

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	848
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Finnish Immigration Service
Titel:	Security Situation in Baghdad - The Shia Militias
Udgivet:	29. april 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. oktober 2015



Suuntaus project

SECURITY SITUATION IN BAGHDAD - THE SHIA MILITIAS

29 April 2015
Finnish Immigration Service
Country Information Service
Public theme report



Pakolaisrahasto



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1. INTRODUCTION

This theme report forms part of the ERF-funded 'Suuntaus' project by the Country Information Service of the Finnish Immigration Service, the purpose of which is to identify major country information topics and better anticipate future information needs. The method used is the systematic review of interview minutes, using a purpose-designed form template. The countries examined are Nigeria, Iran, Iraq and Russia; stateless persons are also examined. The theme of the present report is one of the most frequently quoted reasons for seeking asylum, according to the minutes analysed. The data in this report are derived from public sources.

2. BACKGROUND

Traditionally, both Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as other religious minorities¹ have lived side by side in Iraq. During the regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Sunnis were the ruling class even though Shiites constituted the majority of the population. After the fall of Saddam Hussein following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Shiites began to take an active role in politics. Shia parties became very powerful after the 2005 elections. Following the Iraqi civil war (2006–2007), the previously peaceful coexistence of Sunni and Shia communities came to an end, and Baghdad was gradually split into more clearly defined Sunni or Shia districts. Thousands of people died during the civil war, with Shia and Sunni militias killing each other. Shiites took over several parts of the city that had been occupied by Sunnis and other minorities, turning Baghdad into a predominantly Shia city. According to 2009 estimates, the population of Baghdad was 80–85% Shia.² Since the civil war, the situation in Baghdad has calmed down.

The Sunnis have, however, been dissatisfied with the Shia administration, and feel that it is discriminating against them. The unwillingness of the Shia administration to integrate Sunnis into the administration sparked public protests between 2011 and 2013 among the Sunni population. These protests were suppressed by the security forces. Protesters have been killed, arrested, assaulted and accused of belonging to al-Qaeda.³

The general security situation in Iraq changed again as the civil war in Syria escalated and ISIS began to take control of areas in western Iraq. When ISIS invaded Mosul in June 2014 and the Iraqi army fled, Shia militias began to organise themselves in order to defend Iraq and Baghdad, in particular, against the ISIS Sunni fighters. Even before this, the Shia militias had behaved violently towards the Sunni population in response to the ISIS troops gaining ground in Iraq. Sunnis were considered ISIS supporters and were feared to be members of ISIS.

ISIS continues to set off bombs in Baghdad almost daily, targeting Shia districts with the intention of demonstrating its ability to push into Baghdad. Together with the Iraqi security forces, Shia militias are inciting fear among Baghdad's Sunni population. It is feared that the Shia militias will take revenge for ISIS's actions on Sunnis who have nothing to do with ISIS. Shia militias have committed serious human rights violations against the Sunnis.

Despite the persistent strikes by ISIS on Baghdad, which make life in Shia districts difficult, this report focuses on the actions of the Shia militia, which are currently a major reason for seeking asylum.

¹ Eg. Christians, Turkmens, Yesids and Mandeans.

² MIGRI 5.4.2009 p. 3

³ HRW 4.1.2014, Al-Jazeera 28.12.2012



3. SHIA MILITIAS IN BAGHDAD

The Sunni–Shia conflict is closely related to the operations of various armed groups. There are a number of armed groups in Baghdad, which are complicating the daily lives of people living in the city. Iraq is reported to have dozens of Shia military groups that call themselves al-Muqawama al-Islamiya ("the Islamic resistance"). They see themselves as defenders of Iraq and its sacred sites against ISIS, and as a force filling the void left by the Iraqi army. All of these groups have connections with Iran.⁴ They are armed by Iran and share their (religious) ideology with the country. They are loyal to the Iranian religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and follow the doctrine of wilayat-e faqih, according to which learned religious men should be actively involved in all sectors of government and society.⁵

According to Amnesty International, there are four major armed Shia militias in Iraq: Badr Brigades, Mahdi Army (currently Peace Brigades), Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH) and Kata'ib Hizbollah. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq is the most powerful of these four groups.⁶ Many asylum seekers have mentioned AAH as a threat and this group appears to be the most influential in Baghdad. According to the Institute for the Study of War, Shia militias are particularly active in Kadhamiya, Adhamiya, Mansour and Saidiya, and operate openly in Sadr City, Shu'ala, Hurriya and Kadhamiya.⁷

Shia militias are actively recruiting fighters, not only to fight against ISIS on the front line but also to guard Baghdad's various districts.⁸ Militant groups in Iraq are becoming increasingly powerful and independent. The current Prime Minister, Haidar al-Abadi, is unable to control the Shia militias,⁹ nor are they punished for the acts of violence they are committing.¹⁰ Shia militias operate independently and the government is unwilling or unable to control them. Some Shia politicians fear that the Shia militia will become as radical as the Sunni al-Qaeda.¹¹

According to Amnesty International, Shia militias are violating the human rights of Sunni.¹² During the civil war, all Shia militias¹³ were referred to as the Mahdi Army, a habit which appears to have persisted. Sunnis are harassed at checkpoints. They have been sent threatening letters and been driven from their homes by the militias. Besides engaging in Sunni persecution, Shia militias have also assumed the role of moral guardians. They have raided liquor stores and killed the owners.¹⁴ They also persecute people on the basis of their occupations. Although Sunnis have reported falling victim to persecution and discrimination by the Shia militias, they also report being rescued from the militias by their Shia neighbours.¹⁵

Shia militias and kidnapping gangs kidnap Sunnis and almost invariably demand a ransom. After the ransom is paid, the victims are released, or in the worst cases are found dead, killed in the manner of an execution. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the number of kidnappings after which the victims are found shot in such a manner is

