016, [url](#), p. 7

⁴³¹ USAID, et al., The Impact of ISIS on Iraq's Agricultural Sector, December 2016, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁴³² AI, Iraq: Islamic State's destructive legacy decimates Yezidi farming, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

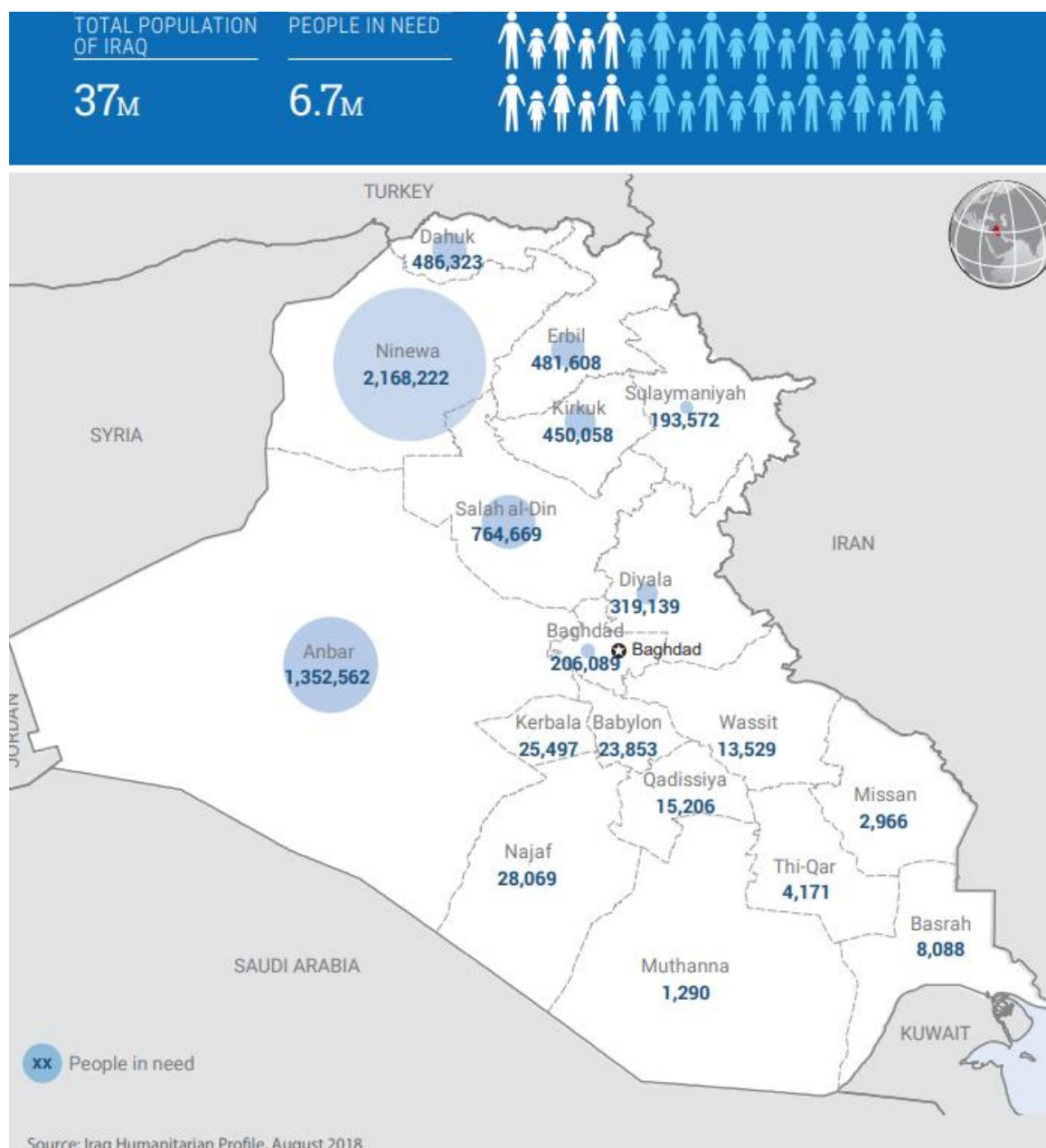
⁴³³ USAID, et al., The Impact of ISIS on Iraq's Agricultural Sector, December 2016, [url](#), p. 9; see also: AI, Iraq: Islamic State's destructive legacy decimates Yezidi farming, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ UNOCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Dashboard (September 2018), 16 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴³⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Dashboard (June 2018), 9 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴³⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Dashboard (June 2018), 9 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

⁴³⁷ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7



Map 4: People in need in Iraq, August 2018, © UNOCHA⁴³⁸

1.5.4 Road security

More information is available on this topic in the governorate chapters.

Fake checkpoints and attacking travellers on roads are a key tactic employed by ISIL to take and kill hostages, target opponents, as well as security forces and civilians, and restrict freedom of movement in areas they wish to disrupt forcing security forces to remain 'bottled up' so ISIL can move more freely in rural areas.⁴³⁹ The prevalence of so-called fake checkpoints, centred in ISIL's earlier strongholds, bears testimony to the organisation's resurgence and resilience to impede security and undermine the credibility of the security forces.⁴⁴⁰

Abuses and enforced disappearances at checkpoints have been carried by members of the PMU and government forces. The senior researcher from Human Rights Watch explained that based on its

⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁴³⁹ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ FP, ISIS 2.0 is Really Just the Original ISIS, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

reporting, enforced disappearances and abuses at checkpoints were extremely high in 2015, lower in 2016, 2017 when there were high periods of operations against ISIL, and has gone down since then; she noted that the PMU are not controlling some of the ‘worst’ checkpoints any longer (such as al Razzaza in Anbar), but also that there are less checkpoints than in the period of operations against ISIL. She remarked that most disappearances happened in the context of people fleeing ISIL and as operations dropped this is not happening so widely, fewer names are being added to the security databases and the numbers of arrests may have gone down as many of those wanted have been caught.⁴⁴¹ However, there are continuing arbitrary arrests – many based on allegations from the local community. HRW gave the view that there is a general suspicion toward Sunni Arabs that still remains as an inherent risk when going through PMU checkpoints. For example, she gave the view that travelling from Baghdad to Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, there is a very high risk for Sunni Arabs crossing PMU checkpoints. In Anbar there are numerous very high risk checkpoints and that the number of checkpoints has dropped but ‘there is no reason to think there are better systems in place if [a person] is arbitrarily arrested or detained either’ as the screening process is the same as in 2016-2017. The same source explained that Sunni Arabs are more likely to encounter problems at checkpoints located in smaller areas, or in Anbar or Hawija, for example, compared to Baghdad where one can be less noticed.⁴⁴² Much of the risk to a person depends on which forces in control in the area. She gave the example that in areas where the group in control is linked to AAH intelligence, Sunnis would be ‘much worse off’. She gave the view that those at higher risk are those whose name is on a wanted list, who originate from an area that was perceived as supportive of ISIL (such as Yathrib, Jurf al Sakhr, or Suleiman Beg, for instance), of, if they are travelling without civil documentation. She stated that arrests are still occurring but authorities will not provide information about the extent to which it is happening.⁴⁴³ Information on road security is provided in governorate level chapters.

1.5.5 Unexploded ordnance contamination

Explosive hazard contamination from booby traps and explosives left by retreating ISIL fighters, as well as from the battles with ISIL, remained a ‘significant danger’ to people returning to retaken areas, according to the USDOD.⁴⁴⁴ The aftermath of the battle against ISIL has left a contamination of explosive remnants, like cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance of hand grenades and artillery shells. Highly contaminated areas have been identified mainly in the governorates of Ninewa, Kirkuk (around Kirkuk city and Daquq), in Dohuk and Erbil (along the Turkish border) and in Sulaymaniyah (along the border with Iran).⁴⁴⁵ The contamination impacts the possibility of IDPs to return to their homes and humanitarian activities.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁴⁴² Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁴⁴³ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁴⁴⁴ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 35

⁴⁴⁵ iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁴⁶ iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

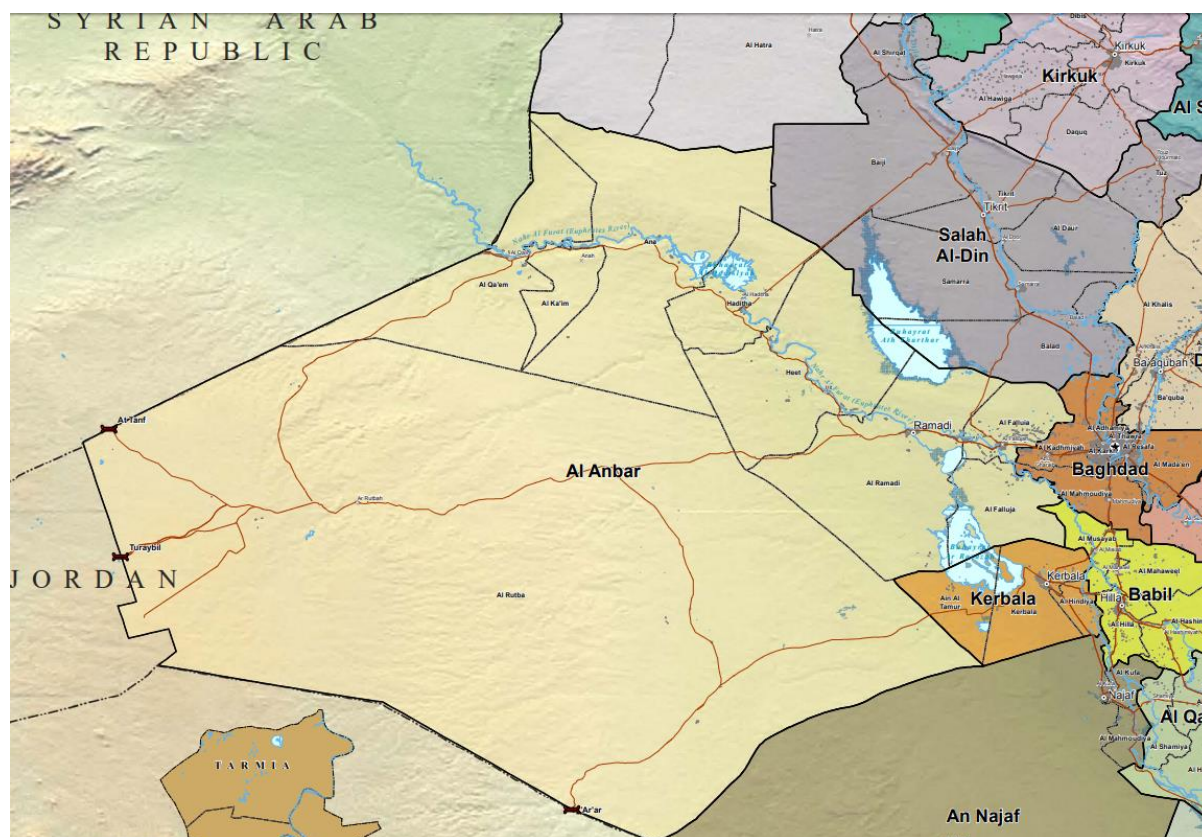
2. Governorate-level description of the security situation

In the following sections, the security situation at the governorate level is described in greater detail. For organisational purposes, the report was organised alphabetically by governorate name: Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din; followed by a chapter covering the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah), and a chapter covering the ‘southern’ governorates: Babil, Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthnana, Najaf, Thi-Qar, Qadisiya, and Wassit. Babil was included in the southern governorates chapter for organisational purposes only.

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and should be consulted in reference to this chapter:

EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

2.1 Anbar



Map 5: Anbar with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁴⁴⁷

General description of the governorate

Anbar is the largest governorate in Iraq, with a population estimated in 2018 at 1 771 656 inhabitants.⁴⁴⁸ The governorate makes up about third of Iraq’s total area. Despite its size, and given its

⁴⁴⁷ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

vast desert terrain, Anbar is also one of the most sparsely populated regions in Iraq.⁴⁴⁹ The governorate has eight districts: Ana, Fallujah, Haditha, Heet, al-Qaim, Al-Ramadi, Rawa and al-Rutba. The capital is the city of Ramadi that has an estimated population of 148 598 inhabitants.⁴⁵⁰

The governorate is predominately inhabited by Sunni Arabs. The socio-political fabric of Anbar traditionally revolves around tribes and local hierarchies, where tribal leaders and Sunni clerics maintain a high level of authority in local affairs.⁴⁵¹ Many of the elder leaders of the tribes -Sheikhs- fled the country after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This opened up opportunities for new Sheikhs to gain power and prestige by 'aligning with coalition forces and securing reconstruction projects and employment opportunities for their tribes'.⁴⁵²

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

Anbar was one of the first governorates to fall under ISIL control, in January 2014, although pockets of resistance such as the ones in Haditha remained unconquered.⁴⁵³ ISIL's takeover also instigated the first waves of displacement of the conflict in the country. Anbar was also ISIL's last remaining bastion that fell to the ISF in November 2017. The military operations that led up to the liberation of Anbar caused widespread destruction of private and public property, which the government is still struggling to address.⁴⁵⁴

In Anbar governorate 24 mass graves have been discovered with many containing civilians and ISF personnel. The number of victims found in the mass graves sites located in Anbar may contain up to 628 victims.⁴⁵⁵

Government and aligned groups

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

Anbar Operations Command (AOC)

The Anbar Operations Command (AOC) is responsible for the security of Ramadi and Fallujah, and the surrounding desert areas.⁴⁵⁶ The AOC consists of the 1st Army Rapid Intervention Division (RID) which operates at low strength. The division was originally part of the Quick Reaction Force, but was later split after the ISF cleared Fallujah in June 2016. The operative brigades under RID deployed to Anbar include the 1st (as of November 2016) and 3rd Brigade (as of July 2016). As of November 2016, the 2nd Brigade is possibly deployed to Mosul.⁴⁵⁷

Jazeera and Badia Operations Command (JBOC)

The JBOC is responsible for most of Anbar, west of Ramadi, including the western Euphrates River Valley, the far western district of Rutba, the Amman-Baghdad highway, and over much of the Jazeera and Badia Deserts. The JBOC is understaffed and therefore relies heavily on the support of local Jughaiifi tribal fighters, who lay claim on the Haditha district. The JBOC makes up the 7th Iraqi Army Division, that operate alongside a small number of Shia militia groups from the villages south of Haditha and as

⁴⁴⁹ NCCI, NCCI Governorate Profile: Anbar, 31 March 2004, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Anbar Governorate Profile, March 2009, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁵¹ NCCI, NCCI Governorate Profile: Anbar, 31 March 2004, [url](#), p. 2; IOM, Integrated Location Assessment II, October 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵² Asfura-Heim, P., CNA-Anaysis & Solutions. No Security Without US: Tribes and Tribalism in al-Anbar Province Iraq, June 2014, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵³ National (The), Local resistance is the way to stop ISIL impetus, 20 November 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵⁵ UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL", 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁵⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14

⁴⁵⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14

far west as the Walid Border Crossing with Syria, and the Guards Brigades. As of July 2017, the operative brigades under the 7th Division include the 27th to the 29th Brigades.⁴⁵⁸

In addition to the AOC and JBOC, the ISF deployed other OC detachments across the country to Anbar.⁴⁵⁹

Federal Police (FP)

Below are the FP-units and detachments deployed to Anbar governorate:

- The 2nd Federal Police Division: the division is initially deployed to secure Baghdad, but has redeployed some of its units to Anbar, namely the 5th and 6th Brigade (as of May 2016). The 2nd FP Division is an extension to the Badr Organisation. The 6th Brigade, is commanded by Haidar Yusuf Abdullah, who also commanded the 5th Badr Brigade.⁴⁶⁰
- The 5th Federal Police Division: commands the 18th Brigade which has deployed units to Trebil border area (with Jordan), Kilo 110 and Kilo 70, both located west of Ramadi.⁴⁶¹

Emergency Response Division (ERD)

The ERD is a mobile special operations force under the MOI that was originally formed with the intention of consolidating into the Iraqi Special Operation Forces (ISOF). It still remains under the Ministry of Interior. The division operates mostly in Missan Province; Subaihat, east of Fallujah, Anbar Province; west of Baghdad; Al-Fatha, east of Baiji, Salah al-Din Province. As of May 2016 the 2nd Brigade is deployed to Subaihat, east Fallujah. The Division has close ties to the Badr Organisation.⁴⁶²

Border Guards Command (BGC)

Anbar falls under the 2nd Region, covering the border areas of Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, including the 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th and 9th Brigades. Anbar's BGC units are deployed particularly in the areas around the Trebil border crossing with Jordan, Ar Ar border crossing with Saudi Arabia and along the Trebil-Ramadi highway.⁴⁶³

Anbar's local police force

Anbar lacks a proper functioning police force. Most of the governorate's local police force collapsed in 2014 following ISIL's takeover. Many of the police fled the governorate in fear for their lives, while others chose to remain under ISIL control, and some of them even collaborated with the organisation. In 2010, Anbar governorate had 28 000 policemen in its employment. Around 14 000 were dismissed, between 2014 and 2016, because they failed to join their units when they were relocated outside the governorate. In 2017, the federal government decided to reinstate 3 190 policemen, provided they pass a special training course before reporting back to active duty. The question of reinstating formerly dismissed policemen has stirred controversy amongst the local population. Many locals oppose the reinstatements as they regard the deserters as traitors for abandoning their posts. The federal authorities are contemplating reinstating an additional 6 000 police.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 18-19

⁴⁵⁹ Detailed information on the detachments redeployed to Anbar is described in ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14-24. The report further includes a chart over Iraqi Army Divisions and their areas of operation (Appendix D: Iraqi Security forced Commanders). See pp. 61-62

⁴⁶⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26

⁴⁶¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁶² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁴⁶³ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁴⁶⁴ Niqash, Amnesty or Disgrace: What next for Anbar Security staffers who fled, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

Popular Mobilization Units

According to a July 2018 report the International Crisis Group the following PMUs are deployed in Anbar: Sarayat al-Jihad in Fallujah, the Hizbollah Brigades, Kataeb Jund al-Imam and Sarayat Ansar al-Aqeeda in Ramadi and Hit areas. In the town of al-Nukhayb, which sits between the predominantly Sunni city of Ramadi and the predominantly Shiite holy city of Kerbala, there is a strong PMU presence which includes al-Ataba al-Huseiniya, Qasem al-Jabain Brigades, Thaar al-Hussein Battalions, al-Iqbal Movement, Ali al-Akbar Brigades, al-Abbas Combat Division, Sarayat Ashoura, the Badr Organisation and AAH.⁴⁶⁵ In December 2018 it was reported that Shia PMUs control the road from Qaim to Rutba in the western part of Anbar governorate, most notably KH.⁴⁶⁶

As of May 2017, the PMUs strength in Anbar was estimated at 16 000 fighters.⁴⁶⁷

Iranian-backed-militias

The majority of the militias groups are positioned in increasing numbers along the Iraq-Syria border, which covers large parts of the governorate, and are 'oised to seize key border crossings as of November 2017'.⁴⁶⁸

Below are the Iranian-backed militias reported by ISW in December 2017 to have been operating within the governorate:

- Badr Brigades: where the organisation's 1st, 5th, 10th, 16th, 27th and 55th brigades are operating in Anbar.
- KH: are one of the smaller Iranian-backed militia forces which consist of a light infantry force. The forces have a presence in various areas within the governorate.
- AAH: are located in Rutba, Garma, Fallujah and al-Khalidiya- north of Ramadi.
- Faylaq Waad al-Sadiq: are located in Al-Sufiyah, east of Ramadi.
- Harakat al-Abda: are located in western Anbar, Garma, Thar Thar basin and eastern Husaybah.
- Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada: are located likely north of al-Walid, western Anbar.
- Qiyadat Quwat Abu Fadl al-Abbas: is located in Saqlawiyah.
- Kataib al-Imam Ali: is also located in Saqlawiya.⁴⁶⁹

Hawza-backed militias

Those located within Anbar governorate include; Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah, Liwa Ansar al-Marjaiyah, Firqat Ali al-Qitaliyah, Liwa Ali al-Akbar and Liwa al-Tufuf.⁴⁷⁰

Politically affiliated militias

Units of the Liwa al-Muntadhir, affiliated to the ISCI Brigades, have been deployed to Fallujah and western Anbar.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), p. 17, footnotes 83, 84.

⁴⁶⁶ Al Monitor, Iraqi border eyes Iran influence as US plans Syria pullout, 27 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ Derzsi-Horvath, A. et.al., Who's who: Quick facts about local and Sub-State forces, GPPi, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁶⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 37-44

⁴⁷⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 47-48

⁴⁷¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 51

Tribal Sunni militias

In 2015, Sunni tribes in Anbar governorate formed their first paramilitary force, a militia of mostly volunteer fighters, with the aim of driving ISIL insurgency from their territories.⁴⁷² The force, supported by the tribes, received military training, focusing on using heavy artillery, as well as defusing explosives.⁴⁷³

The Sunni tribal militias did play an important role in the fight against ISIL. However, they do not retain the same official status as the Shia militia forces, nor are they paid by the government or have the same privileges as their Shia counterparts. Some do not come from the governorate. Corruption is widespread and many do not obey orders from local commanders, as their loyalties lie with parties outside the governorate. The behaviour of some of the tribal militias is contributing to escalating tensions with the local population.⁴⁷⁴

The number of tribal fighters in Anbar are estimated to around 25 000 (as of December 2017), of which 10 000 have been officially incorporated into the PMU forces, therefore retaining salaries from the government.⁴⁷⁵

ISIL

In December 2018 Michael Knights assessed that based on ISIL activity data and operating patterns, the group has ‘permanently operating attack cells in at least 27 areas of Iraq’, which in Anbar include Al-Qaim, Wadi Horan/Rutbah and Lake Tharthar/Hit/Ramadi.⁴⁷⁶ Although by the end of 2017, ISIL did not control any territory in Iraq⁴⁷⁷, it continues to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad).⁴⁷⁸ ISIL sleeper cells have been reported in Al-Anbar desert, the Ghadaf Valley and in Al-Hussainiah, west of Rutbah.⁴⁷⁹

There are no exact figures over the number of ISIL militants operating in Anbar governorate, but the Iraqi military believe them to be around a few hundred fighters, clustered in small groups.⁴⁸⁰ No other sources corroborating this information could be found.

The presence of ISIL insurgency activities continues in various parts of the governorate, especially in the Anbar desert. According to a senior officer in the Defence Ministry in Baghdad, although ISIL has been weakened and cannot launch large-scale attacks, in Anbar there have been recorded attempts by ISIL fighters to get into the governorate via Syria and counter-terrorism forces have been deployed to prevent the ISIL fighters from entering Iraq.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷² Rudaw, Anbar tribes form first Sunni militia to fight ISIS, 19 March 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ Rudaw, Anbar tribes form first Sunni militia to fight ISIS, 19 March 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Niqash, Patchwork of loyalties: Anbar’s tribal militias grow larger, but powerless and divided, 15 August 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Niqash, What next for fighters?: Anbar’s Sunni militias fear they will be abandoned by Iraqi govt- again, 21 December 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2018/770], 16 August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁷⁹ UN Security Council: Letter dated 16 July 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2018/705], 27 July 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁸⁰ Al Jazeera, Iraq looks to snuff out ISIL remnants in remote Anbar province, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Niqash, Hunting ISIS Ghosts: Extremists prepare for their defeat in Iraq, now they are regrouping, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

Reporting on the period July to September 2018 USDOD noted that ISIL remained active in rural areas and violence continued ‘mainly along a crescent of territory stretching from Anbar province in the west to Diyala province in the east’.⁴⁸² According to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) data, increases in violence during July – September 2018 were reported in Kirkuk, Anbar, Salah ad-Din, and Diyala governorates.⁴⁸³ The desert and mountainous terrain hampered efforts by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to remove ISIL from those areas.⁴⁸⁴

Sources from US Consulate in Erbil and US Agency for International Development (USAID), interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo during their April 2018 FFM to KRI noted that while it is difficult to assess the capacity of ISIL ‘especially in Kirkuk, ISIS is more a threat to the security actors and the authorities than it is a threat to the civilian population, while in Ninewa, Diyala and Anbar ISIS would also be a threat to the civilian population’.⁴⁸⁵

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	1 739	4 188	5 927
2015	1 177	3 526	4 703
2016	883	1 232	2 115
2017	291	531	822
2018	83	169	252
	4 173	9 646	13 819
UNAMI: Anbar casualties⁴⁸⁶			

IBC data on civilians killed 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

IBC data for Anbar governorate recorded 46 security-related incidents leading to 86 civilian deaths during 2018, a significant decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 170 incidents leading to 761 civilian deaths. The derived intensity of deaths per 100/k dropped from 45.3 in 2017 to 5.1 in 2018.

⁴⁸² US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁸³ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁸⁴ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁸⁵ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 75

⁴⁸⁶ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on [url](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq’s Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

In 2018, the districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were in Ramadi, Al-Ka'im, Haditha.

The highest intensity of violent civilians (deaths per 100k of the population) was recorded in Haditha (14.08), followed by Ana (includes Ruua) (11.48) and Heet (9.29).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Anbar governorate involved improvised explosive devices (IED) (41.3 %) followed by gunfire (26.1 %), whereas executions/summary killing significantly decreased during the year and made up 4.3 % of incidents causing civilian deaths.⁴⁸⁷

Security incidents and activity

During 2018 ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad).⁴⁸⁸ According to Michael Knights, Anbar 'was the scene of weak insurgencies in 2017 that were characterised predominately by low-quality harassment attacks, such as mortar or rocket attacks or victim-operated IEDs not focused on specific targets'.⁴⁸⁹ The same source observed that in 2018 ISIL has weakened its campaigns of attacks in Anbar, noting that his incident data for 2018⁴⁹⁰ showed 9.1 attacks per month in Anbar governorate, compared to 60.6 attacks per month in 2017. The same source noted that the number of 'high-quality' (mass casualty, overruns, effective roadside bombs, and targeted killings) attacks increased in 2018 to 49 % of all attacks, against 30 % in 2017.⁴⁹¹ In his overview of security trends in Iraq, Joel Wing noted that 'insurgents largely withdrew from Anbar in 2018'.⁴⁹²

Michael Knights assessed that the decrease of ISIL's activity in Anbar could be due 'to the temporary disruptive effect of the full recapture of the province in late 2018' and it may indicate 'a de-prioritization of Anbar by the Islamic State as an attack location at this stage of the war'.⁴⁹³

In January 2018 several military operations against ISIL militant camps took place in Anbar along the Iraqi-Saudi border.⁴⁹⁴ Incidents witnessed a slight increase during the month of March (see IBC data). Most significantly was an attack on a checkpoint where seven policemen were killed by ISIL and an attack near the Trebil border crossing that left three soldiers killed and two other injured.⁴⁹⁵ Also in March, police thwarted a suicide bomber from driving into a checkpoint, in Sonar (Kilo 18), west of Ramadi. Apart from the attacker no casualties were reported.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁸⁷ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁸⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹⁰ Incident data is drawn from the author's geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) dataset up to the end of October 2018. 'The dataset includes non-duplicative inputs from open source reporting, diplomatic security data, private security company incident data, Iraqi incident data, and U.S. government inputs'. See: Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹¹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹² Wing, J., Review Of Security Trends In Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁹³ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁴⁹⁴ Iraqi News, Iraqi Troops destroy four Islamic State armored vehicles, seizes three others in Anbar, January 10 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Baghdad Post (The), 3 soldiers killed in ISIS attack at Anabr's Trebil border crossing, 22 March 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Security In Iraq, Mar 22-28 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 30 March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ AlSumaria, شرطة الانبار تفجر عبوه مخخه يقودها انتحاري حاولت استهداف سيطره امنيه بالمحافظة, (Police thwart vehicle borne explosive device by suicide bomber, targeting checkpoint in Anbar Governorate), 2 March 2018, [url](#)

Security incidents gradually subsided after March and appeared to shift towards the central parts of the governorate⁴⁹⁷, for example Hit and Haditha, mostly targeting members of the Iraqi forces and the PMU.⁴⁹⁸

In April a suicide bomber hit the headquarters of the al-Hal party in Hit district, killing one person and leaving four others injured.⁴⁹⁹ According to other sources, the attack killed four people (three members of the security forces) and injured seven others, including a candidate to the parliamentary elections.⁵⁰⁰

On 29 August, a car bomb targeted a checkpoint at al-Qaim, killing 10 members of the Iraqi forces and the PMU, and wounding 14 others.⁵⁰¹ In September, seven policemen were wounded when a bomb exploded at the al-Razaza checkpoint, between Kerbala and Anbar.⁵⁰² In September an attack on the home of a PMU commander was reported.⁵⁰³ In October, three ISIL militants were killed as they attempted to attack a checkpoint (Kilo 18) west of Anbar. Another attempt was carried out against a special operation's regiment west of Ramadi.⁵⁰⁴ In October, 10 members of the security forces were killed by ISIL militants in an attack on the Akkas gas field in western Anbar, while in another ISIL attack on a military vehicle in Al-Qa'im district an Iraqi serviceman was killed and two others went missing.⁵⁰⁵ In addition, three militants were arrested in Fallujah, after setting police stations on fire.⁵⁰⁶

In October an Imam was killed by ISIL militants in Rutba for urging to fight against ISIL.⁵⁰⁷ In November, at least nine people were killed when gunmen attacked the home of a Sunni tribal militia officer near Karma district, north-east of Fallujah. Security sources attributed the killings to ISIL.⁵⁰⁸

Following an attack carried out by ISIL near the Iraqi border against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDFs), a state of emergency was declared in October along the Iraqi-Syrian border. The Iraqi government deployed up to 30 000 army and PMU fighters were deployed along Iraq's western border sent two army brigades to Qaim, Anbar governorate, to prevent cross border ISIL attacks from Syria.⁵⁰⁹ In November, the Iraqi army carried out extensive military operations in desert areas west of the country (including Anbar) against IS hideouts along border the Syrian border.⁵¹⁰

According to UNAMI, writing in November 2018, most ISIL movements 'in recent months have been reportedly through the desert joining central Iraq and its Anbar and Ninewa provinces to the western border with Syria'.⁵¹¹

State's ability to secure law and order

The vast Anbar desert, covering large parts of the governorate is used by the ISIL sleeper cells for regrouping and planning attacks, posing security challenges for the authorities.⁵¹² Anbar's Security Council have raised concerns that the governorate lacks security forces. This in turn makes it difficult for the security forces to have a permanent presence.⁵¹³ Sweeps carried out by the Iraqi forces have

⁴⁹⁷ Wing, J., 645 deaths, 275 wounded feb 2018 in Iraq (updated), Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Wing, J, Security in Iraq Apr 8-14, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 17 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Iraqi News, Parliamentary hopeful injured in suicide attack against party's HQ in Anbar, 8 April 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Daily Mail (The), Four killed in IS suicide attack on Iraq party hq, 8 April 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Iraqi News, Updated: Death toll from today's car bomb attack in Anbar rises to 10, 29 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Iraqi News, Bomb attack in Iraq leaves seven policemen wounded, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Wing, J, Security in Iraq Sep 1-7, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 17 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Iraqi News, Three Islamic State members arrested in Anbar: Military intelligence, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Iraqi News, 10 security forces killed in fierce attack by Islamic State on Iraqi gas field, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Iraqi News, Three Islamic State members arrested in Anbar: Military intelligence, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ Iraqi News, Imam of Mosque killed in wake of sermon urging fighting Islamic state in Anbar, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Middle East Monitor, Security sources: Gunmen kill 9 in Iraq's Anbar province, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM: October 26 – November 1, 2018, 1 November 2018, [url](#); NBC News, Iraq deploys up to 30,000 fighters to secure Syrian border from ISIS, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ Baghdad Post (The), Iraq launches extensive military operations against ISIS hideouts, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ UNAMI, Briefing to the Security Council by SRSG for Iraq Ján Kubiš New York, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹² Al Jazeera, Iraq looks to snuff out ISIL remnants in remote Anbar province, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹³ Baghdad Post (The), Anbar's western roads insecure, under ISIS control-official, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

led to the destruction of hideouts⁵¹⁴, as well as confiscation of weapons.⁵¹⁵ In addition, the rugged terrain makes manning checkpoints and surveillance posts extremely difficult. The Iraq-Syria border alone stretches some 600 kilometres.⁵¹⁶

The governorate's porous border to Syria is another challenge facing the Iraqi government in containing ISIL militants from infiltrating the border. The Iraqi government is attempting to build a security fence on the Syrian border, located in al-Qaim to the Syrian border, to prevent extremists from entering the country. However, there are doubts about the fence's ability to keep the insurgency groups out.⁵¹⁷ Advances by ISIL in eastern Syria near the Iraqi border have increased. ISIL has taken the entire side of the Baghouz area and the town of Soussa. Some ISIL rockets reportedly strayed into Iraqi territory in October. This could have an impact on the stability of the border areas inside Iraq, one of which is the town of al-Qaim.⁵¹⁸

The PMUs have committed human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings in the governorate during the military operations against ISIL.⁵¹⁹ The lack of trust and the fear of the local population of the security forces deter many locals from cooperating with the security forces. This would require capacity building efforts with local tribal leaders which are 'often from a different sect, tribe, and part of the country'.⁵²⁰

Although the PMUs were scheduled to withdraw from Anbar governorate following the declaration of victory over ISIL, they have refused 'to leave liberated areas under the pretext that there are still explosive bombs and booby-trapped houses there'.⁵²¹ In January 2018 the Iraqi government has declared its commitment to withdraw the PMU forces from Sunni areas, but ISIL advances in the Syrian border area and withdrawal of some international troops have led to PMUs bolstering their presence in Anbar governorate.⁵²² According to Al Monitor, Anbar is the only Sunni area where the PMU has yet to retreat.⁵²³

Displacement and return

According to IOM December 2018 data, Anbar continues to have approximately 201 996 individuals displaced with 52 878 displaced within the governorate.⁵²⁴ As of December 2018, Anbar governorate ranks second amongst the top governorates of return. According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), since December 2018, Anbar has registered 1 290 606 returnees.

UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview continues to show that after Ninewa, Anbar has the second most people in need with 1 352 562 million.⁵²⁵

Ninewa also had the highest number of returnees in December 2018 (38 %), followed by Anbar (32 %), but also experience the highest severity in terms of lack of humanitarian access. UNOCHA in November 2018 reported that the most high severity hotspots for returnees were in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Anbar.⁵²⁶

⁵¹⁴ Iraqi News, Int'l coalition warplanes destroy four Islamic State caves in Anbar, 29 October 2018, [url](#), Baghdad Post (The), 3 ISIS hideouts destroyed in Anbar, 20 May 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ Iraqi News, Iraqi Security forces seize arms cache in Anbar, 19 May 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ Al Jazeera, Iraq looks to snuff out ISIL remnants in remote Anbar province, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁷ Niqash, Build the wall: Despite doubts about efficacy, Anbar builds border fence to keep extremists out, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁸ Al Monitor, Iraqi border city eyes IS advance amid dust storms, 30 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ Al, Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye, The Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units, 5 January 2017, [url](#), pp. 18-19

⁵²⁰ Atlantic (The), ISIS never went away in Iraq, 31 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵²¹ Iraqi News, Pro-gov't forces reluctant to withdraw from Anbar following IS defeat – source, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵²² Al Monitor, Anbar governor thanks PMUs, tells them to get out, 18 January 2018, [url](#); Al Monitor, Iran-backed PMU militias in Iraq raising profile, 21 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵²³ Al Monitor, Will Iraqi Shiite militias withdraw from Sunni areas?, 22 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁵²⁵ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2, 6

⁵²⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

In their January 2019 ILA III, IOM stated that 11 % of returnee locations across Iraq had evidence of involuntary returns continuing, mainly in Baghdad (42 %), Erbil (19 %), Diyala (16 %), and Anbar (15 %).⁵²⁷ UNHCR reported that since October 2017, 3 000 families from Salah al-Din, 2 400 from Anbar, and 400 from Baghdad have been forcibly evicted from camps and informal settlements.⁵²⁸ IDP camps in Ninewa and Anbar reported harassment by armed actors; and military and police conducted security operations inside camps.⁵²⁹ UNHCR noted that

‘Many IDPs reported repeated displacement due to military operations, financial difficulties, or unsuccessful attempts to return to their area of origin due to lack of services. Others experienced threats or were denied return over perceived affiliation with extremists or other forms of collective punishment in their area of origin, while some female-headed households also reported moving to camps after incidents of sexual harassment in non-camp settings. Significant gaps in services, particularly around mental health and psychosocial support as well as medical services, WASH [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene], and shelter support continue to be reported in governorates hosting large concentrations of IDPs (Anbar, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Sulaymaniyah).’⁵³⁰

Reportedly, IDPs at camps in the town of Amiriyat al-Fallujah maintained that commanders and military trucks had arrived unannounced, read out lists of names, giving IDPs one hour to leave the camps.⁵³¹

A report published in February 2018 by the Norwegian Refugee Council concluded that many of the returns undertaken within Anbar province were premature.⁵³² The report addresses the challenges facing families attempting to return, based on data collected between November 2017 and January 2018. Accordingly, 84 % of those residing in the camps of Amiriyat al-Fallujah and Bezabize maintained at the time that they felt more secure in the camps than in their place of origin. The survey further concluded that 62 % did not think that assistance would be available upon return. Of those who said that they planned to return (56 %), half cited emotional obligation as a motive for return, while 20 % claimed limited livelihood opportunities in the place of displacement, and another 20 % attributed the lack of basic services in the camp as a reason for premature return.⁵³³

According to IOM’s Return Index, from September 2018, Anbar ranks second of seven governorates hosting caseloads that are likely to face some category of harsh conditions upon return, so-called severity conditions.⁵³⁴ IOM has identified four categories of severity conditions: Very high, high, medium and low. Anbar has, to date, a total of 210 000 returnee families, likely to face severity conditions. The majority, 57 %, fall under the low category of severity, and 40 % belong to the category of medium, while a very little percentage (5 000 families) are likely to face high severity.⁵³⁵ IOM’s ILA III, published in January 2019, listed a number of ‘conflict hotspots’ for returnees where there was a higher incidence of physical violence or threats between groups. In Anbar, they were in Al Qaim, Ana, Falluja, Haditha.⁵³⁶

⁵²⁷ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁵²⁸ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁵²⁹ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update – September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵³⁰ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵³¹ Independent (The), Iraqi Security forces returning displaced civilians from refugee camps to unsafe areas, 8 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵³² NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 13

⁵³³ NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵³⁴ IOM’s Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018 [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁵³⁵ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁵³⁶ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 53

Areas retaken from ISIL by security forces have not all been cleared of explosive remnants after ISIL. Multiple incidents have been reported of civilians, including children⁵³⁷, killed and injured of remnant explosives placed by ISIL in agricultural⁵³⁸ and residential areas. Incidents involving ISIL booby-trapped homes have been reported and a security campaign was launched in search of any booby-trapped houses targeting repatriated families in Rawa.⁵³⁹ In Ramadi authorities claim to have removed over 20 000 explosive devices.⁵⁴⁰

According to NRC, writing in February 2018, one of the most persistent threats facing returnees is retributive acts perpetrated against returnees for their perceived links with ISIL.⁵⁴¹ UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that 'many returnees— in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa—who are alleged to be affiliated with extremists have been forcibly evicted from their homes upon return, resulting in their secondary displacement, with their properties destroyed or confiscated.'⁵⁴²

Tribesmen in Anbar vowed to take revenge on family members of ISIL affiliates if they return. Others fear that the return of ISIL affiliates, or their family members, could spark confrontations that could lead to unrest and bloodshed. Houses belonging to family members of ISIL militants have either been destroyed⁵⁴³, or occupied by other tenants, whose homes were destroyed by ISIL.⁵⁴⁴

Even if the violence has subsided in most parts of the governorate, residents continue to live in fear of future attacks from ISIL. The violations committed by ISIL put a wedge between local residents. The majority of the fighters recruited by ISIL in Anbar were local residents from within the governorate. Members of the Abu Nimr tribe in Hit lost 'about 1000 members, with the same number of disappeared, shot in the desert as they tried to escape, or had their bodies thrown down wells'.⁵⁴⁵ The faltering judicial system, and the marginalisation that many Sunni Arabs feel towards the central government, has strengthened tribal law enforcement.⁵⁴⁶

Tribal and community leaders have banned ISIL families from returning. Reportedly, families have been subjected to extortion by the leaders who threaten to report them to the authorities unless they pay large sums of money.⁵⁴⁷ Other tribal leaders have stipulated tribal decrees as a form of collective punishment banning alleged ISIL families from return, although national legislation forbids such practices.⁵⁴⁸ In February 2018, a member of the Anbar Province Council stated that fear of revenge from tribes was preventing 500 families from returning to areas Iraqi forces had recaptured from the militants.⁵⁴⁹

In February 2018 it was reported that about 380 families affiliated to ISIL continued to be detained in camps within the governorate.⁵⁵⁰ Since 2014 HRW has reported of incidents across Iraq of families prevented by the authorities from returning, despite receiving security clearance.⁵⁵¹ In early 2018, a

⁵³⁷ Iraqi News, Four children wounded as IED explodes west of Anbar, 19 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ Iraqi News, IS bomb kills woman, injures another in eastern Ramadi, 20 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ Iraqi News, Civilian Killed in house bomb explosion in Anbar, says military source, 23 January 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Six Family members killed, injured as booby-trapped house explodes in Anbar, 22 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ UNEP, War-torn cities in Iraq keen to boost reconstruction efforts by recycling debris, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁵⁴² UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

⁵⁴³ Daily Star (The), Revenge awaits families of extremists in Iraq's Anbar province, 13 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ Independent (The), For this Iraqi tribe massacred by ISIS, fear of the group's return is a constant reality, 4 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ Independent (The), For this Iraqi tribe massacred by ISIS, fear of the group's return is a constant reality, 4 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁶ National (The), The Post-ISIL Iraq, tribal justice grows in shadow of Baghdad mistrust, 25 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁵⁴⁸ NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁵⁴⁹ Iraqi News, 500 displaced militants' families fear revenge back home in Iraq's Anbar, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, Iraqi tribesmen warn ISIS fighter's families, 12 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ HRW, Iraq: Displaced Families Blocked from Returning, 24 June 2018, [url](#)

group of 51 families from the town of al-Baghdadi (north-western Anbar) were banned from return, despite receiving security clearance from the authorities at the al-Khalidiya camps where they had been displaced. The families, who were members of the Sa'ada tribe, were stopped at the checkpoint, because the authorities had been pressured by the mayor of al-Baghdadi to block the returns. However, unverified information maintains that 11 families were later allowed to return.⁵⁵² In June 2018 HRW informed that the families from al-Baghdadi were allowed to return.⁵⁵³

In September 2018 UNHCR reported that 'tribal leaders, security actors and communities continue to impede or deny permission to families with perceived links to extremists to return to areas of origin in Anbar, Kirkuk and Ninewa.⁵⁵⁴ USDOD, reporting in November 2018 stated that 'IDPs returning to Anbar continue to face restrictions imposed by security forces, tension from sectarianism and tribal feuds, and the effects of unexploded remnants of war.'⁵⁵⁵

In a January 2019 interview with EASO, a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, stated

'In Anbar, generally people can return home if they get the security clearance, and if they are not seen as ISIL affiliated, or, if they are (seen as) ISIL-affiliated, if the community is demanding payment and they've been able to pay. Those who are now left lingering in the camps are mostly from communities where other people were able to go home because they could pay compensation (20k for a family or 10k for a person, for example for alleged destruction of another tribe's houses or cattle, etc), and those families that could pay left, and those that could not pay cannot go back – and so this requirement is on top of the security clearance requirement which would be granted by the Anbar Operations Command – so even if they get a clearance, but if the community is demanding payment for them to return and if they can't pay, they can't return. In an area like that you wouldn't say that the returns are not permitted, but there are stipulations on it that some can't meet because of poverty, while those who can afford it might be able to.'⁵⁵⁶

The humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of the defeat of ISIL has contributed to high levels of infrastructure damage, unemployment and poverty in governorates impacted by ISIL.⁵⁵⁷ According to UNEP infrastructure damage is the highest in Ramadi, Haditha, Hit, Qaim and Kubaisa. It was estimated that approximately 80 % of Ramadi is in ruins.⁵⁵⁸

Road security

There are different military groups maintaining security within the governorate. These include the army, police, Sunni tribal militias, as well as the PMUs. Every checkpoint along the main roads tends to have representatives from the different security forces working in the area. The checkpoints appear to work arbitrarily, depending on the schedule set by the different groups, using sniffer dogs and various security devices. Local residents in Anbar have complained of the increasing 'militarisation' of their hometowns, whereby civilians are caught up in checkpoints, and requiring dozens of pieces of documentation in order to pass, hampering their freedom of movement.⁵⁵⁹ According to Al Monitor 'a plethora of checkpoints manned by several different security forces are scattered throughout Anbar province, slowing movement and creating confusion regarding authorizations due to ineffective communication between the officers in charge.'⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵² HRW, Iraq: Displaced Families Blocked from Returning, 24 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ HRW, Iraqi Authorities Finally Allow Group of Families to Return Home to Anbar, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ UNHCR, Iraq protection update-September 2018, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁵⁵ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, p. 21, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁵⁵⁷ IOM Iraq, Crisis Funding Appeal 2018, 31 January 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁵⁸ UNEP, War-torn cities in Iraq keen to boost reconstruction efforts by recycling debris, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ Niqash, Living in a Prison, High security in Anbar changes Iraqi civilian lives, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

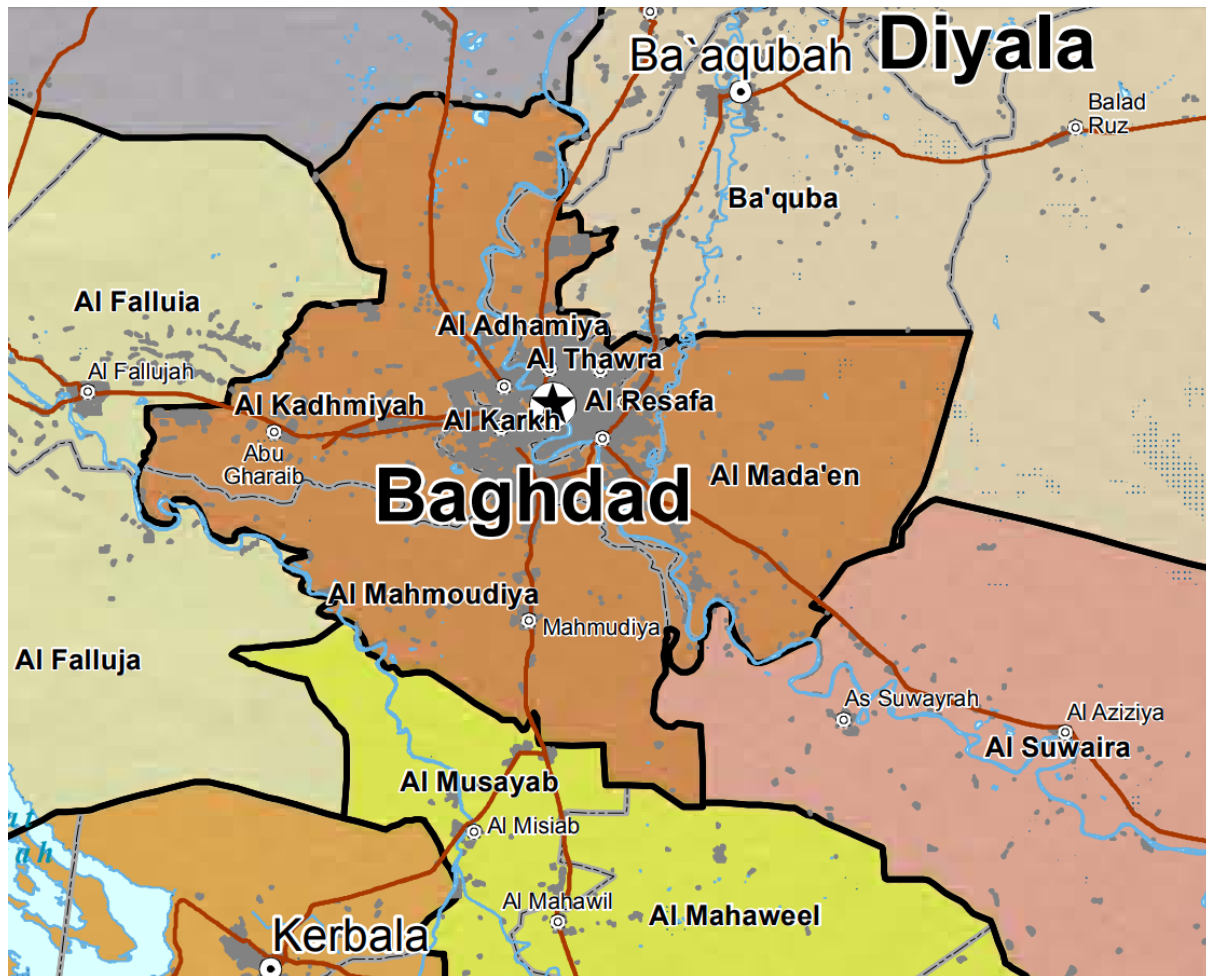
⁵⁶⁰ Al Monitor, Anbar governor wants police boosted and military back on bases, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

Referring to the risks encountered by Sunni Arabs crossing PMU-manned checkpoints, a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, pointed out that in Anbar ‘there are numerous checkpoints there as well where you could be taken and there is no reason to think there are better systems in place if you are arbitrarily arrested or detained either – in terms of notification of arrest or your family being able to locate you, or that you’re more likely to see a judge or be released if you’re the wrong person.’⁵⁶¹ Human Rights Watch has documented one case in which the Anbar Operations Command, an integrated military and security command, was implicated in the enforced disappearance of eight Sunni men who were displaced by the fighting against ISIL in Anbar governorate from a checkpoint in October 2017.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁵⁶² HRW, “Life Without a Father is Meaningless”; Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances in Iraq 2014-2017, 27 September 2018, [url](#), p. 26

2.2 Baghdad



Map 6: Baghdad with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁵⁶³

General description of the governorate

Baghdad governorate is the smallest in the country and contains the capital of Iraq, Baghdad city.⁵⁶⁴ Baghdad has an officially estimated population of about 8.1 million in 2018.⁵⁶⁵ WorldPop, a project at the University of Southampton which compiles UN-adjusted population figures, puts the population at 7.2 million.⁵⁶⁶ Baghdad is located in the Tigris valley in the centre of Iraq and it the smallest governorate in terms of overall surface area (4 555 km²).⁵⁶⁷ Despite being the smallest governorate in Iraq, it has the highest population of all governorates, with 87 % being urban.⁵⁶⁸ Baghdad has the highest population density in Iraq.⁵⁶⁹ It is the main economic hub of the country and hosts the heavily protected Green Zone.⁵⁷⁰

Baghdad city is made up of the districts: Adhamiyah, Karkh, Karada, Khadimiyah, Mansour, Sadr City, Al Rashid, Rusafa and 9 Nissan ('new Baghdad'). The rest of Baghdad governorate is comprised of the

⁵⁶³ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁶⁵ Iraq, CSO, Population estimation of Iraq by governorates, sex, and region for year 2018, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ WorldPop, Iraq- WorldPop Population Estimates by COD Administrative Units, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁶⁸ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁶⁹ UN, Iraq Population Density [Map], 23 July 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁰ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

districts of Al Madain, Taji, Tarmiyah, Mahmudiyah, and Abu Ghraib.⁵⁷¹ Outlying areas of Baghdad in where it shares a border with Diyala, Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Babil are referred to as the ‘Baghdad belts’.⁵⁷²

According to sources, Baghdad governorate and city has a mixed population of Shia and Sunni, with a smaller number of Christian communities.⁵⁷³ Baghdad was one of the main ‘battlegrounds’ between groups involved in the 2006-2007⁵⁷⁴ sectarian violence that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, when bombings and killings impacted many areas of Baghdad and caused inhabitants to resettle along more sectarian lines, reportedly with the involvement of Shia militias forcing Sunnis out of some areas at that time.⁵⁷⁵ Landinfo also observed in 2015 that while most Baghdad neighbourhoods used to be inhabited by a mix of Sunni and Shia in the past, the violent sectarian cleansing in the 2000s resulted in the city appearing to be much more segregated and Shia-dominated.⁵⁷⁶

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

In 2013, ISIL increased the number of terrorist attacks in Baghdad drastically. Particularly Shia targets in the city were hit by VBIEDs. With this strategy, ISIL tried to demonstrate the incapacity of the Iraqi authorities and the Security Forces, and to provoke the resurgence of Shia militias.⁵⁷⁷ These waves of VBIEDs continued in 2014.⁵⁷⁸ The fear that ISIL could overrun Baghdad during summer 2014 did not materialise, however, there was fighting between ISIL militants and the Iraqi Army in Zaidan and Abu Ghraib in the west of the governorate (in about 20 km distance to the city centre).⁵⁷⁹ Also in the towns of al-Mahmudiya and Latifiya south of the city gunfights with ISIL were reported.⁵⁸⁰ In addition, the Shia districts of Baghdad continued to be targeted by regular terrorist attacks on public places in 2014.⁵⁸¹ The ISIL raids in June 2014 led to the mobilisation of Shia militias in Baghdad.⁵⁸² While the Iraqi army was primarily maintaining the security in the centre of Baghdad, these militias were mainly present in the suburbs of Baghdad.⁵⁸³ The visible re-entering of these militias recalled memories from the civil war of 2006-2007 within the Sunni minority in the city, when Shia militias carried out sectarian cleansing against the Sunni population of Baghdad.⁵⁸⁴ During 2014, there were reports of sectarian killings by Shia militias and murders of Sunni civilians have been attributed to members of different

⁵⁷¹ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁷² IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁷³ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁷⁴ According to IBC data, the period 2006-2007, with the exception of the year 2003 and 2014, the years between 2006-2007 were among the years with the highest levels violent deaths of civilians in Iraq. See: IBC, Documented civilian deaths from violence, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁷⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat, Irak: Bagdad - sikkerhetssituasjon per februar 2015 [Baghdad – Security situation], 13 February 2015, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁷⁷ ISW, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, The Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I, Middle East Security Report 14, September 2013, [url](#), p. 9

⁵⁷⁸ ISW, Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ ISW, The Battle for Baghdad: Scenarios, 13 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ US, CRS, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights, 02 July 2014, [url](#), p. 19; ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 24, 2014, 24 July 2014, [url](#); ISW, "ISIS in Iraq: Battle Plan for Baghdad" - Coming Soon! 27 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 15, 2014, 15 June 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ Reuters, Dozens killed in car bombs across Baghdad, 08 June 2014, [url](#); Reuters, Suicide bomber kills 16 people in Baghdad's Shi'ite Sadr City, 11 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 17, 2014, 17 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 26, 2014, 26 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 14, 2014, 14 July 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 19, 2014, 19 July 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸² Washington Institute, Iranian Proxies Step Up Their Role in Iraq, 13 June 2014, [url](#), p. 18

⁵⁸³ Netherlands, Ambtsbericht Veiligheidssituatie in Irak, 19 September 2014, [url](#), pp. 45, 18

⁵⁸⁴ Daily Beast (The), Torched Baghdad Neighborhood Could Be Just the Beginning, 15 May 2015, [url](#)

Shia militias.⁵⁸⁵ However, the large-scale sectarian killings of 2006-2007 did not repeat in Baghdad in 2014 or later.⁵⁸⁶

According to ISW, ISIL stopped using VBIED/SVEST attacks on Baghdad for a few months in 2016, but returned to using these tactics to attack Baghdad in April and May 2016. According to ISW, ISF forces had successfully been blocking VBIED but due to political upheaval and overstretched security, the resurgence of ISIL's successful use of VBIED/SVESTs in Baghdad allowed 23 attacks by ISIL by VBIED and SVEST in the month of 4 April to 11 May 2016 – mainly targeting security forces and checkpoints, but also markets, funerals, and pilgrims for example.⁵⁸⁷ Civilians and Shia pilgrims were targeted by ISIL, leading to large numbers of civilians being killed and wounded in Baghdad bombings in April 2016.⁵⁸⁸ In May 2016, ISIL detonated a large bomb in the Shia area, Sadr City, killing 52 people and injuring dozens of people; Baquba, in Diyala, but on the outskirts of the Baghdad belts was also targeted by a bomb that killed 10.⁵⁸⁹ ISIL carried out three simultaneous attacks in Baghdad on 11 May 2016, killing 93 civilians and injuring many others.⁵⁹⁰ In July 2016, 324 people were killed in the Karrada suicide bombing in Baghdad when IS blew up a truck bomb outside a shopping mall.⁵⁹¹ According to Joel Wing, using his own data in August 2017, ISIL continued to launch attacks from the rural areas surrounding Baghdad, but incidents dropped from 12 daily incidents down to three.⁵⁹² In 2017, there were large numbers of attempted mass casualty incidents against markets and shops by ISIL in Baghdad.⁵⁹³ For example, 35 people were killed in a car bomb attack on the Shia area of Sadr City in January 2017; A car bomb outside the Al Kindi hospital in Baghdad killed three people; and two suicide bombings in a market in Baghdad targeted Shia and left 28 people dead the same month.⁵⁹⁴ Mass casualty attacks by ISIL dropped off significantly after the first quarter of 2018.⁵⁹⁵

Armed actors

Iraqi army, police, and affiliated PMU armed groups

The units of the Iraqi Army in Baghdad are under the lead of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC), which is divided in two areas, the Karkh Area Command and the Rusafa Area Command. The Prime Minister's Special Forces Division (SFD) is responsible for security in the International Zone and for protecting the Prime Minister. The SFD answers to the Ministry of Defence through the BOC and the Joint Operations Command (JOC), and to the PM. They also have some responsibilities for securing areas of Baghdad, especially during Shia pilgrimages.⁵⁹⁶

The Iraqi army presence in Baghdad is organised Rusafa and Karkh areas of the BOC:

- Karkh Area Command: 6th Iraqi Army Division, one of the units securing the western Baghdad Belts. The 22nd, 24th and 54th Brigade are stationed north and north-west of the capital, the

⁵⁸⁵ New York Times (The), As Sunnis Die in Iraq, a Cycle Is Restarting, 17 June 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Sectarian killings return to Baghdad as war rages elsewhere, 29 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 16, 2014, 16 July 2014, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Pro-Government Militias' Trail of Death, 31 July 2014, [url](#); BBC News, Iraq: Shia militias 'killing Sunnis in reprisal attacks', 14 October 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁶ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 14 January 2019

⁵⁸⁷ ISW, ISIS's Explosive Attacks in the Greater Baghdad Area: April 4-May 11, 2016, 11 May 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ UNAMI, SRSG Kubiš Condemns Baghdad Suburb Terrorist Bombing: "A premeditated and Wanton Aggression" against Civilians, 30 April 2016, [url](#); UNAMI, SRSG Kubiš on Saydiyah Bombing: Iraqis should in one loud voice condemn targeting of civilians, particularly pilgrims, 03 May 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ New Arab (The), Dozens killed in IS attack on Iraq's Sadr City, 11 May 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attacks in Baghdad, 12 May 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#); New York Times (The), Major Islamic State Attacks in Baghdad, 15 October 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁹² Wing, J., 1,459 Killed, 636 Wounded In Iraq July 2017, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 03 August 2017, [url](#); Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding Operations In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁵⁹⁴ BBC News, IS Conflict: Baghdad suicide car bomb blast kills 35, 2 January 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁵⁹⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), pp. 11-12, 14-16. The information provided by this source is not fully updated, the localization of some of the units dates back to 2016 and 2017.

54th also in Mansour, central Baghdad. The 59th Brigade is situated north of Baghdad, in Garma, near Falluja, and also south of the capital. Unattributed units are active in the south-west of Baghdad, in Anbar governorate and in Kadhimiyah, north-west of the capital.⁵⁹⁷

- Rusafa Area Command: 9th Iraqi Army Armoured Division. This is the only armoured division of the IA, therefore, it has a functional rather than a geographical area of responsibility. The 9th IA Division is not stationed in Baghdad.⁵⁹⁸

The Federal Police under the Ministry of Interior are present in Baghdad through the 1st Federal Police Division, securing the south-west, west, south-east, Canal Zone (east of the capital) of Baghdad⁵⁹⁹; the 2nd Federal Police Division, the only mechanised FP division for Baghdad security, occupied mostly by counter-terrorism operations in Baghdad and the belts, securing pilgrimage routes, and law enforcement.⁶⁰⁰ The 4th FP Division covered southern Baghdad and areas south of the capital such as Karkh prison.⁶⁰¹ The Emergency Response Division (ERD) 3rd brigade is stationed west of Baghdad.⁶⁰²

Baghdad city and the suburbs are generally under the control of the authorities; however, in practice, authorities share defence and law enforcement roles with the Shia-dominated PMUs, leading to 'incomplete' or overlapping control with these militias.⁶⁰³ ISW wrote in its December 2017 report on Iraq's battle orders:

'The BOC is responsible for security in both Baghdad and much of the Baghdad Belts that surround the capital. The BOC's area of responsibility is a merger of the former Karkh and Rusafa Operations Commands' areas of responsibility. Iraqi Shi'a militias, including lethal proxy militias and Sadrist loyalists, operate outside the BOC's command and control. They have conducted crimes and kidnappings with impunity, established bases and unilateral control zones in northeastern and southern Baghdad, and even clashed with the ISF on rare occasions. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's SFD, attached to the JOC [Joint Operations Command], maintains security in the Green Zone and for critical infrastructure around Baghdad. The BOC is nevertheless ordinarily one of the best-resourced of the ISF's operations commands. It is assessed to have the most frontline on-duty strength of all the operations commands given its role in securing the capital.'⁶⁰⁴

According to ISW, clear PMU presence is difficult to track and it remains unclear to what extent groups shift, though ISW noted that PMU that have operated in or around Baghdad and its outskirts include,

- Badr Organization 3rd, 4th, 5th, 10th, and 21st Brigades, 22nd Brigade (Baghdad belts)⁶⁰⁵;
- Saraya al-Khorasani (Baghdad belts)⁶⁰⁶;
- AAH (Shula District)⁶⁰⁷, 41st, 42nd, 43rd PMU brigades in the Baghdad belts⁶⁰⁸;
- Faylaq Waad al-Sadiq (Abu Ghraib)⁶⁰⁹;
- Saraya al-Salaam 1st and 7th Divisions (Rusafa and Karkh)⁶¹⁰;
- KH, the 45th PMU brigade (eastern Baghdad⁶¹¹, Shula/north of Baghdad)⁶¹²;

⁵⁹⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14-16

⁵⁹⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁵⁹⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁶⁰⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

⁶⁰¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

⁶⁰² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁰³ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Militias in Baghdad], 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁰⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14

⁶⁰⁵ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁶⁰⁶ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁶⁰⁷ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁶⁰⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 41

⁶⁰⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁶¹⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁶¹¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 40

⁶¹² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 40

- Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSAS), 14th PMU Brigade in Al-Maamir, west of Baghdad⁶¹³;
- Qiyadat Quwat Abu Fadl al-Abbas (QQAFA), a small pro-Iranian militia Baghdad Belts⁶¹⁴;
- Saraya Talia al-Khorasani (STaK), 18th PMU Brigade, Baghdad Belts, Baghdad⁶¹⁵;
- Saraya al-Salam / Peace Brigades (PB), 313th PMU Brigade in the northern Baghdad Belts area⁶¹⁶; PB 1st Division: Baghdad/Rusafa⁶¹⁷; PB 7th Division: Baghdad/Karkh.⁶¹⁸

In the past, sources in 2014-2015 reported PMU involvement in abuses and killings of civilians and Sunnis, in the context of anti-ISIL operations, including in Baghdad belt areas.⁶¹⁹

ISIL

There have been fewer large-scale mass attacks in Baghdad and other areas of the country since the defeat of ISIL was announced by the Prime Minister in December 2017.⁶²⁰ ISIL retains active cells in the northern and western belts, but they are in 'hibernation' following significant losses in 2017.⁶²¹ Baghdad became a lower priority for ISIL to attack in 2018.⁶²² ISIL activity has been limited in Baghdad and the belts in 2018.⁶²³ While ISIL is not involved in the majority of the violence in Baghdad in 2018, ISW stated that ISIL can still execute attacks into the urban centre of Baghdad from its traditional support zones in the Baghdad Belts. ISIL is regenerating capabilities, re-entering areas of operations, and reconstituting as an insurgency around Baghdad. ISW remarked that generally 'ISIS is not defeated,' and continues to reconstitute and re-establish its support zones across Iraq.⁶²⁴ According to Michael Knights, writing in December 2018, ISIL retains 'permanently operating attack cells' in 27 areas of Iraq, including in Baghdad, in Tarmiyah, Taji, Rashidayah, Jurf al Sakhr, Latifiyah/ Yussufiyah, Jisr Diyala/Madain, and Radwaniyah/Abu Ghraib in the belts.⁶²⁵

When ISIL claims responsibility for attacks, the victims are labelled by ISIL either as 'apostates,' 'rafida' (a derogatory term for Shia Muslims)⁶²⁶, or as labelled as armed actors although the victims may be civilians.⁶²⁷ ISIL frequently exaggerates the casualties it causes.⁶²⁸

⁶¹³ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 43

⁶¹⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 44

⁶¹⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 45

⁶¹⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 49

⁶¹⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 50

⁶¹⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 50

⁶¹⁹ Reuters, Special Report: Inside Iraq's 'killing zones', 17 December 2014, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Pro-Government Militias' Trail of Death, 31 July 2014, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Militias Escalate Abuses, Possibly War Crimes, 15 February 2015, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ Guardian (The), Suicide attack in Baghdad kills at least 38, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶²¹ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁶²² Wing, J., Review of Security Trends in Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶²³ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁶²⁴ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2019

⁶²⁵ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁶²⁶ BBC Monitoring, IS claims series of attacks on Shia in Baghdad, 25 September 2018, [url](#); The Independent, Baghdad attacks: Isis claims responsibility after at least 125 die in bombings. 3 July 2016, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ EPIC, ISHM: APRIL 27 – MAY 3, 2018, 3 May 2018, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, ISIS Claims Drive-by Shooting that Killed 8 in Iraq, 2 May 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), These Iraqi Farmers Said No to ISIS. When Night Came They Paid the Price. 2 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, ISIS Claims Drive-by Shooting that Killed 8 in Iraq, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	2 419	5 564	7 983
2015	3 727	9 272	12 999
2016	2 895	8 629	11 524
2017	728	2 247	2 975
2018	398	816	1214
	10 167	26 528	36 695
UNAMI: Baghdad casualties⁶²⁹			

IBC data on civilians killed in 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

In 2018 IBC data for Baghdad governorate recorded 392 security-related incidents leading to 566 civilian deaths (second highest to Ninewa, with 1 596 killed in 217 incidents) during 2018, a decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 487 incidents leading to 1 032 civilian deaths. Baghdad had an overall governorate 'intensity' of civilians killed/100 k of 7.36, a drop from 14.38 in 2017.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Adhamiya – 78 security incidents leading to 94 civilian deaths, followed by Resafa (including Thawra 1 & 2) – 77 leading to 161 civilian deaths, followed by and Mada'in – 63 incidents leading to 69 civilian deaths. The highest intensity violent deaths of civilians (deaths per 100k of the population) was recorded in Tarmia (35.80), followed by Mada'in (15.91) and Adhamiya (8.25).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Baghdad governorate involved gunfire (46.4 %), followed by executions/summary killing (30.6 %) and IEDs (20.7 %).⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on [url](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq's Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 17

Security incidents and activity

Several sources also noted an overall decline in violent incidents in Baghdad during the 2018 year⁶³¹, and in the belts, compared to the previous year.⁶³² According to Michael Knights, in 2018, Baghdad witnessed the 'fewest salafi jihadist terrorist attacks' since 2003.⁶³³

ISIL activity capacity has 'more or less disappeared' in the city itself, and has declined in the belts however, ISIL still has activity there.⁶³⁴ ISIL is keeping a low profile in Baghdad and the belts and has not carried out many campaigns in 2018.⁶³⁵ ISW remarked that as of January 2019, ISIS still does retain a general capability to conduct small-scale attacks in Baghdad and the Baghdad Belts, which are primarily IEDs, however, ISIL is 'likely not responsible for the majority of the violence in Baghdad' and ISW continues to track violence linked to criminal and political disputes (i.e. political intimidation, targeted assassinations, etc), which is not ISIL-linked, across Baghdad.⁶³⁶ Michael Knights corroborated the above statement that most of the violence in Baghdad itself is not ISIL-linked.⁶³⁷

ISW observed that the 'vast majority' of violence in Baghdad in 2018 was 'political violence' generally involving political intimidation, armed skirmishes, and targeted assassinations between Shia in the context of ongoing competition and government formation in the aftermath of the May 2018 elections.⁶³⁸ Similarly, Michael Knights explained that the main trend in the violence in Baghdad is that almost all of it is personal, targeted or criminal violence primarily involving small arms, extortion, intimidation and small explosives/IEDs/grenades, shootings, robbery and racketeering. These activities are primarily to use intimidation and violence against civilians to make money, drive away civilians they consider outsiders or people they want to remove, like political opponents or people of a different sect/ethnicity, or because of the person's lifestyle or prior involvement in activities or armed conflict.⁶³⁹ He also mentioned that the political divisions among Shia are driving a lot of the violence in Shia areas of Baghdad and Basrah right now.⁶⁴⁰

Dr Chatelard also remarked that militias in Baghdad are frequently accused by Sunnis and minorities of violence such as death threats, kidnappings, targeted assassinations, taking over buildings from lawful owners, etc; noting that even Shia have been the targets of extortion and killing.⁶⁴¹ Michael Knights also indicated that Sunnis and Christians primarily fear being targeted for extortion, kidnapping, or having their property taken away by Shia militias in Baghdad and against which they will 'be in no position to counter'.⁶⁴² Sources reported that attribution of responsibility attacks to specific perpetrators in Baghdad is difficult, and explosives are used for both political and criminal purposes to attack and intimidate targets.⁶⁴³ Determining actors can be difficult, though most likely they primarily involve militias and gangs.⁶⁴⁴ Dr Chatelard said that PMU militias have 'strong links to criminal gangs' and distinguishing between the two is not always clear.⁶⁴⁵

Militias are also involved in armed clashes between themselves and the ISF, which happened several times in Baghdad in 2018 in central/eastern areas, according to Michael Knights.⁶⁴⁶ One clash between

⁶³¹ Wing, J., Review of Security Trends in Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶³² ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶³³ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁶³⁴ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶³⁵ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁶³⁶ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶³⁷ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶³⁸ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶³⁹ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶⁴⁰ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶⁴¹ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁶⁴² Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶⁴³ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018; Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶⁴⁴ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁶⁴⁵ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁶⁴⁶ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

PMU and the Iraqi police within Baghdad governorate has received national media attention in 2018: On 20 June, Iraqi police stopped a car in downtown Baghdad belonging to members of the Iranian-backed PMU Kataib Hezbollah ('Hezbollah Brigades'), who clashed in the streets when police attempted to pull over the vehicle. A five-vehicle Hezbollah convoy then arrived on the scene and began shooting at police leading to a firefight that injured two officers and one militia member.⁶⁴⁷ Police surrounded the headquarters of the Hezbollah Brigades until the shooter was turned over to police.⁶⁴⁸ The head of Iraq's parliamentary defence and security committee was called in to defuse the situation after the clashes.⁶⁴⁹ The incident reflects the possible power struggle between Iraqi federal forces (army, federal police, local police) and PMU forces.⁶⁵⁰

Sources indicate that in relation to ISIL and violence in the belts, their activity occurred mainly in the Baghdad belts and outlying areas of surrounding governorates circling Baghdad than in the city itself.⁶⁵¹ Joel Wing stated that most violent incidents of IEDs and shootings that he recorded from media sources occur in the towns around the outer north and south of Baghdad, and to a lesser extent, the west.⁶⁵² Regarding explosive attacks specifically, ISW observed that the more intense/active areas where there have been IEDs are the outer belt areas in the northern/north-west part of the city of Baghdad (Kadhimiya, Adahamya) and al Tarmiyah (north of Baghdad). Some incidents occurred inside Baghdad (west of the Tigris - Karadah and New Baghdad/al Nissan), and east of the Tigris (Rusafa, Karkh, Rasheed, and Mansour) as well as Doura, but to a lesser intensity; also, in the outskirts circling the western side through Abu Ghraib (which is neighbouring Kadhimiya) and Mahmoudiya there were some incidents.⁶⁵³ In an interview for this report, Michael Knights gave similar information to ISW, and stated that the Baghdad belt areas of the 'triangle of death' is the most dangerous area in terms of open violence, IED attacks, and bombings are more likely to occur – this includes Mahmudiyah district, Jurf al Sakhr (in Babil), and hundreds of rural villages in these areas, as well as Abu Ghraib, Taji, Tarmiyah, Sabah al Bour (north-west of Baghdad), for example.⁶⁵⁴ This reflects Michael Knights' data on ISIL's 'quality attacks' (mass casualty, effective roadside IED, overrun attacks, person-specific targeting), also revealed that the hotspot areas where attack rates are higher are in belt areas of Tarmiyah, Rashidiya, and Taji (9.7 attacks per month), and Jurf al Sakhr, Iskandiriya, and Latifiya (8.3 attacks per month), while other belt areas averaged 5.7 attacks per month in 2018.⁶⁵⁵

Michael Knights gave the view that in the city the areas where the ISF are concentrated to guard important sites are safer and provide less room for open violence such as IEDs, or robberies; he noted the areas of Karkh, Doura, and Mansour; and remarked that more serious activity happens where the ISF is less dominant, and armed actors like criminal gangs and militias have turf wars and work out grudges, such as in Kadhimiya, Jihad, Bayaa, and Karadah. He gave the view that the 'worst security areas' in the city are Adhamiya, New Baghdad, and Sadr City.⁶⁵⁶

IED and explosive attacks

Baghdad was previously targeted by ISIL because of the concentration of population in Baghdad with large civilian gatherings offering opportunities to be bombed and create large numbers of casualties

⁶⁴⁷ LWJ, Iraq Police, Hezbollah Brigades clash in Baghdad, 21 June 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, 3 people wounded in clashes between Hezbollah, Iraqi police in Baghdad, 20 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ LWJ, Iraq Police, Hezbollah Brigades clash in Baghdad, 21 June 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, 3 people wounded in clashes between Hezbollah, Iraqi police in Baghdad, 20 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ Rudaw, Iraq MP goes to Hezbollah HQ after clashes with security forces, 20 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ LWJ, Iraq Police, Hezbollah Brigades clash in Baghdad, 21 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019; ISW 25 January 2019; Knights, M, Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019; Wing, J., Review Of Security Trends In Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵² Wing, J., Review Of Security Trends In Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶⁵⁴ Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

⁶⁵⁵ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁵⁶ Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

but activity has declined in 2018.⁶⁵⁷ In 2017, Iraq expert Michael Knights tracked high numbers of ISIL attacks using IEDs to target markets and shops in the Baghdad belts and urban sprawl around the city, and this trends continued into the first months of 2018, with a reported 65 attempted mass-casualty events in the Belts, or projected toward Baghdad via rural entry points; however, the number of attacks of this kind dropped off in the remainder of 2018.⁶⁵⁸ ISW observed that a signature style of ISIL attack noted in Baghdad in 2018 has been to use small explosives to target small passenger buses which carry ten or so individuals at a time and which operate across Baghdad. These buses have been targeted several times with IEDs by ISIL in 2018, causing minimal casualties but intimidating the civilian population.⁶⁵⁹ According to ISW, from June to November 2018, IEDs have occurred in Baghdad and the belts in mid-to-late 2018.⁶⁶⁰

In January 2018, two suicide bombers detonated in crowded Tayran square market of Baghdad, killing at least 38 people.⁶⁶¹ As many as 90 were injured.⁶⁶² The attack ‘shocked’ Baghdad’s population because it occurred after a significant decrease in such attacks in Baghdad and elsewhere.⁶⁶³ It was described by the Guardian as the most serious attack on Baghdad since the declaration of victory over ISIL.⁶⁶⁴

Examples of other explosive attacks in 2018 include the following ones.

- A bomb exploded in al Rashidiya in January, killing one PMU and injuring two other people.⁶⁶⁵
- On 23 January, a soldier was killed and two others wounded when an Iraqi Army patrol was hit by a roadside bomb in al-Tarmiya, north of Baghdad.⁶⁶⁶
- On 16 May, 5 people were killed and 10 injured when a suicide bomb attack a Shia funeral in Tarmiyah.⁶⁶⁷
- On 23 May, ISIL claimed a suicide bombing in Shula area that ISIL claimed killed and injured 33 people, however Iraqi media reported that four people were killed and 15 injured.⁶⁶⁸
- ISIL claimed credit for 5 IED attacks on small passenger buses in Baghdad in August, targeting Amil, Shula, Turath, and Baladiyah districts.⁶⁶⁹ Two bus attacks in two areas of Baghdad killed and injured 12 Shia Muslims.⁶⁷⁰
- In June 2018, 17 people were killed and 80 wounded in an explosion of a weapons cache held by Muqtada al Sadr’s militia; the weapons were reportedly stored inside a mosque that was used by Sadr supporters.⁶⁷¹
- An IED targeting Shia in Jihad district (western Baghdad) reportedly killed four people near a shopping centre in September 2018.⁶⁷²
- A string of explosions were reported on 25 September which lead to casualties: Al Jadid [New Baghdad], east of Baghdad (1 dead, 2 injured), al Shaab, north of Baghdad (2 dead), and al-Baayaa,

⁶⁵⁷ Wing, J., Review of Security Trends in Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁸ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Knights, M., Interview with EASO, 25 January 2019

⁶⁵⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶⁶⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶⁶¹ Telegraph (The), Baghdad double suicide bombing kills at least 38 in busy street market, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶² BBC Monitoring, IS belatedly claims twin bombings in Iraqi capital, 17 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶³ Telegraph (The), Baghdad double suicide bombing kills at least 38 in busy street market, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁴ Guardian (The), Suicide attack in Baghdad kills at least 38, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ Iraqi News, Four people killed, injured in two bomb blasts in Baghdad. 30 January, 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ Iraqi News, Three army personnel killed, injured in northern Baghdad bomb blast, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ BBC Monitoring, Suicide attack reportedly kills five in Baghdad, 16 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ BBC Monitoring, IS claims Baghdad suicide attack, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁹ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶⁷⁰ BBC Monitoring, IS claims targeting buses carrying Shias in Iraqi capital, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ BBC News, Iraq arms cache explosions destroy Baghdad mosque, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷² BBC Monitoring, ISIL claims bomb attack on Shia in Baghdad, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

west of Baghdad (2 civilians killed).⁶⁷³ ISIL claimed responsibility for five IEDs targeting Shula, Kadhimiyah (northern Baghdad), Shaab and Bataween (Rusafa), Bayaa district (Central Baghdad) on 25 September 2018, killing 3 civilians.⁶⁷⁴

- On 1 and 2 October 2018, two IEDs, one in the al-Jadeeda [New Baghdad] and the other in the Shaab area, respectively causing at least one death and several wounded. According to ISIL, the number of casualties at these two attacks was much higher, claiming more than 50 killed and wounded.⁶⁷⁵
- On 7 October 2018, a string of attacks against different neighbourhoods in Baghdad (Abu Dshir, 17 km south of Baghdad, Abu Ghraib, 44 km west of Baghdad, and in northern Baghdad) killed four persons and wounded five.⁶⁷⁶
- On 4 November 2018, a series of five IEDs in different areas of the governorate killed between 8 persons and injured 14⁶⁷⁷; another source reported 7 killed and 16 injured.⁶⁷⁸ ISIL claimed credit for the string of bombings in Sadr City, Eastern Mashtal district, Habibyah (northern Baghdad), and Turath district (southern Baghdad). In total the bombings killed 7 people and injured 16; however, ISIL itself claimed the number was more than 50 casualties.⁶⁷⁹ ISIL claimed the IEDs targeted Shia gatherings.⁶⁸⁰
- In 2018, an explosion in a market in Sadr City on 14 August was attributed to criminal causes by a security source; it killed three people and injured four.⁶⁸¹

Armed clashes/shootings and killings

- Unidentified gunmen opened fire in the Jihad neighbourhood of western Baghdad, killing a mayoral official in January 2018.⁶⁸²
- ISIL shot and killed 8 civilians in an assault on Tarmiyah in May 2018; the victims were putting up election signs; ISIL described them as members of a tribal militia.⁶⁸³
- ISIL launched a nighttime attack in Tarmiyah that killed 21 members of a local tribe (18 men, 2 women, and a child) in early May 2018; all were members of the Albu Faraj tribe, which is a 'staunch' opponent to Sunni extremists in the area and members are part of the local Sunni militia and PMUs created to defend against ISIL. The ISIL attackers wore army uniforms and targeted a local lawyer who was known to assist ISIL victims, killing him in his home; when other villagers arrived to help, they opened fire, killing and injuring them, and left before the army arrived to respond.⁶⁸⁴

Several killings of social media personalities have occurred in Baghdad but remain unattributed, for example:

⁶⁷³ Daesh Daily, Reports from Iraq, Baghdad, 25 September 2018, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, IS claims series of attacks on Shia in Baghdad, 25 September 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Three people killed, injured in fifth bomb blast, east of Baghdad, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁴ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁶⁷⁵ BBC Monitoring, IS claims another attack on Shia in Baghdad, 3 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁶ EPIC, ISHM: October 5-11, 2018, 11 October 2018, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, Islamic State claims string of attacks on Shia in Baghdad, 7 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM: November 2-8, 2018, 8 November, 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ BBC Monitoring, At least seven killed in string of bombings in Iraqi capital, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ BBC Monitoring, At least seven killed in string of bombings in Iraqi capital, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁰ BBC Monitoring, IS claims multiple IED attacks in Iraqi capital, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ Iraqi News, Seven people killed, injured in explosion in Sadr city, east of Baghdad, 14 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸² Iraqi News, On 96th anniv. of Police Day, Iraqi cop injured in Baghdad bomb blast, 9 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸³ Asharq Al-Awsat, ISIS Claims Drive-by Shooting that Killed 8 in Iraq, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴ New York Times (The), These Iraqi Farmers Said No to ISIS. When Night Came They Paid the Price, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

- Star of Instagram Tara Fares, who was outspoken on social media about personal freedom, was shot dead while driving her Porsche in Baghdad on 27 September 2018.⁶⁸⁵
- In 2017, Karar Nushi, a male model who had received death threats over his long hair and tight clothes was found stabbed in Palestine street with his body showing signs of torture.⁶⁸⁶
- The stabbing to death of Hammoudi al-Meteiry, a 15-year-old ‘King of Instagram’ who was reportedly killed because of his perceived homosexuality by unknown perpetrators.⁶⁸⁷

ISIL-attributed attacks

ISIL claimed that it targeted sheikhs and tribal leaders who supported the May 2018 elections.⁶⁸⁸ In May 2018, ISIL claimed it bombed the house of a pro-election tribal leader who had encouraged people to vote; it was unclear if he was killed.⁶⁸⁹ ISIL also claimed that it shot and killed a sheikh in al-Zour near Tarmiyah in June 2018 for supporting elections.⁶⁹⁰

Other examples of attacks in 2018 were:

- On 27 February, four Sahwa members were shot by unknown perpetrators in northern Baghdad. One was killed, the other three wounded.⁶⁹¹
- On 1 March, a former official of the Sahwa movement was killed by a bomb placed under his car in Baghdad.⁶⁹²
- On 29 April, a leader of the PMU, Qassim Al-Zubaidi, was injured in an assassination attempt in downtown Baghdad, and hours before, an election candidate of the State of Law coalition was killed north of Baghdad.⁶⁹³
- On 22 June, ISIL claimed to have killed a tribal leader in al-Zour near Tarmiyah, north of the capital, because he supported the parliamentary elections.⁶⁹⁴
- On 8 July, a tribal militia commander and one of his companions were wounded in a bomb attack in northern Baghdad.⁶⁹⁵
- On 19 July, a member of the security forces was wounded in an attack with a roadside bomb targeting him in al-Tarmiya region, north Baghdad.⁶⁹⁶
- On 2 August, a roadside bomb targeted a vehicle of the security forces in Sabaa al-Bour region north of Baghdad. One person was killed, another one wounded.⁶⁹⁷

State’s ability to secure law and order

More information on this topic is available in the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

In January 2018, the Director of the BOC media Office explained that the security forces in the capital have made progress with regard to the intelligence gathering on ISIL, and that military operations in the Baghdad Belt have had a positive impact on the security situation. The Director further announced the construction of a security fence around the Baghdad with security gates to prevent insurgents from

⁶⁸⁵ Independent (The), Iraq shocked by death of Instagram model Tara Fares, 3 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ Independent (The), Iraqi male model brutally killed in Baghdad 'because of his good looks', 5 July 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ Iraqi News, Death threats non-stop for Iraqi male beauty pageant contestant, 23 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁸ BBC Monitoring, IS claims killing tribal figure for 'supporting' Iraq elections, 22 June 2018, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, IS claims bombing house of Iraqi tribal figure for backing elections, 1 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁹ BBC Monitoring, IS claims bombing house of Iraqi tribal figure for backing elections, 1 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ BBC Monitoring, IS claims killing tribal figure for 'supporting' Iraq elections, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ Iraqi News, Four Sunni fighters killed, injured in Baghdad shooting, 27 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹² Iraqi News, Two people killed, four others wounded in bomb blasts in Baghdad, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹³ Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Leader of Shia militia survives assassination attempt, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ BBC Monitoring, IS claims killing tribal figure for 'supporting' Iraq elections, 22 June 2018, [url](#); Daesh Daily, Daesh says it killed an “election supporter” in the Al-Zor area, near Tarmiya, on Thursday, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁵ Iraqi News, Iraqi commander, companion injured in bomb attack in Baghdad, 8 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁶ Iraqi News, Security personnel injured in bomb blast, north of Baghdad, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁷ Iraqi News, Security personnel killed, another wounded in bomb blast, north of Baghdad, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

accessing the capital.⁶⁹⁸ According to ISW, in terms of the past year and the government's ability to prevent attacks, they noted that BOC has focused on the Baghdad belts which has contributed to the drop in attacks in Baghdad.⁶⁹⁹ According to ISW, in terms of the past year and the government's ability to prevent attacks, they noted that

'In general, ISF have been successful in preventing the return of widespread violence to Baghdad in 2018. This success can be seen in the overall decrease of violence incidents over the past year (although this can also be attributed in part to decreased capabilities or new priorities for ISIS). Political violence remains the largest concern for destabilization and civilian protection given continued deadlock over the new Government of Iraq under Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi. The PMF and other local security forces in Baghdad are often responsive to political actors rather than formal state structures controlled by Iraq.'⁷⁰⁰

Similarly, Dr Chatelard explained that effectiveness of protection of civilians from various forms of violence can depend on the political will of actors involved. Efforts to protect are undermined by the situation on the ground where PMU militias act upon orders from their own commands and are not accountable to the unified Iraqi government, but instead to different political contenders or Iranian patrons.⁷⁰¹ She remarked that the government is unable to control the 'lawlessness and criminality' due to the militias and criminal elements.⁷⁰² Michael Knights also said militias can openly break the law without consequence.⁷⁰³ Landinfo gave the assessment that according to them, militias have the freedom of action in Baghdad to have open presence, fixed installations and checkpoints, move freely, interconnect with police, control/arrest/punish/abduct persons, and be involved in criminal activities.⁷⁰⁴ Sources from 2017-2018 stated that PMUs are still manning checkpoints in Baghdad.⁷⁰⁵ According to Landinfo, the militias have greater freedom of action in the suburbs and in the belts, where they can deny locals the right to return to their homes.⁷⁰⁶

The PMUs nevertheless remain popular and have both 'formal and informal power' and are involved focusing on having a reconstruction role post-ISIL – in Baghdad, they have advertised their role in the reconstruction of a medical clinic, for example.⁷⁰⁷ Most neighbourhoods in Baghdad have a PMU base belonging to 'whichever PMU is present in that part of the city' and police have to coordinate with them. Sometimes, local people, including in Baghdad, approach the neighbourhood militias instead of police to seek justice due to perceptions about police corruption.⁷⁰⁸

According to Michael Knights, there is a large concentration of security forces, including the army located in Baghdad, about which he gave the view was 'adequate' and quite active and quite well-led with advisory cells and intelligence support; remarking that this has driven down the threat of violence from ISIL. He noted however, that at the moment, the threat of violence in Baghdad is 'personal and targeted' more so than 'situational' (wrong place/wrong time). The militias are there to contend with and security forces' interactions with the local population in the north-western and south-western edges of Baghdad were more problematic; particularly around places like Jurf al Sakhr and Abu Ghraib.⁷⁰⁹ ISW explained that in Baghdad militias engage in violent competition for territorial presence and territory, populations, and political leverage. Many key political powerbrokers elected into

⁶⁹⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraq Reopens 600 Main Streets, Lifts 281 Security Checkpoints in Baghdad, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Wing, J., Review of Security Trends in Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2018

⁷⁰¹ Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁷⁰² Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019

⁷⁰³ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁷⁰⁴ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Militias in Baghdad], 15 September 2017, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁷⁰⁵ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019; Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019; Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Militias in Baghdad], 15 September 2017, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁷⁰⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Militias in Baghdad], 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰⁷ Mansour, R., More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here To Stay, War on the Rocks, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ Niqash, Baghdad's Legal Gangs? As Iraqi Police Lose Control Of Streets, Militias Take Over, 19 January 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ Knights, M., Email to EASO, 25 January 2019

government in May 2018 control militias with influence in Baghdad, such as Muqtada al-Sadr's Peace Brigades, Hadi al-Ameri's Badr Corps, and Qais al-Khazali's AAH (among other groups active in the Popular Mobilization Forces). Many also retain personal security details and armed groups with a history of violations against civilians.⁷¹⁰

Displacement and return

Baghdad experienced a massive influx of IDPs in 2015 and 2016, forcing the authorities to limit the access to the capital and impose sponsorship requirements.⁷¹¹ At the height of the displacement crisis (on 2 March 2016), there were 604 140 displaced persons in Baghdad.⁷¹² This number was reduced to 69 204 IDPs by 15 December 2018.⁷¹³ The majority of the internally displaced persons living in Baghdad originated from the governorates of Anbar, Ninewa and Babil. The number of IDPs originating from Baghdad who fled into other areas within the borders of the governorate itself has decreased from 8 550 on 15 September 2017⁷¹⁴ to only 486 intra-government IDPs by 15 December 2018.⁷¹⁵ The number of IDPs in all governorates of Iraq with Baghdad as original residence was 30 030 persons on 15 December 2018. Those who left the capital, mostly went to Sulaymaniyah and Erbil governorates.⁷¹⁶

On 15 December 2018, IOM reported that the majority of IDPs in Baghdad are in Karkh (28 284), followed by Abu Ghraib (10 428), Adhamiya (7 464), Rusafa (5 868), Mahmoudiya (5 490), Tarmiyah (5 010), Kadhimia (4 962), Madain (1 104), Thawra I (564) and Thawra II (30).⁷¹⁷

IOM reported as of 15 December, that 27 480 IDPs in Baghdad were staying in a host family, and 35 988 rented a house⁷¹⁸, however, the districts Thawra I and 2 (Sadr City) are overpopulated and socially disadvantaged. In the equally crowded Karkh district is a mix of rented housing, host families or informal settlements. All suffer from frequent interruptions of basic services and poor living conditions.⁷¹⁹ Only a minority live in camps, schools, religious buildings or informal settlements. Abu Ghraib has the highest proportion of camp residents, 3 078 persons, making up for 29.52 % of the IDPs in this district.⁷²⁰

Road security

Checkpoints in Baghdad are used for security to ensure car bombs and suicide vests are not entering the city and security forces will continue to use them to prevent security incidents which may involve profiling for potential threats.⁷²¹ According to Fanar Haddad, PMUs are not running checkpoints in Baghdad city but they will set them up ad hoc in emergencies; the belts are different where there is a more visible PMU presence and checkpoints.⁷²² A similar view was given by a security analyst based in Iraq who stated that checkpoints being run by PMUs are mainly in the outskirts of Baghdad and within ISF/FP checkpoints, but where PMUs are keeping a lower profile. The capability to set up temporary checkpoints due to specific issues in Baghdad neighbourhoods is possible. PMUs do not appear to want to be seen as participating in checkpoints in Baghdad. There has been a reported presence of PMU elements in checkpoints in the eastern parts of the city.⁷²³

⁷¹⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 25 January 2019

⁷¹¹ IOM Iraq, Baghdad Governorate Profile. May-August 2015, 09 November 2015, [url](#)

⁷¹² IOM Iraq, DTM Displacement Dashboards, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹³ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, DTM Round 107 Report, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁷¹⁴ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 15 September 2017, [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, DTM Round 107 Report, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁷¹⁶ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, DTM Round 107 Report, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁷¹⁷ IOM Iraq, DTM Displacement Dashboards, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹⁸ IOM Iraq, IDP & Returnee Master List, IDPs, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ IOM Iraq, Baghdad Governorate Profile. May-August 2015, 09 November 2015, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ IOM Iraq, DTM Displacement Dashboards, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷²¹ Knights, M., EASO interview, 25 January 2019

⁷²² Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report and follow up email, 4 February 2019

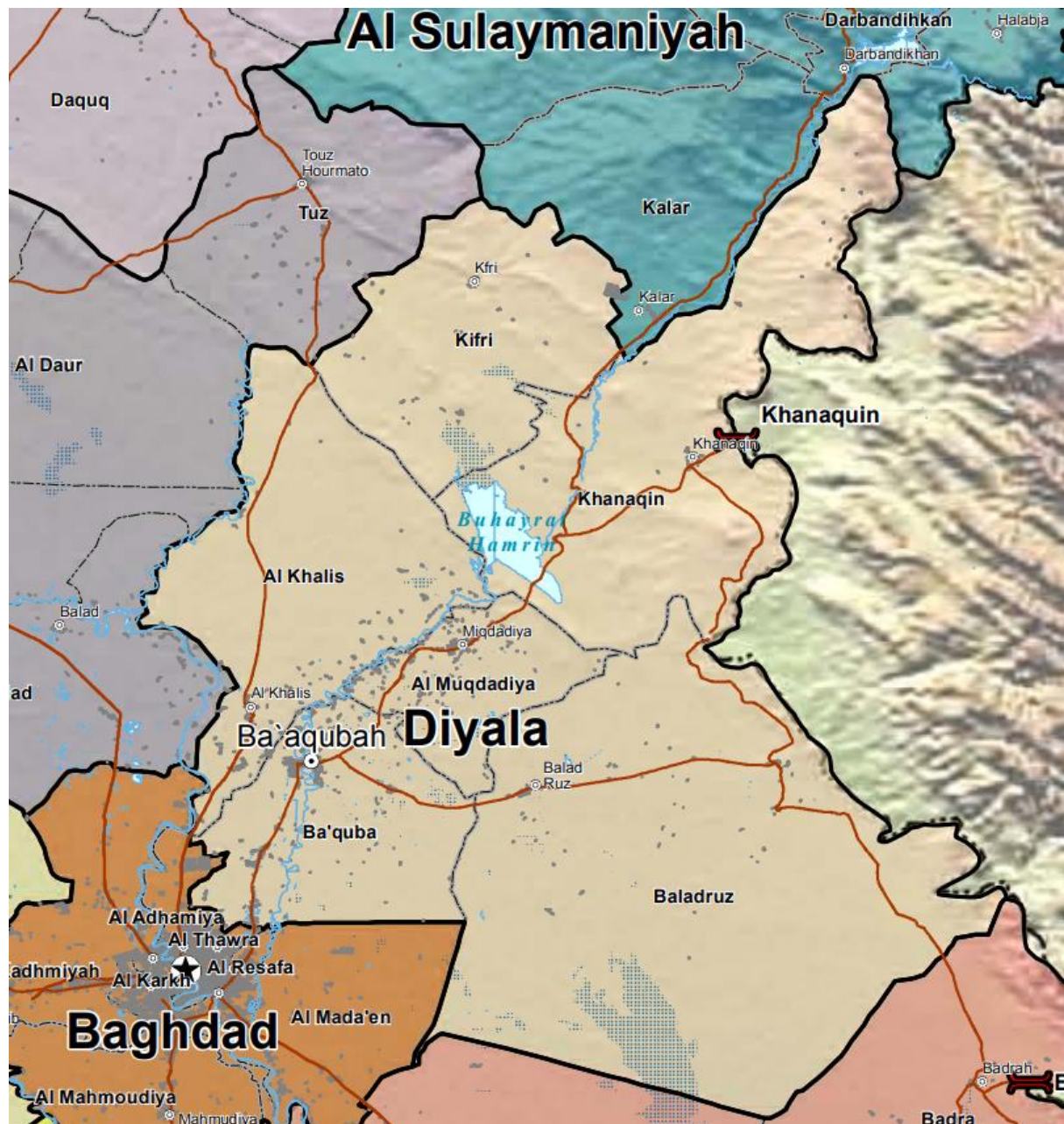
⁷²³ Security analyst, Email to EASO, 5 February 2018

In January 2018, the BOC media director told the newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat that 281 checkpoints in Baghdad had been lifted, at least 600 main streets and exits and its suburbs were reopened, and thousands of concrete blocks had been lifted.⁷²⁴ On 10 December 2018, the fortified International Zone (Green Zone) in the city centre opened to the public. This is first reopening after years. In 2015, the government had it reopened for a few days, but re-closed after opposition from US officials.⁷²⁵

⁷²⁴ Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraq Reopens 600 Main Streets, Lifts 281 Security Checkpoints in Baghdad. 29 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷²⁵ New York Times (The), Baghdad's Fortified Green Zone Opens to Public After 15 Years, 10 December 2018, [url](#)

2.3 Diyala



Map 7: Diyala with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁷²⁶

General description of the governorate

Diyala has an estimated population of 1 637 226 inhabitants.⁷²⁷ The governorate is made up of six districts: Baquba, Baladruz, Khalis, Khaniqin, Kifri and Muqtadiya. Baqubah city is the capital of the governorate. The population estimates for Baqubah district in 2007 was 135 291.⁷²⁸ Diyala has a diverse ethnic and religious population. Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen that make up the majority of the population, each include the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. Other ethnic and religious groups residing

⁷²⁶ UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

⁷²⁸ UNOCHA, Diyala Governorate Profile, March 2009, [url](#), p. 1

in the governorate include Christians, Yazidis and Ahl al-Haqq. Among the Kurdish population is also the community of Feili Kurds, who are predominantly Shia Muslims.⁷²⁹

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

Diyala has also been described as an ‘ethno-sectarian microcosm for the whole of Iraq’.⁷³⁰ The governorate is known to have hosted extremist insurgents in Iraq since 2004.⁷³¹ Since 2003 Diyala was a main hub for ISIL predecessors - the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and before that al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), due to its location that ‘connects many militant operating areas’ and difficult terrain which provides ‘ideal location for insurgents seeking to shelter from security forces’.⁷³² Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who formed the first wing of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), announced the formation of the organisation from Diyala.⁷³³ In 2013, the AQI officially turned into ISIL.⁷³⁴ The governorate’s proximity to Baghdad as well as to the Iranian border made it a priority for the Iraqi government and the Iranian-backed PMU to control.⁷³⁵ According to Michael Knights ‘Diyala was the first place where the Islamic State mounted a strong insurgency after it moved to a terrain-holding model in 2014.’⁷³⁶ Although ISIL managed to occupy large areas in the north of the governorate including Saadiyah and Jalawlah during its offensive, the governorate did not fall in its entirety.⁷³⁷ Diyala was amongst the first areas liberated from ISIL, in January 2015, after an occupation of approximately six months that led to thousands of its inhabitants being displaced.⁷³⁸

ISIL’s advances in Diyala in 2014 prompted many tribal leaders, angered and humiliated by the atrocities committed by ISIL, to broker ad hoc allegiances to support the ISF in the fight against ISIL.⁷³⁹ The Juburi and the Tamimi tribes are the biggest and most influential tribes in the governorate.⁷⁴⁰ Both tribes are known to have supported the central government in 2007, at the early stages of growing insurgency in Diyala.⁷⁴¹ Other tribes that were also instrumental in the battle against ISIL are the Aza and Obeidi tribes.⁷⁴²

An international NGO working in Iraq interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI characterised Diyala’s security situation as follows: ‘you have armed groups whose dynamics predate 2014 because ISIS never controlled the area long enough to influence the underlying trends. You also have protracted communal conflicts that are geographical, ethnic, and sectarian. Lastly, you have PMU competition over access to resources and rents.’⁷⁴³

⁷²⁹ NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 2

⁷³⁰ Flood, D., CTC, From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 36

⁷³¹ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁷³² Knights, M., Losing Mosul, Regenerating in Diyala: How the Islamic State Could Exploit Iraq’s Sectarian Tinderbox, October 2016, [url](#), p. 1

⁷³³ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁷³⁴ NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 4

⁷³⁵ Flood, D., CTC, From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, Volume 11, issue 8, [url](#), p. 32

⁷³⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷³⁷ NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 18 January 2019

⁷³⁸ Flood, D., CTC, From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, Volume 11, issue 8, [url](#), p. 32; NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 4.