⁴ Spyer and al-Tamimi 12/2014

⁵ Smyth 18.9.2014; Cochrane 1/2009, p. 30-31

⁶ Amnesty October 2014

⁷ ISW 9.3.2015

⁸ Smyth 18.9.2014

⁹ Martin et al. 18.2.2015

¹⁰ Amnesty 14.10.2014

¹¹ Abdul-Ahad 24.8.2014

¹² Amnesty 25.2.2015

¹³ Cockburn 2008, p. 229

¹⁴ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

¹⁵ HRW 30.7.2014



growing in Baghdad. In November 2013, there was a dramatic increase in the number of such incidents.¹⁶ In January–February 2014, UNAMI recorded 245 execution-style killings, at least 39 of which took place in Baghdad.¹⁷ In December 2014, the command and control centre of the Baghdad security forces confirmed that kidnappings in Baghdad had decreased considerably, by as much as 90%. Financial rewards are used as an incentive to encourage people to reveal the whereabouts of kidnappers or gangs. Arrests have been made in various Shia districts, such as Baladiyat and Shu'ala.¹⁸

Militias are claimed to be working together with the security forces. According to reports, Shia militias dress in uniforms and drive vehicles identical to those of the security forces. They have been seen together with security officials at checkpoints. There have been recent reports of possible human rights violations committed by the Iraqi army outside Baghdad.¹⁹ Shia militias, particularly Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, have also been accused of human rights violations. Shia militias fighting ISIS in the front line often regard Sunni civilians as ISIS supporters simply because of their religious beliefs. The same can be seen in Baghdad, although it appears that the Sunni population's position is currently much more difficult in areas outside Baghdad in cases where the security forces and Shia militias have been able to reclaim such areas from ISIS. Acts of revenge by Shia militias against the Sunni population in such areas are escalating the Sunni–Shia conflict everywhere in country.²⁰ According to the Iraqi Vice President, Iyad Allawi, ethnic cleansing²¹ by Shia militias is currently under way in the so-called Baghdad Belt²².

The battles against ISIS are moving closer to Baghdad, making life increasingly difficult for internally displaced persons (IDP).²³ These people are primarily Sunnis from the Anbar province and are not welcomed with open arms by the Shia militias. Fleeing to the Shia-dominated areas in southern Iraq is an equally bad alternative. It is currently very difficult for internally displaced persons to enter Baghdad, because they need a local sponsor in order to gain entry to the city.²⁴ Landlords must provide the authorities with the names and social security codes of any new tenants, because it is feared that ISIS troops may try to infiltrate Baghdad by concealing themselves among internally displaced persons.²⁵ In April 2015, the Sadrist head of the Security and Defence Committee, Hakim al-Zamili, commented that ISIS is sending combatants to Baghdad disguised as internally displaced persons, which has resulted in growing suspicion among the residents of Baghdad.²⁶ The fear of ISIS infiltrators is making it difficult for IDPs to gain access to Baghdad. By July 2014, the Abu Hanifa mosque in the Adhamiya district had registered approximately 6,000 internally displaced families.²⁷ The mosques of Baghdad are offering shelter to internally displaced persons from the Anbar province, even though some city residents have suspicions concerning the fugitives.²⁸

It has been reported that Shia militias are also trying to prevent internally displaced persons from entering Baghdad. According to estimates, there are currently more than 300,000 internally displaced persons in the Baghdad province surrounding the city.²⁹ The Babil province south of Baghdad has decided to allow only children, women and old people into its territory. According

¹⁶ UNAMI/OHCHR 7 / 2014, p. 2

¹⁷ UNAMI/OHCHR 8 / 2014, p. 2

¹⁸ Mohammed 28.12.2014; Mamoun 3.1.2015

¹⁹ ABCNews 11.3.2015, HRW 17.3.2015

²⁰ Middle East Monitor 18.3.2015

²¹ Chulov 15.1.2015

²² The Baghdad Belt is an area, with about a 40 km radius, encircling the city of Baghdad.

²³ Bradley 20.4.2015

²⁴ OCHA 17.10.2014

²⁵ Hendawi 25.11.2014

²⁶ ISW 22.4.2015

²⁷ Abouzeid 31.7.2014

²⁸ ISW 22.4.2015

²⁹ IOM 26.2.2015



to ISW, this will further fuel the resentment already felt by the Sunni population towards the political leadership of the country and its administration.³⁰

In early 2014, around 1.66 bombs exploded in Baghdad each day compared to 1.55 in late 2013. The strikes targeted public premises, public squares, coffee shops, shopping streets etc.³¹ In the Shia districts, ISIS was most probably responsible for the attacks, but in Sunni and mixed population districts the strikes could equally well have been carried out by Shia militia.³² The Shia population, and certain Sunnis, who are suffering from ISIS bomb attacks almost daily are grateful for the protection provided by Shia militia. Military groups run their own recruitment centres in the Shia districts.

In June 2014, following the fatwa³³ issued by Ayatollah al-Sistani, calling on citizens to defend Iraq and its sacred sites from ISIS, men swelled the ranks of the Shia militia.³⁴ These voluntary fighters form the al-Hashd al-Shaabi/Hashd (Popular Mobilisation Units), which appear to be providing legal protection to various Shia militant groups. The Hashd troops comprise 100,000–120,000 men with connections to the Badr organisation, Kata'ib Hizbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, or the Mahdi Army.³⁵ Some troops are being supplied with heavy arms directly from Iran.³⁶ Hashd units are built around experienced and motivated militants who consider fighting to be a religious duty and a continuance of the civil war against the Sunni.³⁷ In April 2015, the Iraqi government approved a proposal to place Hashd troops under the control of Prime Minister al-Abadi. For the time being, this is only affecting the funding provided to the troops, since no regulations have been issued regarding the structure of the related forces or the chain of command.³⁸ At the moment, the Hashd troops appear to be commanded by Kata'ib Hizbollah's commander, al-Muhandis.³⁹

³⁰ ISW 20.4.2015

³¹ UNAMI/OHCHR 8 / 2014, p. 2-3

³² Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 6

³³ Fatwa is a recommendation or an order, which any Islamic priest can give.