⁷³⁹ New York Times (The), Wary tribal alliances, born of necessity, offer hope in Iraq, 6 October 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁰ US Army, Tamimi, Jibouri tribes uphold reconciliation in Diyala, 29 October 2007, [url](#); New York Times (The), Wary tribal alliances, born of necessity, offer hope in Iraq, 6 October 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁴¹ US Army, Tamimi, Jibouri tribes uphold reconciliation in Diyala, 29 October 2007, [url](#)

⁷⁴² US Army, Tamimi, Jibouri tribes uphold reconciliation in Diyala, 29 October 2007, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 43

Iraqi Security Forces

Dijla Operations Command (DOC)

Diyala governorate falls under the Dijla Operations Command (DOC), which includes all of Diyala governorate, eastern Salah al-Din and its ethnically mixed town of Tuz Khurmatu, as well as the Hamreen Mountains. Diyala is a vital military and economic entry point for Iran into Iraq, which Iran and the Badr Brigades prioritise.⁷⁴⁴ According to ISW, the Badr Organisation exerts ‘strong influence’ over the 5th Army Division in Diyala and the Dijla Operations Command.⁷⁴⁵ DOC responds to the leader of the Badr Organisation, Hadi al-Ameri. The DOC which commands the 5th Iraqi Army Division, is influenced by the Badr Organisation, and operates as an extension of the organisation. The Division covers Diyala and the Hamreen Mountain terrain, where it deploys units from the 18th to the 21st Brigades.⁷⁴⁶

Border Guards Command

According to an ISW December 2017 report the Border Guards Command in Diyala operate under the 3rd border region which covers the Diyala –Wassit border with Iran. The 3rd Region is reportedly said to lack manpower, as most of the manpower, as of August 2017, is concentrated in the 2nd Region in Anbar governorate, which includes the governorates western border crossings with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and south-east Syria.⁷⁴⁷

PMU forces

PMUs are reported to be particularly strong in Diyala. The Badr Organisation, which has control over the provincial council, is considered to be the main security actor.⁷⁴⁸ An Iraq analyst interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI noted that PMUs are still present in areas liberated by ISIL, including Diyala. The same source further stated that KH ‘operates in secret ways in Diyala and in Southern Iraq, including Basra’.⁷⁴⁹

According to Fanar Hadaad, Senior Research Fellow at the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, local PMUs such as the Hashd al Asha’iri operate as well in Diyala. These are ‘paramilitary units composed of local often non-Shia groups that operate under the broader banner of the PMU – often under the patronage of one of the more powerful PMU groups’.⁷⁵⁰

The following Iranian-backed Shia militia groups were reported to operate within the governorate (information going back to 2016-2017):

- **Badr Brigades:** As mentioned earlier, the Badr Brigades retain strong influence and therefore make up the larger part of the Iranian-backed militias’ presence in the governorate. Badr has around seven brigades- located within various parts of the governorate, namely the 9th, 10th, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 52nd and 110th Brigades, located within various parts of the governorate. The Badr Brigades’ presence in the governorate dates back to early 2016. The main areas of control are; Baquba, Muqtadiya, Hamreen dam and the Naft Khana-Khaniqin road.⁷⁵¹
- **AAH:** The AAH are located in Muqtadiya, Udham and the Hamreen Mountains. The militias have had a presence in Diyala since October 2014.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁴⁵ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁷⁴⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 17-18

⁷⁴⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁷⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 15, 17

⁷⁴⁹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 45, 48

⁷⁵⁰ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 18 January 2019

⁷⁵¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 38-39

⁷⁵² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 41

- Saraya Talia al-Khorasani: The Saraya Talia al-Khorasani militias are located in al-Saadiyah, north-east of Muqadiyah. The militias have been present in the governorate since March 2016.⁷⁵³

ISIL

Security forces pushed ISIL back from the governorate in 2015, but after the defeat of ISIL in central Iraq in 2017 it was reported that many ISIL fighters re-established contacts with former allies inside the governorate.⁷⁵⁴ According to Derek Flood, independent security analyst, ISIL was already launching attacks from its hideouts in the Diyala sector of the Hamreen Mountains well before the fall of Mosul in 2017.⁷⁵⁵

Although by the end of 2017 ISIL did not control any territory in Iraq⁷⁵⁶, it continues to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad).⁷⁵⁷

In January 2019 ISW assessed that in a number of districts were contested, including Kifri and Khanaqin Districts of Diyala governorate.⁷⁵⁸ In December 2018 Michael Knights assesses that based on ISIL activity data and operating patterns, the group has ‘permanently operating attack cells in at least 27 areas of Iraq’, which in Diyala include Muqadiyah, Jawlawla, Saadiyah, Qara Tapa, Mandali.⁷⁵⁹

In October 2018 ISW noted that ISIL has established support zones in the rural areas around Lake Hamrin in the Diyala River Valley from where it tries to expand its freedom of movement and actively launches attacks.⁷⁶⁰ Michael Knights noted in a December 2018 report that ‘in areas like rural Kirkuk, southern Nineveh, Diyala, and even areas near Baghdad like Tarmiyah, the reality is that the Islamic State still rules the night, meaning that key parts of the country have only really been liberated for portions of each day.’⁷⁶¹

An operations commander who spoke to Reuters in July 2018, said that ISIL fighters work in small cells of three to five persons. He did not believe that there were more than 75 fighters within the governorate.⁷⁶² A tribal militia leader in an area south-east of Samarra who spoke to Niqash estimated in July 2018 that ISIL have about 150-200 fighters deployed between Salah al-Din and Diyala governorate.⁷⁶³ According to other sources, ISIL militants are hiding in the mountain ranges, which makes them hard to find, and are mostly using hit-and-run tactics, as well as sniper attacks and fake checkpoints.⁷⁶⁴ An officer who spoke to the Emirati news service The National cited: ‘The militants have shaved off their beards, wear normal clothes ...’, making it easy for them to blend with the local

⁷⁵³ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 45

⁷⁵⁴ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

⁷⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2018/770], 16 August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁵⁸ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

⁷⁵⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ ISW, ISIS Second Resurgence [Map], 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁶² Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with a switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, and then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with a switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

population.⁷⁶⁵ ISIL employs sabotage tactics marking vulnerable targets like energy infrastructure and power towers, further fuelling public anger who are already suffering from power shortages.⁷⁶⁶

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	590	643	1 233
2015	948	1 183	2 131
2016	233	204	437
2017	0	0	0
2018	45	97	142
	1 816	2 127	3 943
UNAMI: Diyala casualties⁷⁶⁷			

IBC data on civilians killed in 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

IBC data for Diyala governorate indicated that the overall raw incidents, deaths, and level of violence in Diyala remained similar in both 2017 and 2018. In 2018, IBC data for Diyala governorate recorded 170 security-related incidents leading to 265 civilian deaths during 2018, a slight decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 180 incidents involving 276 civilian deaths. The intensity of violence (civilians killed/100k) was almost the same year to year, with 17.1/100k in 2017 and 16.4/100k in 2018.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Al-Muqdadiya – 82 leading to 112 civilian deaths, Khanaqin – 36 security incidents leading to 61 civilian deaths and Baladrooz – 20 incidents leading to 30 civilian deaths. The highest intensity violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of the population) was recorded in Al-Muqdadiya (46.37), followed by Kifri (33.77) and Khanaqin (26.14).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during in Diyala governorate involved gunfire (49.4 %) followed by IEDs (25.9 %) and executions/summary killing (19.4 %).⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ National (The), ISIL attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 31

⁷⁶⁷ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on [url](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq's Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), 17

Security incidents and activity

A December 2018 analysis on ISIL published by Michael Knights, Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in the Combating Terrorism Center of West Point (CTC), confirms the decrease in the number of security incidents in Diyala in 2018.⁷⁶⁹ According to Michael Knights, the average number of ISIL attacks in Diyala in 2018 was 26.2 per month⁷⁷⁰, which suggests a sharp decline in comparison to 2017 that witnessed an average 79.6 ISIL attacks per month, and 50.3 in 2013.⁷⁷¹ During 2018 M. Knights recorded '31 targeted killings of district council members, mukhtars (village headman), tribal leaders, and Sunni PMF commanders'. Attacks on civilians included killings, kidnappings, and destruction of rural farming infrastructure.⁷⁷²

Dr. Knights further maintained that the decrease in ISIL attacks could be due to the fact that 'ISIL's brutality is driving predominately local Sunni tribes into partnership with Shi'a PMF and Iraqi military forces, though such tribes have to cooperate with PMF in order to be allowed to resettle in their towns in any case.'⁷⁷³

The security situation in Diyala governorate has fluctuated during 2018. In January 2018 ISIL was reported to be active in nearly every rural area of the governorate. Attacks mainly involved shootings and IED and targeted members of the security forces and civilians.⁷⁷⁴ ISIL's ability to spread its insurgent activities across many parts of the governorate suggests that the group 'has free movement in Diyala'.⁷⁷⁵ Similar attacks continued throughout February.⁷⁷⁶ Representatives of Kirkuk Now interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI noted that at the end of February 2018 29 members of ISF were killed in the town of Al-Sadiyah, although it is not sure if ISIL was behind each attack.⁷⁷⁷

In March the governorate witnessed an escalation, whereby gunfights and ambushes as well as kidnappings of police and members of the PMU were reported.⁷⁷⁸ In addition, ISIL stepped up intimidation tactics. Two mayors were assassinated on 26 March 2018, in separate armed attacks. According to government sources the attacks were allegedly carried out by ISIL.⁷⁷⁹ Insurgent activities continued in the beginning of April, involving mortar attacks⁷⁸⁰, as well as attacks on checkpoints controlled by members of the PMU⁷⁸¹ and the ISF.⁷⁸² There were reports of intimidation and threats carried out by members of the PMU in the run-up to the national elections in May 2018. PMU-affiliated militias reportedly blocked political campaigning of opposition candidates in the governorate. The militias reportedly prevented candidates from campaigning in areas earlier liberated by ISIL.⁷⁸³

⁷⁶⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷⁰ Incident data is drawn from the author's geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) dataset up to the end of October 2018. 'The dataset includes non-duplicative inputs from open source reporting, diplomatic security data, private security company incident data, Iraqi incident data, and U.S. government inputs'. See Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

⁷⁷¹ Knights, M., Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷² Knights, M., Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷³ Knights, M., Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷⁴ Wing, J., Violence Up in Iraq, Jan 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ Wing, J., 645 Deaths and 275 wounded Feb 2018 in Iraq (updated), Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Wing, J., 645 Deaths and 275 wounded Feb 2018 in Iraq (updated), Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 69

⁷⁷⁸ Wing, J., March 2018 the return of the Islamic State insurgency, 2 April 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ Iraqi News, Suspected IS militant kill two Iraqi mayors in Diyala, 27 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ NINA, Three mortar shells northeast of Baquba, 4 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸¹ Iraqi News, Paramilitary personnel slaughtered in ambush by Islamic State, northeast of Baquba, 14 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸² Iraqi News, Iraq thwarts attack by Islamic State militants on security roadblock, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸³ Al-Araby, بلطجة انتخابية في ديالى: الحشد الشعبي يمنع حملات المرشحين المنافسين. [Electoral intimidation in Diyala: al-hashd al-Sha'bi, block rival campaigners], 28 April 2018, [url](#)

Members of the Badr militias are also reported to have pulled down posters in Baquba belonging to candidates not representing the Fatah Alliance. Similar incidents were also carried out by AHH militias in the town Jalawla.⁷⁸⁴

During the May parliamentary elections ISIL used mortar shells to bomb polling stations in Abu Sayda district, Diyala governorate, wounding four civilians.⁷⁸⁵

During the month of May 2018 the governorate continued to be the focus of ISIL activities, which included launching mortar attacks on security checkpoints, as well as kidnappings targeting members of the ISF and affiliated militias.⁷⁸⁶

During June 2018 ISIL was reported to operate in all rural areas of Diyala where it clashed with security forces and launched attacks on villages.⁷⁸⁷ On 9 June 2018 a bomb blast killed one person and injured 23 in a market place in the town of Khalis. Authorities attributed the attack to ISIL.⁷⁸⁸ Increasing number of kidnappings and killings were reported during June in Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk, especially on the Baghdad – Kirkuk highway.⁷⁸⁹ In June 2018 ISIL militants killed two people and kidnapped seven others at a fake security checkpoint in the Injana area of Diyala governorate.⁷⁹⁰

In July 2018, clashes between ISIL and ISF and attacks upon towns in the governorate were reported.⁷⁹¹ Seven civilians travelling the Old Al-Nahrawan Road, which links Baghdad and Diyala, were killed in July near the city of Baquba by alleged ISIL militants.⁷⁹²

In August 2018 the head of security committee of Abu Sayda town in Diyala stated that 180 ISIL members were confirmed to have fled Mosul and infiltrated into Diyala.⁷⁹³ On 29 August 2018 it was reported that two senior officials were killed in an armed attack north-east of Baquba. Earlier in the month separate bomb blasts in Diyala led to one Iraqi soldier being killed while four workers were injured.⁷⁹⁴

Reporting on the period July to September 2018 USDOD noted that ISIL remained active in rural areas and violence continued ‘mainly along a crescent of territory stretching from Anbar province in the west to Diyala province in the east’.⁷⁹⁵ According to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) data, increases in violence during July – September 2018 were reported in Kirkuk, Anbar, Salah ad-Din, and Diyala governorates.⁷⁹⁶ The desert and mountainous terrain hampered efforts by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to remove ISIL from those areas.⁷⁹⁷

The UN Security Council stated that IED and small arms fire were the leading causes of civilian casualties during August – October 2018. IED attacks were often claimed by ISIL and ‘pose a threat to

⁷⁸⁴ Al-Araby, بلطجة انتخابية في ديالى: الحشد الشعبي يمنع حملات المرشحين المنافسين, [Electoral intimidation in Diyala: al-hashd al-Sha’bi, block rival campaigners], 28 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ UN Security Council: Implementation of resolution 2367 (2017); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/677], 9 July 2018, [url](#), p. 5; Baghdad Post, Shia militias, security services unite to make polling stations inaccessible, 12 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Wing, J., Security in Iraq largely unchanged in May 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ Wing, J., June 2018 Islamic State Rebuilding In Rural Areas Of Central Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ Kurdistan24, Photos: 24 people killed, wounded in bomb blast north of Iraqi capital, 9 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ Reuters, Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with a switch to guerrilla tactics, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ Kurdistan24, Two Killed, seven kidnapped at fake security checkpoint in Diyala, 18 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ Wing, J., Violence slightly down in Iraq July 2018, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 2 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹² Kurdistan24, IS kills seven family members driving home from a wedding in Diyala: Report, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹³ Iraqi News, Over 100 Islamic State members fled Mosul toward Diyala: Source, 29 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁴ Iraqi News, Over 100 Islamic State members fled Mosul toward Diyala: Source, 29 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁵ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁹⁶ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁷⁹⁷ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

civilians in Baghdad, Salah al-Din, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar and Sulaymaniyah Governorates'. ISIL also targeted police and members of PMUs in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din governorates.⁷⁹⁸

In October two people were killed and 13 others injured in a bomb blast near a mosque in Khanaqin, north-east of Baquba, where Shia Muslim worshippers were commemorating the 40-day mourning of Imam Hussien.⁷⁹⁹ At the beginning of November two Iraqi civilians and a soldier were killed in two bomb blasts near Udahim, north-east Diyala.⁸⁰⁰ In December a bomb blast killed two policeman and injured four civilians in Youssef Bek village, west of Khanaqin town. The attack was believed to be the responsibility of ISIL.⁸⁰¹ Despite the decline in security incidents at the end of the year (see IBC data), ISIL continued to target ISF and PMU members in the governorate.⁸⁰² In December 2018 Joel Wing assessed that ISIL established 'control of most of the rural areas of Diyala, southern Kirkuk, and central and northern Salahaddin'.⁸⁰³

Khanaqin district

The Diyala district of Khanaqin, includes the sub-districts of Jalawla, Saadiya and Qara Tepe.⁸⁰⁴ The district is ethnically diverse, inhabited by Arabs, Turkmens and Kurds.⁸⁰⁵ The district has undergone deportations and denaturalisation of the Shia (Feily) Kurds in the 1970s, followed by the Arabisation policies, implemented by Saddam's regime, to the pressure exerted by the KRG in post-2003 to oust the Arab population from Khanaqin city, Jalawla and Saadiya.⁸⁰⁶ The Shia Kurds constitute the largest portion of the population in the city of Khanaqin⁸⁰⁷ (divided between Sunni and Shia), whereas the sub-districts appear to be majority Arabs, with significant Turkmen and Kurdish minorities.⁸⁰⁸

In June 2014, ISIL took over the sub-districts Jalawla and Saadiya, but not Khanaqin City. The re-capture of the sub-districts in January 2015, by the PMU and the Peshmerga, gave the PMU (mainly the Badr Organisation and the AAH) the upper hand to control over the liberated sub-districts.⁸⁰⁹ The PMUs intimidation of non-Shiites prompted many, especially the Kurds, to leave, in fear of reprisals and turmoil. The PMU allegedly expelled Kurdish families from villages in Jalawla area. Many have not returned.⁸¹⁰

Federal authorities took charge of security in Khanaqin in October 2017. Security is predominantly shared by the Iraqi army and the Badr forces. However, Kurdish intelligence and security forces (*Asayish*) continue to stand at checkpoints, but without authority to make arrests.⁸¹¹ A high-ranking

⁷⁹⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁹⁹ Iraqi News, 15 worshippers killed, injured in bomb blast in Diyala, 30 October 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁰⁰ Iraqi News, Iraqi soldier, civilians killed in two bomb blasts, northeast of Diyala, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰¹ Iraqi News, Bomb blast leaves two policemen dead, four civilians wounded in Diyala, 12 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰² Iraqi News, Four paramilitary personnel killed, injured in bomb blast northeast of Diyala, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News; Iraqi News, Five security men killed, wounded in armed attack on police patrol, 20 November 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Bomb blast kills senior paramilitary commander, four companions wounded in Diyala, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ Wing, J., Large drop in violence in Iraq November 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁸⁰⁵ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14, December 2018, [url](#), p. 14.

⁸⁰⁷ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14, December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁸⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14, December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁸¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14, December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁸¹¹ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

official in the Khaniqin police force stated that the withdrawal of Kurdish security forces from Khaniqin has made the local population susceptible to attacks from insurgent groups.⁸¹²

The town of Jalawla witnessed tensions between Arabs and Kurds during the Peshmerga forces' control of the town, between 2014 and up until the October 2017. Peshmerga forces accused segments of Jalawla's Arab population, mainly members of the Karawi tribe, of siding with ISIL. Arab returnees were prevented from accessing their homes.⁸¹³ The town is now under the control of the Badr and AAH forces. AAH took advantage of past Arab animosity towards the Kurds and has recruited a number of local Sunni Arabs into its ranks.⁸¹⁴ Reportedly, the alliance between and Sunni Arabs and AAH has led to the marginalisation of the Kurdish population in the town.⁸¹⁵

According to an article published in the Kurdish media site Shafaq News, in September 2018, the local council in Khaniqin expressed concerns over the security vacuum in the district following the withdrawal of the Peshmerga forces in conjunction with the Kurdish referendum in September 2017. A council member who spoke to Shafaq News stated that 84 villages lack presence of security units after the withdrawal of the Kurdish forces.⁸¹⁶

State's ability to secure law and order

In the governorates ranging from Diyala to Ninewa ISIL militants left booby-trapped homes preventing IDPs from return and ISF is not properly trained in high-risk ordinance removal.⁸¹⁷ The security vacuum that came about as government forces were busy clearing IEDs gave ISIL space to quickly revert to insurgent tactics in Diyala.⁸¹⁸

Joint forces from the army, federal police and the PMU continue to carry out security sweeps in the governorate. The rugged terrain of the Hamreen Mountains makes it easy for ISIL militants to train and organise their attacks in hideouts along the mountain range.⁸¹⁹ In February 2018, local forces discovered a tunnel complex, 20 kilometers south of Baquba, outfitted with refrigerators and washing machines, powered by a solar grid. The tunnels also contained several months of food supplies.⁸²⁰

The abduction and killing of eight civilians and ISF members in June 2018 prompted the government to launch large-scale security sweep operation, dubbed 'Revenge of the Martyrs'. The operation included several hundreds of members from the ISF and PMU, as well as elite units (Emergency Response Division (ERD)). Despite the manpower, the forces were not able to locate any militants. The operation was suspended after two weeks, without a single arrest or killings of militants.⁸²¹ According

⁸¹² Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹³ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹⁴ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ Shafaq News, [خانیقین: 84 قرية بلا امن وحادث ارهابي على الاقل يوميا](#), [Khaniqin: 84 villages lack security and at least one reported terrorist incident per day], 11 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

⁸¹⁸ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

⁸¹⁹ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#); National (The), ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24,

Iraqi security in ongoing operation against Islamic State in Diyala: Local politician, 25 June 2018, [url](#)

⁸²⁰ Flood, D., CTC, From Caliphates to Cave: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 31-32

⁸²¹ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#).

to a local officer, Iraqi forces continue to carry out sweep operations. In October 2018, the joint forces were able to locate and destroy 40 positions belonging to ISIL in the governorate.⁸²²

Displacement and return

As of December 2018, over 89 000 individuals from Diyala remain displaced, the majority of which are displaced within the governorate of Diyala (around 50 000 individuals).⁸²³ According to the December Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) published in Iraq, Diyala governorate ranks fifth amongst the top governorates of return, with a total 223 326 of registered returnees.⁸²⁴ The majority of the returnees (176 718 individuals) were formerly displaced within the governorate.⁸²⁵ In their January 2019 ILA III, IOM estimated that around 80 % of all returns to Diyala are intra-governorate.⁸²⁶

In November 2018, UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview showed that Diyala had 319 139 people in need.⁸²⁷ According to IOM's Return Index, from September 2018, shows that in Diyala a total of 36 573 returnee families likely to face severity conditions.⁸²⁸ Although the governorate is not the highest ranking governorate in terms of numbers of severity caseload, it does however retain the largest proportion of its returnees living in high severity conditions (26 %).⁸²⁹ The October 2018 DTM published on Iraq recorded that 12 % of Diyala's returnee population are living in damaged or destroyed houses.⁸³⁰

According to IOM's Return Index, regarding caseloads facing so-called severity conditions, in Diyala 40 %, of returnees fall under the 'low' category of severity, and 32 % belong to the category of 'medium', and 26 % severity category 'high'. A very small percentage (2 %) have been categorised as likely to face high severity conditions upon return.⁸³¹ Diyala is also one of the governorates with particular high scores of infrastructure damage. The humanitarian crisis after the defeat of ISIL has contributed to high levels of unemployment and poverty.⁸³²

In their January 2019 ILA III, IOM stated that 11 % of returnee locations across Iraq had evidence of involuntary returns continuing, mainly in Baghdad (42 %), Erbil (19 %), Diyala (16 %), and Anbar (15 %).⁸³³ According to UNOCHA 'forced and premature returns continue to be reported in Salah al-Din, Baghdad, Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa governorates, including through coercive practices, often resulting in secondary displacement.'⁸³⁴

In November 2018 UNOCHA noted that 'many returnees— in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa—who are alleged to be affiliated with extremists have been forcibly evicted from their homes upon return, resulting in their secondary displacement, with their properties destroyed or confiscated.'⁸³⁵

According to a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, in some Sunni areas of Diyala, persons with perceived ISIL links are prevented from returning by Shia PMUs. It is 'not widespread' but

⁸²² Kurdistan24, Iraqi forces target, dismantle 40 Islamic State positions in Diyala, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸²³ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁸²⁴ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸²⁵ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸²⁶ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 16

⁸²⁷ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸²⁸ IOM's Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018 [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁸²⁹ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸³⁰ IOM, Iraq Mission, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)-DTM Round 106, October 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁸³¹ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸³² IOM Iraq, Crisis Funding Appeal 2018, 31 January 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸³³ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁸³⁴ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 31

⁸³⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

has happened in ISIL-insecure pockets around Muqdadiyah, Saadiyah, and Jalawla, where some returns are conditional on forced recruitment to tribal forces engaged in patrols and neighbourhood watch. Those who join take part in daily patrols without receiving a salary; but are 'forced to do it for free'.⁸³⁶

Representatives of Kirkuk Now that were interviewed during the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI stated that 'families who have ISIS-relatives have experienced problems in the liberated areas. There have been incidents especially in Diyala and Salah al-Din where victims of ISIS' crimes have targeted persons with ISIS-affiliation in their families in a blood-for-blood demand. They have threatened to kill members of the families as revenge, because ISIS has killed members of their families. In other cases the victims' families have demanded that families to ISIS-members had to move away from the area, or that their homes were destroyed.'⁸³⁷

Road security

In the disputed sub-district of Jalawla PMUs are reported to charge illegal taxes from trucks carrying trading goods from KRI to the rest of the country. The AAH is reportedly manning checkpoints on the main commercial roads across Jalawla and earning approximately USD 300 000 daily through checkpoint fees it imposes to passing vehicles.⁸³⁸

During the year ISIL was reported to set up fake checkpoints in Diyala which it used to kidnap people for ransom or execute them.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁶ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

⁸³⁷ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 70

⁸³⁸ Saleem, Z, Skelton, M. & van den Toorn, C., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI: The Case of Northern Diyala, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸³⁹ VOA, Islamic State Regrouping in Iraqi, Kurdish Disputed Territories, 26 March 2018, [url](#), GardaWorld, Iraq: IS executes at least seven civilians in Diyala province, 07 July 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Islamic State kidnaps 30 tribesmen, kills seven, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

2.4 Kirkuk



Map 8: Kirkuk with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁸⁴⁰

General description of the governorate

Kirkuk (previously called al-Tamim) is a governorate in northern Iraq. It comprises four districts, namely Kirkuk, where Kirkuk city is located, Dibs, Hawija (Al-Hawiga) and Daquq.⁸⁴¹ Official projections based on 2009 figures estimate its population to be 1 597 876 in 2018.⁸⁴²

Kirkuk has a diverse and mixed population with a variety of ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Kurds, but also and Turkmens (Shia and Sunni), Christian, Yezidis⁸⁴³, Shabaks, Chado-Assyrians, and others.⁸⁴⁴ The 1957 census⁸⁴⁵ stated that Kurds accounted for half of the population, followed by

⁸⁴⁰ UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ IOM, Kirkuk Governorate profile, 1 July 2015, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴² Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁴³ New Arab (The), Bombs and mortars rock Iraq's restive city of Kirkuk, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴⁵ According to AI this was the last 'semi-reliable census': AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 30

Turkmen and Arabs.⁸⁴⁶ Conflict over the boundaries of the Kurdish region including Kirkuk date back over a century and were exacerbated by the discovery of oil in the region in the 1960s, and failed attempts to demarcate control between the KRG and the Iraqi state, including resolving it under Article 140 of the Constitution.⁸⁴⁷ Kirkuk has long been at the centre of territorial conflicts between Iraq's religious and ethnic groups, including through land disputes between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen.⁸⁴⁸

Successive governments have attempted to demographically alter the Kirkuk region.⁸⁴⁹ The ethnic and religious composition of the region has evolved considerably, due particularly to the 'Arabisation' campaign mounted by the Saddam Hussein regime in the 1970s-1990s⁸⁵⁰, which culminated in the 'wholesale slaughter of rural Kurds' at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 during the Anfal Campaign.⁸⁵¹ Hussein's regime reportedly relied on Arab Sunni tribes from Hawija, largely affiliated with the Baath party, and who benefited from privileged positions in the security services.⁸⁵² After Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003, at the behest of the US, Baghdad retained control over Kirkuk's oil fields, but Kurds secured a degree of US-led protection, and due to the Iraqi government's weakness, this 'allowed the Kurdish parties and their militias to exercise near-total political and security control over the disputed territories, including Kirkuk, for fourteen years until 2017. Following the rapid expansion of ISIL in 2014, the Kurds moved in further consolidating control, including over Kirkuk's oil fields.⁸⁵³ Sunni insurgency in Hawija in years preceding the development of ISIL saw the rise of suicide attacks and VBIEDs on US and Kurdish allies.⁸⁵⁴ Kurdish attempts to reverse the Baathist Arabisation of the area encouraged Kurds to settle in the region between 2003 and 2017⁸⁵⁵, with 800 000 Kurds returning back to Kirkuk in that period.⁸⁵⁶ This was particularly in the period when Kurdish forces were fighting ISIL in Kirkuk in 2015 as the Kurds sought to reduce the area's Arab population.⁸⁵⁷

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

International Crisis Group described Kirkuk as one of the areas of the disputed territories that has experienced 'the worst turbulence' in recent years.⁸⁵⁸ When ISIL launched its 2014 offensive in northern Iraq, the Iraqi army collapsed, and ISIL took over the region around Hawija City, in south-western Kirkuk governorate⁸⁵⁹, with a local population of about 100 000 who lived under ISIL control.⁸⁶⁰ ISIL took over and administered areas of Hawija district since June 2014, controlling the countryside

⁸⁴⁶ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴⁸ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁵⁰ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁵¹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 7

⁸⁵² Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d'après, 10 February 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁵⁴ Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d'après, 10 February 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁵ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁵⁶ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018

⁸⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9

⁸⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁶⁰ Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d'après, 10 February 2017, [url](#)

and rural areas of Kirkuk until it was pushed out in October 2017.⁸⁶¹ From Hawija district, ISIL carried out attacks against Kirkuk governorate from 2014.⁸⁶²

In the wake of the Iraqi army's collapse fighting ISIL in Kirkuk in 2014, Peshmergas moved in and replaced the federal forces, with Kirkuk city remaining for three years under the rule of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK, in Kurdish: Yekêtiy Nîştîmanîy Kurdistan), the second largest party in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).⁸⁶³ For three years, Peshmergas and ISIL were at a standoff in Kirkuk, with 'repeated clashes' along the southern and western parts of the city, though the city itself was 'tightly controlled'.⁸⁶⁴ AI reported on the destruction of villages and Arab properties by Kurdish Peshmergas after ISIL confrontations in Kirkuk, noting this in Makhmur and in Zummar villages in 2015, where Arab residents were also stopped from returning.⁸⁶⁵

In October 2017, several control changes occurred in Kirkuk. In early October 2017, the Iraqi government announced that ISIL had been driven out from the city of Hawija, its final significant remaining stronghold in Iraq. This also marked a point in time 'eliminating the main unifying cause [fighting ISIL] between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi military'. This began on 21 September 2017 with the Hawija campaign, whereby, the Iraqi army, the Emergency Response Division, CTS, Federal Police and the pro-Iranian PMUs led an offensive to push ISIL out of Hawija district.⁸⁶⁶ On 5 October 2017, the Iraqi Prime minister announced the liberation of Hawija from ISIL's occupation⁸⁶⁷, though some villages east of it reportedly were still believed to be under ISIL control at that time.⁸⁶⁸ The Hawija military campaign resulted in the displacement of 47 000 people in September, with 11 000 who were still displaced at the end of the next month and unwilling to return; 62 000 returns were recorded across Kirkuk.⁸⁶⁹ IOM reported that civilians displaced from Hawija during operations mainly left Hawija for districts of Daquq, Tirkrit, Al Daur, Al Shirqat, and Makhmur.⁸⁷⁰ In November 2017, outside Hawija town, 400 bodies of people wearing civilian clothes were found in mass graves; they were thought to have been prisoners killed by ISIL.⁸⁷¹

In retaliation for KRG's decision to hold an independence referendum in September 2017, including Kirkuk, and which was opposed and rejected by the Iraqi government⁸⁷², Baghdad moved into the disputed areas with the Iraqi army, the Counter-terrorism Forces, the Federal Police and the PMUs, made up of the Badr Organization's Turkmen Brigade (the 16th PMU brigade) and AAH (the 41st, 42nd and 43rd PMU brigades), launched an offensive from 15 to 21 October 2017 against Kurdish security forces and regained control of most of Kirkuk governorate. The Peshmerga affiliated to the PUK largely withdrew and were subsequently accused by the KDP of collusion with the Federal government.⁸⁷³ These forces retook the city of Kirkuk from the Kurds within hours, followed by the majority of other

⁸⁶¹ Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24; Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁶² Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d'après, 10 February 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁶⁵ AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq", 15 January 2016, [url](#), pp. 35-36

⁸⁶⁶ Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24

⁸⁶⁷ BBC News, Iraq forces retake town of Hawija from IS, 5 October 2017, [url](#); Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24

⁸⁶⁸ BBC News, Iraq forces retake town of Hawija from IS, 5 October 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq - October 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁷⁰ IOM, Iraq displacement crisis 2014-2017, 8 November 2018, [url](#), based on the map on p. 37

⁸⁷¹ Independent (The), Mass graves discovered in Iraqi town recaptured from Isis, 13 November 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁷² Independent (The), Iraq seizes Kirkuk from Kurds leaving two US allies locked in conflict and bringing end to move for independence, 16 October 2017, [url](#); ISW, The "War after ISIS" begins in Iraq, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁷³ ISW, The "War after ISIS" begins in Iraq, 15 November 2017, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraq forces in full control of Kirkuk province, 21 October 2017, [url](#)

disputed areas.⁸⁷⁴ More information on events that occurred in Salah al-Din, in Tuz Khurmatu, can be found in the [Salah al-Din chapter](#).

In Hawija, Sunni Arab armed groups affiliated with the PMUs and Badr control the district.⁸⁷⁵ There were reports of PMU abuses against civilians in the course of the battle for Hawija in early October 2017⁸⁷⁶ and allegations of abuses against Kurds during the takeover of Kirkuk in mid-October 2017.⁸⁷⁷ For more information on the state's ability to secure law and order in 2018, see the chapter below on this topic.

The Iraqi forces' October 2017 offensive against the Peshmergas led to another significant outflow of population from the disputed territories, mainly composed of ethnic Kurds from Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu.⁸⁷⁸ According to the UNOCHA, as of 2 November 2017, over 183 000 individuals from Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Erbil and Ninewa governorates were still displaced, including 79 000 from Kirkuk city, most of whom went to KRI. UNOCHA reported that around 150 000 IDPs had already returned by 31 October 2017, mainly to Kirkuk.⁸⁷⁹ However, according to ISW, it remained unclear how many IDPs actually returned.⁸⁸⁰ DIS/Landinfo sources also gave conflicting information about the number of people who had returned. Their FFM report stated that those who did not return were members of the KDP and associates, as well as Asayish employees. There were reports that Kurds in Arab neighbourhoods of Kirkuk city and Tuz Khurmatu [in [Salah al-Din](#)] were forced to leave and had their shops and houses burned and destroyed.⁸⁸¹

The offensive against the Kurdish security forces shifted the power dynamics in the governorate. Arabs and Turkmen have gained a more influential position whereas the Kurds have been sidelined to a weaker position. An Arab politician, Rakan Al-Jabouri was nominated Governor.⁸⁸² The Kurdish governor prior to him was issued with an arrest warrant and other members of the KDP and PUK were also targeted; all the Kurdish administrative directors in the administration were dismissed but the rest of the civilian administration remained mixed. According to Arthur Quesnay, there were no new policies of 'Arabisation' enacted by the new administration that replaced the Kurdish one⁸⁸³, however the area is become less intermixed.⁸⁸⁴ At the time of the May 2018 national elections, Kurdish influence in Kirkuk was substantially reduced, and there were election fraud allegations made by the local non-Kurdish population when the results showed that PUK candidates won even in predominantly Arab localities; a subsequent recount did not change the result, which Crisis Group noted resulted in a loss of trust in the political process by Arabs and Turkmen.⁸⁸⁵ Furthermore, the region has become more ethnically homogenised, 'to the benefit of Shia Turkmen' and divided as Sunni Arab villages were destroyed during the fight against ISIL in 2014, and Sunni Arabs only slowly return due to fears of arbitrary arrest and extortion, while the local Kurdish population 'endure[s] racketeering' and 'pillage under the cover of security operations' by local Shia Turkmen militias.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁷⁴ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁸⁷⁵ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁷⁶ Al Monitor, PMU spearheads Hawija battle, as IS fighters 'vanish', 11 October 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁸⁷⁸ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁸⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq - October 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁸⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018.

⁸⁸¹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018 [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁸⁸² NPR, In Iraq, Kirkuk Residents Nervous As Power Turns Over Again, 27 November 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁸³ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁸⁸⁴ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

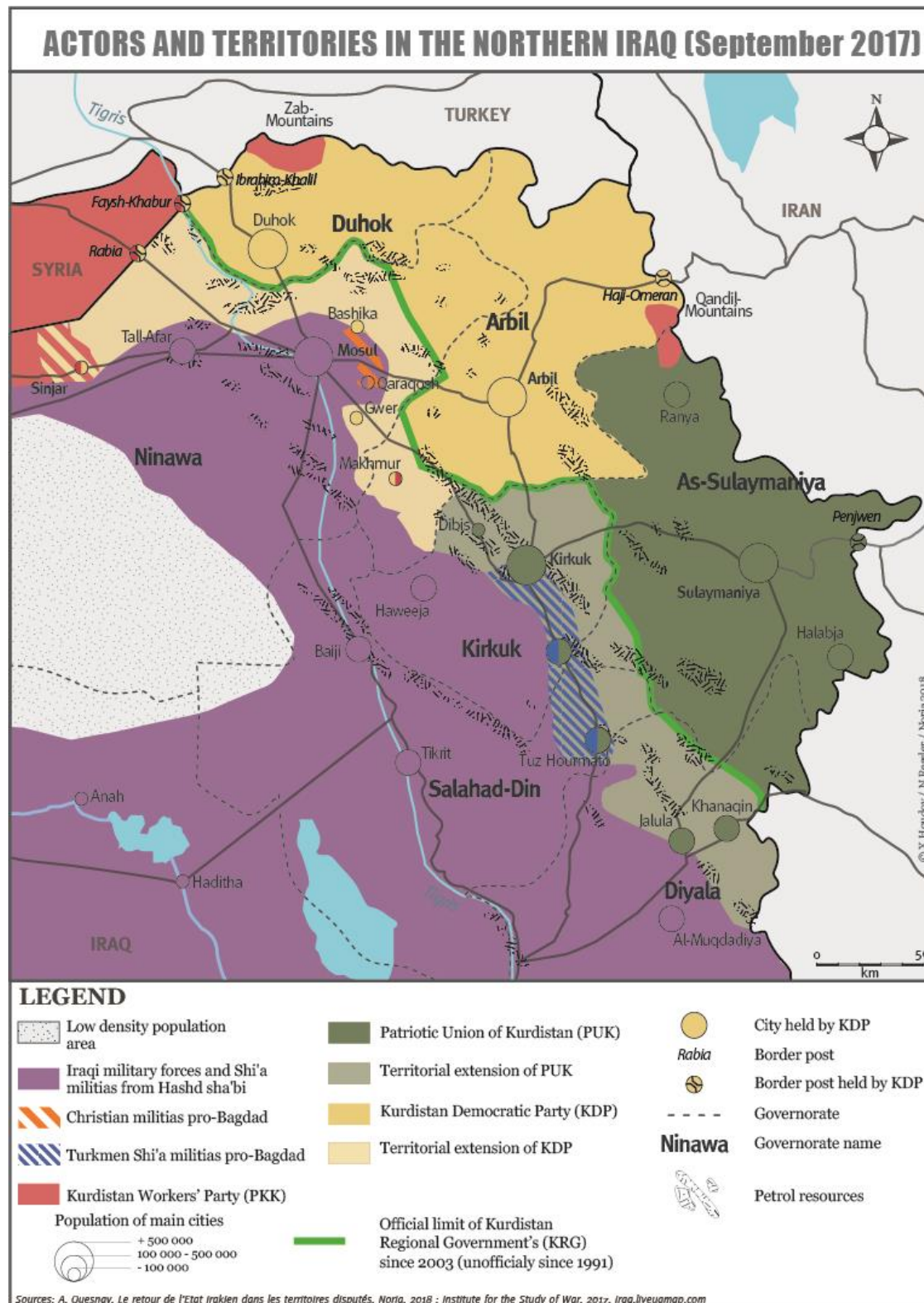
⁸⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9

⁸⁸⁶ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

In the aftermath of the October 2017 change of forces in Kirkuk, a group called the White flags emerged in the governorate, reportedly Kurds who are reportedly former ISIL members⁸⁸⁷ and Kurdish mafia.⁸⁸⁸

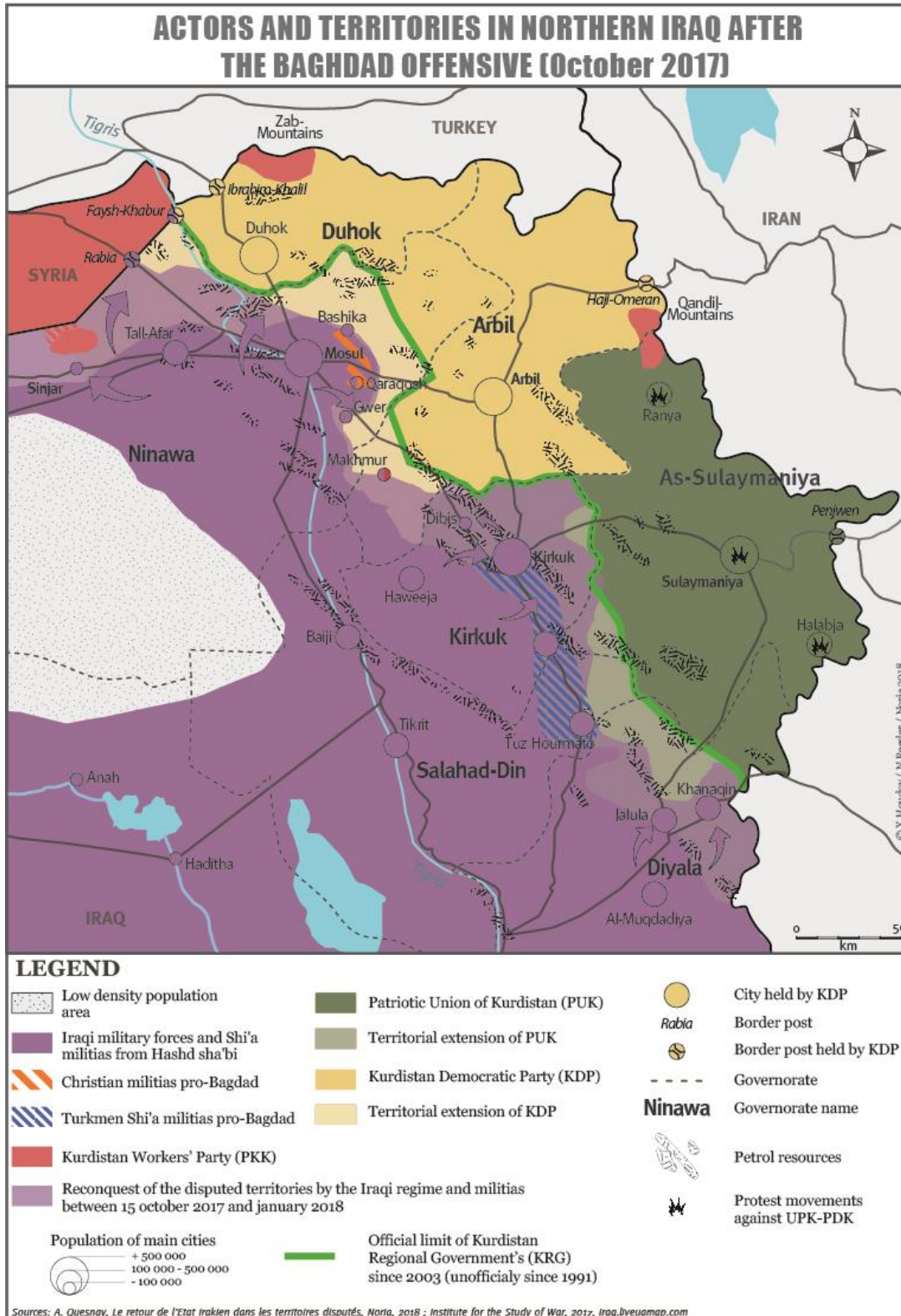
⁸⁸⁷ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; Middle East Eye, Irak: Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ Middle East Eye, Irak : Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#)



Map 9: Disputed territories - actors and territories in northern Iraq before the Baghdad Offensive (as positioned in September 2017), © Noria⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁹ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., [Maps] Actors and Territories in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 May 2018, url



Map 10: Disputed territories - actors and territories in northern Iraq after the Baghdad Offensive (situation after change of control in October 2017), © Noria⁸⁹⁰

⁸⁹⁰ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., [Maps] Actors and Territories in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 May 2018, [url](http://www.noria.eu)

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures for 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	296	556	852
2015	203	96	299
2016	385	362	747
2017	45	67	112
2018	48	107	155
	977	1 188	2 165
UNAMI: Kirkuk casualties⁸⁹¹			

IBC data on civilians killed in 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

In 2018 IBC data for Kirkuk governorate recorded 126 security-related incidents leading to 276 civilian deaths during 2018, a decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 175 incidents leading to 950 civilian deaths. The intensity of civilian deaths (deaths per 100/k) dropped from 62.9 in 2017 to 18.3 in 2018; this was still placing Kirkuk as the governorate with the second highest intensity level in both 2017 and 2018 (behind Ninewa).

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Kirkuk – 53 leading to 81 civilian deaths, followed by Al-Hawiga – 48 security incidents leading to 126 civilian deaths and Daquq – 9 incidents leading to 39 civilian deaths. The highest rate of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of the population) was recorded in Al-Hawiga (43.74), followed by Daquq (41.64) and Dibis (18.76).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Kirkuk governorate involved gunfire (34.9 %), improvised explosive devices (IED) (31.7 %) and executions/summary killing (28.6 %).⁸⁹²

Security incidents and activity

According to Michael Knights, there was an overall drop in the average number of ISIL attacks in Kirkuk in 2018, averaging 39 attacks per month in the first quarter of 2018, of which an estimated 21 (53 %) were 'high quality attacks' (mass casualty attacks, effective roadside bombings, overrun attacks on

⁸⁹¹ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on [monthly UNAMI casualty figures](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq's Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁹² For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 14, 30

checkpoints/outposts, and person-specific targeted attacks). This dropped to 25.3 attacks (13.3 ‘high quality’) by the third quarter of the year.⁸⁹³

ISIL no longer controls any territory in Kirkuk governorate, according to DIS/Landinfo in November 2018 but retains pockets of fighters especially in Hawija and the Hamreen mountains.⁸⁹⁴ ISIL’s regrouping efforts and ongoing activities to retain a strong presence there⁸⁹⁵, or a ‘strong insurgency’ in Kirkuk in 2018.⁸⁹⁶ Iraq security expert Michael Knights, based on his incident/attack data set and research on security trends, gave the view in late 2018 that ISIL retains ‘permanently operating attack cells’ in Kirkuk, in districts of Hawija, Rashad, Zab, Dibis, Makhmour, and Ghaeda, in or near Kirkuk province.⁸⁹⁷ In October 2018, ISW similarly stated that in Kirkuk governorate, ISIL retains a ‘durable support zone’ including leadership elements within the Hamrin mountains, and that in Kirkuk, it has ‘established support zones’, in ‘areas south of Kirkuk City including Daquq, Hawija, Riyadh, and Rashad Districts as well as rural areas around Lake Hamrin in the Diyala River Valley.’⁸⁹⁸ ISW stated that in these areas ‘ISIS possesses the ability to move freely across this terrain at night and is actively waging attacks to expand its freedom of movement during the day’⁸⁹⁹, assessing that the districts of Hawija and Daquq were ‘contested’, where ISIL exerts ‘physical and psychological pressure’ over the local population, as indicated by abandonment of villages, targeted destruction of agriculture/infrastructure, repeated raids, and assassinations of the local social hierarchy.⁹⁰⁰ Sleeper cells also reportedly exist in and around Hawija and Hamreen.⁹⁰¹

In the south-eastern part of Kirkuk governorate, the ‘White Flags’ also reportedly launched attacks during the first half of 2018⁹⁰², including against the Jambur Oil Field in January 2018⁹⁰³, and put up fake checkpoints on highways at night where it abducted or killed passengers.⁹⁰⁴ More information on the White Flags, including further examples of attacks could not be found.

Michael Knights, a specialist of security issues in Iraq, pointed out that ‘the most obvious trend [in 2018] is that Kirkuk was the Islamic’s State’s most prolific attack location in Iraq in the first 10 months of 2018.’⁹⁰⁵ According to DIS/Landinfo, the level of security incidents and level of violence is still relatively high, including assassinations and VBIEDs, though the ‘situation is somehow improving.’⁹⁰⁶ Joel Wing stated in August 2018 that Kirkuk governorate stands out from the rest of Iraq by the fact that ISIL has been able to regularly hit Kirkuk city itself.⁹⁰⁷ In 2018, ISIL attacks appear near the Hamrin Mountains, mainly hitting the south-western half of Kirkuk governorate.⁹⁰⁸

⁸⁹³ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁹⁴ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁸⁹⁵ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁸⁹⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁹⁷ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁹⁸ ISW, ISIS’s second resurgence, ISW, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ ISW, ISIS’s second resurgence, ISW, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁰ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

⁹⁰¹ Al Monitor, Islamic State awakens sleeper cells in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰² Al-Mada, عام على إعادة الانتشار في كركوك.. النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven’t returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰³ Middle East Eye, No surrender: ‘White flags’ group rises as new threat in northern Iraq, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁴ Al-Mada, عام على إعادة الانتشار في كركوك.. النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven’t returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ Knights, M., Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁰⁶ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁹⁰⁷ Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5 [map]

ISW reported in October 2018 that ISIL activities have ‘thus far been limited to small arms attacks, targeted assassinations, and suicide vests (SVESTs)’.⁹⁰⁹ ISW stated in October 2018 that ISIL has scaled up attacks such as assassinations in northern and central Iraq, including in Kirkuk.⁹¹⁰ Attacks using guerilla-like tactics, such as small arms attacks, targeted killings, ambushes, abductions at fake checkpoints and suicide attacks were reported in 2018.⁹¹¹ Attacks targeted security forces, including the PMUs, local authorities, tribal leaders, politicians and civilians⁹¹² and local mayors were reported in 2018.⁹¹³ These efforts are described as part of ISIL’s strategy to regain its control over rural areas.⁹¹⁴ The UN also noted in October 2018 that civilians in Kirkuk continue to be at risk of IED attacks (the leading cause of civilian casualties in Iraq), as well as small arms fire, and reported continued ISIL attacks in Kirkuk and other governorates, wounding and killing civilians.⁹¹⁵

Examples of recent armed and explosive attacks in Kirkuk include:

- ISIL claimed that it ambushed and killed 27 PMU members in Sadounyah in Hawija district in February 2018.⁹¹⁶
- An ISIL suicide attack on 25 February 2018 targeted the headquarters of the AAH which ISIL said caused several deaths, though no casualties were reported in local media.⁹¹⁷
- On 8 June 2018, two IEDs in a crowded market in central Kirkuk, killing at least one person and injuring 14 others.⁹¹⁸
- The CTS was attacked on the Kirkuk Erbil road with a grenade in June 2018, and a civilian was killed and several injured in the crossfire. Killing and kidnapping of civilians was an increasing problem according to civilians.⁹¹⁹
- Several Daquq district villages were attacked by ISIL in June 2018, leaving one civilian dead and others injured.⁹²⁰
- On 25 June 2018, one person was killed and two were injured when 40-50 ISIL fighters reportedly seized control of a Kurdish dominated Kakai village called Ali Saray; they reportedly engaged in a gunfight and threatened those who refused allegiance to ISIL, however, a federal police unit arrived to control the situation and said it was five gunmen. It was reported that ‘a number of families left the village’ after the attack.⁹²¹
- On 1 July 2018 a VBIED exploded inside Kirkuk city, killing one person.⁹²²
- On 18 September 2018, a roadside bomb outside Kirkuk city targeted a bus carrying Federal police officers near Dharban village, between Kirkuk and Baiji; two died and 14 were injured.⁹²³

⁹⁰⁹ ISW, ISIS’s second resurgence, ISW, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁰ ISW, ISIS’s second resurgence, ISW, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ Rudaw, ISIS blows up oil pipeline in Kirkuk: security official, 9 September 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹² Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#); ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁹¹³ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), 31 October 2018, [url](#), para. 46

⁹¹⁴ Wing, J., April 2018 Large Drop In Violence In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁹¹⁶ Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 16 – 22 2018, 22 February 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Islamic State kills 27 Iraqi militiamen near Kirkuk, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ BBC Monitoring, IS claims suicide attack on Shia militia in northern Iraq, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ Reuters, Bomb kills one and wounds 14 in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 8 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁹ Niqash, Caught In The Crossfire? In Kirkuk, Civilian Deaths Raise Local Ire And Endanger Iraqi Troops, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁰ Al Monitor, Islamic State awakens sleeper cells in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹²¹ BBC Monitoring, Islamic State reportedly attacks village in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 26 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²² Reuters, One dead in Iraq’s Kirkuk in suicide bombing near ballot box store, days before recount, 1 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹²³ Middle East Eye, Irak : Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Roadside bomb kills two, wounds 14 in police bus outside Kirkuk, 18 September 2018, [url](#)

- On 13 October 2018 a VBIED exploded in Kirkuk city's Hai Tanak neighbourhood, injuring at least six civilians according to Kirkuk Police's spokesperson.⁹²⁴
- In November 2018, Kurdish security officials reported that ISIL incidents were re-emerging in Kirkuk, reporting 5 IEDs attacks targeting security forces and civilians and 2 defused.⁹²⁵

Furthermore, ISIL's 2018 focus increasingly shifted towards targeting local authorities.⁹²⁶ In October and November 2018, numerous village chiefs in rural areas were targeted and killed by ISIL⁹²⁷, as part of a strategy to depopulate strategic areas by driving out pro-government tribal leaders.⁹²⁸ On ISIL's assassinations, Michael Knights recorded 35 targeted assassinations of local leaders in the first 10 months of 2018, spread across Kirkuk's rural areas.⁹²⁹ The Washington Post reported that dozens of local authorities, tribal elders, village chiefs and others were abducted and killed in June and July 2018 by ISIL members.⁹³⁰ Recent examples include the ISIL assassination of a mukhtars in Mahmudiya village of Hawija, one in Hanutiya village⁹³¹, and another in Jassemiya in Hawija in October 2018.⁹³² Kurdish security officials reported an ISIL attack in Rabza village or Hawija which killed the 'village chief' in October 2018.⁹³³ ISIL also exploded bombs in two villages south of Kirkuk that month, killing two civilians.⁹³⁴ Also in May, they launched an attacks killing PMF and federal police in Dibis, and Juhaysh, near Hawija, resulting in one dead PMF commander and 8 wounded police.⁹³⁵

Michael Knights reported that in rural Kirkuk ISIL has freedom of movement at night, and roams these areas 'through farms, killings farmers, burning houses and crops, destroying irrigation systems, and blowing up tractors and electrical towers'.⁹³⁶ Joel Wing reported that there were monthly reports in fall 2018 indicating that in rural Kirkuk ISIL was regularly attacking Kirkuk's towns, civilians, and engaging in kidnapping, retaliation, and gun battles, including in the day time⁹³⁷, having freedom to move at night. Al Monitor reported ISIL's use of fake checkpoints, particularly in rural areas, ambushing and kidnapping travellers and also indicated that light weapons have been used to attack villages in Daquq and southern Kirkuk.⁹³⁸

Other types of violence

DIS/Landinfo remarked that a range of armed actors are active inside and outside of Kirkuk city and violence is sometimes due to organised crime or political reasons, or both. DIS/Landinfo also reported that there are frequent attacks based on 'hatred and revenge' between ethnic groups in Kirkuk due to high distrust and strained relations.⁹³⁹ Revenge and communal tensions in Hawija over local support

⁹²⁴ Rudaw, Vehicle carrying explosives detonates in Kirkuk injuring 6 civilians, 6 December 2018, [url](#); also reported separately by EPIC: EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁵ EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁶ Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ New Arab (The), IS kills 3 Iraq village chiefs in a week, 3 November 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁸ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁹²⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁹³⁰ Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹³¹ New Arab (The), IS kills 3 Iraq village chiefs in a week, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹³² New Arab (The), IS kills 3 Iraq village chiefs in a week, 3 November 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹³³ EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁴ BBC Monitoring, Blasts in Iraq's Kirkuk kill two people, 20 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁵ BBC Monitoring, Iraqi Kurdish media report deadly IS attacks in Kirkuk, 9 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6. See also: Der Spiegel, 'Liberated' Areas of Iraq Still Terrorized by Violence, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ Wing, J., Violence Remained Steady In Iraq August 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 September 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding Operations in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁸ Al Monitor, Islamic State awakens sleeper cells in Iraq's Kirkuk, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

and resistance to ISIL have led to retributive killings between groups.⁹⁴⁰ Arthur Quesnay also explained that in Hawija there is little trust in the Iraqi forces: locals might depose complaints about a neighbour who fought with ISIL and there may be no reaction; or the inverse also happens, where cooperation with the security forces leads to retaliation from ISIL.⁹⁴¹ According to the researcher Arthur Quesnay, the main impact of the change in territorial control in October 2017 has been linked to politically driven land conflicts between Kurds and Arabs over territory and property lost during successive periods of 'Arabisation' and 'Kurdification' in the past. Southern mixed areas of Kirkuk governorate, such as the town of Taza Khurmatu [in Kirkuk], have been particularly affected, the scene of highly violent clashes as these conflicts become interlinked with Shia militias deployed in the area.⁹⁴²

Election-related violence

CTS assisted with securing polling stations during the May 2018 national elections.⁹⁴³ In the lead-up to Iraq's national elections in May, several parliamentary candidates were attacked across Iraq⁹⁴⁴, including a Turkmen politician in Kirkuk who survived a car bomb and grenade attack against him which killed a civilian and wounded 11 others.⁹⁴⁵ In April 2018, ISIL claimed responsibility for the bomb attack against the convoy of a Turkmen candidate in Kirkuk city.⁹⁴⁶ Joel Wing stated that there was a large number of insurgent attacks during the week of elections in May 2018, with several suicide bombs being prevented and several others successfully detonating in Kirkuk.⁹⁴⁷ UNAMI data shows that in April and May 2018, Kirkuk was the governorate with the third highest number of fatalities ahead of the elections, with 10 civilians killed in April and 20 killed in May 2018.⁹⁴⁸

After the elections, accusations of fraud led to such an increase in tensions⁹⁴⁹ that Rakan Al-Jabouri, Kirkuk Governor, declared a curfew.⁹⁵⁰

State's ability to secure law and order

A combination of numerous government forces reportedly handle security in Kirkuk as of 2018, including PMUs, Federal Police, the army, and the Golden Division of CTS.⁹⁵¹ The PMUs tend to control the suburbs and surrounding villages of Kirkuk city, including Tuz Khurmatu [in Salah al-Din], and control entry and screening into Kirkuk; while in the city of Kirkuk is secured by local police and the CTS. Generally, there were reportedly fewer checkpoints around Kirkuk than in October 2017 and were controlled by ISF forces.⁹⁵²

According to the KRG, the departure of Peshmerga forces in October 2017 reportedly left a 'security vacuum' in some areas where the Iraqi forces did not operate after the takeover of disputed areas of Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah al-Din, allowing ISIL to operate there and prepare attacks.⁹⁵³ DIS/Landinfo, reporting in November 2018, found that there is a perception among sources it interviewed then that

⁹⁴⁰ Der Spiegel, 'Liberated' Areas of Iraq Still Terrorized by Violence, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018

⁹⁴² Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018

⁹⁴³ Middle East Eye, Hunger strikes and 'hostage' situation follow fraud claims in Iraq's Kirkuk, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ Wing, J., April 2018 Large Drop In Violence In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 May 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 4 - 10, 2018, 10 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ Wing, J., April 2018 Large Drop In Violence In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ Kurdistan24, IS claims responsibility for attempted assassination of Turkmen candidate in Kirkuk, 24 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ Wing, J., Security In Iraq Largely Unchanged In May 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁸ UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month April 2018, 2 May 2018, [url](#); UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of May 2018, 31 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁹ EPIC, ISHM: May 11 – 17, 2018, 17 May 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Growing Crisis Over Elections In Kirkuk and Kurdistan, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 18 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM: May 11 – 17, 2018, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵¹ Middle East Eye, Hunger strikes and 'hostage' situation follow fraud claims in Iraq's Kirkuk, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵² Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁵³ Middle East Eye, Irak: Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#)

security had generally improved in Kirkuk since the security forces took over in October 2017, with fewer ISIL attacks targeting Arabs and less stringent control over the civilian population.⁹⁵⁴ However, sources also describe the security situation in Kirkuk as ‘fragile and complex’⁹⁵⁵ and subject to ‘political and security instability’.⁹⁵⁶ ISW assessed the intensity of violence caused by ISIL in Kirkuk in July 2018 as medium-high, along with Salah al-Din and Diyala, the three top intensity governorates.⁹⁵⁷

Michael Knights highlighted that in Kirkuk, the Federal Police, which is perceived by locals to be composed of Shia from Baghdad, southern Iraq and southern Salah al-Din, tends to be distrusted by the local Sunni population.⁹⁵⁸ The Counter-terrorism Forces on the opposite are generally perceived as being more professional.⁹⁵⁹ Michael Knights explained that there is a ‘heavy concentration’ of police brigades in Kirkuk which complicates IS’ ability to operate, however, the garrison forces are ‘failing to protect civilians’ and frequently arrive too late to assist villages that are attacked ‘and then arrest or disarm the wrong people’.⁹⁶⁰

Outside of Kirkuk city, in mixed areas of the governorate where land disputes between Arabs and Kurds occur, Arthur Quesnay highlighted that Kurds who try to return to these areas are subject to discrimination and reprisals by Turkmen Shia militias. In other cases, the lands have been taken over by Arab or Turkmen families. In the western Kirkuk governorate for instance, Kurds have completely evacuated some 40 villages. Many Kurds are afraid to return due to Shia militias.⁹⁶¹

The ISF and PMUs continue to lead further anti-ISIL clearing operations in Kirkuk following the October 2017 changeover; mainly in Hawija, Daquq, southern-south/west Kirkuk.⁹⁶² On 4 July 2018, a two-week long military offensive called ‘Revenge of the Martyrs’ was launched jointly by the Iraqi army and the Peshmergas in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates. The offensive aimed at clearing Kirkuk governorate from ISIL remnants.⁹⁶³ Kirkuk was divided into quarters⁹⁶⁴ and the security situation improved in July and August 2018⁹⁶⁵, with a significant decline in the number of attacks⁹⁶⁶ and at the end of this offensive, ISIL cells were not completely uprooted from Kirkuk governorate and ISIL attacks continued, even in Kirkuk city.⁹⁶⁷

In this context, criminality involving criminal networks and elements of the security forces, has also reportedly increased since the October 2017 changeover, according to Iraqi media source Al Mada.⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁹⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁵⁶ Middle East Eye, Irak : Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

⁹⁵⁸ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁹⁵⁹ Middle East Eye, Hunger strikes and 'hostage' situation follow fraud claims in Iraq's Kirkuk, 17 May 2018, [url](#); Niqash, Caught In The Crossfire? In Kirkuk, Civilian Deaths Raise Local Ire And Endanger Iraqi Troops, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁹⁶¹ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPA), 10 December 2018

⁹⁶² ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018.

⁹⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: June 29 – July 22, 2018, ISHM, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁴ Al-Mada, النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven't returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁶ Al-Mada, النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven't returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#); 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, Kirkuk: One Year On, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ Al-Mada, النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven't returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ Al-Mada, النازحون الكرد لم يعودوا إلى منازلهم.. ومجلس المحافظة معطل [A year after the redeployment in Kirkuk, displaced Kurds haven't returned home yet and the Governorate Council is not functioning], 17 October 2018, [url](#)

Arthur Quesnay and Robin Beaumont reported that drug trafficking, which barely existed in KRI and disputed areas before 2014, became a very lucrative market in PMUs controlled areas.⁹⁶⁹

In an April 2018 article, a member of the CTS was reportedly involved in criminality; the spokesperson of the Counter-Terrorism Forces in Kirkuk revealed that an arrest warrant had been issued against an officer and his subordinates, who were suspected of having perpetrated robberies in the governorate. According to other reports, the group was also responsible of a number of assassinations.⁹⁷⁰

According to the researchers Robin Beaumont and Arthur Quesnay, in Hawija, two militias of affiliated with the Badr Organization, the Hashd al-Zab and Hashd al-Wasfi, 'reign supreme' over the local population; traders are required to pay a 'protection tax' and several reports of killings occurred in cases of non-compliance.⁹⁷¹

Displacement and return

Kirkuk governorate hosts a significant population of IDPs. According to the IOM, it comprised 108 138 individuals in December 2018⁹⁷², a decrease from 180 858 individuals in December 2017.⁹⁷³ Most of this hosted population come from within Kirkuk governorate itself, with 42 % displaced inside the governorate from Hawiga, 9 % from Kirkuk, 6 % from Daquq, and the rest from Salah al-Din and Ninewa.⁹⁷⁴ According to IOM, in December 2018, 319 338 IDPs originating from Kirkuk returned back to the governorate.⁹⁷⁵ Due to rates of return, the Iraqi government closed Daquq camp in Kirkuk in September 2018, which caused hundreds of families, including 294 from Hawiga, to return to liberated areas, host communities, or other camps.⁹⁷⁶

Regarding the Kurdish population, most of the people who had fled the disputed territories during Iraqi forces' offensive against the Peshmergas in October 2017 have returned, according to some sources.⁹⁷⁷ According to Arthur Quesnay, 75 % of displaced families from Kirkuk city have notably returned. The approximately 6 000 IDPs were unwilling to return to the city are mainly families of KDP or KDP Peshmerga members. As for the PUK, its high ranking officials and military officers are still displaced as well, although its state employees and soldiers have been able to stay in Kirkuk.⁹⁷⁸ However other sources are less categorical about how many have returned, as described in the section above.⁹⁷⁹

UNOCHA and IOM reported in late 2018 that Hawija centre, Al-Abassy and Taza Khurmatu [in Kirkuk] were areas where conditions for returnees were described as 'high' or 'very high severity' and returnees were at risk of secondary displacement.⁹⁸⁰ IOM further explained in September 2018 that Al-Abassy, south of Hawija, was 'severely impacted' by infrastructure destruction. Basic services, especially those related to water and health, remained very limited, even though primary schools were

⁹⁶⁹ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Iraqi News, Iraqi police confirms arrest orders for officers involved in robberies, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷² IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁷³ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix Round 98, June 2018, [url](#), p. 2; IDMC and NRC, Nowhere to Return to, Iraqis' search for durable solutions continues, November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁷⁵ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁷⁶ UNICEF, Iraq Humanitarian Situation Report, September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁹⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 14; Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁹⁷⁸ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁹⁷⁹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁸⁰ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 11; IOM, Return Index, Findings round 1 – Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 11

reportedly open. According to IOM, livelihood opportunities were ‘low’ in the urban centre and remained ‘non-existent’ in the rural areas, even though agricultural activities had re-started in part.⁹⁸¹ Similarly, a survey of IDPs living in informal settings by REACH in August 2018 showed that most IDPs in informal settings were displaced from within Kirkuk; 67 % of the 52 households interviewed in Kirkuk governorate had no clear intention to return in the following year; 74 % reported that their home had been completely destroyed; 79 % said there were no basic services in their region of origin and 72 % said they feared extremist groups.⁹⁸² According to Arthur Quesnay, the population is unwilling to return to rural areas without guarantees of protection by security forces.⁹⁸³ In an April 2018 article, Hawija was described as ‘a ghost town’ by Al Monitor.⁹⁸⁴

In other cases, IDPs were prevented to come back by local authorities. At the end of May 2018, UNHCR indicated reported that 300 individuals, mostly from Hawija, were evicted from Kirkuk city into IDP camps in Nazrawa, Daquq, and Laylan due to perceived ISIL affiliation⁹⁸⁵; a smaller case occurred in April⁹⁸⁶, and continued to be reported in Kirkuk in July 2018.⁹⁸⁷ The UNHCR observed movements of people back into camps in Kirkuk in March 2018, as IDPs from Kirkuk who tried to return back ended up returning to camps due to inability to pay rent, access services, or due to destroyed homes and security concerns, mainly in areas like Hawija.⁹⁸⁸

From 4 to 18 January 2018, 1 000 persons from 25 villages in Hawiga district fled to nearby IDP camps or relocated to other areas due to clearing operations by the military.⁹⁸⁹ In September 2018, an predominantly Sunni Arab village populated by the Jubbur Tribe, near Qara Tapa, was evacuated after repeated ISIL threats and an attack that destroyed two houses.⁹⁹⁰ In July 2018, UNHCR reported that ‘small-scale displacement’ in Hawiga district of Kirkuk occurred due to deteriorations in the security situation there.⁹⁹¹ ISW also remarked in October 2018 that ISIL attacks caused civilians from small villages in Kirkuk governorate to be displaced, without specifying the location.⁹⁹²

Civilian infrastructure affected

The World Bank assessed in January 2018 that 7 % of housing in Kirkuk governorate had been damaged, falling behind Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Anbar in the worst affected governorates.⁹⁹³ Health facilities were also targeted by attacks in the context of the battle against ISIL; mostly in Mosul and Baghdad, but also reporting 6 attacks on health facilities/workers in Anbar, Kirkuk, and other areas in 2017.⁹⁹⁴ WHO indicated that for more than 3 years under ISIL’s control, Hawija district was ‘cut off’ from health care and immunisation services and that at the time of the article in November 2017, Hawija’s five main health facilities, in addition to Hawija general hospital, were partially or completely damaged.⁹⁹⁵ UNOCHA stated in its 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview that 35 per cent of primary health centres are not functional in Kirkuk governorate.⁹⁹⁶

⁹⁸¹ IOM, Return Index, Findings round 1 – Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 11.

⁹⁸² REACH, Intentions Survey of IDPs in Informal Sites, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁹⁸³ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁹⁸⁴ Al Monitor, Rural areas southwest of Kirkuk grapple with fears of IS sleeper cells, 16 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁵ UNHCR, Iraq Flash Update, 31 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ UNHCR, Iraq Flash Update, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ UNHCR, Iraq Monthly Protection Update 28 May-1 July 2018, 1 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁸⁸ UNHCR, Iraq Flash Update, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁹ UNHCR, Iraq Flash Update, 18 January 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁰ Kurdistan24, 20-home village fully evacuated in west Kirkuk after IS explosion, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹¹ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁹² ISW, ISIS’s second resurgence, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ World Bank, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment: Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 13, 94-96.

⁹⁹⁴ Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, Violence on the Front Lines: Attacks on Health Care in 2017, 21 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁹⁹⁵ WHO, Lifesaving mobile health teams reach people in newly liberated areas of Hawijja, Iraq, 27 November 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁶ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 33

Agricultural areas have also been severely damaged during the conflict against ISIL, divesting the population of its main financial resource.⁹⁹⁷ Arthur Quesnay stated in October 2018 that a large amount of agricultural land was destroyed in fighting with IS in the south-west of Kirkuk, which has significantly impacted agricultural production and many Kurdish families have not returned. He estimated that about 40 Kurdish villages west of Kirkuk have been depopulated and repopulated with Arab families.⁹⁹⁸

Up to November 2018, several reports documented ISIL attacks on infrastructure facilities in Kirkuk governorate, such as water, electricity or oil infrastructure⁹⁹⁹, depriving entire areas from basic services.¹⁰⁰⁰ In September 2018, ISIS blew up an oil pipeline between Kirkuk and Dubiz.¹⁰⁰¹

Road security

iMMAP, a humanitarian organisation which maps road security incidents for humanitarian purposes in Iraq, produced monthly Kirkuk maps during 2018 which show that numerous roads in Kirkuk city itself and throughout the district and governorate are considered to be 'primary risk' roads.¹⁰⁰²

The Baghdad-Kirkuk highway, which links Baghdad to Kirkuk and other northern parts of Iraq, was described as one of the most dangerous routes in Iraq in an article from July 2018¹⁰⁰³, with sources noting militant activities targeting travellers such as ambushes, kidnappings, and fake ISIL checkpoints¹⁰⁰⁴, killings, robberies¹⁰⁰⁵, targeted assassinations of government officials and security forces, car bombings, and ISIL raids on travellers.¹⁰⁰⁶ In July 2018, three explosions occurred along the Kirkuk-Baghdad highway, which killed and wounded several people.¹⁰⁰⁷ From 5 to 13 September 2018, 5 IEDs and 7 unexploded ordnances were found near Kirkuk-Baiji road.¹⁰⁰⁸ In November 2018, iMMAP reported that 137 IED, 21 cases of unexploded ordinance and 28 other non-specified explosives had been found near Kirkuk-Hawija road.¹⁰⁰⁹

⁹⁹⁷ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018; Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁸ Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

⁹⁹⁹ Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq st months afteraghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#); Middle East Eye, Irak: Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 13 – 19, 19 July 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 27 – August 2, 2 August 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 2 – 8, 2018, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁰ Middle East Eye, Irak: Kirkouk, de nouveau la cible des islamistes armés, 15 October 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 27 – August 2, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰¹ Rudaw, ISIS blows up oil pipeline in Kirkuk: security official, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰² iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response - Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate (Aug 2018), 5 September 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response - Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate (July 2018), 5 August 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate June 2018, 5 July 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response: Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk (May 2018), 7 June 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response: Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate (Oct 2018), 5 November 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response - Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate 01-30 November 2018, 5 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰³ National (The), ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ National (The), ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁵ Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

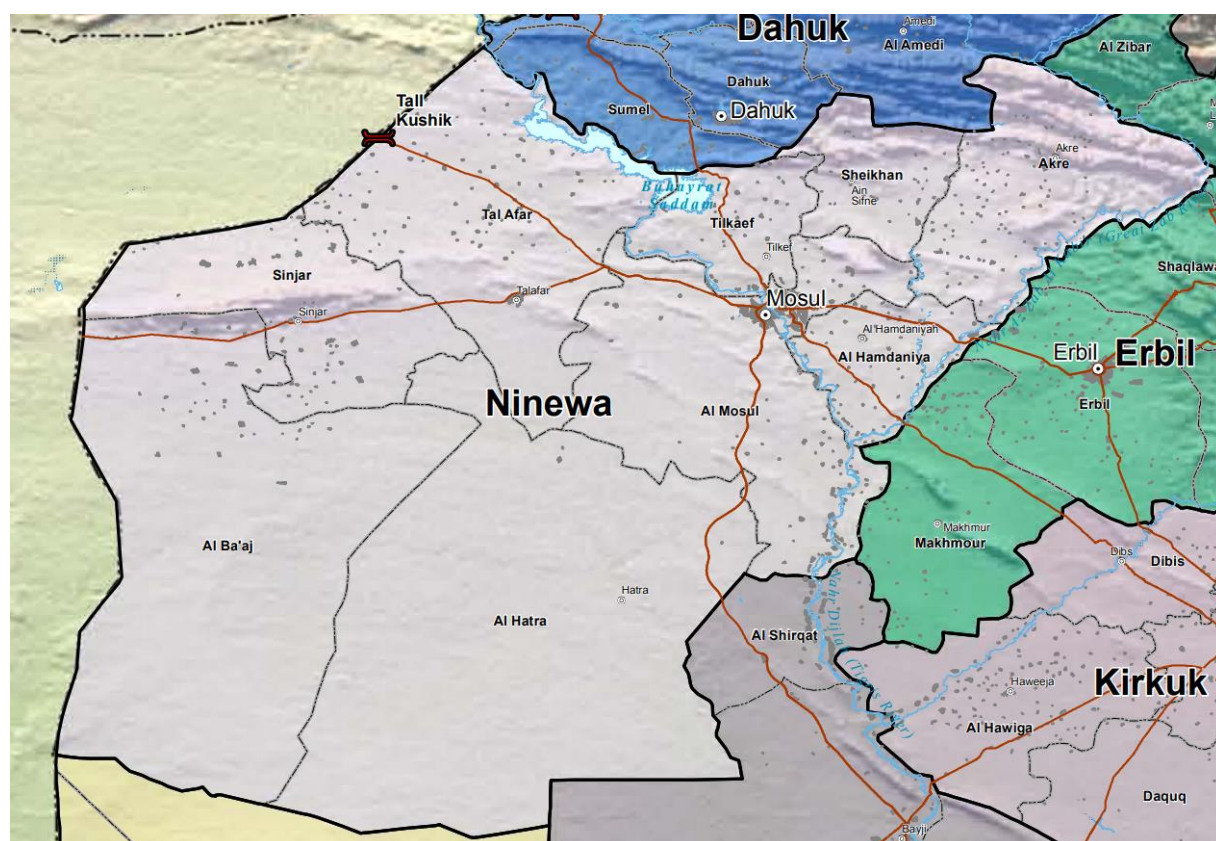
¹⁰⁰⁶ National (The), ISIS Sleeper cells mounting attacks in northern Iraq, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ GardaWorld, Iraq: Multiple explosions reported in Kirkuk July 18, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards from Mobile Data Collection (MDC) in Kirkuk Governorate 05-13 September 2018, 13 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁹ iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards from Mobile Data Collection (MDC) in Kirkuk Governorate 01-30 November, 5 December 2018, [url](#)

2.5 Ninewa



Map 11: Ninewa with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹⁰¹⁰

General description of the governorate

The governorate of Ninewa (or Nineveh) is located in north and north-west Iraq. It borders to Syria and the Iraqi governorates Dohuk, Erbil (both part of KRI), Salah al-Din and al-Anbar.¹⁰¹¹ Ninewa is the third largest governorate at 37 323 km² (8.6 % the total size of Iraq), and has the second highest population in Iraq (3 729 998 in 2018).¹⁰¹² The capital is Mosul, located in the north-east and with an estimated population of more than 1.5 million inhabitants.¹⁰¹³ The second largest city is Tal Afar, north-west of Mosul. Other major towns are Sinjar to the west and Qayara in the south.¹⁰¹⁴

The governorate is divided in nine districts: Mosul, Tel Kayf, Sheikhan, Akre, Tel Afar, Sinjar, Ba'aj, al-Hatra, and Hamdaniya.¹⁰¹⁵

Mosul is an important regional traffic hub: It has direct road connections with Baghdad, Kirkuk, Erbil, Dohuk, and also to Syria and Turkey, through Tal Afar and the Syrian border at Rabia in the north, and towards Sinjar and Syria in the west.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹⁰ UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰¹¹ NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰¹² Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016 – 10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰¹⁴ NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2; Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰¹⁵ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰¹⁶ ABC News, Why the Battle for Mosul Is Important, 16 October 2016, [url](#); Ahn, J., et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

Ninewa is the most ethnically diverse governorate of Iraq. Sunni Arabs constitute the majority, but other groups also share power and influence: the Kurds are dominant in Akre and Sheikhan districts. Akre and Sheikhan districts have been administered by the KRG since the establishment of the Green Line by the ceasefire between Saddam and the Kurds in 1991. The Ninewa Plains, east and north-east of Mosul, are the territory where the majority of the governorate's Christian and Shabak population lives (this area contains also major oil fields). In Tal Afar, the Turkmen (both Sunni and Shia) are prominent, while in Sinjar, the Yezidis are the majority, as well as in their holy city of Lalish in Sheikhan district.¹⁰¹⁷

Because of the ethnic diversity in Ninewa, much of the governorate received formal classification as 'disputed territory' under Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. The control over the northern and eastern portions of the governorate remains contentious. The border line of the areas of control is situated in the Ninewa Plains and in Tal Afar district.¹⁰¹⁸

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

In Ninewa the ISIL occupation was preceded by 'years of overlapping violent extremism and organized crime by militia groups, some of which were IS progenitors and/or rivals'.¹⁰¹⁹ Located within Iraq's disputed territories and having a diverse ethnic composition, Ninewa is considered to be a 'longtime center of Sunni Arab nationalism in Iraq' and was once the 'center of gravity for al-Qaeda in Iraq'.¹⁰²⁰

Mosul was taken over and occupied by ISIL in June 2014. ISIL attacks on Sinjar, Zummar and the Ninewa Plains in August 2014 displaced nearly 1 million people within weeks.¹⁰²¹ The fall of Mosul in June 2014 and the withdrawal of the Kurdish Forces from large parts of the governorate in August 2014 led to widespread targeting of Iraq's minority communities by ISIL: Turkmen, Christians, Yezidis, Shabak, Kaka'i and other groups¹⁰²² who were subjected to torture, public executions, crucifixions, kidnappings, and sexual slavery.¹⁰²³

The battle for Mosul lasted more than nine months¹⁰²⁴, and the victory over ISIL was not officially announced until the beginning of July 2017.¹⁰²⁵ The battle, and especially its second part with the capturing of the historic town of western Mosul was the hardest confrontation between ISIL and the Iraqi government forces during the whole conflict from 2014 until present.¹⁰²⁶ Mosul - the second city of Iraq - sustained heavy damage, a high number of civilians was killed during the hostilities with the estimates of civilian casualties ranging from 4 194 killed and wounded¹⁰²⁷ up to 9 000-11 000 killed¹⁰²⁸, and one source indicated that over 40 000 civilians could have been killed as a result of the massive firepower used against the city by the Iraqi Security Forces, the International Coalition and ISIL.¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰¹⁷ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰¹⁸ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), Executive Summary, i

¹⁰¹⁹ Rise Foundation, Mosul and Tel Afar Context Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰²⁰ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰²¹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰²² HRW, Iraq: ISIS Abducting, Killing, Expelling Minorities, 19 July 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰²⁴ Al Jazeera, More than 9,000 killed in battle for Mosul: AP, 20 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ Huffington Post, Iraq Declares A Brilliant Victory In Mosul: What Are The Lessons? 10 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ BBC News, Major General: Battle for Mosul is 'toughest since WWII', 26 June 2017, [url](#); PBS, Frontline, "The Toughest Battle I've Ever Covered": A Q&A With "Mosul" Director Olivier Sarbil, 18 October 2017, [url](#); Defense One, Watson, B., What the Largest Battle of the Decade Says About the Future of War, 28 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016 – 10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰²⁸ AP, Mosul is a graveyard: Final IS battle kills 9,000 civilians, 21 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁹ Independent (The), The massacre of Mosul: 40,000 feared dead in battle to take back city from Isis as scale of civilian casualties revealed, 19 July 2017, [url](#)

The program director for Mosul at the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) declared that the explosives contamination in Mosul is 'of a previously unseen magnitude'.¹⁰³⁰ UN and Iraq joint assessments estimated that the destruction in Mosul created around eight million tons of rubble. The debris is heavily contaminated with explosive devices of different kinds which includes unexploded mines and booby-traps.¹⁰³¹

In November 2018 UNAMI released a report documenting 202 mass graves since June 2014, the overwhelming majority of which reportedly contain victims killed by ISIL. Estimates provided to UNAMI range from 6 000 to more than 12 000 victims buried in these sites, with the largest number being located in the governorates of Ninewa (95), Kirkuk (37), Salah al-Din (36) and Anbar (24). The report further stated that 'victims include women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities, members and former members of the Iraqi armed forces and police, and some foreign workers'.¹⁰³² The vast majority of mass graves sites (95) were found in Ninewa, especially around Mosul and Sinjar district. The unverified estimate number of victims found in the mass graves sites located in Ninewa is ranging from 4 000 to 10 500.¹⁰³³

Minority communities responded to the threat by ISIL and the fact that the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga abandoned their posts during the ISIL offensive of 2014 by developing many of the local militias and their allegiances.¹⁰³⁴

Armed actors

In the aftermath of the ISIL caliphate, Ninewa has a plethora of armed groups operating within the governorate. The main security actors operating in Ninewa can be classified in the following main categories¹⁰³⁵:

- formal Iraqi Security Forces (ISF);
- Popular Mobilization Units (PMU);
- Kurdish Security Forces;
- militias aligned with the KRG;
- non-aligned militias;
- foreign forces;
- insurgents.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰³⁰ New Arab (The), Explosives contamination in Mosul is 'of previously unseen magnitude', 06 December 2017, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 19 – 25, 2018, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³¹ UNEP, Rising from the rubble: Iraq's Mosul takes steps to deal with war debris, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³² UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL", 6 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁰³³ UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL", 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁰³⁴ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Fracturing of the State. Recent Historical Events Contributing to the Proliferation of Local, Hybrid, and Sub-State Forces, 24 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁵ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 14, 33

¹⁰³⁶ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 14, 33

Formal Security Forces (ISF)

The formal ISF in Ninewa fall under the authority of the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC), with the exception of the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), which reports directly to the Iraqi government. The NOC is located in east Mosul.¹⁰³⁷ Sources interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI assessed that in Ninewa 'ISF seems to be the strongest security actor, but they do not control other armed actors.'¹⁰³⁸

Counterterrorism Service (CTS, *jihaz mukafahat al-irhab*)

During an April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI representatives of Kirkuk Now named the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) as the most powerful security actor in Ninewa adding that 'is directed by a Shia officer who reports directly to Prime Minister Abadi'.¹⁰³⁹

The CTS has a reputation of being Iraq's most well trained, effective and disciplined fighting force. It has the ability to recruit across sectarian lines and this has contributed to its widespread acceptance in Iraq. The CTS members undergo a strict vetting process prior to acceptance, and they are not allowed to associate with political parties or engage in sectarian expressions of any kind.¹⁰⁴⁰

The CTS comprises three brigades, of which ISOF-2 is the main unit operating in Ninewa, based primarily near Mosul. CTS was one of the main units in the battle for Mosul in 2016-2017 and sustained heavy losses in the fighting. It returned to its previous role as a quick reaction force with high mobility. The command structure of the CTS operates parallel to the NOC and does not report to the Ministry of Defence, but directly to the Prime Minister. As of August 2017, ISOF-1 and ISOF-3 were reported to be operating in Tal Afar.¹⁰⁴¹

Iraqi Army (IA, *Jayish*)

Sources interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI stated that since February 2018 Ninewa governorate 'has been divided into three control sectors or spheres of influence. Mosul city is controlled by the local police. The outskirts of Mosul are controlled by various PMUs which are both Shia and local militias. The rest of the governorate is controlled by the Iraqi army.'¹⁰⁴² Representatives of Kirkuk Now interviewed during the same FFM assessed that the Iraqi army is controlling the southern and northern areas of Ninewa.¹⁰⁴³

The Iraqi Army maintains a large presence in Ninewa, the 15th and 16th Infantry Divisions have served in the governorate since the liberation of Mosul. The 20th Infantry Division and parts of the 9th Armoured Division are also currently assigned to the NOC.¹⁰⁴⁴

Prior to the war against ISIL, the IA had a difficult relationship with the Sunni Arab population in Ninewa, it was known for checkpoint abuses and overbearing responses to insurgent attacks.