³⁴ Di Giovanni 26.11.2014; Obel 13.6.2014

³⁵ Knights 2015, p. 9-10

³⁶ Knights 2015, p. 13

³⁷ Aikins 13.3.2015

³⁸ Sowell 23.4.2015; General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers 7.4.2015

³⁹ Sowell 23.4.2015



3.1. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq



Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH) is an armed group that has been operating in Iraq since 2004. AAH celebrated its 10th anniversary in May 2013.⁴⁰ AAH separated from the Mahdi Army to form a group of its own after an alleged confrontation between Qais Khazali, a leading AAH officer, and Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Mahdi Army, regarding the Mahdi Army's strategy. Khazali also commanded his own fighters without Muqtada's consent. Despite the temporary settlement of the dispute between Muqtada al-Sadr and Khazali in 2005, AAH re-separated itself to form its own, independent group.⁴¹

The objective of this openly Shia militia is to establish a Shia administration and enforce the doctrine of the Shia Sadrist movement. In addition, AAH is acting to further Iranian influence on the political and spiritual climate of Iraq.⁴² According to the Iraqi intelligence service, AAH receives funding of USD 1.5–2 million from Iran each year.⁴³ The group mainly operates in Baghdad, but following the ISIS conflict it has recently extended its operations to areas outside the city. Although AAH has attempted to expand its sphere of influence by setting up offices across the country, it continues to be most influential in the Shia districts of Baghdad.⁴⁴ AAH is said to command the districts of Kadhimiya and Rusafa, and the residential areas of Yarmouk, A'amel and 9 Nissan.⁴⁵ It also has a presence in Dora and the district of Sha'ab.⁴⁶

Outside Baghdad, AAH is actively involved in battles against ISIS in the Baghdad Belt. AAH is continuously recruiting combatants for operations in Iraq and Syria. AAH's posters commemorating fighters who died in Syria are being placed near university entrances and other public premises.⁴⁷ Back in 2012, AAH placed pictures of the Iranian Ayatollah Khameneini in Baghdad and in Shia districts in southern Iraq. Fearing AAH's revenge, city employees were afraid to remove the pictures of Khameneini from the streets. The pictures did not meet with the unanimous approval of the Shia community either.⁴⁸

It is claimed that AAH is operating under a mandate issued by the Iraqi government. According to some sources, AAH is more powerful than the local police, meaning that the police are under AAH's control. Shia militias are supported by the Iraqi government. They gained even more

⁴⁰ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, s.6

⁴¹ Cochrane 13.1.2008, p. 2

⁴² Wyer 12/ 2012, p. 10

⁴³ Chulov, 12.3.2014.

⁴⁴ Ali 4/2014, p. 15

⁴⁵ Wyer 12/ 2012, p. 17

⁴⁶ HRW 30.7.2014

⁴⁷ Chulov 12.3.2014.

⁴⁸ Jakes & Abdul-Zahra 25.9.2012



influence and legitimacy after July 2014⁴⁹, when ISIS invaded the town of Mosul and the Iraqi army fled. Some Sunnis regard AAH as the personal militia of the former Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki.⁵⁰ Although AAH is led by Qais Khazali, the troops are loyal to al-Maliki, who gives orders to Khazali.⁵¹

AAH's armed wing is openly fighting alongside the Iraqi army against ISIS.⁵² AAH is also part of the Sons of Iraq security force set up by Maliki, which consists of AAH, Badr Brigades and Kata'ib Hizbollah. Sons of Iraq, which should not be confused with Sunni armed groups, was established in response to the threat posed by ISIS after the flight of the Iraqi army. AAH is the most powerful of these groups. AAH has members in the army and the police forces.⁵³ All persons interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they believed that AAH "controlled" the Baghdad security forces. The government pays militias to control the security forces in several regions across Iraq.⁵⁴

AAH is said to have committed human rights violations in the Baghdad Belt, where they have killed Sunni Muslims. It has also been accused of killing Sunnis in Iraq and, according to HRW, the killings in 2014 seemed to have government approval as they were carried out in plain sight not far from the security forces. In Baghdad, AAH makes illegal arrests and is said to be running its own, illegal detention centres.⁵⁵

On several occasions, AAH has been found to be acting in cooperation with the police and the army. An AAH delegation visited the Iraqi Police Commander in Hurriya in February 2014. The delegation awarded the Commander medals of honour for fighting against ISIS.⁵⁶ According to Human Rights Watch, AAH has a presence in the Sha'ab police station.⁵⁷ AAH has also organised events for soldiers and officers of the Iraqi army.⁵⁸

It is difficult to differentiate between members of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq from other Shia militant groups on the basis of appearance. Some say they typically wear a head band.⁵⁹ Bearded members of AAH are also said to wear t-shirts and camouflage trousers, or ordinary civilian clothing. They often cover part of their face with a scarf.⁶⁰

3.1.1. Political activities of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq

AAH has become a powerful political player whose influence extends to the security forces. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq participated in the elections for the first time in 2014, with the objective of supporting the re-election of al-Maliki and weakening the Sadrists. AAH has its own political wing, al-Sadiqun, which took part in the parliamentary elections of 2014 in a State of Law coalition headed by the former Prime Minister al-Maliki.⁶¹ AAH openly supports an anti-Kurdish policy and is critical of the existence of "two governments" (Baghdad and Erbil). Before the 2014 elections, Khazali campaigned in southern Iraq, hoping to win over the supporters of Muqtada

⁴⁹ Amnesty October 2014

⁵⁰ Dehghanpisheh 12.11.2014

⁵¹ HRW 30.7.2014

⁵² AAH website, mm. تحرير منطقة السعدان على يد رجال المقاومة الاسلامية عصائب اهل الحق وقوات الجيش العراقي, 21.6.2014

⁵³ HRW 30.7.2014, Amnesty World Report 2014 Iraq

⁵⁴ HRW 30.7.2014

⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.7.2014

⁵⁶ AAH website 22.2.2014

⁵⁷ HRW 30.7.2014

⁵⁸ ISW 17.4.2014

⁵⁹ HRW 2.11.2014

⁶⁰ HRW 30.7.2014

⁶¹ Heras 15.5.2014.



al-Sadr.⁶² Al-Maliki was forced to step down as Prime Minister after the election, when the president appointed Haidar al-Abadi Prime Minister. AAH says it supports the new Iraqi Prime Minister, al-Abadi.⁶³ Al-Abadi, like the former Prime Minister, is a member of the Dawa party. However, it is claimed that AAH's support ultimately depends on who Iran supports.⁶⁴

AAH operates very openly. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq has had two political offices in Baghdad, one in Karkh and the other in Rusafa.⁶⁵ Before the 2014 elections, AAH organised major campaign events. Approximately 10,000 AAH supporters were attending such an event in Baghdad when a bomb attack carried out by ISIS killed several of the participants.

3.2. The Mahdi Army



An armed group led by imam Muqtada al-Sadr, which used to be called the Mahdi Army (MA), is currently known as the Peace Brigades (Saraya al-Salam). The group adopted its new name in 2014, which is why people still tend to refer to it as the Mahdi Army. Similarly, news reports still commonly refer to the group as the Mahdi Army.