¹⁰³⁷ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰³⁸ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰³⁹ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰⁴¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰⁴² Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁴³ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 15

Moreover, a lot of the recruitment in the earlier years of US occupation happened within the Kurdish community, because Sunni Arabs were unwilling to take service in the IA.¹⁰⁴⁵

After the liberation from ISIL the image of the IA in Ninewa has improved significantly, although many local leaders campaign to reduce its influence, and also the Ministry of Defence aims at a withdrawal of IA units from cities and to a concentration in large army bases. Nevertheless, the IA plays a significant role in securing Mosul by manning checkpoints and playing a role in decision making. A part of the renewed popularity of the IA stems from the preference of the Sunni population for the army as compared to Shia-dominated militias.¹⁰⁴⁶

Iraqi Police Service (IPS, Local Police)

The IPS is the local police force operating within the governorate. Less militarised than the Federal Police, the IPS often patrols in non-armoured vehicles and carries only light firearms. The Ninewa Province Police (shurta muhafiza Ninewa) is responsible for the day-to-day security duties and is theoretically closest to the local population. Their officers are the first responders and the first line of defence against terrorism and criminality. Because of this, ‘they are exposed to the greatest risk of being targeted by insurgent attacks’. They are locally recruited, but this also means that they and their families are easier targets for kidnapping or assassination.¹⁰⁴⁷

Sources interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI stated that Mosul city is controlled by the local police.¹⁰⁴⁸

National Security Service (NSS, jihaz al-amn al-watni)

The NSS is the primary intelligence service within the governorate, but it is often present at checkpoints throughout the governorate to identify individuals, and they also conduct raids, arrests and interrogations. Their activities has led them to clash with other security forces, especially IA units operating in Mosul.¹⁰⁴⁹

Iraqi Border Guards (haras hadud allraq)

The Iraqi Border Guards operate primarily on the Syrian border in western Ninewa, especially in the border town of Rabia. The Border Guards are also responsible for preventing ISIL fighters from entering Ninewa from Syria, but they receive assistance from the PMU in securing remote border regions.¹⁰⁵⁰

Federal Police (FEDPOL, shurta itihadiya) and Emergency Response Division (ERD, furqa ar-red as-suriya)

According to a May 2018 report FEDPOL and ERD were important during the liberation of Ninewa, but are no longer key players in the governorate. FEDPOL units were transferred to Kirkuk in early 2018.¹⁰⁵¹ However, in an April 2018 interview representatives of Kirkuk Now mentioned the federal police and

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁴⁸ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17; FP, Goodbye, Islamic State - Hello, Anarchy, 24 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁵¹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

the Rapid Response Team under the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior as being amongst the most powerful security actors in Ninewa, after the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) and the PMUs.¹⁰⁵²

Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)

Representatives of Kirkuk Now interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI assessed that PMUs control the eastern part of Ninewa governorate. The Shia PMUs were considered to be the second strongest security actor in Ninewa after the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), which is directed by a Shia officer who reports directly to Prime Minister Abadi.¹⁰⁵³ The outskirts of Mosul are controlled by various PMUs which are both Shia and local militias.¹⁰⁵⁴

Interviewed during the same FFM, Hoshang Mohamed, Director General, Ministry of the Interior, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC), KRI, noted that in general ‘the liberated areas such as Ninewa, Sinjar, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din governorates are controlled by different militia groups, in some cases divided along ethnic lines. In the areas where the militias are in control, local civil administration or authorities are not functioning.’¹⁰⁵⁵

A July 2018 International Crisis Group report noted that several PMUs including AAH, the al-Abbas Fighting Division and Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada are located around Mosul. In the south of the governorate Sarayat al-Salam maintains some units, while in the west PMUs include Sarayat al-Jihad, Harakat Hizbollah al-Nujaba and the Ali al-Akbar Brigade.¹⁰⁵⁶ According to Rudaw, writing in July 2018, the ISF and the PMU were jointly responsible for maintaining the security of Tel Afar.¹⁰⁵⁷ As of May 2017 the PMUs strength in Ninewa was estimated at 18 000 fighters.¹⁰⁵⁸

In a February 2018 report the International Crisis Group pointed out that since October 2017 Sinjar is controlled militarily and politically by Iran-backed PMUs.¹⁰⁵⁹ In Sinjar district PMUs are deployed on the Iraq-Syria border, have co-opted Yazidi tribal leaders and recruit local Yazidis. They also control strategic roads and appointed a new district director and directorate heads.¹⁰⁶⁰

At the beginning of August 2018 the deputy chairman of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Committee issued three orders on restructuring and redeployment of PMUs starting in Ninewa. PMU initially began to withdraw from Rabi’a and Zummar subdistricts of Tal Afar and from parts of Sinjar. However, on 21 August the Prime Minister rescinded the orders, questioning their legality without the prior consultation with the Commander-in-Chief and coordination with the Iraqi Joint Operations Command. The Prime Minister later stated that redeployment of PMUs would provide opportunities for insurgents to launch attacks and decreed that all PMF operations must be coordinated through the Prime Minister’s Office which would henceforth head the Popular Mobilization Commission.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵² Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁰⁵³ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁰⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 80

¹⁰⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁵⁷ Rudaw, Tal Afar on the up-and-up a year after ISIS, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Derzsi-Horvath, A. et al., Who’s who: Quick facts about local and Sub-State forces, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, Winning the Post-ISIS Battle for Iraq in Sinjar, 20 February 2018, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁶¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

Local groups:

The Shia Shabak militias, located in Ninewa governorate, act as supplementary force to the larger PMU forces, particularly the Badr Brigades. The fighters are incorporated into the 30th Brigade of the PMU, which also includes a Chaldean sub-force, known as the Babylon Brigade, headed by the Chaldean Commander Rayan al-Kildani. The Babylon Brigade was active in frontline fighting and holding areas, and were reputed for their harsh treatment of Sunni Arabs. The unit has also accompanied PMU forces on operations in Ninewa governorate, like Qayara and Nimrud. They continue to hold checkpoints in Bartela.¹⁰⁶²

Other local groups include:

- **Ninewa Plains Protection Units (NPU):** a predominantly Christian militia which oversees the security in Qaraqosh.¹⁰⁶³ It is sponsored by the Assyrian Democratic Union and incorporated under the PMU.¹⁰⁶⁴
- **Ninewa Plains Forces (NPF):** A Shia Shabak unit, located in East Mosul and on the Ninewa Plains.¹⁰⁶⁵ There are two groups named Ninewa Plains Forces. One is the Shia-Shabak PMU, the other is a KRG-supported Christian group.¹⁰⁶⁶ The Shabak NPF is also called the 30th Brigade.¹⁰⁶⁷
- **Babylon Brigade:** A mixed Christian-Shia Arab unit, with a Shabak component, too, influential in the Ninewa Plains, with a close operational relationship with the NPF.¹⁰⁶⁸
- **Al-Hashd al-Turkmani:** Shia Turkmen units, primarily within the 16th and 52th PMU brigades have become relevant in the Tal Afar area.¹⁰⁶⁹
- **Lalish Regiment:** A Yezidi unit which does not have a ‘contentious relationship’ with PMF leadership, but does not receive as much support as Shia groups.¹⁰⁷⁰
- **Ninewa Guards (Haras Ninewa):** a largely Sunni unit, led by the former Governor Ateel Nujaifi, trained by the Turkish Army in Bashiqa Camp north-east of Mosul.¹⁰⁷¹ According to a July 2018 International Crisis Group report ‘former Governor Atheel al Nujaifi employs his Ninewa Guards, which at times receive salaries from the Hashd commission’. The Ninewa Guards were formed to fight ISIL but serve more to provide protection for Nujaifi.¹⁰⁷²

Non local:

- **Ali al-Akbar Brigade:** This is a unit loyal to Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has a significant presence in western Ninewa (Tal Afar and the Jazeera Desert).¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁶² Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: July 14 – 20, 2017, 20 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), Acronym Reference Guide

¹⁰⁶⁷ Aymenn, Jawad Al-Tamimi, Hashd Brigade Numbers Index, 31 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ahn, J., et. al, The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 19-20; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, Hashd Brigade Numbers Index, 31 October 2017, [url](#); Knights, M., Confidence and Security-Building Measures in the Nineveh Plains, 14 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ahn, J., et. al, The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁷¹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 20, 24

¹⁰⁷² International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁷³ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 21

- **Badr Organization, AAH and KH:** These large non-local PMU are present in Ninewa and have significant influence over many of the smaller local groups, but their limited presence prevents them from directly controlling territory. These Iranian proxy groups are the main link between the national PMU umbrella and the local Shia Hashd groups. Their attempts to recruit among the local Sunni population have proven largely ineffective. Despite their lack of overt presence, they still have to be seen as major players in the governorate.¹⁰⁷⁴

Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMF, Hashd al-Asha'ari)

The TMF are locally recruited, primarily Sunni militias often from the Shamar and Jabour tribes. The separation between NSS- and Popular Mobilisation Committee-administered militias has to do with the US-support for the Hashd al-Asha'ari-programme: the US refuses to directly cooperate with Iranian-directed PMU-units, and moreover, the Sunni tribes do not want to be marginalised by the predominantly Shia PMU. The individual TMF units are limited to 100-300 fighters, because Baghdad is hesitating to create larger Sunni tribal forces which could be challenging state control in the area.¹⁰⁷⁵

Kurdistan Regional Government Security Forces

KDP Peshmerga

In October 2017, the Peshmerga were forced to retreat from almost all of the disputed areas in Ninewa they had occupied in 2014.¹⁰⁷⁶ According to sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI the Peshmerga are 'no longer present in the disputed areas or the rest of Iraq'.¹⁰⁷⁷

KDP Asayish

The Asayish is the intelligence agency of the KRG.¹⁰⁷⁸ The Asayish plays a security role in some areas of Ninewa, like the Zummar sub-district near the border to the KRI.¹⁰⁷⁹ According to sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI the Asayish are 'no longer present in the disputed areas or the rest of Iraq'.¹⁰⁸⁰

Militias aligned with the KRG

Jazeera Brigade

A Sunni tribal unit, primarily from Rabia and Zummar. The first Sunni unit working together with the KRG. They wear Kurdish flags and Zerevani patches.¹⁰⁸¹ They are recruited of the Jibbour, Juhaysh Mu'amara, Sharabi, and Shamar tribes. The unit is about 2 000 men strong.¹⁰⁸² The Jazeera Brigade reports to the Zerevani.¹⁰⁸³

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁰⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰⁷⁸ Iraq, Kurdistan Region, Kurdistan Regional Security Council – General Security (Asayish), n.d. [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Zummar, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰⁸¹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p.22

¹⁰⁸² Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Zummar, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸³ Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Rabi'a, GPPI, 4 August 2017, [url](#)

Ninewa Plains Force (NPF)

The NPF are a Christian unit in the Ninewa Plains, they are ‘officially considered part of the KRG security forces by the Ministry of Peshmerga’, along with the Ninewa Plains Guard Forces (NPGF) described below.¹⁰⁸⁴ The NPF is aligned with the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party. Romeo Hakari is the leader of the NPF and the Secretary General of the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party.¹⁰⁸⁵ They are a small force of 50-100 auxiliary fighters linked to the KDP-Peshmerga.¹⁰⁸⁶

Ezidkhan Defense Force (Hêza Parastina Ezidkhane, HPE)

The Yezidi HPE was partnered with the KRG before the retreat of the Kurdish forces after the referendum fallout in October 2017. The HPE leader Haider Sesho (Haidar Saso) was arrested on orders of the former Kurdish President Masoud Barzani, and only released after pledging allegiance to the KDP. The HPE has been displaced by the PMU Lalish Regiment, another Yezidi group.¹⁰⁸⁷ Sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI identified Ezidkhan Protection Force (HPE) and the Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS) [seen as PKK affiliated] as the two security actors that control most of Sinjar district. The HPE ‘seems to work within the quite open PMU system’.¹⁰⁸⁸

Rojava Peshmerga

The Rojava Peshmerga is a Syrian militia active along the Iraqi-Syrian border, and it has conducted attacks into Sinjar. The group has cooperated with the KDP and Turkish forces in targeting PKK-affiliated groups in western Ninewa.¹⁰⁸⁹ The group was also manning smaller checkpoints along the main route from the KRI to Sinjar in 2017.¹⁰⁹⁰

Ninewa Plains Guard Force (NPGF)

The NPGF are the largest pro-KRG Christian militia and based in Qaraqosh. They are officially part of the KDP Zerevani.¹⁰⁹¹ They are a long-standing force in the area since 2004 and are supported by the KDP.¹⁰⁹²

Dwekh Nawsha

Dwekh Nawsha is a Christian militia, aligned with the Assyrian Patriotic Party.¹⁰⁹³ The group is mostly operating near Tel as Soqf, north of Mosul. They only have a small number of fighters, estimates range from 50-100 men, and include also a few international volunteers. They receive weapons and funding from the KDP, but are not officially integrated in the Kurdish forces.¹⁰⁹⁴

¹⁰⁸⁴ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁸⁵ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁸⁶ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁸⁸ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23; Kurdistan24, Clashes stop between Rojava Peshmerga, PKK affiliate fighters in Sinjar, 3 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁰ Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Rabi’a, GPPI, 4 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹¹ Gaston, E., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District, 5 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹² Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁹³ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹⁰⁹⁴ Gaston, E., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District, 5 August 2017, [url](#)

Non-Aligned Militias

Sinjar Protection Units (Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê, YBS)

The YBS is a Yezidi PKK affiliate group in Sinjar.¹⁰⁹⁵ Sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI identified Ezidkhan Protection Force (HPE) and the Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS) as the two security actors that control most of Sinjar district. The YBS is widely considered to be affiliated to the PKK.¹⁰⁹⁶ The Yezidi forces are predominantly located in the Sinjar area. They have the same pattern of affiliation as the other minority forces, mainly to the KDP, PMU, and at some point to the PKK.¹⁰⁹⁷

Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK)

The PKK, a terrorist organisation designated by the European Union¹⁰⁹⁸, has a presence in Sinjar, but Landinfo writes in its report on the security situation in Ninewa that, according to sources Landinfo has talked to, the PKK no longer operates in Sinjar, but rather through the YBS.¹⁰⁹⁹ On 18 November 2018, a spokesman for the KRG, Safin Dzayi, declared to Anadolu Agency that the PKK's ongoing presence in Sinjar is 'unacceptable'.¹¹⁰⁰

'Fake Hashd'

Because of the number and diversity of militias, communities often lack the ability to determine whether armed groups are acting under the supervision of a legitimate authority. Militias and criminal organisations within Ninewa take advantage of this ambiguity and claim to be 'Hashd' to justify their actions, or even groups within the PMU framework have dissociated themselves from the PMU during criminal activity or sectarian violence.¹¹⁰¹

Foreign Security Services

The three primary foreign actors involved in Ninewa are Iran, Turkey and the International Coalition to Defeat ISIL. Iran is involved through its Quds Force, a division of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is typically embedded with some of the main Shia PMU units in an advising and assisting capacity. Turkey has a presence through the Turkish Armed Forces TSK, which run a camp near Bashiqa (the town is under ISF control).¹¹⁰² Turkey conducted airstrikes in Sinjar on different occasions in 2018.¹¹⁰³ The International Coalition is partnered with the formal ISF. In Ninewa, the US military base in Qayara (Q-West) continues to be a major logistical hub.¹¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁹⁵ US, USCIRF, *Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The Hopes and Fears of Religious Minorities In Northern Iraq*, May 2017, [url](#), p. 29; Ahn, J. et al., *The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq*, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁹⁶ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, *Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)*, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁹⁷ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., *The Global public Policy Institute, Iraq After ISIL*, March 2018, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁰⁹⁸ Daily Sabah, *European Court of Justice rules against PKK, keeps group on terror list*, 16 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁹ Norway, Landinfo, *Irak: Ninewa provins – sikkerhetssituasjonen per oktober 2018 [Ninewa governorate – security situation]*, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹⁰⁰ Daily Sabah, *KRG: PKK presence in Iraq's Sinjar 'unacceptable'*, 19 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰¹ Ahn, J. et al., *The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq*, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹¹⁰² Ahn, J. et al., *The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq*, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹⁰³ Al Monitor, *Turkish airstrikes hit Iraq as Erdogan calls for draining 'terror swamp'*, 11 June 2018, [url](#); Rudaw, *Turkey strikes YBS vehicles in Shingal, killing local PKK leader*, 15 August 2018, [url](#); VOA, *Iraq Summons Turkish Ambassador Over Airstrikes*, 14 December 2018, [url](#); Hürriyet, *Turkish military conducts airstrikes in northern Iraq*, 14 December 2014, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁴ Ahn, J. et al., *The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq*, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 24-25

ISIL Insurgents

Although by the end of 2017, ISIL did not control any territory in Iraq¹¹⁰⁵, it continues to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad).¹¹⁰⁶

In January 2019 ISW assessed that in rural parts of Mosul District in Ninewa 'ISIL exerts a great deal of physical and psychological pressure over populations even if it does not meet the doctrinal definition of control set by ISW.¹¹⁰⁷ ISIL cannot hold terrain in these districts but we observe a number of indicators that ISIL is contesting control with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). These indicators include the abandonment of populated villages, destruction of agricultural products and infrastructure, repeated raids, and assassinations which target the local social hierarchy'. ISW further noted that in these areas 'civilians cannot rely upon security services for adequate protection.'¹¹⁰⁸

In December 2018 Michael Knights assesses that based on ISIL activity data and operating patterns, the group has 'permanently operating attack cells in at least 27 areas of Iraq', which in Ninewa include Mosul city, Qayyarah, Hatra, and the Iraq-Turkey pipeline corridor south-west of Mosul, Badush, and Sinjar/Syrian border in Ninewa.¹¹⁰⁹ The same source further stated that 'in areas like rural Kirkuk, southern Ninewa, Diyala, and even areas near Baghdad like Tarmiyah, the reality is that the Islamic State still rules the night, meaning that key parts of the country have only really been liberated for portions of each day.'¹¹¹⁰

According to a Jamestown Foundation January 2019 analysis 'Iraqi sources estimated that, in Mosul alone, there are at least 300 IS fighters in sleeper cells, some likely within IDP camps, who are ready to move when the opportunity arises.'¹¹¹¹

Sources interviewed by DIS/Landinfo during their April 2018 FFM to KRI noted that ISIL does no control territory in Ninewa governorate. However, ISIL presence is believed to be 'concentrated in more remote areas close to the Iraq-Syria border and in and in the Badoush area between Mosul and Tel Afar'. ISIL sleeper cells have been reported in Ninewa in Mosul and surrounding villages. Attacks are carried during the night taking the form of explosions, killings, and assassinations.¹¹¹² Hoshang Mohamed, Director General, Ministry of the Interior, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC), KRI assessed that in Ninewa and Kirkuk governorates ISIL cells are active during the night carrying out attacks on a regular basis which include explosions, killings, and assassinations.¹¹¹³

¹¹⁰⁵ UN Security Council, Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2018/770], 16 August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹¹⁰⁷ Regarding their methodology ISW notes the following: 'ISW employs a rigorous methodology to assess control of terrain which conforms to the doctrinal definitions used by the U.S. Armed Forces. ISW defines control zones as areas in which ISIL controls and governs populations - i.e. areas where the group exerts physical and psychological pressure to ensure that groups and individuals respond as directed'. ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

¹¹⁰⁸ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

¹¹⁰⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹¹¹ Jamestown Foundation: Conditions in Mosul Ripen for Return of Islamic State; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 1, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹² Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹¹³ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 80

Regarding ISIL's capacity to commit violence sources from US Consulate in Erbil and USAID noted that 'especially in Kirkuk, ISIS is more a threat to the security actors and the authorities than it is a threat to the civilian population, while in Ninewa, Diyala and Anbar ISIS would also be a threat to the civilian population.'¹¹¹⁴

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures for 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	1 466	692	2 158
2015	755	144	899
2016	1 701	1 090	2 791
2017	1 514	1 107	2 621
2018	86	96	182
	5 522	3 129	8 651
UNAMI: Ninewa casualties¹¹¹⁵			

IBC data on civilians killed in 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Ninewa governorate is the governorate with the highest intensity of violence (civilians killed/100k) in 2017 and again in 2018, though the rate dropped from 265.15/100k to 46.46/100k in 2018. In 2018 IBC data for Ninewa governorate recorded 217 security-related incidents leading to 1 596 civilian deaths, a significant decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 600 incidents leading to 9 211 civilian deaths.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Mosul (including Hamdaniya & Tilkaif) – 183 leading to 1 369 civilian deaths, followed by Sinjar – 14 security incidents leading to 95 civilian deaths and Telafar – 8 incidents leading to 96 civilian deaths. The highest rate of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of population) was recorded in Sinjar (113.00), followed by Mosul (61.99) and Telafar (19.98).

¹¹¹⁴ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 75

¹¹¹⁵ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on monthly [UNAMI casualty figures](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq's Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Ninewa governorate involved executions/summary killing (44.7 %), followed by gunfire (32.3 %) and improvised explosive devices (IED) (18.9 %).¹¹¹⁶

Security incidents and activity

Insurgent violence after the ISIL collapse remained high in Ninewa, with figures from October to December 2017 showing that ISF suffered heavier casualties in Ninewa than in any other governorate.¹¹¹⁷ During 2018 ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad).¹¹¹⁸

According to M. Knights, writing in December 2018, ISIL has focused on rural insurgency in Ninewa after losing Mosul. During 2018, ISIL focus areas in the governorate included ‘the desert districts south of Mosul such as Qayyarah, Hatra, Ash Shura, the south-western outer urban sprawl of Mosul city (Atshana, Sahaji, and Tall Zallat), and the desert located between the Baghdad-Mosul highway and the Iraq-Turkey Pipeline—the so-called Jurn Corridor (named after two notorious villages in the area)’.¹¹¹⁹

Although considered small in scale, the rural insurgency produced 62 % ‘quality attacks’ during the first 10 months of 2018, particularly 37 assassinations of local leaders, including 17 village *mukhtars* and a Tribal Resistance Force leader.¹¹²⁰

For the first 10 months of 2018 Michael Knights recorded 17.1 ISIL attacks per month in Ninewa and 3.0 in Mosul city¹¹²¹, a significant decrease from the analyst’s data sets for 2011-2013. M. Knights assessed that the main reason for the decrease is the inactivity of ISIL in Mosul, a traditional spot for insurgent attacks in the governorate. Knights further noted that during the year Tel Afar city, ISIL’s second historic hub in Ninewa, ‘witnessed practically no visible insurgent activity at all’.¹¹²²

Referring to ISIL’s activity in Ninewa during 2018 J. Wing stated that ‘there was a steady number of shootings with the security forces, especially during the first half of the year. The group didn’t start attacking towns until the end of the year, which also coincided with 4 suicide-car bombings’.¹¹²³

According to the UN Security Council, writing in October 2018, ISIL targeted and killed local mayors in Ninewa, accusing them of providing information on their movements to the authorities. Between 1 January and 18 August 2018 seven mayors were killed and two other injured in Ninewa.¹¹²⁴ ISIL also targeted police and members of PMUs in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din governorates.¹¹²⁵

¹¹¹⁶ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

¹¹¹⁷ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹¹⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹¹¹⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹²⁰ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹²¹ Incident data is drawn from the author’s geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) dataset up to the end of October 2018. ‘The dataset includes non-duplicative inputs from open source reporting, diplomatic security data, private security company incident data, Iraqi incident data, and U.S. government inputs’. See Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

¹¹²² Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

¹¹²³ Wing, J., Review Of Security Trends In Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹²⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 9

The UN Security Council stated that IED and small arms fire were the leading causes of civilian casualties during August – October 2018. IED attacks were often claimed by ISIL and ‘pose a threat to civilians in Baghdad, Salah al-Din, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar and Sulaymaniyah Governorates’. During the last part of 2018 ISIL began to use ‘heavily armed, technical-mounted raiding groups in southern Nineveh, akin to special forces, capable of out-gunning isolated outposts and making highways and village access roads too dangerous to use’.¹¹²⁶

In a July 2018 report the UN Security Council stated that although security forces are continuing operations to clear ISIL remnants in Tall Afar, Ba’aj and Sinjar districts of Ninewa, ‘asymmetric attacks have continued in Ninawa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala and Baghdad governorates, with ISIL targeting security forces and community leaders and also destroying farms and residential buildings.’¹¹²⁷

Security raids were conducted in Mosul and surrounding areas that led to the arrest and killing of several ISIL fighters, including women fighters. In two separate operations during August 2018 the local police arrested persons suspected of being affiliated with ISIL: on 13 August five women were arrested in eastern Mosul and on 26 August another 41 persons, including women, were arrested in Badush and Qayyraj subdistricts of Mosul. An ISIL explosives factory was also discovered in Sinjar district.¹¹²⁸ In October 2018 Iraqi security operations against ISIL were reported to be ongoing in Ninewa, Anbar, Diyala, and Salah al-Din.¹¹²⁹ On 14 November 2018 Iraqi forces killed over 20 ISIL militants during a military operation in Badush heights in Ninewa. Another 14 ISIL militants were reported to be arrested by security forces during an operation in the governorate.¹¹³⁰

In January 2018 ISIL small-scale regular attacks were reported along the Syrian border and to the south of Mosul.¹¹³¹ In its January 2018 causality figures report for Iraq UNAMI listed Ninewa amongst the worst affected governorates by acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict.¹¹³² On 7 January the mayor of al-Rashidiya town was killed by unidentified gunmen near his house in al-Qubba region, north of Mosul.¹¹³³ On 29 January authorities announced that 10 ISIL militants were killed while trying to infiltrate into a region south of Mosul.¹¹³⁴

During February 2018 insurgent activities were also reported in western and southern Ninewa.¹¹³⁵ According to the UN Security Council ‘civilians also continued to be targeted by unknown gunmen in Mosul district: on 21 February, in eastern Mosul, gunmen stopped the car of the local *mukhtar* and shot him dead. The perpetrators are suspected of being affiliated with ISIL.’¹¹³⁶ On 20 February 2018 it was reported that in western Mosul an IED was detonated inside the house of a family of IDPs that have just returned, killing two persons.¹¹³⁷ On 25 February 2018 Iraqi troops killed 30 ISIL militants who were hiding in a cave in Al-Ba’aj district, west of Mosul.¹¹³⁸

¹¹²⁶ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹¹²⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2367 (2017); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/677], 9 July 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹²⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹²⁹ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

¹¹³⁰ Iraqi News, Iraqi forces kill over 20 Islamic State militants in Nineveh, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ Wing, J., Violence Up in Iraq, Jan 2018, Musings on Iraq [weblog], 2 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³² UNAMI, Press Release: UN Casualty Figures for Iraq for the Month of January 2018, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³³ Iraqi News, Mayor killed in armed attack, north of Mosul: Police, 7 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ Iraqi News, Ten Islamic State members, attempting infiltration, killed, south of Mosul, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁵ Wing, J., March 2018 the return of the Islamic State insurgency, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹³⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹³⁸ Iraqi News, Iraqi troops kill 30 Islamic State militants while hiding inside Mosul cave, 25 February 2018, [url](#)

In February and March 2018 it was assessed that ISIL increased its attempts to assassinate and kidnap tribal sheikhs from the Jabour tribe which are one of the main sources of local resistance against ISIL.¹¹³⁹ In one such attack on 12 March 2018 ISIL militants attacked the house of a tribal sheik near Qayyara, killing him and six other persons.¹¹⁴⁰ In another incident on 5 March it was reported that four policemen were killed in Mosul following a clash with ISIL militants.¹¹⁴¹

On 20 April 2018 Iraqi troops repelled the attack of a group of ISIL fighters on the Iraqi-Syrian border near Rabei-a town, north-west of Mosul, killing 18 ISIL militants during the clash.¹¹⁴² On 28 April 2018 a top ISIL leader was arrested after a security operation in Al Entesar district in eastern Mosul.¹¹⁴³

In the run-up to the May 2018 parliamentary elections, Faruq Mohammed al-Zarzw, a candidate in Ninewa, was killed by armed men in his house in the town of Qayyara. Although ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack the spokesperson of the Supreme Judicial Court confirmed that the murder was a criminal offence and the perpetrator was identified to be the victim's son.¹¹⁴⁴ At the end of May 2018 Joel Wing reported six confrontations with insurgents leading to gun battles in Ninewa.¹¹⁴⁵

On 9 June 2018 two policemen were killed in an armed clash with ISIL militants in al-Hadar district, south of Mosul.¹¹⁴⁶ Reporting on July 2018, J. Wing assessed that ISIL was active along the Syrian border and occasional clashes occur.¹¹⁴⁷ On 30 August 2018 ISIL militants attacked the house of a senior leader of the PMUs in al-Shoura town, south of Mosul, killing him and seven members of his family.¹¹⁴⁸

The UN Security Council noted that 'on 15 August (2018), an armed group shot and killed the mayor of the Tall al-Rumman neighbourhood in western Mosul. Similarly, on 17 August, two masked gunmen on a motorbike shot and killed the mayor of the Yarmuk neighbourhood in western Mosul.'¹¹⁴⁹ On 21 September ISIL militants killed a mayor and another civilian in Hatra region.¹¹⁵⁰ In another armed attack that took place on 23 September a mayor was killed by ISIL militants south of Mosul.¹¹⁵¹

On 23 October at least six people were killed, including two soldiers, and 30 injured in a car bomb blast near a market area in the town of Qayyara. The military commander in Mosul Major-General Najim al-Jabouri accused ISIL of carrying out the attack.¹¹⁵² On 8 November, a car bomb explosion near a popular restaurant on Abu Layla street in Mosul killed four people and injured 12 others, reportedly, all were civilians.¹¹⁵³ On 15 November, an IED blast on the road to Badush, north-west of Mosul, took the lives of two civilians and a policeman, and four Iraqi schoolboys were killed and seven wounded in an explosive attack on a school bus in a district south of Mosul on 22 November.¹¹⁵⁴

In December 2018 ISIL claimed responsibility for a car bombing in Tel Afar that killed two people and injured 11 others. The incident was the first such attack recorded since the city was liberated in August 2017.¹¹⁵⁵

¹¹³⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁴⁰ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁴¹ Iraqi News, Four policemen killed in confrontation with Islamic State in Mosul, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴² Iraqi News, 18 Islamic State members killed as Iraqi troops thwart attack on borders with Syria, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴³ National (The), Top ISIS leader arrested in Mosul, 29 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ Kurdistan24, UPDATE: Assassination, car accident brings Iraqi candidate death count to five, 07 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁵ Wing, J., Security in Iraq largely unchanged in May 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ Iraqi News, Islamic State's media official apprehended in Mosul, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁷ Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁸ Iraqi News, Islamic State kills security leader, seven of his family members, south of Mosul, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹⁵⁰ Iraqi News, Mayor killed, son injured in Islamic State attack, southwest of Mosul, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ Iraqi News, Mayor killed in armed attack by Islamic State, south of Mosul, 23 September 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵² Reuters, Car bomb kills six, wounds 30 near Iraq's Mosul, 23 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ EPIC, ISHM 184, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁴ Iraqi News, Bomb blast kills, wounds three Iraqis in Mosul, 15 November 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, 11 Iraqi students killed, wounded as bomb blast targets school bus in Mosul, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ RFE/RL, Islamic State Claims Responsibility For Iraq Car-Bomb Attack, 25 December 2018, [url](#)

State's ability to secure law and order

According to DIS/Landinfo, the ISF appears to be the strongest security actor in the governorate, but are 'relatively weak' and do not have control over every armed actors, as competing security actors are trying to assert dominance in their areas of control and the governorate is split into three control zones: Mosul city is controlled by local police, the outskirts involve PMU militias and local militias and the rest is covered by the ISF.¹¹⁵⁶ The ISF reportedly controls some areas in the south, while the PMUs control areas in the east.¹¹⁵⁷ In a November 2018 article Foreign Policy pointed out that in Sinjar the presence of militias threatens the region's stability and is 'preventing reconstruction, demining, and the safe return of Yazidis to their homes'.¹¹⁵⁸ Clashes between PMUs and regular security forces are reported to occur frequently, such as in February 2018 when a checkpoint dispute between Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada fighters with soldiers of the army's 8th Regiment in western Mosul led to an exchange of fire between the units and 'the Kataeb briefly detaining four of the regiment's troops on questionable authority'.¹¹⁵⁹ Sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI pointed out that in Mosul 'the perpetrators of the violence are the multiple armed groups that are present as well as ISIS remnants cells', and that security incidents are mostly a result of organised criminal activities.¹¹⁶⁰ According to Kirkuk Now representatives 'the criminal groups consist of former members of the armed groups. In some cases it looks like that members of the PMUs can be security actors by day and criminals by night.'¹¹⁶¹

ISF and PMUs controlling Ninewa are accused of using their power for gaining revenue through illegal activities which in turn weakens their combat capabilities and creates uncertainty in the local community.¹¹⁶² In a July 2018 report the International Crisis Group noted that residents claimed that PMUs operating in Mosul 'were reaping illicit profit, whether through extortion or looting'.¹¹⁶³ The analysts Robin Beaumont and Arthur Quesnay state that in northern Iraq the state authorities operate in parallel with the PMUs, which are taking over public institutions and embezzle the funding these institutions receive from the state. Drawing their legitimacy from the 'price paid by the martyrs' who were killed in the battle against ISIL, PMUs are taking control of territory and state institutions leading to a situation where 'each sub-district has become the sphere of influence of a given militia'.¹¹⁶⁴

Under the designation Fake Hashd, all kind of actors are comprised, who are exploiting the popularity of the Hashd (PMU) phenomenon and are creating all kinds of schemes or situations to make money, such as the establishment of irregular checkpoints to collect bribes, or other kinds of criminal activities. Sometimes, people join a group, believing it is a regular PMU, only to find out later that it is fake.¹¹⁶⁵

In December 2018 the U.S. administration announced the withdrawal of its troops from Syria is considered by officials and experts to accelerate ISIL's resurgence in both Syria and Iraq.¹¹⁶⁶ A January

¹¹⁵⁶ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹¹⁵⁷ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹¹⁵⁸ FP, ISIS May Be Gone, But Iraq's Yazidis Are Still Suffering, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹¹⁶⁰ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹⁶¹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹¹⁶² Jamestown Foundation, Conditions in Mosul Ripen for Return of Islamic State; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 1, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶³ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹¹⁶⁴ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁵ Rise Foundation, Mosul and Tel Afar Context Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 21

¹¹⁶⁶ Washington Post (The), The Islamic State remains a deadly insurgent force, analysts say, despite Trump's claim it has been defeated, 19 December 2018, [url](#)

2019 Jamestown Foundation analysis stated that ‘there has been no real work to address the root causes that led to IS’ rise, and Iraq’s Shia-led federal government has not prioritized Mosul. The U.S. administration’s recent decision to withdraw from Syria makes the situation in Mosul and Ninawa even more relevant for the efforts to defeat IS completely.’¹¹⁶⁷

Displacement and return

As of December 2018, 1 073 994 individuals from Ninewa remained displaced, out of which 539 436 were displaced inside the governorate.¹¹⁶⁸ According to IOM December 2018 data Ninewa governorate ranks first amongst the top governorates of return with 1 614 150.¹¹⁶⁹ UNOCHA’s 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that ‘forced and premature returns continue to be reported in Salah al-Din, Baghdad, Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa governorates, including through coercive practices, often resulting in secondary displacement.’¹¹⁷⁰

HRW noted in its annual 2018 report, published in January 2019, reports that families with perceived ISIL affiliation were prevented from returning in some areas of Ninewa.¹¹⁷¹ UNHCR also reported that tribal leaders, security actors and communities are opposing the return of families with perceived links to extremists in Ninewa, Anbar and Kirkuk.¹¹⁷² In November 2018 UNHCR reported that 175 families displaced from Al Abour village in Mosul District, Ninewa, were not allowed to return ‘until they have disowned relatives with perceived links to extremists and have been cleared by the Federal Court in Baghdad and local police. Reportedly, only 5 per cent of the families have begun the clearance process to return.’¹¹⁷³ UNHCR also reported several cases of denied returns of families accused of ISIL affiliation in Tal Afar, Ba’aj, Mosul, Haj Ali camp and Qayara.¹¹⁷⁴

At the beginning of September 2018 security forces forcibly relocated at least 22 female-headed households and families from villages near Mosul to camps in Ninewa due to their alleged affiliations with extremists.¹¹⁷⁵

The highest number of returns are towards Mosul district, followed by Tal Afar, and Al-Hamdaniya districts. Mosul has by far the most returnees with 955 140. The most returns happen within the governorate, followed by people coming back from displacement in the KRG-administered governorates Erbil and Dohuk.¹¹⁷⁶ Returns from the de facto KRG-administered district of Sheikhan and Akre are counted as intra-governorate.¹¹⁷⁷

There have reportedly been very few returns to Baaj where the Badr PMU is in control; HRW remarked that the PMU would claim that many families from Baaj were ISIL-affiliated and the PMU there issued an order that families with a first-degree relative in ISIL were not permitted to return.¹¹⁷⁸ Those who cannot return to Mosul and Tal Afar mostly relate to destruction of housing.¹¹⁷⁹

¹¹⁶⁷ Jamestown Foundation: Conditions in Mosul Ripen for Return of Islamic State; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 1, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Round 107, December 2018, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹⁶⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Round 107, December 2018, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹⁷¹ HRW, World Report 2019 - Iraq, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷² UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update – September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷³ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷⁴ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update – October 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷⁵ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update – September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷⁶ IOM, Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Round 107, December 2018, 15 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁷⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 106, October 2018, [url](#), p. 2; IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, DTM Return Dashboards, Returnees Per Governorate and District, Ninewa, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

Very few Yezidi IDPs have returned to Sinjar primarily due to the unstable security situation, the presence of different security actors in the area¹¹⁸⁰, and perceptions of insecurity.¹¹⁸¹ Moreover, the KRG is reported to hinder the return of Yezidi IDPs living in KRI to Sinjar, allegedly through pressure and incentives.¹¹⁸²

According to IOM's Return Index, from September 2018, Ninewa had a total of 238 401 returning families, that are likely to face some category of harsh conditions upon return, so-called severity conditions.¹¹⁸³ The majority of returning families in Ninewa facing severity conditions (54 %) fall under the medium category, followed by 29 % belonging to the low severity category. Only 15 % of the return families are likely to face high severity conditions on return, followed by a very small segment (2 %) that are likely to face very high severity conditions upon return.¹¹⁸⁴ Hotspots of severity include Sinjar Centre, Telafar Centre, West Mosul, Al-Ba'aj, and the desert strip of Al-Tal, Hatra, and Muhalabiya in Ninewa governorate. IOM assessed that Sinjar is the district with the highest number of locations with very high severity of conditions out of assessed locations.¹¹⁸⁵ According to IOM, writing in November 2018, of all areas of return in Iraq, Sinjar is the one where the IDPs are the least willing to return within the following year.¹¹⁸⁶ IOM's ILA III, published in January 2019, listed a number of 'conflict hotspots' for returnees, where there was a higher incidence of physical violence or threats between groups. In Ninewa, they were in Raua, Shikhan, Sinjar, Telafar.¹¹⁸⁷

According to UNOCHA writing in November 2018 the highest number of people in need are in Ninewa with 2 168 222.¹¹⁸⁸

During a September 2018 research focusing on the destruction of Iraq's rural environment and the subsequent effects in the area around Sinjar district in Ninewa, AI 'found evidence that IS deliberately targeted the rural environment that underpins the livelihoods of people living off the land'. The area around Sinjar was considered to have suffered some of the most extensive destruction: irrigation wells were often sabotaged with rubble, oil, or other foreign objects, and pumps, cables, generators and transformers stolen or destroyed. IS also burnt or chopped down orchards and pulled down and stole vital electricity lines. Although Iraq adopted a reconstruction plan in 2018 AI observed that the government hasn't managed to 'meaningfully address the full scale of destruction of agricultural livelihoods or implement plans to assist farmers to rebuild Iraq's shattered land and the livelihoods it enables'.¹¹⁸⁹ Safe water remains a significant concern for the population in areas of return.¹¹⁹⁰

The level of destruction is high in West Mosul¹¹⁹¹ and Sinjar¹¹⁹², but also other areas in the governorate suffered heavy damage, like the Christian towns in Hamdaniya district, Zummar and Rabia sub-districts

¹¹⁸⁰ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 32; Rudaw, Exclusive: Nobel winner Nadia Murad says Yezidis will return when Shingal is safe. 9 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹¹⁸² Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹¹⁸³ IOM's Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See: IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1- Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-5

¹¹⁸⁴ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁸⁵ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 8

¹¹⁸⁶ IOM, Reasons to Remain: Categorizing Protracted Displacement in Iraq, November 2018, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹⁸⁷ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 53

¹¹⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁸⁹ AI, Dead land: Islamic State's deliberate destruction of Iraq's farmland [MDE 14/9510/2018], 13 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹¹⁹⁰ WHO, Iraq Humanitarian Emergency Situation Report Issue number 8 01 September– 30 September 2018, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁹¹ UNITAR, UNOSAT, Damage assessment of Old City, Mosul, Ninawa Governorate, Iraq (18 July 2017), 25 July 2017, [url](#); Washington Post (The), How war ravaged the city of Mosul, in satellite images, 14 July 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁹² UNITAR, UNOSAT, Damage assessment of Sinjar area, Nineveh Province, Iraq, 11 December 2015, [url](#)

of Tal Afar and Qayara¹¹⁹³, and particularly Ba'aj, reportedly the town with the highest level of destruction in all Iraq.¹¹⁹⁴ Not only residential buildings suffered damage, also the infrastructure suffered and partially has to be rebuilt. For instance, in the town of Ba'aj, the only hospital and all the primary health care centres were destroyed or damaged due to the conflict. Prior to the crisis, Ba'aj town had one functional hospital and eleven primary health care centres, according to the World Health Organization.¹¹⁹⁵ In West Mosul, WHO supported the relocation of two field hospitals from other towns. Three health facilities in West Mosul are destroyed, while 23 are partially damaged. In 2017, 17 out of 35 attacks on health workers and hospitals in Iraq had occurred in Ninewa province in relation to the fight to retake Mosul; this included hospitals being used and occupied by ISIL, attacks on facilities and workers, and destruction of hospitals by ISIL's retreating forces.¹¹⁹⁶

Returns of IDPs to Mosul are taking place but the western part is 'still completely destroyed and almost no one returns to this part of the city. Because of the destruction, there is a lack of housing. Furthermore, there are still many dead bodies in the ruins and the cleaning process have been halted several times because of risk of viruses and other diseases.'¹¹⁹⁷ The returns to Sinjar are also hindered by the severe destruction in the area, and the lack of infrastructure and services for the population. IOM assessed Sinjar centres as one of the areas where it is most difficult to return to in Iraq.¹¹⁹⁸

The UN Security Council noted in July 2018 that around 18 742 explosive hazards have been removed from Mosul and Fallujah since the beginning of 2018. In the Khatunyah neighbourhood of Mosul authorities discovered several weapons and ammunition manufacturing facilities suspected to be ISIL's.¹¹⁹⁹ In July 2018 Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion stated that 8 million tons of explosive remnants remain in Mosul city. Due to the presence of explosive remnants accidents are frequent and some areas of the city remained inaccessible.¹²⁰⁰

Road security

According to sources interviewed during the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI 'on the road from Mosul to Sinjar, travelling is more difficult since there are approximately 30 checkpoints, each manned by different groups and the level of control and unpredictability varies from each group.'¹²⁰¹

In June 2018 Iraqi troops killed 17 ISIL fighters as they set a fake checkpoint on the road linking Hatra and Mosul, with the aim to kidnap civilians.¹²⁰² In August 2018 the Prime Minister asked the army to provide better road security on the Shingal-Talasqaf-Batnaya-Mosul road, connecting the Yazidi city of Shingal to Mosul.¹²⁰³ In December 2018 the Iraqi government decided to remove all customs checkpoints on intra-provincial roads but the measure has not been fully implemented. The road that

¹¹⁹³ Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Rabi'a, GPPI, 4 August 2017, [url](#); Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Zummar, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#); Gaston, E., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District, GPPI, 5 August 2017, [url](#); Gaston, E., GPPI, Iraq after ISIL: Qayyara, GPPI, 2 August 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁴ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹⁹⁵ WHO, More primary health care reach returnees in remote areas of Ninewa, 13 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁶ Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, Violence on the Front Lines: Attacks on Health Care in 2017, 21 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 22-23

¹¹⁹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹¹⁹⁸ IOM, Return Index, Findings Round 1, Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹⁹⁹ UN Security Council: Implementation of resolution 2367 (2017); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/677], 9 July 2018, [url](#), p. 11

¹²⁰⁰ Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion, 1st anniversary of the liberation of Mosul: a city under siege by improvised explosive devices and bombs, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 27

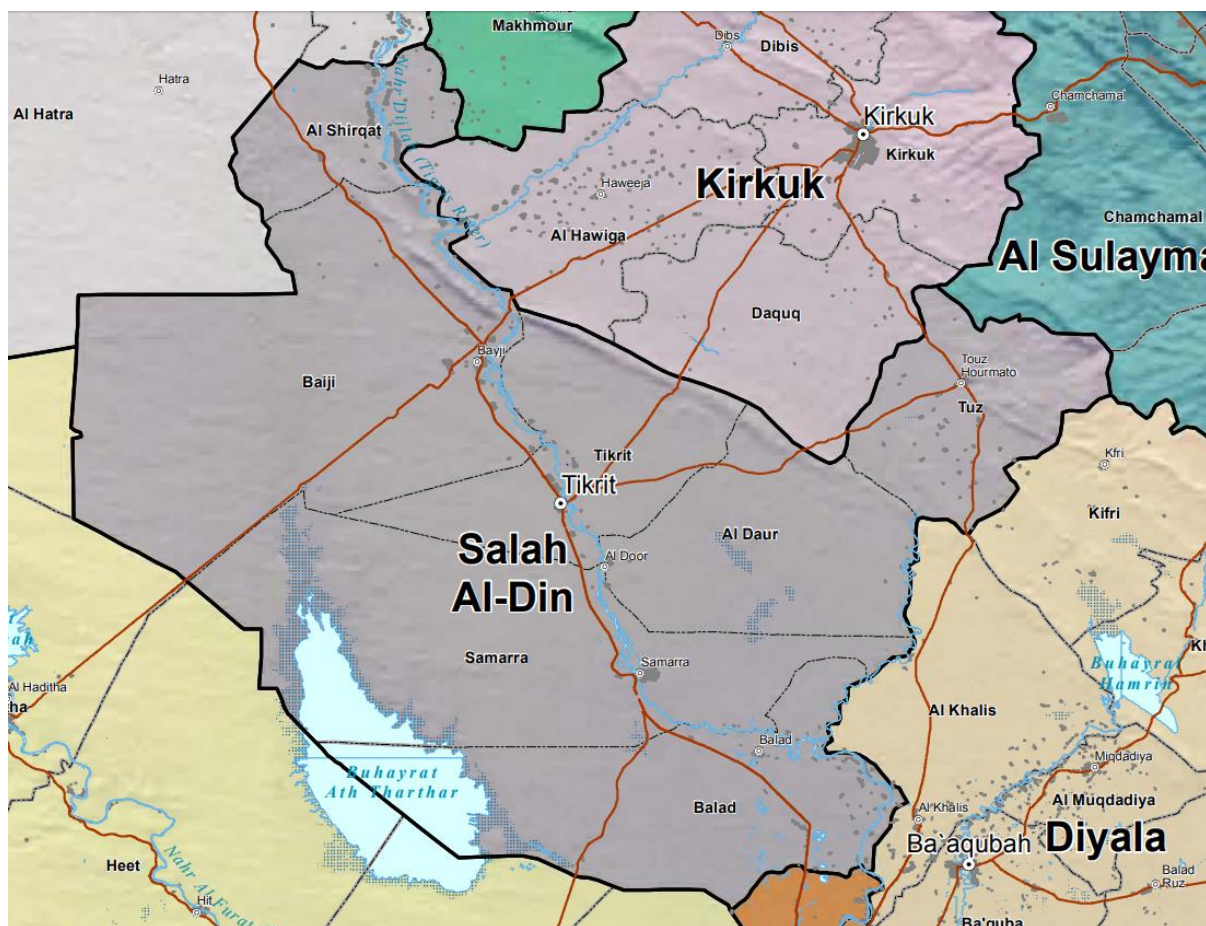
¹²⁰² Iraqi News, 17 Islamic State militants killed as they set fake checkpoint to kidnap civilians, near Mosul, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ Rudaw, Abadi asks army to provide better road security around Mosul, 10 August 2018, [url](#)

links Dohuk to Mosul is reported to have multiple checkpoints manned by government and armed groups, who hamper trade.¹²⁰⁴

¹²⁰⁴ Rudaw, Multiple checkpoints, levies hamper trade on Mosul road, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

2.6 Salah al-Din



Map 12: Salah al-Din with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹²⁰⁵

General description of the governorate

Salah al-Din has an estimated population of 1 595 235.¹²⁰⁶ The governorate is divided into eight districts: Al-Dour, al-Shirqat, al-Faris, Balad, Baiji, Tooz, Samarra and Tikrit.¹²⁰⁷ Tikrit city, the governorate's capital was Saddam Hussein's place of birth.¹²⁰⁸ It has a population estimated at over 200 000 and has been viewed as an important power centre of the Sunni Arabs.¹²⁰⁹

Salah al-Din is predominantly Sunni Muslim, but also hosts a Shia Arab minority, as well as Turkmen and Kurdish minority groups.¹²¹⁰ According to an April 2018 DIS/Landinfo report 'Tuz Khurmatu district has many Turkmen towns and villages.'¹²¹¹ The governorate also houses the Shiite al-Askari Shrine in Samarra, one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam.¹²¹²

Salah al-Din is home to several Iraqi tribal confederations.¹²¹³ The confederation which is based in and around the area of Tikrit, unites a number of prominent tribes, perhaps the most notable being the Albu Nasir, which is the tribe of the former dictator Saddam Hussein and many of his closest

¹²⁰⁵ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁶ Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Salah al-Din Governorate Profile, July 2009, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁰⁸ IOM, Salah al-Din Governorate Profile, May 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁰⁹ Gaston, E., Iraq after ISIL: Tikrit and Surrounding Areas, GPPI, 29 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ IOM, Kirkuk, Ninewa & Salah al-Din, governorate profile, June 2008, [url](#), p. 3

¹²¹¹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹²¹² New York Times (The), Blast destroys shrine in Iraq, setting off sectarian fury, 22 February 2006, [url](#)

¹²¹³ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 18 January 2019

associates.¹²¹⁴ According to a 2003 report the governorate also hosted other prominent tribes, such as the Jubur (al-Shirqat), Obeid (al-Alam), al-‘Azzat (Balad), Luhayb (Sharqat) and Harb (al-Dour).¹²¹⁵

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

In the summer of 2014, ISIL captured Tooz district, the oil town of Baiji and the governorate’s capital Tikrit.¹²¹⁶ However, cities in the governorate, such as Samara, Balad and Amerli, withstood ISIL attacks and remained unconquered.¹²¹⁷

Salah al-Din governorate was the amongst the first to be liberated in the Iraqi forces’ offensive against ISIL having most of the key population centres out of ISIL’s control by mid-2015. Salah al-Din was also one of the first governorates to witness large-scale return of IDPs, with 130 000 IDPs returning in July 2015 and 360 000 by December 2016, almost all Sunni Arab. Despite ISIL’s ousting the governorate experienced ‘much higher rates of abduction, killing, forced evictions, unlawful detentions, and property destruction than other governorates’, especially against families and tribes accused of affiliation to ISIL. This development is largely attributed to the dominant role that PMU played in the governorate and in influencing existing political divisions.¹²¹⁸

Salah al-Din was also affected in the context of the change of control over the disputed territories after the Kurdish referendum on independence. The ethnically mixed city of Tuz Khurmatu in Salah al-Din¹²¹⁹ was the scene of significant clashes between Peshmerga and ISF forces.¹²²⁰ On 16 October 2017, in Tuz Khurmatu, clashes and ‘indiscriminate fighting’ broke out between Kurdish and Iraqi forces and led to the killing of over 50 civilians as well as looting of property by the local population.¹²²¹ Civilians reported that rockets, mortars, and heavy machine guns were used in densely populated areas of Tuz Khurmatu during the fighting in October between the forces and in subsequent months, civilians were killed and wounded in sporadic events.¹²²² A large number of allegations were received from the UN about destruction of property allegedly by civilians and by Turkmen armed groups who acted to intimidate residents, many of whom left the city.¹²²³ An estimated 35 000 people fled Tuz Khurmatu.¹²²⁴

During the fighting between the Kurdish and Iraqi forces local residents in Tuz Khurmatu also reported looting and arson attacks taking place between Kurds and Shia Turkmen¹²²⁵, and shops and homes were destroyed, in what AI described as targeting predominantly Kurdish areas of the town.¹²²⁶ The UN reported that 40 buildings mainly in Kurdish areas, 100 shops, and 30 homes were burned or destroyed; graffiti was reported marking homes belonging to Turkmen to prevent damage to those

¹²¹⁴ Gospodinov, I., Leiden University, *The Sunni Tribes of Iraq: Tribal consolidation, through turbulent years 2003-2009*, 2015, [url](#), p. 18

¹²¹⁵ Baram, A., *The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Sadam Tribal System*, Brookings Institution, 8 July 2003, [url](#)

¹²¹⁶ Norway, Landinfo, *Irak: Salah al-Din provins - sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli - september 2018* [Salah al Din Governorate – Security situation July-September 2018], 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹²¹⁷ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 18 January 2019

¹²¹⁸ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, *Iraq After ISIL*, March 2018, [url](#), p. 43

¹²¹⁹ According to a security analyst based in Iraq, Tuz Khurmatu is in Salah al-Din and some public sources mixed this up with Taza Khurmatu in Kirkuk when reporting on these incidents at the time. The incidents are mostly in Tuz Khourmatu (in Salah al-Din); there were no serious incidents like that in the similarly named Taza Khurmato (Kirkuk). There were also incidents in Kirkuk around that time related with the move by ISF to push Kurdish forces back out of the disputed areas into the KRI. Security analyst, 5 February 2018, Email to EASO.

¹²²⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017*, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹²²¹ HRW, *Iraq: Fighting in Disputed Territories Kills Civilians*, 20 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²²² AI, *Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson*, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²²³ AI, *Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson*, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁴ AI, *Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson*, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁵ HRW, *Iraq: Fighting in Disputed Territories Kills Civilians*, 20 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁶ AI, *Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson*, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

properties. Armed groups attacked both Kurdish and Turkmen political offices.¹²²⁷ Tensions between the two groups had risen since 2014, as many Shia Turkmen felt marginalised by the KRG government.¹²²⁸ The Iraqi forces' takeover of Kirkuk governorate gave the opportunity to Shia Turkmen groups, notably belonging to the PMUs, to retaliate against the Kurdish population.¹²²⁹ Incidents also occurred in [Kirkuk](#).

In terms of security forces, the Iraqi army, the Federal and the local police, as well as the PMUs have jointly shared control of Kirkuk governorate since October 2017¹²³⁰ as well as the Counter-Terrorism Forces.¹²³¹ The army was given control over Kirkuk city while PMUs were securing perimeters and oil fields and more 'aggressive' levying fees and controlling roads, as well as replacing Kurdish government positions with Shia Turkmen.¹²³² In Tuz Khurmatu, following the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from the disputed areas, one of Badr Organization's top commanders took over the town as the 'strongman' in the area, along with a 'personal militia' that he developed with local Turkmen Shia, who are reportedly involved in looting, arms and drugs trafficking.¹²³³

Armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces

The ISF have the overall responsibility of the security within the governorate. The ISF predominately consists of units from the army, federal police and to some extent Special Forces. In many of the rural areas the ISF are sparsely present.¹²³⁴ The contested multi-ethnic district of Tuz Khurmatu, was up until October 2017 under the control of the Kurdish Forces, PMUs and local police.¹²³⁵ After clashes between Iraqi forces, backed by the PMUs, and Kurdish forces took place in October 2017, the central government's Rapid Response Forces were deployed in January 2018.¹²³⁶ They held control of the town until September 2018, after which the unit was replaced by the regular army forces.¹²³⁷

Salah al-Din Operations Command (SDOC)

The SDOC was formed after ISIL-captured terrain in Iraq. The SDOC retains control over half of Salah al-Din including Tikrit, Baiji and al-Shirqat. It is unclear which army division will command over the SDOC. According to a December 2017 ISW report, the 20th Iraqi Army Infantry Division is proposed to command over the SDOC.¹²³⁸ No verified information could be found to date confirming the information.

¹²²⁷ UNAMI, UN Expresses Concern about Reports of Violence in Tuz Khurmatu, in Kirkuk, 19 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Independent (The), Iraq seizes Kirkuk from Kurds leaving two US allies locked in conflict and bringing end to move for independence, 16 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ Independent (The), Iraq seizes Kirkuk from Kurds leaving two US allies locked in conflict and bringing end to move for independence, 16 October 2017, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ Middle East Eye, Hunger strikes and 'hostage' situation follow fraud claims in Iraq's Kirkuk, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

¹²³¹ Middle East Eye, Hunger strikes and 'hostage' situation follow fraud claims in Iraq's Kirkuk, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

¹²³² International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹²³³ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#) p. 3

¹²³⁴ Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins-sikkerhetssituationen i perioden juli-september 2018 (Salah al-Din Governorate - Security Situation July-September 2018), 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹²³⁵ Al Shahid, Security and stability has returned to Tuz Khurmatu after months of clashes, 24 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²³⁶ Rudaw, Iraq's Rapid Response force deployed to Tuz Khurmatu, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²³⁷ Rudaw, Iraq's Rapid Response Force withdrawing from Tuz Khurmatu: official, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²³⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 22-23

Samarra Operations Command (SOC)

The SOC has responsibility over Samarra, large parts of the Jazeera desert west of Samarra and southern Salah al-Din.¹²³⁹

Federal Police (FP)

FP units are deployable and are largely influenced by the Badr Organisation. The FP have an extensive presence within the governorate, with four divisions operating in the area - the 2nd, 4th and 5th divisions.¹²⁴⁰ The 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division, is located at the Sayid Mohammed Shrine in Balad (As of May 2016), and the 13th (as of September 2016) and 15th Brigades (as of May 2017), within the 4rd Division, are located in Makhoul and al-Shathra respectively. The 5th Division has allocated three brigades to Salah al-Din, these include the 17th, 19th and 20th Brigades. This division operates alongside the FP's 6th Division, which is led by a Badr commander.¹²⁴¹

PMU Forces

Shia-backed militias

Shia PMUs played a significant role in the liberation of areas of Salah al-Din from ISIL, leading or accompanying ISF in the recapturing of Tuz, Tikrit, Dour, al-Alam, Baiji, and parts of Shirqat. Present in large number in the governorate, Shia PMUs exerted control over strategic locations and even areas they were not officially responsible for. Shia PMUs also developed their own auxiliary forces, by mobilising a local Turkmen PMU that controlled half of Tuz and establishing a number of Sunni tribal PMUs in Tikrit and surrounding areas, as well as in Baiji and Shirqat.¹²⁴² As of May 2017 the PMUs strength in Salah al-Din was estimated at between 2 000 to 3 000 fighters.¹²⁴³ According to ISW, the PMUs operate freely in the Salah al-Din Operations Command (SOC), including Tikrit, Shiqat, Tuz Khurmatu, Samara, and southern Salah al-Din, which is nominally under the control of the SOC.¹²⁴⁴

In a July 2018 report the International Crisis Group noted that due to ISIL's presence in the governorate, especially in areas such as Tuz Khurmatu, the PMU leadership 'has demanded that Abadi allow them to serve as a national guard in place of the regular security forces which proved incapable of stabilising the area and anyway are needed, like any national army, to watch the borders'.¹²⁴⁵ The same source further noted that PMUs are becoming increasingly engaged in economic activities in liberated areas, particularly in reconstruction.¹²⁴⁶

In August 2018, the deputy commander of the PMUs ordered their withdrawal from cities liberated from ISIL in Sunni-populated territories, including Salah al-Din. However, Prime Minister Abadi rescinded the order shortly afterwards, warning against efforts to 'politicize and restructure' the PMUs, without his consent as the commander in chief of all armed forces.¹²⁴⁷

In a July 2018 report the International Crisis Group noted that PMUs operating in Salah al-Din include Kataeb Asbal al-Sadr, Ansar al-Marjaeeya, the Badr Organisation, Sarayat al-Salam, AAH, Kataeb Jund

¹²³⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁴⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26

¹²⁴¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26

¹²⁴² Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., The Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44

¹²⁴³ Derzi-Horvath, A. et al., Who's who: Quick facts about local and Sub-State forces, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁴ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018

¹²⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 10, 11, 20

¹²⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), p. 20

¹²⁴⁷ Kurdistan24, Deputy Commander of Hashd al-Shaabi orders withdrawal of Shia militias from liberated areas, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Rudaw, Abadi warns Hashd commander against withdrawals, military restructuring, 24 August 2018, [url](#)

al-Imam, Kataeb Hizbollah, Sarayat Ansar al-Aqeeda, Sarayat alMukhtar and the Waad Allah Force. Their focus is on Samarra and the Shia shrines.¹²⁴⁸

According to sources interviewed by DIS/Landinfo during their April 2018 FFM to KRI in Salah al-Din there is ‘a substantive proliferation of militias and armed groups that are not under government control’ and control of area by various militias is often divided along ethnic lines. The presence of the PMUs can also consist of representation offices in the major towns.¹²⁴⁹ Representatives of Kirkuk Now, interviewed by DIS/Landinfo stated that ‘the areas of Sulaimanbek and Tuz Khurmatu are controlled by the PMUs: Badr Organisation, the AAH and a Turkmen PMU’. The city of Baiji is also controlled by PMUs.¹²⁵⁰

ISW noted in a December 2017 report that PMU forces operate freely in Salah al-Din, without coordination with the SDOC. Iranian-backed PMU militias operate out of Baiji and Speicher Air Base, north-west of Tikrit, and are posted along the Baiji-Haditha highway.¹²⁵¹ The PMU forces also proliferate the SOC area of responsibility, as it includes the al-Askari holy shrine in Samarra.¹²⁵²

The PMUs present in Salah al-Din primarily include the Badr Brigades and members of AAH, in addition to smaller groups, like the Khorasan Brigade¹²⁵³, or Jaish al-Mu’ammal and Harkat al-Nujaba.¹²⁵⁴ The PMU units usually conduct joint operations with Sunni tribal militias.¹²⁵⁵ Most checkpoints are controlled by these militias, together with a variety of security forces; like the FP and counterterrorism forces, most of them do not communicate with each other.¹²⁵⁶

The large-scale executions carried out by ISIL against Shia recruits at Camp Speicher (north of Tikrit) on 12 June 2014, where ISIL claimed they killed 1 700 men¹²⁵⁷, exacerbated sectarian tensions, often displayed in retributive actions by the PMUs against the local population, particularly the Sunni population. Reportedly, PMUs carried out retaliatory actions – including extrajudicial killings, unlawful detention and destruction of property- against Sunni Arab communities, in the wake of the Camp Speicher massacre in June 2014. Although such reports have subsided over time, there are still reports of kidnapping and abuse carried out by the southern PMUs, but also by local militias - Turkmen and Sunni tribal forces - affiliated to the PMUs.¹²⁵⁸ A mass grave was discovered in March 2018, containing the remains of 157 cadets massacred by ISIL in 2014, at Speicher Air Base in Tikrit. The discovery brings the body count of the Speicher Massacre to 1 150.¹²⁵⁹

Below is the list of major PMU-militias deployed to the governorate as listed by ISW (using data as of 2016 and 2017):

- Badr Organisation: retain the largest presence with 8 brigades- the 1st, 5th, 9th, 10th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 52nd, including the 16th Brigade Turkmen Force. The brigades are located across strategic areas, mainly the Alas and Jail oil fields, Hamreen Mountains, Makhoul Mountains, Tuz Khurmatu and al-Shirqat.

¹²⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹²⁴⁹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹²⁵⁰ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 73

¹²⁵¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 22

¹²⁵² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁵³ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁴ Al Monitor, Iraqi Police who fought for tribal PMUS won’t return to force, 11 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ Al Monitor, Iraqi Police who fought for tribal PMUS won’t return to force, 11 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁶ PBS, Political instability facilitates resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ A HRW investigation estimated that the number was closer to between 560 and 770 men. See HRW, Ruinous Aftermath Militia Abuses Following Iraq’s Recapture of Tikrit, 20 September 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁵⁸ Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44

¹²⁵⁹ Iraqi News, Iraq: bodies of 175 Speicher massacre victims found in 20 days, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

- Harkat Al-Nujaba: the militia is predominately deployed in Syria, it does however retain a presence in the Makhoul Mountains and Samarra.
- KH: militias are located in Thar Thar, Tuz Khurmatu, Tikrit, Baiji, Balad, Makhoul Mountains, Amerli and Suleiman Beg.
- AAH: retains a presence in Samarra and surrounding areas, Baiji, Tikrit, al-Shirqat, Tuz Khurmatu, Alas and Jail oil fields, Hamreen Mountains Emeril and Suleiman Beg.
- Liwa al-Hussein: are located in the Makhoul Mountain areas.
- Harkat al-Abdal: has a presence in the Makhoul Mountains.
- Qiyadat Quwat Abu Fadil al-Abbas: are located in the Jazeera Samarra.
- Kataib Ansar al-Hujja: cover areas in Baiji, Makhoul Mountains.
- Kataib al-Imam Ali: are located in Jazeera Samarra and Al-Siniyah.
- Saraya Talia al-Khorasani: retains a presence in Amerli, Hamrin Mountains, Al-Zarka bridge and Yankaja.¹²⁶⁰

Hawza-Militias

These militias include:

- Firat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah.
- Liwa Ansar al-Marjiyah.
- Firqat al-Imam Ali al-Qitaliyah.
- Liwa Ali al-Akbar.

They are mainly located in Baiji (as of July 2016), al-Shariqat (as of September 2016), Makhoul Mountains (as of May 2017), Balad (as of July 2016), Tuz Khurmatu (as of April 2016) and Thar Thar (as of April 2016).¹²⁶¹

Sadr, Sistani and other affiliated Shia militias:

These mainly include Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam and the Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI) Brigades. Saraya al-Salam have deployed their Rapid Intervention Brigade to Samarra, Balad and Sulaiman Beg. It is the best equipped brigade in the force. The ISCI-Brigades include Saraya Ansar al-Aqida, Liwa al-Muntadhir and Saraya Ashura. The Brigades are deployed to surrounding areas to Baiji, Hamreen Mountains and Tulul al-Baj.¹²⁶²

Sunni Tribal Militias

Few Sunni tribal groups have mobilised their support to the PMU forces within the governorate. An estimate of 2 000 – 3 000 fighters have been recruited by the PMU in Salah al-Din, in comparison to for example Ninewa governorate, which is estimated to have 18 000 recruits. The low recruitment figures are mainly attributed to the deep mistrust Sunni tribal leaders feel towards the Shia PMU forces. There is also a relatively higher number of forces from Dour, al-Alam, and Shirqat than in other areas. Those who join have done so in order to receive salaries and training by the PMF.¹²⁶³

Sunni tribal militias operating within the governorate are often directly recruited by the larger PMU forces, mainly the Badr Brigades and the AAH, and in smaller numbers to the other groups, for example the Khorasan Brigade. The Shammari Brigade in Dour were initially recruited by both the Badr Brigade and the AAH during the liberation of the governorate in 2015. Other Sunni militias have resorted to use personal contacts in Baghdad to have their forces registered. To register, these forces often have to go through one of the major Shia PMU groups. One such registered Sunni militia group is al-Alam

¹²⁶⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 38-45

¹²⁶¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 47-48

¹²⁶² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 49-52

¹²⁶³ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

tribal forces. These groups appear to operate more independently than those directly sponsored by PMUs on location.¹²⁶⁴

Other Sunni militia groups include:

- The 51st Brigade¹²⁶⁵- Liwa Salah al-Din¹²⁶⁶ - which stems from the prominent Jubur tribe and are said to have close ties to the PMU, although prominent Juboris such as Salah al-Din governor Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri and Parliament Speaker Salim al-Jubouri from Diyala oppose the Iran backed PMUs. The militias operate in al-Shariqat, Tulul al-Baj and Baiji.¹²⁶⁷
- 88th Brigade, based in al-Alam district. The leader Sheikh Wanas al-Jabara has a Sunni Sahwa background.¹²⁶⁸

The ad hoc nature of Sunni tribal militias' mobilisation, often regulated in accordance with the Shia PMUs' own need for them, determines much of their role, and the assignments designated to them when upholding security in the area. In some areas Sunni militias are tasked with manning checkpoints, while in others they are engaged in actual fighting, or helping to hold the frontline.¹²⁶⁹

Turkmen Militias

Turkmen militia groups operating in the governorate are Badr affiliated. These include 52nd Brigade – Fawj Amerli, located in Amerli, Tooz district and the 16th Brigade, located in both Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu, also dubbed the 'northern front'.¹²⁷⁰

ISIL

The DIS/Landinfo's April 2018 FFM to KRI report noted that in Salah al-Din governorate ISIL operational capabilities are limited by the presence of the PMUs but pockets of fighters operating during the night have still been reported; the group does not hold territory and is weakened.¹²⁷¹ However, according to ISW, as of October 2018, ISIL established a small control zone north of Baiji in Salah al-Din.¹²⁷² In December 2018 Michael Knights assessed that based on ISIL activity data and operating patterns, the group has 'permanently operating attack cells in at least 27 areas of Iraq', which in Salah al-Din include the southern Jallam Desert (south of Samarra), Baiji, Shirqat, Pulkhana (near Tuz), and Mutabijah/Udaim.¹²⁷³

In January 2019 ISW assessed that 'ISIS only holds doctrinal control¹²⁷⁴ in one district of northern Iraq - the Baiji District of Salah ad-Din Province. ISIS controls terrain in the Makhoul Mountains of rural Baiji District where it exercises social control over the population. We observe numerous indicators of social control in this area including prisons, judicial proceedings, training camps, and organized worship.'¹²⁷⁵

In the Shirqat and Tuz districts of Salah al-Din ISW further notes that 'ISIS exerts a great deal of physical and psychological pressure over populations even if it does not meet the doctrinal definition of control

¹²⁶⁴ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁵ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁶ Al Monitor, Iraqi Police who fought for tribal PMUS won't return to force, 11 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 46

¹²⁶⁸ Al-Tamimi, A., Hashd Brigade numbers index, 31 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁹ Gaston, E., Study: Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁰ Al-Tamimi, A., Hashd Brigade numbers index, 31 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁷¹ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 18-19

¹²⁷² ISW, ISIS Second Resurgence [Map], 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁴ Regarding their methodology ISW notes the following: 'ISW employs a rigorous methodology to assess control of terrain which conforms to the doctrinal definitions used by the U.S. Armed Forces. ISW defines control zones as areas in which ISIS controls and governs populations - i.e. areas where the group exerts physical and psychological pressure to ensure that groups and individuals respond as directed'. ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019.

¹²⁷⁵ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

set by ISW. ISIS cannot hold terrain in these districts but we observe a number of indicators that ISIS is contesting control with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). These indicators include the abandonment of populated villages, destruction of agricultural products and infrastructure, repeated raids, and assassinations which target the local social hierarchy. ...Civilians in this area cannot rely upon security services for adequate protection.¹²⁷⁶

In the Hamrin mountains area 'that straddles Diyala, Salah ad-Din, and Kirkuk governorates' ISIL constructed vast rural cave and tunnel complexes with weapons depots and foodstuffs that is now using to pursue insurgent campaigns in northern Iraq. The Hamrin mountains are also used by ISIL as 'logistical lifeline stretching from Diyala to Kirkuk via Salah ad-Din'.¹²⁷⁷ ISIL's access to the mountainous terrain further gives the group free mobility at night, subsequently enhancing its possibility to expand its activities during the day.¹²⁷⁸

According to Ali Taher al-Farhan al-Obeidi, the leader of the tribal militia south-east of Samarra, there are between 150 to 200 ISIL militants operating in the areas between Salah al-Din and Diyala. Militant groups are known to target remote rural areas, earlier used by al-Qaeda militants, prior to 2014.¹²⁷⁹ In July 2018, former Iraqi Minister of Interior Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi estimated that ISIL controlled some 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Diyala.¹²⁸⁰

White Flags

The White Flags, a group thought to be formed out of ISIL veterans and Kurdish mafia members¹²⁸¹, shuffle back and forth through Arab and Kurdish areas on the outskirts of Tuz Khurmatu, and along the Kirkuk-Baghdad highway.¹²⁸² The area is a good base for operations as it lacks security controls, making it easy for the group to operate undetected. In addition, the nearby oil facilities, Jambur oil facility (south-east Kirkuk), is another incentive for the group to want to gain territorial control, as it furthers its gains of illicit oil trade. Iraqi forces have attempted to remove small pipes, used by thieves to tap oil from mainlines, in the hope to hamper their activities.¹²⁸³ In April 2018 ISF conducted a security sweep on the Kirkuk-Khurmatu-Kifri against ISIL and White Flags militants.¹²⁸⁴ During 2018 White Flag militants have been involved in attacks on oil delivery routes in northern Iraq, near the border with Iran.¹²⁸⁵

¹²⁷⁶ ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

¹²⁷⁷ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 30

¹²⁷⁸ ISW, ISIS Second Resurgence [Map], 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁹ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁰ Kurdistan24, IS controls 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Diyala: Former Iraqi Interior Minister, 08 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸¹ Middle East Eye, No surrender: 'White Flags' group rises as new threat in northern Iraq, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸² BuzzFeed News, The new face of ISIS in Iraq calls itself the White Flags, 1 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸³ Middle East Eye, No surrender: 'White Flags' group rises as new threat in northern Iraq, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ Rudaw, Iraqi forces target ISIS, 'White Flags' on Kirkuk-Khurmatu-Kifri road, 7 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, Iraq fighting Kurdish 'White Flags' group in north, 9 February 2018, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), Kirkuk at the centre of Iraqi terror, vote fraud woes, 08 July 2018, [url](#)

Recent trends 2018

UNAMI casualty figures for 2014-2018

	Civilians killed	Injuries	Total
2014	1 388	1 445	2 833
2015	541	480	1 021
2016	268	305	573
2017	158	313	471
2018	37	67	104
	2 392	2 610	5 002
UNAMI: Salah al-Din casualties¹²⁸⁶			

IBC data on civilians killed in 2018

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and more detailed information on 2012, 2017-2018 should be consulted from the source: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019,

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Salah al-Din is the governorate with the fourth highest level intensity (10.05 civilian deaths/100k) in 2018, after Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala. This marked a drop from 28.05/100k in 2017. In 2018 IBC data for Salah al-Din governorate recorded 69 security-related incidents involving 152 civilian deaths during 2018, a decrease compared to 2017 when they reported 83 incidents involving 424 civilian deaths.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths in 2018 were Baiji – 19 leading to 32 civilian deaths, followed by Al-Shirqat – 13 security incidents leading to 40 civilian deaths and Balad (including Fares) – 13 incidents leading to 34 civilian deaths. The highest rate of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of the population) was recorded in Al-Shirqat (19.41), followed by Baiji (15.24) and Tooz (13.42).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Salah al-Din governorate involved gunfire (36.2 %), followed by improvised explosive devices (IED) (29 %) and executions/summary killing (27.5 %), whereas suicides attacks and shelling decreased during the year and made up only 4.3 % and 1.4 % respectively, of all incidents.¹²⁸⁷

Security incidents and activity

During 2018 ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks against Iraqi security forces in northern and north-central Iraq (Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk) and in the central region (Diyala, Anbar and

¹²⁸⁶ Casualty data was provided and compiled to EASO by the UK Home Office based on monthly [UNAMI casualty figures](#). UNAMI states that as a caveat: UNAMI has in general been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in certain areas; in some cases, UNAMI could only partially verify certain incidents. Figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate ... Casualty figures obtained from the Anbar Health Directorate might not fully reflect the real number of casualties in those areas due to the increased volatility of the situation on the ground and the disruption of services. For these reasons, the figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum: UNAMI, UN Casualty Figures, Security Situation and Violence Continue to Take a Terrible Toll on Men, Women, and Children of all Iraq's Communities, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁷ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties see: EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 28

Baghdad).¹²⁸⁸ Regular attacks by ISIL on Sunni tribal militias across Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah al-Din governorates were also reported.¹²⁸⁹

In a December 2018 article Michael Knights observed that in 2018 ISIL has weakened its campaigns of attacks in Salah al-Din, noting that his incident data for 2018¹²⁹⁰ showed a monthly average of 14.2 attacks in 2018, compared to 84.0 attacks per month in 2017. The same source noted that the number of 'high-quality' (mass casualty, overruns, effective roadside bombs, and targeted killings) attacks increased in 2018 to 60 % of all attacks, against 42 % in 2017, but the overall scale of local insurgency was small. ISIL attack activities in Salah al-Din were considered to be significantly reduced in 2018, the source noting that 'with the exception of the ruined refinery town of Baiji and the adjacent Sharqat, the Islamic State is only slowly starting to attack Salah al-Din cities like Samarra, Tikrit, Dour, Balad, and Tuz Khurmatu.'¹²⁹¹

Michael Knights assessed that the decrease of ISIL's activity in Salah al-Din might be due the pressure it feels from the partnership between the Shia and Sunni PMUs (especially Brigades 51 and 88) which could have led ISIL to invest its resources in other areas.¹²⁹²

January 2018 saw an uptick in the number of security incidents¹²⁹³, including suicide attacks, bombings and kidnappings by the 'White Flags', affecting areas like Tuz Khurmatu.¹²⁹⁴ Kurds residing in the multi-ethnic (Kurdish and Turkmen) town of Tuz Khurmatu were subjected to 'violent attacks, arson, and looting' at the hands of ISF and PMU forces, following the withdrawal of the Peshmerga forces in October 2017. In January 2018, the head of AAH in Tuz Khurmatu was arrested by the Rapid Response Force following clashes between units of the two forces.¹²⁹⁵ Armed attacks by ISIL on security checkpoints and clashes between government forces and militants were also reported during January and February.¹²⁹⁶

The governorate continued to witness an ebb and flow in violence during February.¹²⁹⁷ The month of March noted an upsurge in the number incidents, reportedly, with attacks targeting security forces and civilians in various parts of the governorate.¹²⁹⁸ On 12 March, ISIL ambushed and killed 15 civilians at a fake checkpoint, near Amerli, Tooz district.¹²⁹⁹ In mid-March, ISIL militants detonated a bomb

¹²⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹²⁸⁹ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹²⁹⁰ Incident data is drawn from the author's geolocated Significant Action (SIGACT) dataset up to the end of October 2018. 'The dataset includes non-duplicative inputs from open source reporting, diplomatic security data, private security company incident data, Iraqi incident data, and U.S. government inputs'. See Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, p. 2, [url](#)

¹²⁹¹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁹² Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, pp. 3-4, [url](#)

¹²⁹³ Wing, J., Violence Up in Iraq, Jan 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 February 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁴ Wing, J., Security in Iraq, Jan 15-21, 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 23 January 2018, [url](#), Shafaq News, "أصحاب الرايات البيضاء" "Members of the 'white flags' kidnap four Kurds, amongst which two women", 20 January 2018, [url](#); Baghdad Post (The), The Iraqi Security forces repel White Flags terrorists in Tuz Khurmatu, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁵ Rudaw, Iraq's Rapid Response force deployed to Tuz Khurmatu, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ Iraqi News, Three Islamic State members, including suicide attacker, Killed in Salahuddin, 5 January 2018, [url](#); Baghdad Post (The), 9 police personnel killed in armed attack in Salah al-Din, 18 January 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Three servicemen injured as military operation underway in Iraq's Tuz Khurmatu, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁷ Wing, J., 645 deaths, 275 wounded Feb 2018 in Iraq (updated), Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ Wing, J., March 2018 the return of the Islamic State insurgency, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 April 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Four army personnel wounded in armed attacked, south of salahuddin, 21 March 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Five security personnel killed, injured in Islamic State attack in Salahuddin, 14 March 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Police office assassinated by unknown gunmen in Iraq's Tuz Khurmatu, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ Shafaq News, العراق... داعش يقتل ويحرق 25 شخصا بهجمات متفرقة, [Iraq... Daesh kills and burns 25 persons in sporadic attacks], 12 March 2018, [url](#)

inside in a mosque in al-Alam district, causing material damage to the building. No casualties were reported.¹³⁰⁰ Clearance operations were launched by the security forces in March in response to insurgent activities south of Hamrin Mountains, near the border with Salah al-Din.¹³⁰¹ Security sweeps conducted by the ISF (23 in March 2018 in Kirkuk and parts of Salah al-Din) have not succeeded in curbing insurgency activities in the governorate.¹³⁰²

In the beginning of April ten persons were killed and 14 injured while digging tombs as explosives planted by ISIL militants went off in western al-Shirqat.¹³⁰³ In another attack ISIL militants targeted PMU training centres wounding four persons.¹³⁰⁴ On 15 April, a suicide bomber carried out an attack near a police station in al-Eshaqi district, south Samarra, killing four persons.¹³⁰⁵

During the month of May insurgent activity included numerous suicide bombings and gun battles, some of which were foiled.¹³⁰⁶ Attacks of civilians were reported in May when militants killed 12 members of a single family and bombed the funeral of three Sunni tribal fighters, killing at least ten persons.¹³⁰⁷ ISIL is also capitalising on the ongoing lack of community services by launching sabotage tactics against energy infrastructure. On 24 May, militants attacked the power lines in the village of Barmaid, north of the Baiji-Kirkuk road, subsequently cutting the power to the majority of the cities of Hawija and Tikrit.¹³⁰⁸ ISIL militants attacked and shot dead a village chief after storming the village of Kanan after taking him hostage, in May.¹³⁰⁹

In June, security incidents included several kidnappings, killings of local officials and intimidation offensives¹³¹⁰ against those who refuse to collaborate with them.¹³¹¹ The rural population living in the area who raise cattle and rely on agriculture for their livelihood, have reported abductions and killings of unarmed cattle herders, burning of agricultural land, as well as targeting and bombing homes of locals, whom ISIL suspects of being members of local tribal militia and government collaborators.¹³¹² On 19 June 2018 ISIL militants abducted 30 members of the Shammar tribe in Salah al-Din. Authorities found the bodies of seven tribesmen while the fate of the rest remained unknown.¹³¹³ On 27 June 2018 the bodies of eight people abducted by ISIL along were found in Salah al-Din. Earlier in the month, the abductees which included members of ISF, were shown in an online video where ISIL member threatened to execute them unless the government released female Sunni Arab prisoners.¹³¹⁴

¹³⁰⁰ Iraqi News, Suspected IS militants detonate mosque in Salahuddin province, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁰² Wing, J., March 2018 the return of the Islamic State insurgency, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰³ Iraqi News, Islamic State claims responsibility killing, injuring tens of people in blasts, north of Salahuddin, 13 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁴ Iraqi News, 4 paramilitary personnel injured as Islamic State attack training facility, south of Tikrit, 12 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁵ Kurdistan24, Four killed, wounded in suicide attack in Salahuddin province, 16 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁶ Wing, J., Security in Iraq largely unchanged in May 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 June 2018,

[url](#); Iraqi News, Two Islamic State members killed as paramilitaries repulse attack in Salahuddin, 2 May 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Four Islamic State members killed as troops repel attack north of Salahuddin, 30 May 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Iraqi forces, Islamic State militants clash at Salahuddin bridge, 26 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁷ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines, April 1 2018 – June 30 2018, August 2018, [url](#), p. 20

¹³⁰⁸ Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 31

¹³⁰⁹ BBC Monitoring, Islamic State kills kidnapped village head in Iraq's Kirkuk, 23 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁰ Wing, J., June 2018 Islamic State rebuilding in rural areas of central Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹¹ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, and then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹² Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, and then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹³ Kurdistan24, Islamic State kidnaps 30 tribesmen, kills seven, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ Iraqi News, Bodies of people kidnapped by Islamic State in Iraq found, 27 June 2018, [url](#); National (The), Iraq forces find bodies of eight ISIS captives, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

The Head of Salah al-Din's provincial council told Niqash in July 2018 that there has been an increase in attacks in east and west Salah al-Din.¹³¹⁵ At the beginning of July a joint military operation against ISIL militants was launched by the Iraqi Army, Federal Police and Iran-backed PMUs on the outskirts of Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk aiming to clear areas in the desert between the three provinces that have been the scene of recent 'insurgent attacks, bombings, ambushes, and kidnappings'.¹³¹⁶ Between July and September, ISIL was attributed attacks on energy infrastructure sites, cutting power to parts of Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salah al-Din governorates.¹³¹⁷

The UN Security Council reported that 'on 10 August, at a football game in Sharqat district of Salah al-Din governorate, ISIL gunmen shot and killed five civilians and wounded six others, including two children.'¹³¹⁸ A sticky bomb exploded in a neighbourhood of Kirkuk city in August, killing one person and wounding another.¹³¹⁹

In September 2018 UNHCR stated that local authorities reported an increase in organised crime in Tuz Khurmatu, including kidnapping for ransom that led to about 400 persons missing. There are fears among the city's residents and IDPs of a 'potential relapse in ethnically motivated violence as a result of the withdrawal of the highly respected Emergency Response Division (ERD) forces and their replacement by the Iraqi Army'.¹³²⁰

The UN Security Council stated that IED and small arms fire were the leading causes of civilian casualties during August – October 2018. IED attacks were often claimed by ISIL and 'pose a threat to civilians in Baghdad, Salah al-Din, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar and Sulaymaniyah Governorates'. ISIL also targeted police and members of PMUs in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din governorates.¹³²¹

State's ability to secure law and order

The resurgence of ISIL along the Hamreen mountain range is a destabilising factor to the governorate. The difficult-to-reach mountain terrain is serving as launching pad for ISIL to instigate attacks against the ISF and the various allied militias. Iraqi and local joint task forces continue to grapple with containing ISIL militias that are now trying new tactics to regain control in the governorate.¹³²²

Constant security sweeps by the security forces have proven ineffective. The main problem is the lack of government presence in many of these rural areas.¹³²³ Interviews conducted by the news organisation Intercept, with civilians, community leaders and local security forces in Hawija, Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu, in which eye witnesses reported that ISIL militants move freely in these communities, in broad daylight, asking for Zakat (charitable contribution) or demanding information about the whereabouts of government security forces.¹³²⁴

A particular area of concern is the security vacuum in the multi-ethnic town of Tuz Khurmatu, following the withdrawal of Peshmerga forces in October 2017. A former security representative for the Kurdish counter-terrorism service in Tuz Khurmatu, Dler Ghazi, attributed the security vacuum to the political tensions between the KRG and the central government in October 2017, which forced the withdrawal of the Kurdish counter terrorism forces from the area. Ghazi further added: the ERD that took over Tuz

¹³¹⁵ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ Kurdistan24, IS controls 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Diyala: Former Iraqi Interior Minister, 08 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁷ Kurdistan24, Unknown Attackers Target Erbil-Kirkuk Power Lines Five Times in One Week, 17 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹³¹⁹ BBC Monitoring, Civilian killed in explosion in Iraq's Kirkuk, 15 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹³²¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹³²² Flood, D., CTC, From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, Volume 11, issue 8, [url](#), p. 30

¹³²³ Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding operations in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2018, [url](#)

¹³²⁴ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

Khurmatu following the withdrawal of the Kurdish forces in last October lack local knowledge to fight an insurgency. He does not believe that the government is serious about clearing the area, or making use of his long experience and knowledge of the area.¹³²⁵

Displacement and return

As of December 2018, there were 238 728 individuals who remain displaced from Salah al-Din, the majority of which are displaced within the governorate (117 870 individuals).¹³²⁶ Salah al-Din governorate ranks third amongst the top governorates of return, with a total of 590 652 of registered returnees.¹³²⁷ The majority of the returnees (274 026 individuals) were formerly displaced within the governorate. The remainder were mainly displaced in Kirkuk and Erbil governorates.¹³²⁸

UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview continues to show that Salah al-Din has the third most people in need with 764 669.¹³²⁹ UNOCHA in November 2018 reported that the most high severity hotspots for returnees in Iraq were in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Anbar.¹³³⁰ In Salah al-Din, these hotspots were the districts of Tuz Khurmatu [or Tooz Khormatu/Suleiman Beg], Balad/Duloeiya, and Baiji.¹³³¹

In their January 2019 ILA III, IOM stated that 68 % of IDPs originally from Salah al-Din have returned. Security conditions are affecting a higher than average percentage of returnees in Salah al-Din as they 'live in locations where different security incidents take place – including arbitrary arrests (35 %), abductions and kidnappings (21 %) and incidents involving explosive remnants of war (ERWs), landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs); (13 %)'.¹³³²

According to IOM's Return Index, from September 2018, Salah al-Din ranks third of the seven governorates hosting caseloads that are likely to face some category of harsh conditions upon return, so-called severity conditions.¹³³³ Salah al-Din had a total of 89 158 returning families, facing severity conditions.¹³³⁴

The majority of returning families facing severity conditions (58 %) fall under the medium category, followed by 29 % belonging to the low severity category. Only 11 % of the return families are likely to face high severity conditions on return, followed by a very small segment (2 %) that are likely to face very high severity conditions upon return.¹³³⁵ IOM's ILA III, published in January 2019, listed a number of 'conflict hotspots' for returnees, where there was a higher incidence of physical violence or threats between groups. In Salah al-Din, they were in Shirqat, Balad, Tikrit, Tooz.¹³³⁶

Salah al-Din is also one of the governorates with particular high scores of infrastructure damage. The humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of the defeat of ISIL has contributed to high levels of unemployment and poverty.¹³³⁷

UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that 'forced and premature returns continue to be reported in Salah al-Din, Baghdad, Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa governorates, including

¹³²⁵ PBS, Political instability facilitates resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³²⁶ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹³²⁷ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹³²⁸ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹³²⁹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³³⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹³³¹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 6, 11

¹³³² IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹³³³ IOM's Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-5

¹³³⁴ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018 [url](#), p. 6

¹³³⁵ IOM, Return Index Finding, Round 1-Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹³³⁶ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 53

¹³³⁷ IOM Iraq, Crisis Funding Appeal 2018, 31 January 2018, [url](#), p. 3

through coercive practices, often resulting in secondary displacement.¹³³⁸ At the beginning of November 2018 ISF forcibly evicted 100 families originally from Ninewa from Shahama camp in Salah al-Din.¹³³⁹ In September 2018 UNHCR reported that since October 2017, 3 000 families from Salah al-Din, 2 400 from Anbar, and 400 from Baghdad have been forcibly evicted from camps and informal settlements.¹³⁴⁰

UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that 'many returnees— in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa—who are alleged to be affiliated with extremists have been forcibly evicted from their homes upon return, resulting in their secondary displacement, with their properties destroyed or confiscated.'¹³⁴¹

Family members with alleged ties to ISIL are confined in camps, unable to return. The Shahama camp in Salah al-Din is one such place, often referred to by locals as 'ISIL camp'. The camp which lies on the outskirts of Tikrit is holding family members of ISIL affiliates. The families residing at the camp were forcibly placed there after their relatives were arrested, or killed, for ties to ISIL - regardless as to whether they joined voluntarily or by force.¹³⁴² The overall majority of the population are women and children, with very few male adults. Most of them stem from Hawija and Sharqiyya. The camp has no schools or clinics. The residents are not allowed to leave or to have mobile phones, and visitors are restricted.¹³⁴³

There are approximately 140 families residing in the camp. According to UNHCR weekly protection update from April, 17 families were allowed to leave the camp.¹³⁴⁴ Most of them returned, under sponsorship, to Anbar, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Baghdad and Diyala. Others were relocated, to Al-Karamah camp, in Anbar governorate. UNHCR further reported that 90 of the families remaining in the camp have been banned by their tribes to return to their homes in the al-Shirqat and Baiji districts.¹³⁴⁵

AI conducted interviews in eight IDP camps, including Shahama camp, holding family members of perceived ISIL affiliates. Many of the interviewed families reported that they were denied food, water, non-food items and health care due to their perceived affiliation to ISIL. Women are often taunted and harassed by the security at the camps, as well as being subjected to sexual violations. They are routinely blocked from obtaining identity and civil documents.¹³⁴⁶ Women at the Shahama camp further reported that their family members could not visit them, in fear of being arrested themselves and sent to the camp. Other family members refused to visit, because it would stigmatise them as being associated with an 'ISIL family'.¹³⁴⁷

According to representatives of Kirkuk Now, interviewed by DIS/Landinfo during their April 2018 FFM to KRI IDPs haven't been allowed to return to the town of Sulaimanbek in Salah al-Din governorate since its liberation in 2016. In 2018 returns were permitted but IDPs, mostly Sunni Arabs, had to go through strict security screenings.¹³⁴⁸ Blocked returns mostly to Baaj and are often due to lack of services, mines, and movement restrictions.¹³⁴⁹

¹³³⁸ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 31

¹³³⁹ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴⁰ UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹³⁴¹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹³⁴² Pacific Standard, The Government is constructing a new Generation of ISIS, 27 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁴³ New Arab (The), Awaiting judgement: meet the Islamic State families held in desert camps, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁴ UNHCR, Iraq Bi-weekly protection update, 5-16 April, 16 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹³⁴⁵ UNHCR, Iraq Bi-weekly protection update, 5-16 April, 16 April 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴⁶ AI, The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped and Exploited in Iraq, April 2018, [url](#), pp. 20-27

¹³⁴⁷ AI, The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped and Exploited in Iraq, April 2018, [url](#), p. 25

¹³⁴⁸ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 73

¹³⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

The district of Tuz Khurmatu is divided between Sunni Kurds, Shiite Turkmen and Sunni Arabs and has been the scene of longstanding interethnic and sectarian clashes.¹³⁵⁰ Tuz Khurmatu witnessed more violence than other disputed areas in the aftermath of the Iraqi army and PMU's takeover of the district from the Kurdish forces in October 2017 which led to the displacement of some Kurds during that month.¹³⁵¹

Road security

As of March 2018, the PMU controlled the majority of highway 1 in the governorate connecting Salah al-Din to Mosul, Erbil, and Baghdad.¹³⁵² Fake checkpoints set up by ISIL are another hazard facing security forces and civilians travelling in the area.¹³⁵³ According to sources interviewed by the DIS/Landinfo during its April 2018 FFM to KRI in Salah al-Din 'the PMUs have both area control and control of strategically important checkpoints. One source mentioned that a car journey that usually would take one hour, now takes four hours due to the checkpoints.'¹³⁵⁴

¹³⁵⁰ International Crisis Group: Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15; Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 50

¹³⁵¹ International Crisis Group: Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15; Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 50

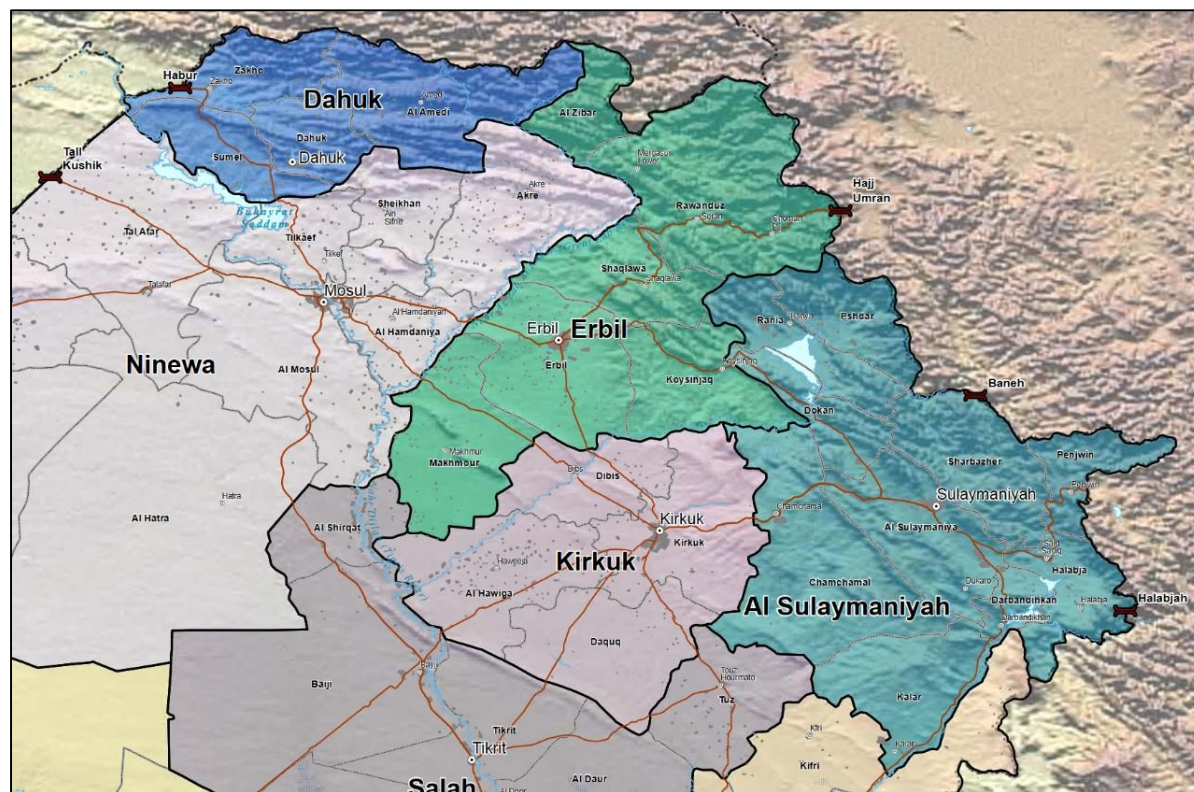
¹³⁵² Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., The Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#) p. 43

¹³⁵³ Niqash, New Terror Campaign: Extremists intimidate, harass, dislocate locals in Salahaddin, then take over, 12 July 2018, [url](#); Shafaq News, [شخصاً بهجمات متفرقة، داعش يقتل ويحرق 25](#) [Iraq... Daesh kills and burns 25 persons in sporadic attacks], 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 18

2.7 Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah)

General description of the governorate



Map 13: Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹³⁵⁵

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is an autonomous region which includes three governorates: Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk.¹³⁵⁶ Although Halabja was symbolically designated as a governorate by the Iraqi government in December 2013, many ministries and institutions consider it as part of Sulaymaniyah.¹³⁵⁷ The administrative centre of the KRI lies formally in Erbil, but the control of the region is divided between KRI's two main dominant political parties. The KDP exercise its power over Dohuk and Erbil governorates and the PUK controls Sulaymaniyah governorate.¹³⁵⁸ According to the Iraqi Central Statistical Organization's estimates, KRI has a population of 5 309 592 in 2018¹³⁵⁹, most of whom are Sunni Kurds, in addition to Sunni Arabs, Christians, Circassians, Fayli Kurds, Shabaks, Shia and Sunni Turkmen, Yarsan (including Kaka'i), as well as Yezidis.¹³⁶⁰

IOM reports that Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk have enjoyed a 'stable security situation' since the beginning of the 2014 ISIL conflict, noting that in Dohuk this is the case despite the Turkish and PKK activity in the governorate [described in the sections below]. Erbil was the only KRI governorate with internal displacement/return within the governorate, noting displacement from the district of Makhmur.¹³⁶¹ Makhmour is 60 km south-west of Erbil¹³⁶². It is part of the disputed territories which have been contested between Kurdish and Iraqi governments since the fall of Saddam Hussein in

¹³⁵⁵ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Kurdistan Region, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁵⁷ Rudaw, Years on, Halabja still waiting for full province status, 26 June 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁵⁹ Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁶⁰ US, USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁶¹ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 13, 37, 55

¹³⁶² Rudaw, Authorities reopen main Erbil-Makhmour road, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

2003.¹³⁶³ Makhmour district has been part of Erbil governorate since 1932, though the district has been administered under Ninewa governorate since 1991 and is therefore ‘generally considered outside those districts administered by the KRG as of 19 March 2003’ though there has not been an official decree transferring it to Ninewa; it continues to have an uncertain status and remains ‘one of the least developed districts of Iraq’, according to Lifos.¹³⁶⁴ For more information, see the chapter on [Ninewa](#).