The army has been active since 2003. During the civil war, the Sadrist had an office in each residential area of Sadr City, tasked with caring for the poor people in the area, among other things.⁶⁶ In 2004, the MA comprised 500–1,000 trained combatants and 5,000–6,000 active soldiers.⁶⁷ In 2006, the MA launched an ethnic cleansing in Baghdad's Sunni and mixed population areas. They set up checkpoints and harassed residents. The MA sent threatening letters to the Sunni population, asking for protection money. In an interview conducted in 2013, Muqtada al-Sadr said that the Mahdi Army was being infiltrated by people who were killing Sunnis and that he, personally, would not have accepted such people under his command.⁶⁸ Al-Sadr also accused the troops led by Khazali (currently AAH) of sectarian killings during the civil war.⁶⁹ It is very difficult to link these killings to al-Sadr, because he is said to have used middlemen for conveying his orders and has repeatedly condemned sectarian killings.⁷⁰

⁶² Ali 4/2014, p. 16

⁶³ George 20.8.2014

⁶⁴ Morris 11.8.2014

⁶⁵ Wyer 12/ 2012, p. 16

⁶⁶ Cockburn 2008, p. 214

⁶⁷ Global Security 2014

⁶⁸ Cockburn 29.11.2013

⁶⁹ Mansour & Clark 20.11.2014

⁷⁰ Cordesman ja Ramos 4.8.2008, p. 11



Muqtada al-Sadr had trouble directing MA operations against the movement's original enemy, US troops – his soldiers found it easier to terrorise the Sunni population. Towards the end of 2006, al-Sadr gradually lost control of his troops. In August 2007, he suspended MA operations for six months. By this time, at least 10 previously mixed population districts/neighbourhoods had been turned into Shia areas. Local and federal administration was in the hands of Shiites.⁷¹

Muqtada al-Sadr disbanded the Mahdi Army in 2008.⁷² This happened at a time when the US was bringing more forces into Baghdad. Evidently, the Mahdi Army was afraid of getting caught in a crossfire between the US forces and the fighters of the rivalling Shia Badr organisation who had been recruited into the police force. At this point, the Mahdi Army was largely operating outside the administration.

According to the residents of Sadr City, the Mahdi Army began to reorganise in 2010. They no longer wore their distinctive black clothes, particularly when fighting against US troops, but the locals maintained that they were still able to recognise them.⁷³ In 2014, the Peace Brigades (Saraya al-Salam) organised parades in the Shia district of Sadr City as a show of power. It is estimated that as many as 30,000–50,000 Mahdi Army members took part in these parades, most of them in uniform and bearing weapons. These troops are again active, but their official duty is to protect Shia mosques and residential areas from ISIS. According to troop leaders, they worked under government control and in line with Iraqi Army orders.⁷⁴ When Sadr established the Peace Brigades, his intention was to engage in defence. However, the group has increasingly been involved in offensive battles.⁷⁵ The Mahdi Army/Peace Brigades are powerful in the Sadr City region.⁷⁶ The MA is setting up its own illegal checkpoints in Sadr City and can refuse entry even from governmental troops.⁷⁷

Muqtada al-Sadr has recently begun to advocate the prevention of violence. He feels that the Shia militias are jeopardising the unity and authority of the Iraqi Army. In January 2015, Sadr held a press conference together with the Iraqi Minister of Defence Khaled Al-Obeidi, announcing that he was placing his own troops at the disposal of the Iraqi Army.⁷⁸ However, like other Shia militias, the group is cooperating with Iran. The Mahdi Army has stronger and more nationalistic connections with Iraq than other religious militant groups. The Mahdi Army, or currently the Peace Brigades, consists of 60,000 combatants.⁷⁹

In February 2015, Muqtada al-Sadr suspended the operations of his armed groups, Peace Brigades and Promised Day Brigades, when Qassim al-Janabi, a well-known Sunni tribal leader, was found dead. An unknown Shia militant group was accused of the killing, which caused a stir among Sunni politicians. According to al-Sadr, the resulting suspension of operations was a show of good will. Al-Sadr also said that violence against Shiites does not justify attacks on others, and that people should work together to prevent violence.⁸⁰ In June 2014, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that the Mahdi Army had 6,000–10,000 combatants.⁸¹

⁷¹ Hagan, J., Kaiser, J., Hanson, A. & Rothenberg, D. 4.8.2013, p. 6-7

⁷² Svensson 22.6.2014.

⁷³ Daraghi 28.6.2010

⁷⁴ Freeman 21.6.2014, Jihad Intel, Vinograd 26.6.2014

⁷⁵ Smyth 18.9.2014; CNN 23.12.2014

⁷⁶ Landinfo 2/2015

⁷⁷ Chulov 22.6.2014

⁷⁸ Mustafa 20.1.2015

⁷⁹ Siegel 16.7.2014

⁸⁰ Martin et al. 18.2.2015; CNN 17.2.2015

⁸¹ Global Security 2014



3.2.1. Sadrist Movement

Muqtada al-Sadr's political party, Sadrist Trend, won 40 seats in the 2010 elections. Similarly, in the 2013 provincial elections the party won seats in both Baghdad and southern Iraq. In 2014, Muqtada al-Sadr announced he was going to retire from politics, but has nevertheless been involved in the group's political activities. Sadrists have been highly active in encouraging their supporters to vote in the elections.⁸² In recent years, the movement has become a significant player in the Iraqi politics. Al-Sadr has been very critical of the former Prime Minister al-Maliki, but is said to have a good working relationship with the new Prime Minister, al-Abadi.⁸³ The Sadrist Movement is part of a political block that opposes the State of Law coalition.⁸⁴

3.3. Badr organisation



Badr organisation, the armed group of the Hakim family that has traditionally competed for dominance within the Shia groups of Iraq with Sadr, was founded in Iran in 1982/3. It initially formed the armed wing of the Supreme Council of Iraq (SCI), and consisted of exiled Iraqi Shiites who were provided with weapons by Iran and urged to fight against Saddam Hussein. After Saddam Hussein was ousted, the group moved to Iraq.⁸⁵ During the Iraqi civil war, the Badr organisation's death squads killed ordinary Sunnis as well as members of the former administration and security forces.

In April 2005, Bayan Jabr of the Badr organisation became Minister of Interior. Since the police forces operate under the Ministry of Interior, Jabr was able to recruit members of the Badr Brigade to the security forces, where groups formed by militias were accused of multiple human rights violations.⁸⁶

At first, the Badr organisation was part of the Islamic Council of Iraq (ICI), a Shia coalition, but in March 2012 it allied with the former Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki and is now part of al-Maliki's State of Law coalition.⁸⁷ The Badr organisation has transformed from a brutal Shia militia into a political party with a military wing.

⁸² Vick 17.2.2014, Ali 4/2014, p. 13-14

⁸³ Cockburn 29.11.2013; Abu Zeid 12.8.2014

⁸⁴ Smyth 18.9.2014

⁸⁵ Musings on Iraq 20.1.2015

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20.1.2015

⁸⁷ Musings on Iraq 20.1.2015; Ali 4/2014, p. 33



Badr organisation is most powerful in Baghdad and holds 22 seats in the Iraqi Parliament.⁸⁸ A member of the Badr organisation has been appointed head of the Ministry of Human Rights. Human Rights Minister Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati has defended the use of Shia militias in the fight against ISIS. He regards them as voluntary fighters rather than militant groups.⁸⁹ Mohammed Ghabban, a member of the Badr organisation, is Iraq's Minister of Interior, but former Transport Minister Hadi al-Ameri, head of the Badr organisation, is believed to be the one actually in power.⁹⁰ He has close ties with Iran and Qassem Soleiman, the commander of the Quds forces of the Revolutionary Guards, which has actively supported Iraqi troops in the fight against ISIS.⁹¹ The group's influence extends to the Iraqi security forces, where it is said to have direct control over a number of police and special forces. Like other Shia militias, the organisation is supported by Iran.⁹²

Similarly, the armed wing of the Badr organisation has close connections with the former Prime Minister al-Maliki. At the moment, the organisation is said to comprise more than 10,000 combatants. After the invasion of Mosul, al-Maliki placed al-Amer in charge of the Diyala province. The Badr organisation receives weapons and supplies from the government.⁹³ It is primarily fighting ISIS outside Baghdad, in Diyala, Babil and in the Baghdad Belt. According to Human Rights Watch, the organisation has committed serious human rights violations outside Baghdad. It has forced Sunnis to leave their homes and has randomly kidnapped and executed people.⁹⁴

Former members of the Badr organisation are now active in other Shia militant groups operating in Iraq and Syria. Members of the Iraqi Parliament also include former fighters. Sheikh Adnan al-Shahmani is a member of Parliament and of the parliamentary defence committee. He is also the leader of the Tayyar al-Rasuli political party, which in 2013 urged Shia militias to protect Shiites in Sunni areas. Tayyar al-Rasul is linked to the State of Law coalition.⁹⁵

3.4. Kata'ib Hizbollah



Led by Jamal al-Ibrahimi, Kata'ib Hizbollah (KH) is one of the Shia militias operating in Iraq.⁹⁶ Al-Ibrahimi is also known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.⁹⁷ Kata'ib Hizbollah is commanded by a

⁸⁸ Karami 13.11.2014

⁸⁹ Freeman 9.12.2014

⁹⁰ Morris 18.10.2014

⁹¹ Karami 13.11.2014

⁹² Smyth 18.9.2014

⁹³ Musings on Iraq 20.1.2015

⁹⁴ George 6.11.2014

⁹⁵ Smyth 18.9.2014

⁹⁶ Smyth 18.9.2014

⁹⁷ Knights, 1.11.2010



former Iraqi Army officer, Sheikh Raad al-Kafaji. This group is smaller and more organised than other Shia militias. According to the Iraqi intelligence service, Kata'ib Hizbollah is approximately 1,000 strong, but the group itself claims to have 4,000 combatants. The group receives weapons from Iran and support from the Lebanese Hizbollah.⁹⁸ Kata'ib Hizbollah is claimed to report directly to the leader of the Quds forces of the Revolutionary Guards.⁹⁹

KH primarily operates outside Baghdad but in the mixed Sunni and Shia districts Kata'ib Hizbollah has threatened to kill members of the Sunni population if they refuse to vacate the said areas.¹⁰⁰ KH has a presence in Karrada.¹⁰¹ KH uses US-made armoured military vehicles in its operations.¹⁰²

3.4.1. Popular Defense Companies (Saraya al-Dafa al-Shaabi)

Kata'ib Hizbollah has set up armed groups known as Popular Defence Companies. These groups consist of voluntary Shia fighters and operate under Kata'ib Hizbollah. They are active in Baghdad, Diyala and Amerli.¹⁰³ In May 2014, Kata'ib Hizbollah announced that its groups were fighting alongside the Iraqi security forces.¹⁰⁴

3.5. Relationships between Shia militias

Even though Shia militias share a similar ideological background, their attacks do not target just Sunnis but occasionally Shia militias attack each other, too. Relations between Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq and Sadrists have been particularly tense. Muqtada al-Sadr is said to have travelled to Iran after receiving threats from Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq in 2011.¹⁰⁵

AAH and the Sadrists have been fighting for control of Baghdad. Both movements are seeking recognition as defenders of the Shiites. In 2012, the Sadrists and AAH had several confrontations in different parts of Baghdad. Clashes were reported in Shu'ala, Mansour, A'amel, Kadhimiya, Rusafa and Yarmouk. In Iskan and Saydiya, there have been assassination attempts between the Sadrists and AAH.¹⁰⁶ Sadrists have pointed to these attempts as proof of AAH's capacity to kill members of the Shia population.¹⁰⁷ AAH attempted to kill Hazim al-Araji, an influential Sadrist leader, in June 2013. AAH leader Qais al-Khazali denied his organisation's involvement in the attempted murder.¹⁰⁸ In August 2013, leaders of AAH and MA clashed in Sadr City after a verbal altercation. Other conflicts occurred in the Hurriya area.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, political differences between group leaders have resulted in skirmishes between MA and AAH supporters in Baghdad's Shia districts.¹¹⁰ In 2013, al-Sadr demanded that Maliki withdraw AAH troops from the streets. Al-Sadr has expressed open criticism of al-Maliki.¹¹¹

⁹⁸ Di Giovanni 27.11.2014, Smyth 18.9.2014

⁹⁹ Knights 27.6.2013

¹⁰⁰ Amnesty World Report 2014 Iraq, p. 3

¹⁰¹ Di Giovanni 26.11.2014

¹⁰² Smyth 18.9.2014

¹⁰³ Ibid., 18.9.2014

¹⁰⁴ Smyth 13.7.2014

¹⁰⁵ Knights 8.2.2011

¹⁰⁶ Wyr 12/2012, p. 17

¹⁰⁷ Institute for the Study of War, June 2013; Sadah 28.8.2013

¹⁰⁸ Ali 12.6.2013

¹⁰⁹ Sadah 28.8.2013

¹¹⁰ Heras 15.5.2014.