Security forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are the Peshmerga, having 14 infantry brigades and 2 support brigades, and the Asayish intelligence services, in addition to KPD and PUK-controlled militias.¹³⁶⁵ Most these forces’ members are politically divided between the KDP and the PUK, to which they answer directly.¹³⁶⁶ There are no Iraqi federal forces or PMUs operating inside the KRI.¹³⁶⁷

IOM described security incidents in Erbil as ‘not recurrent’ in 2017.¹³⁶⁸ However, Makhmour was the site of armed clashes between Iranian backed PMUs and Peshmerga forces during October 2017 during the change of territorial control that followed the Kurdish independence referendum.¹³⁶⁹ The KRI has been largely spared ISIL attacks since 2014, however Makhmour district, which fell close to the frontline with ISIL territory, was hit by attacks between 2014 and 2017.¹³⁷⁰ It was described by IOM as the only location in 2017 in Erbil governorate that experienced terrorist attacks.¹³⁷¹

KRG is also linked to Kirkuk through busy commercial highways, and as such, Kirkuk has been described as the ‘most significant entry point for ISIL car bombers and attack cells’ to penetrate into KRI territory. Through this entry point, ISIL launched a major local offensive against the Peshmergas in 2015 with a team of suicide bombers.¹³⁷² In August 2014, ISIL was 15 km from Erbil, causing many to leave the area, and only due to the backing of the US were Peshmergas able to block further advances.¹³⁷³

Internal ISIL threats in KRI continue to exist in 2018 according to Adel Bakawan, although the KRI was largely untouched by ISIL violence.¹³⁷⁴ ISIL benefits from a support zone around the Halabja Mountains close to the Iranian borders, where ISIL-loyal groups such as Ansar al-Islam (AAI) operate.¹³⁷⁵ ISIL’s ally, AAI, had controlled a number of villages in Sulaymaniyah/Halabja which the Peshmergas took back in 2003 with support from US forces.¹³⁷⁶ AAI¹³⁷⁷ is a US-designated terrorist group established in the KRI is, as of USDOS’s 2017 reporting, ‘active in northern Iraq’ and has a ‘presence in western and central Iraq’.¹³⁷⁸ ISIL has recruited about 2 000 Kurds as fighters.¹³⁷⁹ The KRI was targeted with a number of car bomb attacks in 2013 and 2014.¹³⁸⁰ On 17 April 2015, a VBIED attack hit the US Consulate in Erbil, killing

¹³⁶³ Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 12

¹³⁶⁴ Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, June 4 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁶⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights for 2017 – Iraq, 20 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹³⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, Arming Iraq’s Kurds: Fighting IS, inviting conflict, 12 May 2015, [url](#), pp. 8-11

¹³⁶⁷ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 12

¹³⁶⁸ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

¹³⁶⁹ Rudaw, Authorities reopen main Erbil-Makhmour road, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁰ UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 November 2015 – 30 September 2016, 30 December 2016, [url](#); IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

¹³⁷¹ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

¹³⁷² Knights, M., Kirkuk Foreshadows Challenges for a Post-ISIL Iraq, 25 February 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁷⁴ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁷⁵ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁷⁶ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁷⁷ Also known as nsar al-Sunna; Ansar al-Sunna Army; Devotees of Islam; Followers of Islam in Kurdistan; Helpers of Islam; Jaish Ansar al-Sunna; Jund al-Islam; Kurdish Taliban; Kurdistan Supporters of Islam; Partisans of Islam; Soldiers of God; Soldiers of Islam; Supporters of Islam in Kurdistan; USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Ansar al-Islam, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Ansar al-Islam, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁹ Bakawan, Adel, Three Generations of Jihadism in Iraqi Kurdistan, IFRI, July 2017, [url](#), p. 5

¹³⁸⁰ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

two civilians.¹³⁸¹ In July and August 2017, two ISIL groups were arrested in Sulaymaniyah. According to the security forces, one of the groups was planning to carry out new terrorist attacks inside KRI.¹³⁸²

The PKK is a Marxist-Leninist group that was founded in the 1970s, launching an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 and calling for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.¹³⁸³ The PKK operates a long-standing presence in northern Iraq on the Turkish, Iranian and Syrian borders.¹³⁸⁴ There have been ‘many PKK attacks on Turkish forces’ and human rights groups have accused Turkey of killing large numbers of civilians during anti-PKK operations, imposing curfews and using heavy weapons in urban areas of south-east Turkey. The group operates in the Iraqi border in northern Kurdistan, where it is regularly targeted by air strikes by the Turkish, and where Turkey has established bases¹³⁸⁵ inside territory controlled by the KDP with the tacit approval of the KDP.¹³⁸⁶ The PKK is on the European Union’s list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism¹³⁸⁷, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States¹³⁸⁸, and Australia.¹³⁸⁹ According to Joel Wing’s data, in the past years in KRI, recorded casualties have mostly been concentrated on KRI’s borders with Iran and Turkey, due to conflict between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK; also called Kadek, Kongra Gel) and the Turkish Army.¹³⁹⁰ Joel Wing noted that according to media he monitored in relation to Turkish strikes in 2017, ‘casualties are rarely reported but many towns and villages were hit in these strikes’ during the 2017.¹³⁹¹

The PKK has developed its territorial presence and control over mountainous areas along the Turkish and Iranian borders, especially in the Qandil Mountains, along the border between Erbil/Sulaymaniyah governorates/Iran, and in the Zab Mountains, in Dohuk governorate along the Turkish border. Its PKK bases and populations are located there.¹³⁹² Local officials interviewed by Rudaw in 2016 estimated on their part that as many as 650 communities might live under the PKK in total in KRI, although some of the villages have been evacuated due to the conflict.¹³⁹³ From these areas, the PKK has launched cross-border attacks in Turkey, to which the Turkish Air force has retaliated with regular raids.¹³⁹⁴ See the [Kirkuk chapter](#) for a relevant 2018 map of this area, showing the Turkish ground presence.

Other armed groups active in the KRI’s mountainous areas are Kurdish insurgent and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups. These include the PKK’s Iranian offshoot, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK), as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (PDKI, or in Kurdish: Hîzbî Dêmukratî Kurdistanî Êran) and its splinter group the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-I, or in

¹³⁸¹ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; Kurdistan24, The threat from within: Erbil attack exposes radicalization in Kurdistan, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸² Rudaw, Sulaimani security announce arrest of 2 ISIS groups, 8 January 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ BBC, Who are Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ HRW, Turkey/Iraq: Strikes May Break Laws of War, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁵ BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels ? 4 November 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁶ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018

¹³⁸⁷ EU, Council of the European Union, Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/1084 of 30 July 2018 updating the list of persons, groups and entities subject to Articles 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2018/475, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ BBC News, Who are the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁹ Australia, Criminal Code (Terrorist Organisation – Kurdistan Workers’ Party) Regulations 2018, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, [Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ Wing, J., PKK-Turkey Escalation In Northern Iraqi Kurdistan Interview With Journalist Frederike Geerdink, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 8 January 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹² Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹³ Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁴ Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 December 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

Kurdish: Hizba Dêmkrata Kurdistanê-Îran)¹³⁹⁵, Society of Revolutionary Toilers (Komala), and the Kurdistan Free Party (PAK).¹³⁹⁶ Although a ceasefire was agreed in 2011 between Iran and the PJAK, with the mediation of the PUK, attacks were waged sporadically by both sides as of 2015¹³⁹⁷ and into 2018.¹³⁹⁸ Iran would not be able to target these groups inside the southern Kurdistan region without the tacit approval of the PUK, according to Kurdistan expert Adel Bakawan.¹³⁹⁹

KRI has faced heightened political instability in the second half of 2017. On 25 September 2017, an independence referendum was organised, on the initiative of the KDP of Massoud Barzani and 93 % of voters answered favourably. The resulting crisis and embargo imposed by Federal authorities, as well as Iran and Turkey, forced the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to waive the referendum results. The Iraqi government, which had experienced badly the growing autonomy of the KRI since 2003, seized this opportunity to take back most of the disputed territories controlled by the KRG, as well as KRI's main border crossings with neighbouring countries.¹⁴⁰⁰ The rivalry between the PUK and the KDP was exposed during the crisis over the referendum and the loss of territorial control over the disputed areas: the Kurdish population and the PUK share aspirations for an independent Kurdistan, PUK were suspicious of the KDP's motives and timing; and when the Iraqi federal government moved against the independence referendum, the KDP ended up without international or regional support for the move. The PUK then sided with Baghdad allowing for the retaking of the disputed areas, including Kirkuk, which has led to very divisive tensions between the two parties in KRI, risking further tensions.¹⁴⁰¹

The independence referendum crisis further increased the tensions between the two main parties, each blaming the other for the weight of the Federal government's sanctions. The crisis also aggravated public discontent and distrust against Kurdish authorities, only adding up to already rising resentments over the severe economic crisis, the delayed payment of public employees' salaries and the endemic corruption of Kurdish officials.¹⁴⁰² Because of this discontent, part of the population have turned their support to new political parties, such as the Goran and New Generation movements, which contest the KDP and the PUK's monopoly over the region.¹⁴⁰³

Building on a longstanding dispute over the share of oil revenues, the Iraqi government also suspended the payment of the salaries of KRG's employees until March 2018, when civil servants finally received part of their wages.¹⁴⁰⁴

Recent trends 2018

IBC data on civilians killed

IBC data on civilian deaths in 2017 and 2018 show that the Kurdistan Region has among the areas of Iraq with lowest intensities of civilian deaths/100k when compared to other parts of the country. There

¹³⁹⁵ Al Monitor, IRGC masses troops on Iraq border amid rising tensions with Kurdish groups, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Iranian bombardment in Kurdistan: 14 dead, 40 wounded, two more missing, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁷ Al Monitor, Turkey, Iran, Iraq in shaky alignment against Iraqi Kurdistan, 29 September 2017, [url](#); Rudaw, Iranian Kurdish group shifts policy, seeking democratic autonomy, 6 May 2014, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁸ EPIC, ISHM: July 13 – 19, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁹ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018

¹⁴⁰⁰ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018; Roussel, Cyril, Irak et Kurdistan d'Irak : la problématique de la frontière interne et les enjeux du contrôle territorial, February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of this report, 9 January 2019

¹⁴⁰² International Crisis Group, Iraqi Kurdistan's Regional Elections Test a Brittle Status Quo, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰³ International Crisis Group, Iraqi Kurdistan's Regional Elections Test a Brittle Status Quo, 28 September 2018, [url](#); Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018

¹⁴⁰⁴ Wing, J., Baghdad Paid Half Of KRG's Salaries, Kurdistan Didn't Contribute Leading To Protests, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 25 March 2018, [url](#)

was an increase in 2018: Dohuk (3.12, an increase from 1.89 in 2017); Erbil (1.3, an increase from 0.8 in 2017), and Sulaymaniyah (2.28, an increase from 1.21 in 2017).¹⁴⁰⁵

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and should be consulted in reference to this chapter: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Dohuk / Dahuk

In Dohuk, IBC recorded 20 incidents leading to 28 civilian deaths in 2018, an increase from 7 and 17 deaths in 2017. Out of the 28 deaths, 20 occurred in Dohuk district, which had an intensity rate of 5.65 civilians killed/100k, a small increase from 2017. Most incidents causing civilian deaths involved air attacks (50 %), gunfire (25 %), and executions/summary killing (4 %).¹⁴⁰⁶

Erbil

In 2018 IBC data for Erbil governorate recorded 15 security-related incidents leading to 26 civilian deaths during 2018, an increase compared to 2017 when they reported 10 incidents leading to 16 civilian deaths.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Erbil – 6 security incidents leading to 9 civilian deaths, followed by Soran – 4 leading to 7 civilian deaths, and Koisanjaq – 3 incidents leading to 7 civilian deaths. These latter two areas had the highest intensity of violence (deaths per 100k of the population) - in Koisanjaq (6.56) followed by Soran (3.47), marking a slight increase over 2017.

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Erbil governorate involved gunfire (40 %), followed by improvised explosive devices (IED) (20 %) and executions/summary killing (13.3 %).¹⁴⁰⁷

Sulaymaniyah

In 2018 IBC data for Sulaymaniyah governorate recorded 26 security-related incidents leading to 45 civilian deaths during 2018, an increase compared to 2017 when they reported 16 incidents leading to 24 civilian deaths.

The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Rania, 2 incidents and 10 deaths; Chamchamal – 5 incidents and 7 civilian deaths. However, the highest intensity of violence (deaths/ 100k) was recorded in Penjwin (9.28), followed by Rania (4.48).

Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Sulaymaniyah governorate involved gunfire (53.8 %), followed by executions/summary killing (26.9 %) and shelling (3.8 %).¹⁴⁰⁸

¹⁴⁰⁵ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths, see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴⁰⁶ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths, see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁰⁷ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths, see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁴⁰⁸ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths, see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

Security incidents and activity

Protests

Political violence occurred in the midst of the preparation of the federal parliamentary elections of 12 May 2018. On 24 April 2018, Fares Mohammed Sadek, the KRI's Management Director of the Independent High Electoral Commission was shot dead in Erbil.¹⁴⁰⁹ On 12 May 2018, the headquarters of the Coalition for Democracy and Justice and the headquarter of the Goran Movement in Sulaymaniyah governorate were attacked and the offices of a TV channel were seized by gunmen.¹⁴¹⁰ A long series of demonstrations were also organised throughout KRI in March 2018. UNAMI expressed its concerns about 'reports of using excessive force against demonstrators'.¹⁴¹¹ Amnesty International quoted eyewitness accounts of journalists and demonstrators who reported 'physical and verbal attacks by security forces' during the demonstrations.¹⁴¹²

Large-scale mass protests were reported in December 2018 in the KRI, in Sulaymaniyah, Koya, Halabja, Ranya, Koysinjaq, and Kifri with public buildings and party offices being targeted, as protesters have called for the KRG to resign. On 18 December 2018, 5 political party offices in Sulaymaniyah were set on fire, injuring several protesters.¹⁴¹³ Protests over lack of salary payment and social services were also reported on 18 December in Kala, Taqtaw, Chamchamal, Koya, Rawanduz, Said Sadiq, and Qalit Dizah, with clashes reported and traffic disruptions occurring due to road closures.¹⁴¹⁴ Small arms fire is a 'moderate risk' during such demonstrations across KRI.¹⁴¹⁵

Turkey-PKK conflict

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK scaled up in 2018 compared to the previous year. The Turkish military moved across the border into Kurdish-Iraqi territory in December 2017 and progressively developed its presence in KRI territory in 2018, by building military infrastructure¹⁴¹⁶, such as military bases and combat outposts, as well as roads. In June, Turkish authorities announced that Turkish troops had penetrated 26-27 km into KRI, being a territory of 400 square kilometres.¹⁴¹⁷ It also led increasing military patrols through populated villages inside KRI territory.¹⁴¹⁸ The Turkish military has a presence in rural areas of Dohuk, and Erbil¹⁴¹⁹, with a military base near Bashiqā [visible on the map

¹⁴⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM: April 20 – 26, 2018, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: May 11 – 17, 2018, 17 May 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Growing Crisis Over Elections In Kirkuk and Kurdistan, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 18 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹¹ UNAMI, UNAMI expresses concerns about reports of using excessive force against demonstrators in the Kurdistan Region, 28 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹² EPIC, ISHM: March 23 – 29, 2018, 29 March 2018, [url](#); UNAMI, UNAMI expresses concerns about reports of using excessive force against demonstrators in the Kurdistan Region, 28 March 2018, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Violence against protesters and journalists in Kurdistan Region shows blatant disregard for freedom of expression, 28 March 2018, [url](#); HRW, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Protesters, Journalists Detained, 28 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹³ GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests continue in Kurdistan December 19/update 1, 19 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁴ GardaWorld, Iraq: Ongoing protests in Kurdistan December 18, 18 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ GardaWorld/IHS Markit, Iraq Country Report, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁶ Wing, J., PKK-Turkey Escalation In Northern Iraqi Kurdistan Interview With Journalist Frederike Geerdink, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 8 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁷ EPIC, ISHM: March 30 – April 5, 2018, 5 April 2018, [url](#); Al Monitor, What's behind Turkish threats to invade PKK stronghold in Iraq?, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁸ ISW, Email to EASO, 11 July 2018.

¹⁴¹⁹ HRW, Turkey/Iraq: Strikes May Break Laws of War, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

provided below^{1420]} and as many as two dozen such military/intelligence bases inside Iraq as of 2018.¹⁴²¹

Airstrikes targeting Dohuk and Erbil governorates reportedly continued in August and September 2018.¹⁴²² Ground clashes and air attacks by the Turkish Air Force increased significantly in 2018 compared to the previous year, sometimes causing civilian fatalities.¹⁴²³ According to the data collected by Joel Wing, in February 2018, the PKK ambushed a Turkish military patrol and executed two soldiers. Turkey responded with intense shelling against PKK positions, especially in Sidakan sub-district, and 49 PKK members were killed in a raid during the same month.¹⁴²⁴ Also in April 2018, Turkish shelling was reported in the districts of Zakho in Dohuk, which caused border closures between Iraq and Syria.¹⁴²⁵ In April 2018, 91 Turkish soldiers were killed by the PKK, whereas 5 KRI civilians died in Turkish shelling.¹⁴²⁶ These raids continued at a high rate until July 2018 and decreased afterwards.¹⁴²⁷

On 16 September 2018, the Iraqi Prime minister ordered the Iraqi Federal Border Guards to deploy along the Iraq-Turkey border to prevent violations of Iraqi sovereignty.¹⁴²⁸ According to Joel Wing, Turkey's ground offensive stopped after the announcement but air strikes continued. The same source reported that 85 PKK members were killed in October 2018 and 69 others died in November 2018, along with 3 civilians.¹⁴²⁹ Human Rights Watch reported in September 2018 that four Turkish military operations against the PKK over 2018 and 2017 could be 'possible violations of the laws of war' because they killed at least 7 civilians and wounded another, in attacks that apparently had 'no military objectives'.¹⁴³⁰ Shelling and air strikes by the Turkish forces on areas around Sinji and Halania villages in Dohuk, and Barmiza and Sarkan villages in Erbil caused the 7 civilian casualties as farmers were working in the area. Turkish airstrikes have also killed civilians in the past in the Qandil mountains, mentioning 15 such attacks between 2015 and August 2018 that led to civilian casualties.¹⁴³¹ More than 50 civilians have been killed in Sidekan area alone between December 2016 and July 2018 during anti-PKK operations.¹⁴³² In December 2018, Turkish jets bombing PKK positions reportedly killed four people near Makhmour.¹⁴³³

Iranian activity

Iranian forces also scaled up their operations against Iranian Kurdish insurgency groups in 2018 compared to the previous years.¹⁴³⁴ In March 2018, a car bomb explosion in Erbil's Bnaslawa sub-district injured two PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, PDKI) fighters, who accused Iranian

¹⁴²⁰ US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115th Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 11.

¹⁴²¹ Wing, J., PKK-Turkey Escalation In Northern Iraqi Kurdistan Interview With Journalist Frederike Geerdink, 8 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²² UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), 31 October 2018, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁴²³ Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., April 2018 Large Drop In Violence In Iraq, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 2 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁴ Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 March 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 30 – April 5, 2018, 5 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁵ EPIC, ISHM: March 30 – April 5, 2018, 5 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁶ Wing, J., April 2018 Large Drop In Violence In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁷ Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding Operations in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General, 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴²⁹ Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁰ HRW, Turkey/Iraq: Strikes May Break Laws of War, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³¹ HRW, Turkey/Iraq: Strikes May Break Laws of War, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³² HRW, Turkey/Iraq: Strikes May Break Laws of War, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³³ Rudaw, Hundreds mourn at burials in Makhmour for Kurds killed in Turkish airstrikes, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁴ Rudaw, Kurdish party resumes armed struggle against Iran, third party to do so, 30 April 2017, [url](#); Al Monitor, Why Iranian Kurdish party is stepping up fight against Tehran, 1 July 2016, [url](#); Al Monitor, IRGC masses troops on Iraq border amid rising tensions with Kurdish groups, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

intelligence of launching the attack.¹⁴³⁵ In September 2018, Iran launched a missile attack targeting the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, the PDKI and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-I), killing 11¹⁴³⁶ or 12 people and wounding another 50 other people in Koysinjaq, Erbil province.¹⁴³⁷ The UN similarly stated that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was responsible for firing seven surface-to-air missiles at two opposition parties in Kuyah in September 2018, killing 11 party affiliates.¹⁴³⁸ A few days later in September 2018, an anonymous official of the Ministry of Peshmergas told the media that Iranian forces had made a 20 km incursion into the northern Sulaymaniyah governorate, up to Mount Surin following strikes against KDPI.¹⁴³⁹ Corroboration on these claims of Iranian incursions could not be found.

ISIL and Ansar Al Islam

According to ISW, citing Arabic sources, ISIL has a support zone in the Halabja mountains of Kurdistan since 2016 in conjunction with AAI which operates as a district unit under its command. According to a senior leader of the PUK, 'Peshmerga stated in February 2018 that Ansar al-Islam is leveraging its cross-border links and local knowledge to facilitate infiltration into Iran.' Furthermore, ISW notes that 'ISIS is expanding its support base in Iraqi Kurdistan beyond the Halabja Mountains. Local Kurdish forces have detained numerous alleged cells in Sulaymaniyah Province in northern Iraq since January 2018.¹⁴⁴⁰ According to the researcher Adel Bakawan, ISIL's support zone has expanded beyond Halabja in southern Kurdistan since 2013, reaching Sulaymaniyah and Kalar, up to Erbil.¹⁴⁴¹

ISW explained in a January 2019 email to EASO that Makhmour district, which formally lies in Erbil governorate [but also considered part of disputed with Ninewa governorate], is considered what ISW calls a 'contested district' which ISW states that ISIL 'exerts a high level of physical and psychological pressure over the population' and where ISIL cannot hold terrain but does contest control with the ISF. Indicators for contestation include abandonment of villages, destruction of agriculture and infrastructure, repeat raids, and assassinations' targeting the local social hierarchy.¹⁴⁴² For more information, see the chapter on [Ninewa](#).

On 23 July 2018, three Kurds, suspected by security officials and experts to belong to ISIL or Ansar al-Islam, attacked a government building in Erbil [reportedly the governor's building¹⁴⁴³], killed a government employee and wounded four security force members.¹⁴⁴⁴ On 13 December 2018, Kurdish security officials announced that 21 prisoners, most of whom are ISIL members, escaped from the jail of Sosa, near Sulaymaniyah city, in unclear circumstances. A day after the breakout, 15 had been recaptured and 6 were still at large.¹⁴⁴⁵

State's ability to secure law and order

A 2016 FFM report by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) states that in areas controlled by the KRG, their forces have the potential to provide very effective security. Law enforcement in KRI was described as more effective than in the south/central areas of Iraq, however, other sources commented that there are areas outside of KRI control where there are pockets that lack law

¹⁴³⁵ Rudaw, Two PDKI Peshmerga injured in bombing in Erbil, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁶ Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 October 2018, [url](#); ISHM: September 7 – 13, 2018, 13 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁷ GardaWorld, Iraq: Iranian missile attack kills 12 people in Koysinjaq (Iraqi Kurdistan) Sep. 8, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), 31 October 2018, [url](#), para. 25

¹⁴³⁹ New Arab (The), Iran military 'takes over mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan' after strikes on separatists, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁰ ISW, ISIS's second resurgence, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴¹ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹⁴⁴² ISW, Email to EASO, 17 January 2019

¹⁴⁴³ GardaWorld, Iraq: Gunmen attack governor's building in Erbil July 23, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁴ Al Monitor, Terrorist attack on Erbil government building raises concern in Iraqi Kurdistan, 25 July 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Security forces end attack on Erbil governorate by suspected Islamic State militants, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁵ Reuters, 21 Islamic State militants escape Iraqi jail, most recapture, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

enforcement, such as west of KRI. Another source interviewed by DIS stated that the possibility of protection can depend on ‘who the persecutor is’ and those in conflict with politicians would not be protected by authorities.¹⁴⁴⁶ The efficiency of KRI’s security forces is impeded by their political division as most of the KRI’s military, police and intelligence are indeed divided between those belonging to the KDP and those belonging to the PUK, both receiving their orders directly from their party and serving its interests. According to the researcher Adel Bakawan, only 25 % of Kurdish forces receive formally their orders from the KRG. The war against ISIL further heightened this division, as foreign aid was granted to politically affiliated forces instead of those belonging to the KRG.¹⁴⁴⁷

Moreover, both parties have different alliances in KRI and in the region. The KDP, which is a Turkish ally and a strong adversary of the PKK, agrees to Turkish operations on the territory it controls, namely Dohuk and Erbil governorates.¹⁴⁴⁸ The KDP’s ability to fight the PKK itself is limited as the areas controlled by the organisation often constitute hard and unreachable terrain. In the Qandil Mountains, which have become a de facto semi-autonomous area, although not in legal terms, the PKK acts as the local authority and strictly controls access by means of numerous checkpoints.¹⁴⁴⁹

Displacement and return

In December 2018, IOM stated that IDPs from Erbil came from one district as a ‘governorate of origin’ for IDPs.¹⁴⁵⁰ The same source listed 9 960 IDPs from Erbil displaced within Erbil itself.¹⁴⁵¹ Further information could not be found for 2018. However, IOM’s 2017 profile of Erbil governorate remarked that the only district of displacement in Erbil was Makhmour.¹⁴⁵²

Very little information is available on the displacement impact on civilians of Turkish and Iranian offensives against Kurdish insurgency groups.¹⁴⁵³ Different sources reported however that these Turkish and Iranian operations forced entire populations to relocate, fleeing the insecurity and infrastructure destruction.¹⁴⁵⁴ BasNews reported that 140 villages in one district of Dohuk governorate, Deraluk, were abandoned by inhabitants who feared Turkish air strikes due to the presence of PKK fighters, although some returned periodically to tend crops.¹⁴⁵⁵ According to the researcher Arthur Quesnay, populations living under PKK rule tend to resettle outside the mountains, mainly in southern districts around Erbil, where they are met with strong suspicion from the KDP.¹⁴⁵⁶ Iranian artillery shelling in parts of Erbil reportedly displaced three villages when Iranian Kurdish armed groups were targeted by Iran in July 2018.¹⁴⁵⁷ During times of ‘active bombing and shelling’, multiple villages are ‘often displaced’ or move and re-establish villages following Turkish bombings. Christian Peacemaker

¹⁴⁴⁶ Denmark, DIS, The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI): Access, Possibility of Protection, Security and Humanitarian Situation, April 2016, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁴⁴⁷ Bakawan, A., Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018; Quesnay, A., Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018; International Crisis Group, Twilight of the Kurds, 16 January 2018, [url](#); Fantappie, Maria, The Peshmerga Regression, Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2015, [url](#); Al Monitor, Terrorist attack on Erbil government building raises concern in Iraqi Kurdistan, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁸ Bakawan, A., Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹⁴⁴⁹ Niqash, Running Qandil: The Controversial Kurdish Region, Inside The Kurdish Region, 12 April 2017, [url](#); Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁰ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁵¹ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6, Table 2

¹⁴⁵² IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁴⁵³ Comment by the drafter of this chapter, OFPRA/France

¹⁴⁵⁴ CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 13 – 19, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁵ Basnews, 140 Villages of Single District in Duhok Abandoned due to PKK, 29 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁶ Quesnay, A., Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018

¹⁴⁵⁷ EPIC, ISHM: July 13 – 19, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

Teams (CPT) was told in 2017 by a local sub-mayor that inhabitants of twenty villages in Dinarte have been displaced to other cities.¹⁴⁵⁸

Return movement

Erbil's return movements are mainly from within the governorate itself (90 %).¹⁴⁵⁹ In terms of returnees, in December 2018, IOM listed Erbil as having 36 648 returnees from Erbil living in the governorate, all in their habitual residence, and all having been returned from being previously displaced in Erbil.¹⁴⁶⁰ Other KRI governorates were not listed as governorates of displacement origin or return by IOM's December 2018 report.

Hosted IDPs

Makhmour reportedly also hosts a camp for 12 000 Kurds originally from Turkey who fled and crossed the border during the 1990s¹⁴⁶¹ who are families who have 'lost children fighting in PKK ranks'.¹⁴⁶² The camp reportedly has 'armed units' taking up positions to protect residents from ISIL. Turkish jets reportedly attacked the camp in December 2018 which is accused by Turkey as linked to the PKK.¹⁴⁶³ Kurdistan24 reported that there were several people killed and wounded.¹⁴⁶⁴

ISIL crisis IDPs

KRI hosts roughly 35 % of the Iraqi displaced population.¹⁴⁶⁵ KRI is one of the regions in Iraq hosting the largest share of Iraq's IDPs generated by the 2014 crisis, reaching 700 410 individuals in December 2018. Broken down by governorate, Dahuk hosted the largest number, with 337 596 IDPs (concentrated in Sumel and Zakho districts and mainly coming from Ninewa), followed by Erbil, with 211 920 IDPs, almost all of whom were concentrated in Erbil district (originating from Ninewa, Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk), and lastly, Sulaymaniyah, with 150 894 IDPs, the majority of whom were located in Sulaymaniyah district (and originating from Salah al-Din, Anbar, Diyala, Baghdad, and Babil).¹⁴⁶⁶ KRI also hosted about 113 000 Syrian refugees as of late 2018.¹⁴⁶⁷

Most of those displaced people into KRI were displaced following the 2014 ISIL crisis.¹⁴⁶⁸ The primary concern of these IDPs has been the lack of employment and the high cost of living, especially due to high housing rental prices.¹⁴⁶⁹ IOM reported in 2018 that most displaced individuals in KRI felt 'mostly safe and protected' and intergroup threats were reportedly very low compared to other governorates.¹⁴⁷⁰

¹⁴⁵⁸ CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁹ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁴⁶⁰ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁶¹ Rudaw, Hundreds mourn at burials in Makhmour for Kurds killed in Turkish airstrikes, 15 December 2018, [url](#); Al Monitor, Why Turkey's Kurdish strategy will remain ineffective, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶² Al Monitor, Why Turkey's Kurdish strategy will remain ineffective, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶³ Al Monitor, Why Turkey's Kurdish strategy will remain ineffective, 28 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁴ Kurdistan24, Rocket attack targets Makhmour refugee camp, southern Erbil, 6 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁵ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁶⁶ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3, 6-7

¹⁴⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁴⁶⁸ UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan - Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 10; IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix Round 104, September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁹ IOM, Iraq displacement crisis 2014-2017, 8 November 2018, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁴⁷⁰ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 51-52

Several sources from 2018 state that returnees to their areas of origin often end up in secondary displacement.¹⁴⁷¹ In a survey conducted by REACH in August 2018, 10 % of the 375 households interviewed in Dohuk and 17 % of the 60 IDP households interviewed in Sulaimaniyah had a family member who tried to return, but who was then displaced once again.¹⁴⁷²

According to a report published by IOM in October 2017, Erbil is one of the governorates in Iraq which has been most well-functioning infrastructure in all districts, remarking that the only returnees to Erbil reporting having residential damage were in Makhmur district, where 53 % of returnees' houses suffered some damage and 25 % of returnees' houses had severe damage.¹⁴⁷³

Iraq is one of the most contaminated countries in the world with explosive ordinance and mines. The conflicts since the 1980s, such as the Iran-Iraq war (until 1988), the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 US-invasion, and border barrier minefields with Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as the impact of ISIL improvised devices.¹⁴⁷⁴ In the Kurdistan region, mines contamination is 'a fraction' compared to the explosive contamination in southern and central Iraq but mines from previous decades conflicts 'would still rank KRI among the world's top five most contaminated regions in the world'. Mine contamination covered 226 square kilometres in the KRI, with more than half of that area being in Sulaymaniyah.¹⁴⁷⁵ In 2018, the government reported that 35 people were victims of mines in KRI, 21 of whom died and 14 of whom were severely injured.¹⁴⁷⁶ According to IOM, in Erbil, about 15-17 % of arable/grazing lands are not accessible due to mining, with about 10 % being marked out as such.¹⁴⁷⁷

Leftover unexploded munitions from Turkish and Iranian shelling and bombing have been reported in areas such as in Qandil district and Sidekan district.¹⁴⁷⁸

Road security

In April of 2018, the main highway linking Erbil and Makhmour district was re-opened after a six-month closure due to clashes between KRG and Iraqi forces over the disputed areas in October 2017.¹⁴⁷⁹ The main road connecting Erbil to Kirkuk was also officially re-opened in August 2018, after having remained closed since clashes between ISF and the Peshmerga on 16 October 2017.¹⁴⁸⁰ A November 2018 mapping of security incident risk on roads, which is produced for humanitarian actors by iMMAP, highlights the two main highways entering into Erbil governorate from Kirkuk governorate as 'primary risk' roads at the border point in Kirkuk where they enter into Erbil.¹⁴⁸¹

¹⁴⁷¹ IDMC and NRC, *Nowhere to Return to, Iraqis' search for durable solutions continues*, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6; Denmark, DIS/Norway, *Landinfo, Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I)*, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁴⁷² REACH, *Intentions Survey of IDPs in Informal Sites*, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5; 11-12

¹⁴⁷³ IOM, *Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles*, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴⁷⁴ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Iraq, *Mine Action*, 16 November 2018, [url](#); iMMAP, *iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response – Monthly security incidents situation report (September 2018)*, 4 October 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁷⁵ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Iraq, *Mine Action*, 16 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁶ Kurdistan24, *Mines in Kurdistan Region killed 21 in 2018: IKMAA*, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁷ IOM, *Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles*, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴⁷⁸ CPT, *Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017)*, 17 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁹ AA, *Iraq's Erbil-Makhmour roads reopens after 6-month hiatus*, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

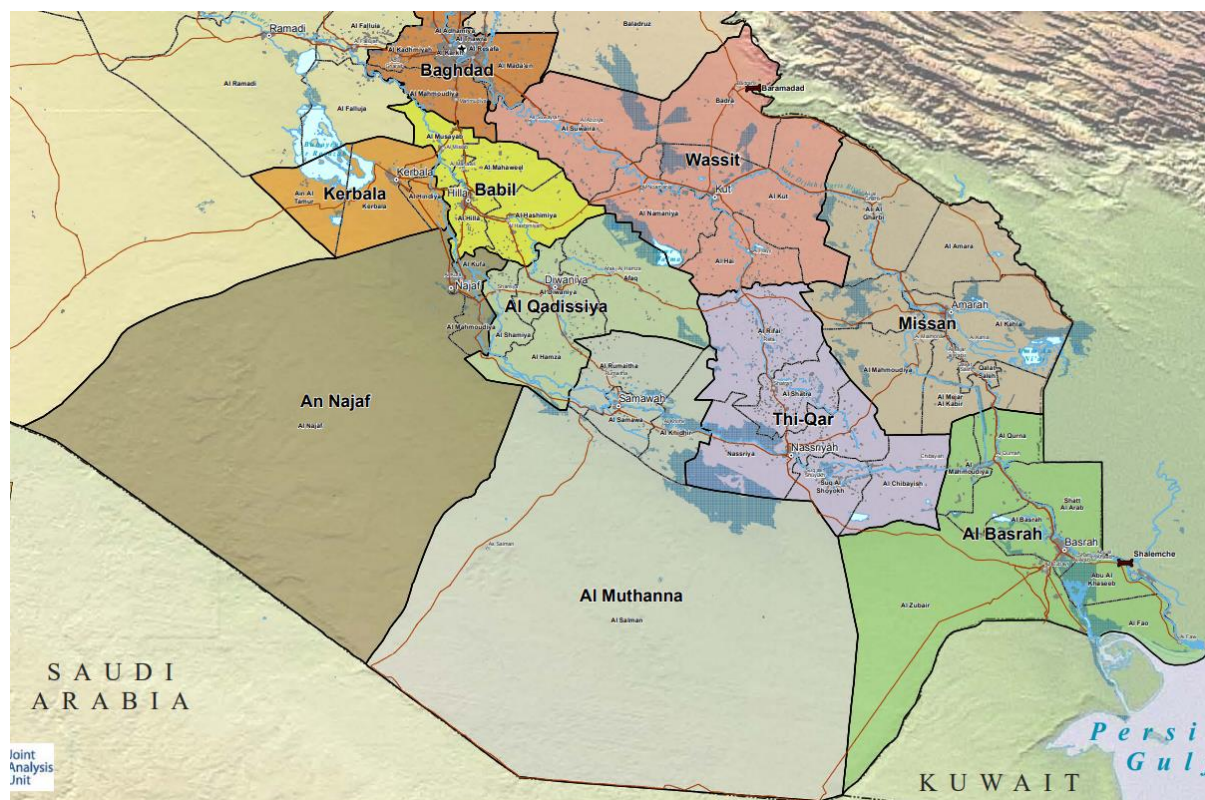
¹⁴⁸⁰ UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018)*, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/975), 31 October 2018, [url](#), para. 16

¹⁴⁸¹ iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response - *Security Incidents Risk Level on Camps and Roads in Kirkuk Governorate 01-30 November 2018*, 5 December 2018, [url](#)

2.8 Southern governorates

This chapter covers the ‘southern’ governorates organised for the report for this purpose to include: Babil, Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthnana, Najaf, Thi-Qar, Qadissiya, and Wassit. Babil was included in the southern governorates chapter for organisational purposes only.

Information on the general situation of the governorates in the area is provided, with more specific information provided where relevant on a per governorate level.



Map 14: southern Iraq with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹⁴⁸²

General description of the governorate

A wide range of ethnic and religious groups live in southern Iraq. The overwhelming majority is Shi'a. Southern Iraq is also home to Iraqis of African descent, Faily Kurds, Christians and Sabean Mandaens.¹⁴⁸³ Most Sabean-Mandaens live in southern Iraq, including in Basrah, with a few in Baghdad and the KRI.¹⁴⁸⁴

Population estimates for the southern governorates in 2018 are as follows: Babil (2 065 042), Basrah (2 908 491), Thi-Qar (2 095 172), Kerbala (1 218 732), Missan (1 112 673), Muthanna (814 371), Najaf (1 471 592), al-Qadisiya (1 291 048), and Wassit (1 378 723).¹⁴⁸⁵ However, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) estimates the population of Basrah governorate to be about 4.5 million.¹⁴⁸⁶ The vast majority of the population of Basrah governorate and the south of Iraq are Shia Muslim Arabs.¹⁴⁸⁷

¹⁴⁸² UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸³ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁴⁸⁴ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁴⁸⁵ Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁶ NRC, Basra Fact Finding Mission Report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁸⁷ NRC, Basra Fact Finding Mission Report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

Assyrian and Chaldean Christians are also present in Basrah governorate.¹⁴⁸⁸ Basrah also has a considerable Sunni community.¹⁴⁸⁹ There are hundreds of Arab tribes and clans in the Basrah governorate.¹⁴⁹⁰ Dr Geraldine Chatelard, Contemporary Historian and Social Anthropologist associated with the Iraq (Erbil) branch of the Institut français du Proche-Orient (French Institute in the Near East), commented that there is much less demographic diversity in the south than in any other region of Iraq. Nowhere in the south is there a ‘critical mass’ of Sunnis to create religiously homogenous neighbourhoods. She noted that Sunnis, Christians, and Sabeen-Mandaens tend to cluster in neighbourhoods with a similar sect but within the majority Shia areas.¹⁴⁹¹

Basrah city is the third largest city in the country. The governorate of Basrah has the largest oil fields in Iraq. The oil fields compete with the largest fields in the world and are also characterised by abundant resources of oil and low production costs.¹⁴⁹² The opening up of oil reserves to foreign expertise after the fall of Saddam Hussein was seen as a long awaited boost to the economy that was shattered as result of the sanctions, in the aftermath of the Gulf War. However, ordinary Iraqis have seen little or any benefits of the process as those who profit from it are mostly corrupt politicians and local leaders.¹⁴⁹³ The oil companies that were supposed to open up job opportunities for the local population are now forced to hire those with connections to powerful tribal leaders and Islamist parties. Meanwhile, local militias with influential political and tribal links have established their own companies that give them lucrative security contracts with the subsidiaries of foreign oil firms.¹⁴⁹⁴

Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

In a September 2018 interview with Al Monitor Hisham al-Hashimi, a security analyst at Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies in Iraq, described the security actors in Basrah governorate as follows:

‘Security roles in Basra overlap [on three levels]. First, local security is enforced by the local police, the National Security [Council] and the intelligence service in the province [of Basra]. The second [level] is the Basra [security] operation, represented by a branch of the army and federal police in charge of military and security strategies and tactics aimed at imposing stability and enforcing the law when it comes to major incidents that are outside the local security’s scope.’ The third level consists of “tribes, factions and special protection [units] in charge of [safeguarding] party buildings, political and religious figures, and private security companies.” ... referring to the PMU and other armed groups affiliated with the PMU.¹⁴⁹⁵

In a November 2018 report USDOD stated that ‘security in Basrah was solely an Iraqi responsibility, but noted that three ISF brigades and an ISF divisional headquarters had been dispatched to the area to restore order in late 2017. Two of the brigades were later withdrawn for training, leaving one brigade to manage provincial security.’¹⁴⁹⁶ The same source further noted that security forces from Basrah that have been sent to fight ISIL in 2014 have not yet returned to the governorate. Authorities in Basrah and Missan have pointed out that due to insufficient security forces the governorates ‘risked an increase in arms proliferation, tribal feuds, militancy, and smuggling’.¹⁴⁹⁷

¹⁴⁸⁸ NCCI, Basrah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁸⁹ NRC, Basra Fact Finding Mission Report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3 ; NCCI, Basrah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁹⁰ NCCI, Basrah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁹¹ Chatelard, G., Email to EASO, 19 October 2018

¹⁴⁹² Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, Basra, Oil wealth of Iraq, 26 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹³ Guardian (The), ‘Iraq is dying’: oil flows freely but corruption fuels growing anger, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Guardian (The), ‘Iraq is dying’: oil flows freely but corruption fuels growing anger, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Al Monitor, PMU steps up role in Iraq’s security after Basra rioting, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁶ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁴⁹⁷ US, Lead Inspector General for Overseas and Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations, July 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 24

Iraqi security forces

Basrah Operations Command (BasOC)

IWS reported in December 2017 that the BasOC is responsible for the governorate of Basrah. However, the division has not been able to assert command over the governorate due to lack of manpower, as the majority of the 14th Iraqi Army division was deployed out of the governorate. The BasOC consists of the 14th Iraqi Army Division, with five brigades - the 50th to 53rd Brigades, including the 64th Brigade. As of 2016, all units, with exception of the 64th Brigade, have been redeployed outside the governorate.¹⁴⁹⁸

Babil Operations Command (BabOC)

The BabOC is responsible for Babil governorate and Southern Baghdad Belts. The BabOC, which includes the 8th Iraqi Army Division has the majority of its detachments in Anbar. It also retains detachments in Jurf al-Sakhr, as well as Kerbala and Najaf.¹⁴⁹⁹

Mid-Euphrates Operations Command (MEOC)

The MEOC is responsible for the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, as well as the southern Anbar district of Nukhaib. MEOC is chiefly responsible for ensuring the security of Shia pilgrims and securing Iraq's southern governorates.¹⁵⁰⁰

Rafidain Operations Command (ROC)

The ROC oversees security in Muthanna, Thi-Qar, Missan, Qadisiyah and Wassit governorates. The ROC deployed several of its Emergency Police Battalions to Baghdad and Samarra, to secure the pilgrim routes there, subsequently reducing the manpower of the ROC locally.¹⁵⁰¹

4th Federal Police Division

The 4th FP Division is one of the few units with a security presence in southern Iraq, maintaining a detachment in Basrah, whereby the 16th Brigade (as of October 2016) is concentrated in western Kerbala and the desert district of Nukhaib. The brigade also maintains a presence in Wassit Province (as of October 2016). The Division's 13th Brigade has a presence in Basrah prison (as of July 2016), and the 14th Brigade retains a presence in Nasiriyah prison, Thi-Qar governorate (as of June 2015).¹⁵⁰²

PMU forces

Although the southern governorates were not directly engaged in the battle against ISIL, the Shia from the south provided the majority of the young fighters that filled the ranks of the PMU forces.¹⁵⁰³ Large numbers of Shia militias supplement security in the areas where the MEOC operate, giving them legitimacy in securing pilgrim routes.¹⁵⁰⁴

The Shia militias view Basrah as a key recruitment pool for Shia youth. As indicated in ISW's December 2017 report, the most prominent PMU units operating in Basrah include the Badr Brigade, AAH, KH, Saraya Taila al-Khorasani, and Kataib Jund al-Imam, including Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam. These groups oppose any effort of control from the ISF that could hamper their freedom of action.¹⁵⁰⁵

¹⁴⁹⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁴⁹⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14, 19

¹⁵⁰⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁵⁰¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁵⁰² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁵⁰³ Financial Times, Iraq's Shia militias: capturing the state, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁵⁰⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

Sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI noted that KH ‘operates in secret ways in Diyala and in Southern Iraq, including Basra’.¹⁵⁰⁶

The outbreak of protests that rocked the southern region in July 2018 (see section in this chapter on [Anti-government Protests](#)) prompted a deployment of ISF forces in Basrah. The deployment came after an alliance of the leading Shia militias, many backed by Iran, vowed to respond to the violent protests. Reportedly, masked groups in combat fatigues set checkpoints in the city centre of Basrah - the epicentre of the protests.¹⁵⁰⁷ According to a July 2018 International Crisis Group report, during the demonstrations the PMUs ‘attacked protesters, to defend their political order’.¹⁵⁰⁸ A Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, noted that during the protests there were moments when PMUs affiliated with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (Iraq’s supreme Shia cleric) were siding with the protesters while the PMUs that have close links with Iran were on the other side, especially when the Iran consulate was attacked.¹⁵⁰⁹

In September 2018 security reinforcements were sent from Baghdad to stabilise the situation.¹⁵¹⁰ Hisham al-Hashimi, a security analyst, stated in an interview to Al Monitor in September 2018 that the PMU are expected to play a greater security role in Basrah ‘in the near future’.¹⁵¹¹

In September 2018, the PMU office in Basrah announced the formation of the Voluntary Reserves, consisting of ten brigades. The Voluntary Reserves were formed in response to the violence that broke out during the demonstrations, in which demonstrators burnt down several offices belonging to Iranian-backed PMU forces. According to Al Monitor this action ‘suggests an intent of the PMU forces to expand their presence and increase the number of their cadres in Iraq’.¹⁵¹²

The formation of the Voluntary Reserves has also brought about negative reactions amongst civil society activists, who oppose the growing Iranian presence in Basrah. Civil activists claimed in an interview to Al Monitor in September 2018 that PMU’s creation of the Voluntary Reserves is an attempt to ‘militarize society’ and a ‘tool to suppress protests against the ruling parties whose military wings are represented by the PMU factions’.¹⁵¹³

According to a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, although PMUs are present in Basrah they have not been redeployed here in large numbers and are not manning checkpoints in Basrah City like in Baghdad, Anbar, Salah al-Din or Diyala.¹⁵¹⁴

Recent trends 2018

IBC data on civilians killed

Civilian deaths data is taken from Iraq Body Count and should be consulted in reference to this chapter: EASO, Country of Origin Information: Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Iraq_IBC_Civilian_Deaths.pdf

Overall, IBC data showed that the lowest intensity rates for civilian deaths in Iraq (civilians killed per 100/k) are in the south. According to IBC data for 2018, within the governorates covered in this

¹⁵⁰⁶ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁵⁰⁷ AP, Security forces deploy in Iraq’s Basra following violence, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, How to Cope with Iraq’s Summer Brushfire, 31 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

¹⁵⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹⁵¹⁰ Al Jazeera, Iraq: Calm returns to Basra after week of violent protests, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

RFE/RL, Iraqi PM Urged To Resign Over Basra Unrest, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹¹ Al Monitor, PMU steps up role in Iraq’s security after Basra rioting, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹² Al Monitor, Will Shiite militias become Iraq’s Basij, 30 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹³ Al Monitor, Will Shiite militias become Iraq’s Basij, 30 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

chapter, the highest intensity of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of population) was recorded in Basrah (4.62/100k), Thi-Qar (2.52/100k), Missan (1.71/100k) and Babil (1.43/100k).¹⁵¹⁵

In 2018 IBC data for Basrah governorate recorded 88 security-related incidents that led to 127 civilian deaths, marking an increase in intensity from 3.35/100k in 2017 to 4.62/100k in 2018. The districts with the highest number of security-related incidents leading to civilian deaths were Basrah – 42 leading to 69 civilian deaths, Al-Zubair – 16 security incidents leading to 20 civilian deaths and Shatt Al-Arab – 9 incidents leading to 16 civilian deaths. The intensity of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of population) was recorded in Shatt Al-Arab (9.69), followed by Basrah (5.11) and Al-Zubair (4.12). Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Basrah governorate involved gunfire (68.2 %) and executions/summary killing (25 %).¹⁵¹⁶