¹¹¹ Sadah 29.5.2013



In March 2014, 32 people were kidnapped in Sadr City. These incidents were believed to be linked to the conflicts between Shia militias, more specifically AAH and the Sadrists.¹¹²

According to Hussam Al-Sudan, the commander of the Mahdi Army, they have no cooperation with AAH or the Iraqi Hizbollah.¹¹³ At the moment, it seems that Muqtada al-Sadr and the Peace Brigades have taken the offensive against other Shia militias and are seeking to shore up their position by portraying themselves as nationalists. This is likely to have angered other Shia militias operating in Baghdad.¹¹⁴

The Mahdi Army has clashed with the Badr organisation since 2005, both in and outside Baghdad. In 2008, former Prime Minister al-Maliki launched a campaign against the Sadrists in Basra, which led to fighting in Baghdad's Sadr City.¹¹⁵

In April 2015, Prime Minister al-Abadi gained control of the voluntary al-Hashd al-Shaabi troops. These troops appear to be under the command of Kata'ib Hizbollah's commander al-Muhandis.¹¹⁶

3.5.1. Political differences/relations

In political terms, al-Sadr and AAH's Khazali are on opposing sides. Al-Sadr is a member of the State of Law coalition while Khazali opposes it. In the 2014 elections, the objective of the Sadrists was to oust al-Maliki as Prime Minister. Meanwhile, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq supported al-Maliki, hoping to secure a third term for him as Prime Minister.¹¹⁷ Both now appear to have given their support to the new Prime Minister al-Abadi.

4. ISIS IN BAGHDAD

After war broke out in Syria, ISIS began to invade areas of Iraq as well. At the moment, ISIS controls a large part of the Anbar, Ninive and Salah al-Din provinces, and is fighting the Iraqi security forces relatively close to Baghdad. The Iraqi security forces fighting ISIS largely consist of Shia militia and Kurdish troops. The security forces have recently managed to reclaim some of the areas held by ISIS. In early April 2015, the security forces gained control of Tikrit, although there is still fighting in the area.¹¹⁸

Baghdad is ISIS's attack zone and they use the area surrounding Baghdad as their base for preparing and launching attacks against the city. ISIS bombings primarily target the Shia districts of Baghdad, and strikes occur on an almost daily basis. It is not believed that Baghdad will fall to ISIS,¹¹⁹ despite the fact that ISIS is claimed to have sleeper cells in the Sunni districts of Baghdad.¹²⁰ There are growing fears that ISIS infiltrators have entered Baghdad among internally displaced persons.¹²¹ ISIS claimed that it had combatants in Baghdad as early as

¹¹² ISW 9.3.2015

¹¹³ Siegel 16.7.2014

¹¹⁴ ISW 9.3.2015

¹¹⁵ Musings on Iraq 20.1.2015

¹¹⁶ Sowell 23.4.2015

¹¹⁷ Ali 4/2014, p. 13, 15

¹¹⁸ Lewis McFate 3.4.2015

¹¹⁹ James et al. 19.10.2014

¹²⁰ Daragahi 1.7.2014

¹²¹ ISW 20.4.2015



October 2014 and has accepted responsibility for several bombings, particularly in the Shia districts.¹²²

In October 2014, ISIS detonated four car bombs in Shia districts of Baghdad. The resulting explosions killed 36 and wounded 98 people. ISIS has used mortars to bombard the Kadhimiya district and the Green Zone.¹²³ ISIS claims it has also carried out bomb strikes against the Baghdad security forces and the Shia militia fighting alongside them.¹²⁴

5. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY SHIA MILITIAS IN THE BAGHDAD REGION

Shia militias have been persecuting the Sunni population. In particular, the actions of Asai'b Ahl al-Haqq include everything from threats to killing. The group operates rather extensively in the Baghdad region. According to the Institute for the Study of War, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq has been killing Sunni civilians since May 2013.¹²⁵ According to AAH's commander, militia is executing Sunnis they catch in the reclaimed areas outside Baghdad. The situation in Baghdad's Sunni districts is increasingly difficult. A local human rights organisation employee says that it is dangerous to visit the Ghazaliya district due to the threat posed by Shia militia.¹²⁶ In Baghdad, some Sunnis hang religious Shia emblems outside their homes, so as not to attract the attention of the Shia militia.¹²⁷

5.1. Being driven away from home

The people threatened by AAH are usually Sunni Muslims. Because of threats and kidnappings, some move to quieter areas in Baghdad, but for others relocation is impossible for one reason or another. Relocation to another residential area is often temporary. Family members may be sent to live with relatives in a more peaceful area if one or more family members leave the country.

According to a report by Amnesty International, Sunnis have been driven away from Baghdad's residential areas with mixed populations of Sunnis and Shiites. AAH uses various measures to drive Sunnis out of specific areas. For instance, certain persons or their family members may be sent death threats.¹²⁸ Threats are also targeted at Christians. AAH members have identified themselves as neighbourhood security guards and forced their way into people's homes. This happened to a Christian family, when the intruders demanded money and threatened to kill the family if they refused to comply. The family moved out of Baghdad.¹²⁹

5.2. Kidnappings

¹²² Salaheddin 17.10.2014

¹²³ James et al. 19.10.2014

¹²⁴ Salaheddin 17.10.2014

¹²⁵ ISW 17.4.2014

¹²⁶ Aikins 13.3.2015

¹²⁷ Hendawi 15.11.2014

¹²⁸ Amnesty World Report 2014 Iraq

¹²⁹ Amnesty 10 / 2014, p. 9



The number of Sunni civilian kidnappings increased in 2014.¹³⁰ Shia militias kidnap Sunnis and demand ransoms. But even if a ransom is paid, the kidnapped people may not be returned to their families. According to a Shiite, Shia militias also kidnap Shiites but mainly Sunnis, because they can be easily linked to ISIS and nothing will be done about such abductions. In particular, Sunnis from outside Baghdad are generally thought to be ISIS members.¹³¹ In February, an unknown armed group shot and killed a family (IDP) that had moved from Diyala to the al-Huseniya region.¹³²