In 2018 IBC data for Thi-Qar governorate recorded 39 security-related incidents that led to 50 civilian deaths and had an intensity rate of 2.52 killed/100k, marking a decrease from 4.99/100k in 2017. Nassriya district had most incidents with 24 leading to 27 civilian deaths (3.67/100k). Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Thi-Qar governorate involved executions/summary killing (43.6 %) and gunfire (41 %).¹⁵¹⁷

In 2018 IBC data for Missan governorate recorded 13 security-related incidents that led to 18 civilian deaths and had an intensity rate of 1.7 killed/100k, marking an increase decrease from 1.2/100k in 2017. Amara district had most incidents with 6 leading to 9 civilian deaths (1.6/100k). Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Missan governorate involved gunfire (69.2 %) and executions/summary killing (30.8 %).¹⁵¹⁸

In 2018 IBC data for Babil governorate recorded 23 security-related incidents that led to 28 civilian deaths (a decrease compared to 2017 from an intensity level of 5.57/100k killed down to 1.42/100k killed in 2018). The highest rate of violence against civilians (deaths per 100k of population) was recorded in Al-Mahawil (3.86) followed by Al-Musayab (3.22). Most incidents recorded by IBC during 2018 in Babil governorate involved gunfire (73.9 %) and executions/summary killing (21.7 %).¹⁵¹⁹

For information on security-related incidents and civilian casualties in Kerbala, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, and Wassit see IBC's data in the EASO's Supplementary COI Source: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018.¹⁵²⁰

Security incidents and activity

Southern Iraq has largely escaped the ISIL violence that hit the rest of Iraq and many thousands of Iraqis from southern Iraq went to fight against Islamic State in 2014.¹⁵²¹ Southern Iraq is 'more secure' than other parts of the country, although problems of criminality, drug abuse, and violence between

¹⁵¹⁵ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths in Basrah Governorate see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁵¹⁶ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths in Basrah Governorate see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵¹⁷ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths in Basrah Governorate see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁵¹⁸ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths in Basrah Governorate see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁵¹⁹ For more information on security-related incidents and civilian deaths in Basrah Governorate see EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵²⁰ EASO, Iraq Security Situation - Supplementary COI Source on Iraq: Iraq Body Count Data and Analysis on Civilians Killed in Iraq, 2012, 2017-2018, February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²¹ New York Times (The), In Strategic Iraqi City, a Week of Deadly Turmoil, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

Shia armed groups involved in militia and tribal groups also occur¹⁵²², including organised crime by militias¹⁵²³, as well as kidnapping, extortion¹⁵²⁴, and sex trafficking.¹⁵²⁵ According to a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, there are few security incidents in the south. Many involve tribes, PMUs, gangs, or a combination of all of the above.¹⁵²⁶

According to DFAT, writing in October 2018, ‘violence between different Shi’a armed groups occurs in southern Iraq and is mostly related to control of land and oil revenues. Local sources suggest that intra-Shi’a violence predominantly affects those who are actively involved in a militia or tribal group.’¹⁵²⁷

Tribal rivalries

The security void resulting from the deployment of security forces in 2014 to fight ISIL insurgency in central and northern Iraq left the southern region open to tribal clashes, criminal activity and political violence. Fighting between rival Shia tribes over farmland, state construction contracts, land ownership gradually undermined the stability of the region.¹⁵²⁸

Local police were reluctant, if not incapable in stopping these conflicts. Even in situations where intervention is durable, police officers - many of whom relate to one of the conflicting tribes- hesitate for fear of reprisals.¹⁵²⁹ Weapons proliferated following the Iraqi Army’s hasty retreat from Kuwait after the Gulf War in 1991 and were further boosted after the US-invasion in 2003.¹⁵³⁰ Armed confrontations often involve automatic firearms and artillery guns. Some tribes possess heavy artillery, such as canons, rocket launchers and Katyusha rockets.¹⁵³¹

NRC reported that Basrah tribes are known to be well-armed and that clashes are the main source of violence in the area.¹⁵³² In 2017 this included tribal fighting between rival Shia tribes over ‘farmland, state construction contracts and land ownership’ which threatened security at oil installations in the south.¹⁵³³ In 2018 Foreign Policy reported that in Basrah ‘unresolved tribal disputes in Basra frequently spill into violent clashes, transforming some residential areas into conflict zones’. It further assessed that local security forces rarely intervene in tribal disputes. The government has resorted to short-term military actions to stabilise the situation temporarily.¹⁵³⁴ AFP also reported on the situation and described a ‘never-ending cycle of revenge attacks’ in Basrah where tribal feuds turn into battles with the usage of heavy arms that kill bystanders.¹⁵³⁵ In the first part of 2018 tribal violence and unrest increased in Basrah governorate. Independent analysts tracked 62 tribal-related violent incidents in April, compared to 42 in March.¹⁵³⁶ In November 2018, the head of the Iraqi parliament office in Basrah governorate stated that 133 people have been killed and another 411 were wounded in tribal armed confrontations since January 2018.¹⁵³⁷

¹⁵²² Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁵²³ New York Times (The), In Strategic Iraqi City, a Week of Deadly Turmoil, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁴ National (The), Fear has become a fact of life in Basra, 9 January 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁵ New Arab (The), The Iraq Report: Baghdad’s ‘most-wanted’ list gives Islamic State leader a pass, 8 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁶ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹⁵²⁷ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁵²⁸ Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq’s south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁹ New Arab (The), Tribal feuds spread in Iraq’s Basra province, 19 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁰ New Arab (The), Tribal feuds spread in Iraq’s Basra province, 19 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³¹ Raseef22, South Iraq’s armed clans outmuscling the state, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³² NRC, Basra Fact Finding Mission Report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵³³ Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq’s south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁴ FP, Northern Iraq May Be Free, but the South Is Seething, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁵ AFP, Tribal feuds spread fear in Iraq’s Basra, 19 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁶ Jane’s 360, Tribal violence and Islamic State attacks likely in multiple locations ahead of Iraq’s 12 May elections, 03 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁷ Basnews, Nearly 550 Iraqi People Killed, Wounded in Tribal Conflicts this Year, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

Anti-government protests

In the beginning of July 2018 protests took place across the Shia heartland of southern Iraq over electricity cuts, poor water quality, poor public services, and unemployment and widespread corruption.¹⁵³⁸ The spark that lit the protests came when Iran, that supplies much of the electricity in the south, cut off the electricity, due to unpaid bills, amounting to USD 1 billion.¹⁵³⁹

Public anger also caused protests and demonstrations throughout 2015 and 2016.¹⁵⁴⁰ The recent protests that began on 8 July at the oil field near the town of al-Qurna, north-west of Basrah City spread quickly in the oil fields areas of al-Burjasiya and Rumaili, and later Basrah City.¹⁵⁴¹ The demonstrations soon escalated and spread to neighbouring cities, Amarah (Missan governorate), Nasiriyah (Thi-Qar governorate), Samawa (Muthanna governorate), including the holy cities of Najaf (Najaf governorate) and Kerbala (Kerbala governorate).¹⁵⁴² On 13 July, demonstrators stormed Najaf International Airport, bringing traffic to a temporary standstill.¹⁵⁴³ Demonstrators in Nasiriya, Thi-Qar governorate, surrounded the governor's house on the same day.¹⁵⁴⁴ Dozens of demonstrators stormed the offices of the South Oil Company in Basrah before security forces regained control of the site. Protestors took to blocking routes to local refineries, setting up tents near the oil fields.¹⁵⁴⁵ On 13 July Prime Minister Abadi commissioned a ministerial committee of five ministers to travel to Basrah to discuss plans of short-, medium- and long-term service priorities for the region. The committee announced the decision to grant Basrah's water department USD 2 billion to develop the drinking water sector as well 10 000 jobs for the people of Basrah.¹⁵⁴⁶

Despite government promises demonstrations continued. On 15 July demonstrators stormed provincial government buildings in Basrah, Najaf, Kerbala and other southern cities. Checkpoints were posted along roads connecting to the main southern cities, where people were stopped and questioned for hours. The demonstrations further provoked anti-Iranian sentiments as protestors took to burning photos of Iranian leaders, shouting slogans against Iran and blaming Iran for supporting failed governments in Iraq.¹⁵⁴⁷

A new wave of protests broke out again on 3 September, this time in Basrah City, when demonstrators took to the street over the state of the city's infrastructure, setting fire to the provincial government headquarters, as well as offices belonging to the al-Dawa party and PMUs. Basrah security officials announced a curfew from 10:30 p.m. to quell the protests.¹⁵⁴⁸ Demonstrators shouted anti-Iran slogans outside the Iranian consulate in Basrah, before setting it on fire and burning the Iranian flag. Basrah Airport came under attack, but no casualties or damages were reported.¹⁵⁴⁹ The US consulate, located close by, was not targeted. The attack prompted the U.S. Department of State to shut down the consulate.¹⁵⁵⁰

¹⁵³⁸ Guardian (The), Protests spread through cities in Iraq's oil-rich Shia South, 18 July 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Police clash with protestors in Basra as unrests sweeps neglected southern cities in Iraq, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁹ Telegraph (The), Police clash with protestors in Basra as unrests sweeps neglected southern cities in Iraq, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁰ Guardian (The), Thousands of Iraqis protest against corruption and power cuts, 7 August 2015, [url](#); Financial Times, Basra: Hopes for Iraq's oil capital going up in flames, 3 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴¹ HRW, Security Forces fire on Protestors, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴² Guardian (The), Protests spread through cities in Iraq's oil-rich Shia South, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴³ Reuters, Protestors storm airport in Iraqi city of Najaf, halting air traffic, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁴ Al Monitor, Oil Installations hit by protests in southern Iraq, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁵ Al Monitor, Oil Installations hit by protests in southern Iraq, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁶ Al Monitor, Oil Installations hit by protests in southern Iraq, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁷ Al Monitor, Iraqi protests escalate with no new government in sight, 16 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁸ Reuters, Protestors torch political party offices in Basra's fourth night of violence, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁹ Reuters, Rockets fired at Basra airport as violent protests grip Iraq, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, US shuts down consulate in Iraq's Basra citing Iranian 'threats', 29 September 2018, [url](#)

Security forces are reported to have opened fire and beaten protestors, including children during the demonstrations.¹⁵⁵¹ Authorities also cut off access to the internet on 12 July which sources interviewed by AI viewed as a measure to prevent the sharing of footage and pictures of violence used by security forces.¹⁵⁵² Demonstrators told AI that Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactic Forces (SWAT) confronted protestors and opened fire at them before chasing and beating them. Other accounts concluded that security forces used tear gas against protestors, as well as beating them with batons, cables and plastic hoses, in an attempt to disperse them.¹⁵⁵³

In September 2018 the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that at least 20 people were killed and more than 300 were injured in Basrah since the protests began on 8 July.¹⁵⁵⁴ According to the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights casualties between 9 August and 3 October from the Basrah protests reached 18 civilians killed (17 men and 1 woman), 155 civilians injured (all men) and 43 members of the security forces injured.¹⁵⁵⁵ By October 2018 it was reported that at least 27 persons were killed and nearly 100 injured in clashes between protestors and security forces in Basrah.¹⁵⁵⁶

There are no exact figures as to the numbers of demonstrators arrested. Some sources maintain that dozens of demonstrators have been arrested.¹⁵⁵⁷ The spokesman for the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, Ali Al-Bayati, stated in an interview to AI Monitor that the number of arrested protestors had reached 141, but that some had been released. Those remaining in detention are accused of acts of vandalism. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights denied these allegations and asserted that criminal activities lay behind the vandalism, carried out by mafia and smuggling rings, as well as political parties.¹⁵⁵⁸ A spokesperson from the MoI asserted that only persons confessing to arson and vandalism remain in custody. Other detainees were to be released after the conclusion of the investigation.¹⁵⁵⁹ In a January 2019 interview with EASO for this report, a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch stated according to the information HRW had about protestors it was tracking, protestors were released after they were arrested for short periods and to their knowledge, no new arrests of activists or organisers of protests are happening; though smaller-scale protests are happening on a weekly basis.¹⁵⁶⁰

Basrah incidents

Criminal gangs in Basrah have exploited the security gap and there has been a rise in robberies, kidnapping, murder, and drug trafficking while the Iraqi security forces struggle to keep security among competing armed groups.¹⁵⁶¹ Drug usage and drug trafficking were reported to be widespread in Basrah in 2018, which officials blamed on corruption and unemployment.¹⁵⁶²

According to the UN OHCHR there were six cases of abduction and assassination reported in Basrah in 2018.¹⁵⁶³

¹⁵⁵¹ HRW, Iraq: Security forces fire on protestors, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵² AI, Iraq: Security forces deliberately attack peaceful protestors while internet is disabled, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵³ AI, Iraq: Security forces deliberately attack peaceful protestors while internet is disabled, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁴ OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Myanmar freedom of expression, Iraq Basra protests and Yemen attack, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁵⁵⁶ Independent (The), Boiling Basra: Residents afraid of their taps as Iraq's water crisis threatens to destabilise the region, 1 October 2018 [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁷ AI Monitor, Dozens of Basra activists arrested, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁸ AI Monitor, Dozens of Basra activists arrested, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁹ AI Monitor, Dozens of Basra activists arrested, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹⁵⁶¹ USDOS, OSAC, Iraq 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Basrah, 20 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶² New Arab (The), Basra: The epicenter of Iraq's drug problem, 2 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶³ Iraqi News, OHCHR: 6 cases of abduction and assassination in Basra in 2018, 13 January 2019, [url](#)

In January 2018 four people were injured in a tribal dispute in al-Sha'biya area, Basrah governorate. Police arrested one of the persons involved in the fight.¹⁵⁶⁴

On 4 September 2018 at least at least five protesters were reported to have been killed and 41 others injured when unidentified attackers in a white van threw grenades at demonstrators in Basrah City.¹⁵⁶⁵

On 6 September, three protesters were reported to have been killed in Basrah. Activists claimed that at least one of those killed was shot by an armed guard of a political party building that was attacked by the protesters.¹⁵⁶⁶

The women's rights activist Saud al-Ali was shot dead by unknown gunmen on a street in Basrah on 25 September 2018. al-Ali had been a significant female presence during the demonstrations, usually dominated by men. No group has claimed responsibility for the killing. The murder of al-Ali marked the first public assassination in Basrah since the protests broke out in July.¹⁵⁶⁷

Days after Al-Ali's death, a medic, Haidar Shaker, was shot outside the al-Sadr Hospital in Basrah. Shaker, a former PMU volunteer in the fight against ISIL, took part in the demonstrations. Both incidents spread concerns amongst other activists, who fear retaliation from influential groups who oppose their protests.¹⁵⁶⁸ Activists are reported to have received threats from what they perceive are Iranian backed Shia militias, and political groups in Basrah. There are allegations of Shia militias working with local authorities to quell the protests. These charges have been denied by the head of Sayyed al-Shuhada, one of several Basrah militias.¹⁵⁶⁹

On 17 November, a Muslim cleric, and prominent figure in the demonstrations, Wissam al-Ghrawi was killed outside his home in Basrah by unknown assailants. Al-Ghrawi had earlier advocated for that 'protesters should take up arms over poor public services in the city.'¹⁵⁷⁰

Al-Mada news site, stated in an article on 8 October 2018 that Iraqi intelligence had revealed name lists, compiled by armed groups, with connections to various political parties. The lists, allegedly featured the name of leaders of the protests. According to al-Mada, political parties are purported to have ordered the hits to make it look like tribal related incidents.¹⁵⁷¹ In a December 2018 report Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and Minority Rights Group International stated that 'death threats by militias and associated parties have become ubiquitous among activists, many of whom blame the influence of Iran, which supports the largest militias in the PMF, including the Badr Organization. There have also been unconfirmed reports that a hit list of activists' names is circulating among members of AAH and Hezbollah al-Nujaba, two other PMF militias.'¹⁵⁷²

Below are examples of incidents in the other governorates covered under this chapter:

Babil/Babylon incidents

Babil is placed under the 'south' in this chapter for organisational purposes only.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Iraqi News, Four people wounded in tribal fight in central Basra, 7 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁵ OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Myanmar freedom of expression, Iraq Basra protests and Yemen attack, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁶ AI, Iraq: Effective investigations needed into deaths of protesters in Basra [MDE 14/9055/2018], 7 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵⁶⁷ Middle East Eye, Iraqi Women's rights activist shot dead in Basra, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁸ Middle East Eye, Female activist's death sparks fear of assassination campaign in Basra, 1 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁹ AP, Iran-backed militia accused of reign of fear in Iraqi Basra, 23 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁰ VOA, Iraqi cleric linked to Basra protests killed, 18 November 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Leading figure of Iraq's Basra protests assassinated days after renewed demonstrations, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷¹ Al-Mada, لجان التحقيق في البصرة تعثر على "قوائم اغتيال" تطول ناشطين بحوزة فصائل مسلح, [Investigation committees discover 'assassination lists' over activists in possession of armed factions], 8 October 2018, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 5 – 11, 2018, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷² Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and Minority Rights Group International, Activists under Threat in Iraq, December 2018, [url](#), p. 16

Babil was affected by ISIL activity though it was spared large attacks during the ISIL period but continued to be affected by sporadic attacks in 2018.¹⁵⁷³ During 2018 ISIL made raids in Babil governorate, mostly in north-east along the border with Anbar and in Jurf al-Sakhr.¹⁵⁷⁴ The town of Jurf al-Sakhr, located in the north-west of Babil, was the only majority Sunni town in the governorate. It was liberated from ISIL in 2014. Unlike other liberated towns, Jurf al-Sakhr remains depopulated because of its strategic and delicate location. Not only is it connected to the major cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, it is also situated along the road leading to the holy Shiite cities of the south – Najaf and Kerbala. As of August 2017, residents have not been allowed to return and only members of the Iranian-backed militias – the Badr organisation and the AAH – have access to the town.¹⁵⁷⁵ During the DIS/Landinfo April 2018 FFM to KRI, representatives of Kirkuk Now stated that in Jurf al-Sakhr district PMUs operate outside of government control and no IDPs have been allowed to return or visit.¹⁵⁷⁶ A Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, similarly noted in a January 2019 interview that no returns were recorded in Jurf al-Sakhr.¹⁵⁷⁷

In January 2018, two PMU leaders were assassinated by insurgents.¹⁵⁷⁸ Also in January, an Iraqi soldier was killed and an officer was wounded while trying to deactivate a booby-trapped vehicle in Jurf al-Nasr region.¹⁵⁷⁹

In March 2018 five ISIL members and one PMU were killed during an attack launched by the militants on security forces in al-Owaisat village in Jurf al-Nasr, north of Babil.¹⁵⁸⁰

PMUs reportedly have a strong presence in the Musayyib area of Babil since 2014, making a return of ISIL to that region unlikely in the near future. Garda World added without giving details that kidnappings and abductions by tribes at fake checkpoints in the area of Musayyib have reportedly occurred in the past. In April 2018, the vice-chair of the Iraqi Olympic Committee was kidnapped at one such checkpoint and later released; 4 of 20 perpetrators were arrested and likely involved militias and criminal gangs.¹⁵⁸¹

In June 2018, a targeted assassination by unknown gunmen killed the head of Iraq's Babil passport department when they opened fire on his car near his home.¹⁵⁸² In the same month, authorities and security officials announced tightened security measures in Babil governorate at places of worship and gathering places following the announcement that ISIL was reportedly planning attacks in central and south Iraq. An arrest campaign and, intensified searches also occurred.¹⁵⁸³ A July 2018 bomb blast targeting police injured an officer and driver in Babil.¹⁵⁸⁴

In October 2018, an explosive device targeted a government vehicle but no one was injured.¹⁵⁸⁵

¹⁵⁷³ BBC Monitoring, Attacks target intelligence, security forces in Iraq, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁴ Wing, J., Review Of Security Trends In Iraq 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 15 January 2019, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Up in Iraq, Jan 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁵ Niqash, Security or Demographics? Why Babel Province Has A Ghost Town, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁶ Denmark, DIS, Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 73

¹⁵⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹⁵⁷⁸ Wing, J., Violence Up in Iraq, Jan 2018, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁹ Iraqi News, Iraqi soldier killed, officer wounded defusing trapped vehicle in Babil, 26 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁰ Iraqi News, 9 Islamic State members, security personnel killed, injured in suicide attack, north of Babel, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸¹ GardaWorld, Vicechairman of Iraq Olympic Committee kidnapped 24 April in Babil province and released next day, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸² BBC Monitoring, Unknown gunmen kill Iraqi official in Babel, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸³ Iraqi News, Islamic State preparing for massive attacks in Iraq: Sources, 9 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁴ Iraqi News, Police personnel and driver injured in bomb blast, north of Babel, 11 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁵ BBC Monitoring, Attacks target intelligence, security forces in Iraq, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

Thi-Qar / Dhi Qar incidents

In February 2018 it was reported that 20 clan clashes have developed between tribes in Thi-Qar due to water scarcity. The local government was unable to reach a solution over the tribal differences.¹⁵⁸⁶

In Nasiriyah, 6 civilians and 36 police were injured when protests turned violent in a week long protest in July 2018 and protesters stormed government buildings, started fires, and also raided the airport temporarily.¹⁵⁸⁷

Kerbala incidents

Two protesters died in Kerbala during week-long protests in July 2018 when they turned violent.¹⁵⁸⁸

In August 2018 one person was killed and 19 others injured when a weapon stash of the PMU affiliated al-Abbas combat division exploded in al-Wand, north of Kerbala.¹⁵⁸⁹

In September 2018 a bomb blast targeting a police force in al-Razaza area between Kerbala and Anbar governorates left seven policemen injured.¹⁵⁹⁰

Missan incidents

In January 2018, the Iraqi government had to deploy security forces to restore order in the governorate of Missan, after armed tribesmen launched an attack on tribal rivals' houses. Eyewitnesses stated that assailants drove similar vehicles to the Iraqi police, displaying automatic guns, medium weapons, including RPG7 grenade launchers.¹⁵⁹¹

In February 2018 tribal conflicts were reported to intensify in Missan governorate due to water scarcity. In the northern areas of the governorate tribal leaders took control of the water flow of the Tigris River for irrigation purposes.¹⁵⁹²

In May 2018, unknown attackers bombed a military and a religious office belonging to the Sairoon Alliance of Muqtada al-Sadr in May 2018, though both were empty at the time of the attack.¹⁵⁹³

Clashes in Missan between protesters and security forces led to 9 security forces and 21 protesters injured after protests turned violent in July 2018.¹⁵⁹⁴

Muthanna incidents

On 15 July 2018 it was reported that one protester was killed and 15 others were injured in Muthanna, as protesters attacked the headquarters of National Wisdom Movement political party.¹⁵⁹⁵ CNN further reported that three protesters died in protests in al-Samawa in July 2018.¹⁵⁹⁶

¹⁵⁸⁶ Al Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁷ CNN, Protests spread, turn deadly in Iraq: at least 8 are dead, dozens hurt, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁸ CNN, Protests spread, turn deadly in Iraq: at least 8 are dead, dozens hurt, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁹ Iraqi News, 20 people killed, injured as pro-govt troops' weapon stash explodes, north of Karbala, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁰ Iraqi News, Bomb attack in Iraq leaves seven policemen wounded, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹¹ Raseef22, South Iraq's armed clans outmuscling the state, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹² Al Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹³ AA, Unknown attackers target Sadr-linked sites in S. Iraq, 15 May 2018, [url](#); Rudaw, Sadr's bases and religious centers attacked in Maysan after provincial win, 16 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁴ CNN, Protests spread, turn deadly in Iraq: at least 8 are dead, dozens hurt, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁵ Iraqi News, 16 protesters killed, injured, 33 others arrested in demonstrations at Iraq's Muthanna, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁶ CNN, Protests spread, turn deadly in Iraq: at least 8 are dead, dozens hurt, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

Najaf incidents

Two protesters died and several injured in Najaf on 15 July 2018.¹⁵⁹⁷

Qadissiya incidents

In December 2018, a man was killed in his home in the governorate capital, Diwaniyah, due to a tribal conflict.¹⁵⁹⁸

Wassit incidents

According to the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights 176 detained protesters in Wassit have been released, including 158 on bail.¹⁵⁹⁹

State's ability to secure law and order

Tribal clashes are affecting the economy of southern Iraq economy as some foreign companies and oil refineries have suspended their operations in the area, and workers refused to work due to security concerns.¹⁶⁰⁰ Security forces attempts to settle tribal conflicts in the southern governorates have had limited impact.¹⁶⁰¹

Arab News reported in April 2018 on corruption and extortion in the Iraqi oil sector noting that 'Basra's prominent clans have been paid more than 105 million USD as part of a racketeering scheme disguised as state-backed compensation.'¹⁶⁰² In Basrah 'many oil fields are located in areas dominated by strong and even armed tribes and oil companies are known to hire influential tribal figures to settle disputes with tribes as well as reserving different positions for their members.'¹⁶⁰³

Criminal gangs in Basrah have exploited the security gap and there has been a rise in robberies, kidnapping, murder, and drug trafficking while the ISF struggles to keep security among competing armed groups.¹⁶⁰⁴ The United States Overseas Security Advisory Council stated in its Iraq 2018 Crime and Safety report that:

'Kidnapping is common throughout the Basrah consular district and remains at significantly high levels. Kidnapping for ransom is a common means of monetary gain. Kidnapping for intimidation (to include kidnapping intended to send a "political" message) is also common in Basrah. RSO Basrah assesses that most kidnappings are criminal rather than political and reflect the deteriorating economic situation.'¹⁶⁰⁵

Displacement and return

In their January 2019 ILA III, IOM estimated that 3 % of IDPs are hosted in the southern governorates¹⁶⁰⁶, nearly all in Najaf.¹⁶⁰⁷ In December 2018 the number of IDPs hosted in southern

¹⁵⁹⁷ CNN, Protests spread, turn deadly in Iraq: at least 8 are dead, dozens hurt, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁸ Iraqi News, Iraqi civilian killed in a tribal dispute in Diwaniyah, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁹ Iraqi News, Iraqi authorities release 273 detained protesters in Basra, Wasit, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁰ Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#); AFP, Tribal feuds spread fear in Iraq's Basra, 19 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ Al Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#); Raseef22, South Iraq's armed clans outmuscling the state, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰² Arab News, Oil firms' multimillion-dollar bribery racket bringing death to the streets of Iraq's Basra, April 4, 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰³ NRC, Basra Fact Finding Mission Report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁰⁴ USDOS, OSAC, Iraq 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Basrah, 20 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁵ USDOS, OSAC, Iraq 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Basrah, 20 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁶ In IOM's analysis the South is made up of the following regions: Basrah, Missan, Najaf, Thi-Qar, Qadissiya and Muthanna. See IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 6, footnote 4

¹⁶⁰⁷ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 6

governorates were as follows: Kerbala (22 098), Babil (18 690), Najaf (12 858), Qadissiya (11 250), Basrah (7 704), Missan (2 592), Muthanna (1 200), Thi-Qar (3 552).¹⁶⁰⁸

In November 2018, UNOCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview showed that in the southern governorates the people most in need were in Najaf (28 069), followed by Kerbala (25 497), Babil (23 853), Qadissiya (15 206), Wassit (13 529), Basrah (8 088), Thi-Qar (4 171), Missan (2 966), and Muthanna (1 290).¹⁶⁰⁹

According to a Senior Researcher on Iraq for Human Rights Watch, Babil is the only governorate in the country that has seen zero returns.¹⁶¹⁰ IOM noted that returns are not allowed to some areas of Babil and 'no returns have been recorded to Al-Musayab district in Babil. IDPs originally from Jurf Al-Sakhar [in Babil] (around 30 000 individuals) are currently moving from one area to another but are not allowed to return for security reasons.'¹⁶¹¹

¹⁶⁰⁸ IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁰⁹ UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶¹⁰ HRW, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019

¹⁶¹¹ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 15, 24

Annex I: Chronology

Date	Key events
1979	Through a series of coups in the 1958 and 1963, the pan-Arab nationalist Arab Socialist Baath Party took power in Iraq, and in 1979, Saddam Hussein became President in the one-party Baathist system. ¹⁶¹²
1979-2003	International and non-international conflict periods. Saddam Hussein and Arab Socialist Baath party control Iraq; crimes against humanity in situations of international/non-international armed conflict committed throughout the regime against political opponents and minority groups. ¹⁶¹³ UNHCR reports that armed groups opposing Saddam Hussein and the Baath regime also committed violent resistance, including Peshmerga forces, Badr, Dawa, and Kurdish Islamist groups such as Ansar Al Islam/Jund al Islam. ¹⁶¹⁴
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq War; use of chemical weapons and execution of prisoners of war; International armed conflict. ¹⁶¹⁵
1987-1988	Anfal campaign and campaigns against Baath opponents; February-September 1988: <i>Anfal</i> campaign against the Kurds ¹⁶¹⁶ and forced resettlement/systematic persecution of Kurds ¹⁶¹⁷ 182 000 Kurds estimated to have been deported, killed, disappeared in de-population campaigns in Kurdish areas carried out by Baath party; 5 000 Kurdish villages destroyed; Arabisation campaigns; March 1988: Air attacks and chemical weapons attack on village of Halabja gassing of civilians, killing 5 000; violent suppression of Shia and Kurdish political opposition. ¹⁶¹⁸
2 August 1990	Iraq invades and occupies Kuwait; Breach of international peace and security under UN Security Council Resolution 660 (1990) ¹⁶¹⁹ ; International armed conflict. ¹⁶²⁰
16 January 1991 – 28 February 1991	First Gulf War; the US and coalition forces begin UN-authorized air attacks against Iraq until Kuwait is liberated; international armed conflict. ¹⁶²¹
1991	In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War: Baath/Hussein's violent suppression of uprisings caused mass displacement of Iraqis out of the country and into Iran/Turkey; deemed a threat to international peace and security under UN Security Council 688 (1991) ¹⁶²² ; Uprisings in the south and the north by Shia and Kurdish political opponents to Baathist regime and violent suppression by the government; killing, attacks, forced expulsion of Marsh Arabs by the Baath government; systematic assassinations and violence against Shia population and leadership. ¹⁶²³

¹⁶¹² NPR, Timeline: Saddam's Violent Road to Execution, 29 December 2006, [url](#)

¹⁶¹³ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1397 and 1398)

¹⁶¹⁴ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 58

¹⁶¹⁵ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶¹⁶ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 50 a)

¹⁶¹⁷ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 50 a)

¹⁶¹⁸ HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992,

[url](#); HRW, Genocide in Iraq – The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds, July 1993, [url](#); HRW, Bureaucracy of Repression: The Iraqi Government in Its Own Words, February 1994, [url](#).

¹⁶¹⁹ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 71

¹⁶²⁰ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019],

[url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶²¹ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019],

[url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶²² UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers, April 2009, [url](#), para. 71

¹⁶²³ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1396); HRW, Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and its Aftermath, June 1992, [url](#); Frontline World, The Crimes of Saddam Hussein - 1980-1990 The Marsh Arabs, 24 January 2006, [url](#); HRW, The Iraqi Government Assault on the Marsh Arabs, January 2003, [url](#)

1994-1998	Kurdish civil war involving Iraq government forces and Kurdish militias linked to KDP and PUK, Kurdish political parties; Kurdish uprisings against the Iraqi authorities occurred at several points in the 1960s-80s and in 1975 Kurds split into the two main factions of PUK and KDP vying for control; In 1994, civil war broke out between PUK and KDP and more than 2000 Kurds were killed ¹⁶²⁴ and engaging in use of artillery, shelling, and heavy weapons against civilian targets and executions ¹⁶²⁵ ; KDP with Baath government support takes control of KRI government and PUK claims control of Sulaymaniyah – splitting the region into rival administrations. ¹⁶²⁶ This conflict was noted as occurring in a period of non-international armed conflict in Iraq by UNHCR . ¹⁶²⁷
September 2001	Bomb blasts by Jund al Islam (Soldiers of God) / Ansar al Islam attacking PUK areas of KRI including UN and NGO buildings; clashes break out between Jund al Islam and Kurdish forces ¹⁶²⁸ ; PUK is accused by human rights groups of killing prisoners. ¹⁶²⁹
20 March 2003	US-led military campaign and invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein launched based on accusation that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction; International armed conflict period (until handover of sovereignty in June 2004). ¹⁶³⁰
28 June 2004	The US officially hands over sovereignty to Iraqi government; End of international armed conflict; Beginning of non-international armed conflict between multi-national forces/Iraqi security forces and insurgent groups of different kinds. ¹⁶³¹ Members of the ISF, Iraqi government, Kurdish forces, Sahwa, and members of armed groups such as ISI, AQ-I, Ansar al Islam, Naqshbandi Army, Jaysh al Mahdi/Mahdi army/Promised Day Brigades/Asaib ahl al Haq, Kataib Hezbollah, and others involved in 'indiscriminate and targeted attacks on civilians and security forces' post-2003; criminal gangs since 2003 have also cooperated with militias and armed groups to carry out abduction, rape, murder, extortion, trafficking. ¹⁶³²
30 January 2005	Transitional National Assembly elected with Shia and Kurdish parties winning the majority. ¹⁶³³
2005	Allegations of militias, including under special forces and Ministry of Interior command, engaged in human rights violations, torture, killings, excessive use of force. ¹⁶³⁴
October 2005	Iraq approves new constitution as an Islamic democratic republic. ¹⁶³⁵
15 December 2005	Parliamentary elections lead to the Shia conservative United Iraqi Alliance victory; PM al Jaafari takes over followed by Nour al Maliki. ¹⁶³⁶
2006	Sectarian violence / civil war involving Shia militias; retaliatory violence between sectarian groups; Al Askari Shia mosque is bombed 22 February 2006; sets off violence, killings, public executions, abuses between groups, initially targeting Arab Sunnis in retribution for Askari bombing; extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, torture, including involving police and militias is reported; allegations of death squads within the MoI. ¹⁶³⁷
7 June 2006	US air strikes kill Abu Musab al Zarqawi, leader of AQ-I ¹⁶³⁸ ; the Sahwa Sunni tribal militias are created by US/Coalition forces to fight against AQ-I. ¹⁶³⁹
2007	UNAMI reported that Sunni and Shia armed groups deliberately targeted civilians with suicide bombs, car bombs, indiscriminate attacks and attacks that 'are tantamount to crimes against humanity'; large and mass casualty attacks on civilians occurred as well as intimidation, threats,

¹⁶²⁴ Slate, The Kurds, 28 September 1996, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁵ UN Secretary General, Situation of human rights in Iraq (A/51/496), 15 October 1996, [url](#), para. 87-89, 91-93

¹⁶²⁶ BBC News, Iraqi Kurdistan profile – timeline [Dated: October 31 2017], 31 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁷ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶²⁸ BBC News, Iraqi Kurdistan profile – timeline [Dated: October 31 2017], 31 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ HRW, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan – 2002, 2002, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁰ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶³¹ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 210 (footnote 1395)

¹⁶³² UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq, 31 May 2012, [url](#), p. 58

¹⁶³³ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶³⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004), 7 December 2005, [url](#), para. 43-45

¹⁶³⁵ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶³⁶ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶³⁷ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 January -28 February 2006, n.d., [url](#), pp. 1-3

¹⁶³⁸ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶³⁹ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 January-30 June 2009, June 2009, [url](#), para. 18

	abduction, torture, assassinations, extra-judicial killings; Sectarian violence drive many civilians from their homes. ¹⁶⁴⁰
5 November 2007	Internal displacement reaches 2.3 million, increasing 16 % since August. ¹⁶⁴¹
22 February 2008 and March 2008 and again in May 2008	Heavy fighting between Mahdi army Shia militia and Iraqi forces breaks out in Basrah; and in May in Baghdad; violence spreads and ISF fights to gain control of Shia extremist controlled areas. ¹⁶⁴²
July-December 2008	Decrease in violence levels and mass casualty attacks by militias; 6 787 civilians were killed in 2008, compared to 34 542 civilians killed in 2006. ¹⁶⁴³
2009	January-June 2009: Violence drops to lowest level since 2003; civilians systematically and deliberately targeted in bombings, targeted attacks; 'ideologically driven insurgent operations and criminal acts committed by organized gangs' were difficult to differentiate; extra-judicial killing and hundreds of unidentified bodies reported. ¹⁶⁴⁴
19 August 2009 – October 2009	Increase in violence in second half of 2009; Truck bombs in Baghdad kill over 100 and wound over 1 000 people; and another series of bombings to target reconciliation meetings in October 2009; Human rights commission estimates that more than 85 000 people died in fighting in 2004-2009 ¹⁶⁴⁵ ; over 4 000 killed in 2009. ¹⁶⁴⁶
4 May 2010 and 1 October 2010	Elections; State of Law Coalition and Iraqi National Alliance ally to govern parliament; Nour al Maliki becomes PM supported by Muqtada al Sadr and smaller Shia factions. ¹⁶⁴⁷
2010	ICRC remarks that despite improvements in security, ongoing 'armed conflict' continued to involve armed violence, bombings, election incidents, attacks, and killings, displacement, and impacts that disrupted the lives of many communities. ¹⁶⁴⁸
2010	Armed groups carry out repeated targeting of civilians in the context of political stalemate and 'Sunni discontent' with violence killing and injuring hundreds of civilians per month; over 4000 civilians killed in 2010 from ongoing violence and use of IEDs by insurgents and terrorist groups, with some attacks appearing sectarian in nature designed to kill large numbers of civilians. US forces begin to withdraw in August 2010. ¹⁶⁴⁹
2011	UNAMI signals the 'ongoing armed conflict' in Iraq caused high levels of violence, killing 2 771 civilians and wounding more than 7 000 people during the year. Armed insurgent and opposition groups deliberately targeted civilians. US forces withdraw by December 2011. ¹⁶⁵⁰
2012	UNAMI indicates that Iraq is in a situation of heightening communal tensions in April 2012 ¹⁶⁵¹ ; Waves of terrorist attacks occur across Iraq reported in September 2012; 3 102 civilians killed across Iraq in 2012 due to 'armed violence' and terrorism; 1 000 IEDs and VBIED incidents recorded in the last 6 months of 2012; violence levels had been declining since 2007 but begin to reverse and increase due to sustained violence by a range of non-state armed groups 'directed primarily at civilians' for political, ethnic, religious or political/sectarian reasons. ¹⁶⁵²
2013	Rising insurgent violence in Anbar; Sunni insurgent groups formed together under the Islamic State of Iraq and also with Al Qaeda and affiliates ¹⁶⁵³ ; 'armed violence and terrorism' and targeted killings by these groups occurred; in the south, Shia militias were suspected of targeted killings. ¹⁶⁵⁴

¹⁶⁴⁰ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 July-31 December 2007, 31 December 2007, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁴¹ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁴² UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁴³ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 July – 31 December 2008, December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁴⁴ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 January-30 June 2009, June 2009, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹⁶⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁶ UNAMI, Human Rights Report: 1 July-31 December 2009, December 2009, [url](#), p.v2

¹⁶⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁸ ICRC, Annual Report 2010, [url](#), p. 427

¹⁶⁴⁹ HRW, World Report 2011 (Events of 2010) – Iraq, 2011, [url](#); UNAMI, Human Rights in Iraq - 2010, January 2011, [url](#), para. 1.1, 2.1

¹⁶⁵⁰ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: 2011, May 2012, [url](#) para. 2.1

¹⁶⁵¹ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁵² UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July-December 2012, June 2013, [url](#), pp. vii, 2, 3

¹⁶⁵³ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq, [Last updated 29 January 2018], n.d., [url](#); UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July-December 2013, June 2014, [url](#), p. iii

¹⁶⁵⁴ UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July-December 2013, June 2014, [url](#), p. iii

April 2013	ISF ends a demonstration in Hawija (Kirkuk) violently leading to deaths; protesters demonstrate in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Diyala; Sunni sense of exclusion is exacerbated by the government crackdown. ¹⁶⁵⁵
November 2013	UN states that Iraq is having serious challenges maintaining political stability and that there is a deteriorating security situation ¹⁶⁵⁶ ; total number of civilians killed in 2013 rises up to 7 818, the highest year since 2008, when 6 787 civilians were killed. ¹⁶⁵⁷
January 2014	ISIL attacks and fighting begin in Anbar; Fallujah falls and is taken over by ISIL; 85 000 people displaced ¹⁶⁵⁸ ; the conflict with ISIL (and its predecessor groups in Iraq) was identified as a 'non-international armed conflict' by the UN in January 2014. ¹⁶⁵⁹
June 2014	ISIL precursor group, ISI, declares itself a Caliphate; Mosul falls on 10 June and ISIL takes control as violence spreads across north-central Iraq; conflict displacement increase to 1.2 million though some return to Mosul ¹⁶⁶⁰ ; civilian casualties increase significantly as the 'non-international armed conflict' spreads from Anbar to other areas; Baghdad experiences daily attacks of IEDs; as did Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din. ¹⁶⁶¹
12 June 2014	ISIL carries out the Camp Speicher massacre, executing 1 500-1 700 of unarmed Shia military cadets. ¹⁶⁶²
July-August 2014	ISIL seizes control of large areas of north-western Iraq including Mosul and Tikrit ¹⁶⁶³ ; threats and persecution of minorities in Mosul and other parts of ISIL-controlled territory; widespread systematic attacks could constitute crimes against humanity ¹⁶⁶⁴ ; Shia militias mobilise and begin moving north to fight ISIL. ¹⁶⁶⁵
August 2014	ISIL attacks Sinjar, Zummar, Ninewa Plains; displacement increased to 1.8 million ¹⁶⁶⁶ ; systematic and widespread attacks against Yazidi and ethno-religious minorities in the Ninewa plains and areas taken over by ISIL which may constitute genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes ¹⁶⁶⁷ ; Worst displacement wave of 2014 as Sinjar is captured. ¹⁶⁶⁸
December 2014	Military operations against ISIL continued, including KRI forces, PMUs, militias, tribal fighters, international forces, and the ISF, fighting to reclaim territory from ISIL. ¹⁶⁶⁹
January 2015	Insecurity and conflict in central-north; displacement rises to 2.2 million. ¹⁶⁷⁰
19 March 2015	UN states that ISIL may have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide particularly for manifest patterns of attack against the Yazidi people in particular. ¹⁶⁷¹

¹⁶⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), para. 3

¹⁶⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁷ UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July-December 2013, June 2014, [url](#), p. iii

¹⁶⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁵⁹ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June – 5 July 2014, 18 July 2014, [url](#), Summary

¹⁶⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁶¹ UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: January-June 2014, August 2014, [url](#), p. i

¹⁶⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), para. 32

¹⁶⁶³ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#); UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: January-June 2014, August 2014, [url](#), p. iii

¹⁶⁶⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), para. 17-28

¹⁶⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), pp. 5-11

¹⁶⁶⁸ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 2 January 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁶⁹ UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014-30 April 2015, 13 July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18), 13 March 2015, [url](#), pp. 5-11; UNAMI/OHCHR, A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yazidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL, August 2016, [url](#), p. 4

31 March 2015	Tikrit is liberated from ISIL by ISF. ¹⁶⁷²
18 May 2015	ISIL takes Ramadi and forces there flee; Military operations in Anbar trigger displacement of 116 850 people ¹⁶⁷³ ; widespread violence, armed conflict, and displacement impeded IDP access to basic services; ongoing hostilities caused mass displacement mainly in Anbar and Ninewa, and Salah al-Din. ¹⁶⁷⁴
November 2015	Sinjar is retaken by KRI forces. ¹⁶⁷⁵
December 2015	Military operations to retake Ramadi intensify ¹⁶⁷⁶ and Ramadi is retaken at the end of the month by ISF. ¹⁶⁷⁷
January 2016 – July 2016	ISIL attacks Shia areas of Baghdad and Muqdadiya killing at least 50 people; car bombs targeting Shia; anti-ISIL operations ongoing. ¹⁶⁷⁸
March 2016	Battles to retake Heet and areas along the Mosul corridor; 50 000 displaced. ¹⁶⁷⁹
June 2016	Recapture of Fallujah from ISIL; 85 000 displaced. ¹⁶⁸⁰
September 2016	Military operations in Anbar and Mosul corridors; 500 000 displaced. ¹⁶⁸¹
17 October 2016	Military operations to retake Ninewa and Mosul city and many civilians become trapped and used as human shields by ISIL during sieges ¹⁶⁸² ; Fight to retake Mosul begins and 90 000 people are displaced in two months. ¹⁶⁸³
January 2017	Eastern Mosul declared liberated ¹⁶⁸⁴ ; Second phase of Mosul operations to take back the western half of Mosul city; deteriorating humanitarian situation. ¹⁶⁸⁵
February to 10 July 2017	Fighting to retake Mosul, and in July, Mosul is declared liberated. More than 2 500 civilians killed, but the figure could be much higher. ¹⁶⁸⁶
2017	Civilians killed in 2017 totalled 8 079 from armed violence, terrorism and conflict. ¹⁶⁸⁷
September 2017	Military operations to take Hawija on 21 September ¹⁶⁸⁸ ; Hawija successfully retaken. ¹⁶⁸⁹
25 September 2017	KRG holds independence referendum and overwhelming majority vote for it; referendum not approved by Iraqi government and ruled unconstitutional. ¹⁶⁹⁰
October 2017	180 000 people displaced in the disputed territories by military realignment when ISF retake areas held by KRG since 2014. ¹⁶⁹¹
7 December 2017	Prime Minister Abadi declares the ISIL caliphate militarily defeated ¹⁶⁹² ; during December-January 2018, returns (3.6 million people) exceed displacement (2.6 million) for the first time since 2014. ¹⁶⁹³

¹⁶⁷² UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016-10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁷³ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#); UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁶⁷⁴ UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014-30 April 2015, 13 July 2015, [url](#), pp. 7-8

¹⁶⁷⁵ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016-10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁷⁷ UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016-10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Chronology of events – Iraq [revised 4 January 2019], [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹⁶⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶⁸¹ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶⁸² UNAMI, Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July to December 2016, 30 August 2017, [url](#), p.xviii

¹⁶⁸³ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

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May 2018	National parliamentary elections are held; no government could be formed ¹⁶⁹⁴ ; parties with links to the Shia militias and the PMUs are elected to office with the top list being composed of Muqtada al Sadr's Sairoon, followed by Hadi Al Ameri's Iran-backed Fateh coalition headed by Badr, and PM Haider al Abadi in the third place. ¹⁶⁹⁵
July and August 2018	Basrah protests over corruption and lack of services spread from the south; buildings are set on fire and several protesters are killed. ¹⁶⁹⁶
August 2018-	Turkey continues to airstrike targets in northern Iraq. ¹⁶⁹⁷
December 2018-	ISIL devolves into insurgent tactics at its lowest operational tempo since 2010 ¹⁶⁹⁸ ; operations continue to pursue the remnants of ISIL and asymmetric attacks are ongoing across northern and north-central Iraq (Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar, Baghdad). ¹⁶⁹⁹

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Annex III: Terms of Reference

In order to assess Article 15(c) QD: serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report should examine the following indicators of indiscriminate violence:

- Is an armed conflict taking place?
 - Who are the armed groups?
 - Are there confrontations?
 - What are their areas of control?
 - What are the areas where confrontations take place? Have there been offensives taking place?

- What is the nature/extent of the violence?
 - Where? Geographical scope / intensity of armed conflict in different areas
 - Presence of actors / conflict in different areas of the territory
 - Number of incidents over a specified reference period? Frequency of security incidents / trends?
 - Nature and methods/tactics used – are they likely to cause (intended and/or unintended) civilian casualties? What are the main causes of civilian casualties?
 - Are civilian targets attacked? (hospitals, schools, etc.)
 - Number of civilian casualties? Patterns over time?

- What is the impact of the violence? Displacement:
 - How many civilians have been displaced by the conflict?
 - Is there secondary displacement? (forced return, evictions, etc.)

Research should aim to cover:

1. General description of the security situation
 - a. Short overview of main conflict context (2014-2017)
 - b. Overview of current conflict actors, key conflict dynamics/trends, and political context (2018)
2. Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by region
 - a. Central region (with separate chapters for governorates: Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din)
 - b. Southern governorates
 - c. Kurdistan Region of Iraq