It is also claimed that Shia militias are using the fight against ISIS as an excuse for attacking the Sunni community.¹³³ Men identified as AAH members kidnapped Sunni men in the districts of Sha'ab, Baya'a, Za'franiyya and Ghazaliyya. The kidnappers were dressed in civilian clothing and drove an army vehicle with no number plates. In both cases, the kidnapped men were found a few days later, shot in the head.¹³⁴ AAH is also claimed to be kidnapping Sunnis in the Sunni districts of Ma'alif, Ameriyya, Khadraa, Dora and Saidiyya.¹³⁵ In July 2014, AAH kidnapped Sunni civilians on Palestine street in the al-Mohandeseen region.¹³⁶ AAH is suspected of kidnapping local business men. It is said that as many as 12 men are being kidnapped each day.¹³⁷

Sometimes, the militias release the Sunnis they have taken if they manage to convince their kidnappers that they are Shiites. Similarly, Sunnis may pose as Shiites in Shia-dominated residential areas.¹³⁸ Many Sunnis say that their Shia neighbours saved their lives by falsely identifying them as Shiites. Sunnis are forced to pose as Shiites in certain areas to avoid problems and being driven away from their homes.¹³⁹ In conclusion, it seems that religious beliefs are not making ordinary Shiites violent towards their Sunni neighbours.¹⁴⁰

Some Sunnis have experienced discrimination from Shiites living in the area. This mainly occurs in Shia-dominated residential areas and workplaces. Although it appears that Sunnis are being driven away from Shia-dominated districts, Sunnis continue to live in families where one of the spouses is Sunni and the other Shiite. In Iraq, marriages between Sunnis and Shiites have been commonplace through the ages, but during the civil war mixed marriages were not accepted.¹⁴¹ At the moment, entering into a mixed marriage is somewhat challenging but still happens nonetheless.¹⁴²

People interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they believed AAH was responsible for the Sunni kidnappings.¹⁴³ People have been kidnapped and taken away in cars with no number plates. In May 2013, the government issued a driving ban on all unregistered vehicles.¹⁴⁴ The sources used here did not reveal whether the driving ban is still in effect. However, the militias continue to use unregistered cars.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁰ HRW 24.10.2014

¹³¹ Amnesty 10 / 2014, p. 9, 18

¹³² ISW 28.2.2015

¹³³ HRW 4.11.2014

¹³⁴ HRW 30.7.2014

¹³⁵ Ibid., 30.7.2014

¹³⁶ UNAMI/OHCHR 6.7.-10.9.2014, p. 20

¹³⁷ Di Giovanni 26.11.2014

¹³⁸ HRW, 30.7.2014

¹³⁹ Ibid., 30.7.2014

¹⁴⁰ Hendawi 15.11.2014

¹⁴¹ Australian Government 21.2.2011

¹⁴² Al-Mudhafar 25.3.2013

¹⁴³ HRW 30.7.2014

¹⁴⁴ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 8

¹⁴⁵ Habib 24.6.2014



5.3. Checkpoints

People tend to make a connection between militias and the administration; in particular, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq and the government are said to be working together. People seem to make no difference between official and illegal checkpoints. There are approximately 200 checkpoints in the streets of Baghdad. These are used to check the identity of people and to check vehicles. Checkpoints often slow down traffic even if no checks are conducted.¹⁴⁶ Sunnis are inspected more thoroughly than Shiites.¹⁴⁷ Checkpoints are often adorned with Shia religious iconography.¹⁴⁸ Attempts will be made to reduce the number of checkpoints after the curfew, which has long been in place in Baghdad, has been lifted.¹⁴⁹ AAH members have been seen at the checkpoints, helping the security forces to check identities and vehicles.¹⁵⁰ It is very difficult to make a distinction between armed militias and the security forces.¹⁵¹

According to a representative of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, the checkpoints are sometimes manned (in 2013) by intelligence service or other department personnel in civilian clothing checking identity cards. AAH, together with the security forces, has manned the checkpoints and used them to detain and threaten local Sunnis.¹⁵² It is said that armed AAH members can pass the checkpoints in vehicles with no number plates.¹⁵³ It is also claimed that Shia militia are using Iranian Saipa vehicles and can get through checkpoints quickly.¹⁵⁴ According to the police, AAH is becoming increasingly disrespectful and ignores checkpoints. The police are experiencing more and more problems with AAH.¹⁵⁵

5.4. Illegal checkpoints

There are several illegal checkpoints in Baghdad, run by armed militias. People are stopped at these checkpoints, asked to show their identification documentation and asked questions about their sectarian orientation. Checkpoints seem to be located predominantly in the mixed Sunni-Shia population districts of western Baghdad.¹⁵⁶ Illegal checkpoints have also been set up in Karrada, Hurriya and central Baghdad.¹⁵⁷ In the same year, an AAH representative said they had searched for illegal checkpoints in Iskan and elsewhere in Baghdad together with the authorities, but found no traces of them.¹⁵⁸

5.5. Problems at checkpoints due to having a Sunni name

Sunnis have experienced problems at checkpoints because of their names. Back in 2003–2005, during the sectarian conflict, many Iraqis acquired two identification documents, one with a Sunni name and another with a Shia name. This was particularly the case with people who had to travel between different parts of the town for work-related reasons. The same holds true to

¹⁴⁶ Habib 19.12.2013

¹⁴⁷ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 11

¹⁴⁸ Abouzeid 31.7.2014

¹⁴⁹ Jazeera 8.2.2015

¹⁵⁰ Ramzi 17.6.2014

¹⁵¹ Amnesty 10/ 2014

¹⁵² Brown 2.7.2014

¹⁵³ HRW 30.7.2014

¹⁵⁴ Smith 5.8.2014

¹⁵⁵ The National 21.10.2014

¹⁵⁶ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 8

¹⁵⁷ UNAMI/OHCHR 18.7.2014

¹⁵⁸ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 8



this day: Sunnis acquire identity documents indicating they are Shiites to avoid trouble.¹⁵⁹ In a Shia-dominated district in western Baghdad with a 20% Sunni population, Sunnis have to pose as Shiites to avoid being killed by the militias or being driven away from that part of town.¹⁶⁰

However, it is difficult to know whether a person is Sunni or Shiite simply on the basis of their name. In Iraq there are Sunnis called Ali and Hussein and Shia called Omar,¹⁶¹ even though some sources suggest that even secular Shia parents would not name their children Omar, Abu Bakri, Othman or Aisha.¹⁶² Traditionally names such as Omar, Abu Bakr and Yazid are Sunni names while Ali, Hassan and Hussein are Shia names. Mohammed and Fatima are popular with both Sunnis and Shiites. Omar appears to be one of the names that causes trouble for Sunnis.¹⁶³

There were already problems with the name Omar during the civil war in 2006. In July 2006, the police found 14 young men dead in Baghdad. They were all Sunnis who had been shot in the head. All of them had the same first name, Omar.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Shiites have reportedly experienced problems at the hands of Sunni militant groups such as ISIS due to their names.

These days it can be easier for parents to give their newborn child a neutral name that is not clearly Sunni or Shiite. In fear of conflicts, some Iraqi parents give their children names that do not reflect any particular religious orientation. Neutral names include Muhammed, Abdullah and Mariam. The names Ali and Hussein can be considered fairly neutral, as they are popular with both Sunnis and Shiites. The names Zina, Raneen, Atasi and Safad are highly secular and do not therefore directly indicate a person's religious orientation.¹⁶⁵

5.6. Killings

Shia militias, including AAH, typically kill Sunnis by shooting them in the head using a silenced gun.¹⁶⁶ In recent years, victims have been found in Baghdad who have been executed in typical Shia militia style: they have been shot in the head and their arms have been tied behind their backs.¹⁶⁷

According to pathologists working in Baghdad, a growing number of Sunnis shot in the head are being brought to mortuaries, typically 8–10 bodies a day, and mainly from the districts of Saidiyya, Dora, Ghazaliyya, Shu'ala, Washashi and Mansour. These areas are under AAH control. Families are afraid to collect the bodies because of AAH surveillance.¹⁶⁸ A man who had been captured by the army in 2011 and was hospitalised warned his mother not to come and see him, because AAH members were keeping an eye on him. The man died a few days later. The family had to ask a Shia friend to collect the man's body, because they were afraid to go to the hospital themselves. Another family thought it best to send a female relative to collect a man's body, because they were afraid that male family members would be kidnapped.¹⁶⁹

¹⁵⁹ Balkiz 7.7.2014

¹⁶⁰ HRW 30.6.2014

¹⁶¹ Al-Monitor 24.9.2013

¹⁶² Independent 13.6.2014

¹⁶³ Daily Mail 23.8.2014.

¹⁶⁴ Beaumont 10.10.2006

¹⁶⁵ Niqash 23.5.2012

¹⁶⁶ Ali 12.6.2013; Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

¹⁶⁷ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

¹⁶⁸ HRW 30.7.2014; Rubin ja Nordland 25.6.2014

¹⁶⁹ Amnesty 10 / 2014, p. 8, 20



In 2015, it was reported that the government no longer allowed journalists to visit mortuaries. A doctor working at a mortuary said the director of the mortuary was fired because he was Sunni. He was replaced with a member of AAH.¹⁷⁰

5.7. Persecution at work

Sunnis have had problems in workplaces due to their sectarian orientation. This appears to be the case in government offices and universities in particular.¹⁷¹ For instance, Shia domination and violations of rights have been reported in the Ministry of Health and Education. A large number of Shia posters and banners and a picture of the Shia martyr Iman Hussein have been placed on the walls of the Ministry of Interior's premises and in police stations. Shia iconography is prominently displayed.¹⁷²

University teachers have been dismissed on the basis of their sectarian orientation. Sunnis, or former Baathists, have been expelled from universities. According to reports, the University of Baghdad was placed under the control of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq in 2012, while the University of al-Mustansiriya was under Sadr and the University of al-Nahrain under the Shiite Dawa party control. The groups even interfered with university personnel recruitment and security arrangements.¹⁷³

In Iraq, only minorities such as Christians and Yazidis are allowed to sell alcohol. Alcohol merchants experienced persecution during the civil war, with their stores destroyed and the merchants killed.¹⁷⁴ In recent years, dozens of liquor stores have been destroyed, allegedly by Shia militias.¹⁷⁵ In May 2013, armed men killed 10 young Yazidi men who worked in a liquor stores in the district of Ghadeer. Some store owners say that, back then, they were required to pay protection money to the Iraqi Army units and were not issued with licenses for their stores. Licenses are issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Tourism, which in 2013 was led by a Shiite leader Liwa Semsem with links to Muqtada al-Sadr.¹⁷⁶ At the moment, the Ministry of Tourism is headed by a Shiite, Adel Fahd al-Shirshab.¹⁷⁷ In addition to unidentified armed men, the security forces have raided night clubs and liquor stores, claiming that they were not properly licensed. Security forces have closed down liquor stores, claiming they wanted to protect the store employees and owners.¹⁷⁸

Militias have threatened judges and lawyers. It is very difficult for them to try cases related to organised crime, corruption or the actions of militias.¹⁷⁹

The position of barbers and hairdressers seems to have improved in Baghdad. They have not experienced any harassment related to their occupations.¹⁸⁰ In the post-civil war years, they were killed and their saloons destroyed. In 2013, hairdressers and beauty salon employees organised a festival to celebrate their trade. New beauty salons and fitness centers have been opened in Baghdad.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁰ Aikins 13.3.2015

¹⁷¹ CBC News 3.4.2012

¹⁷² Aikins 13.3.2015

¹⁷³ GCPEA 2014

¹⁷⁴ Wong 19.2.2004; George 4.8.2014

¹⁷⁵ George 4.8.2014

¹⁷⁶ Sadah 19.5.2013

¹⁷⁷ Europa World online

¹⁷⁸ Sadah 19.5.2013

¹⁷⁹ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 24

¹⁸⁰ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 19

¹⁸¹ Karim 14.10.2011



The first fashion show since 1988 was held in Baghdad in March 2015.¹⁸²

Journalists frequently experience harassment and violence. The security forces arrest them without good cause. Besides the security forces, militias resort to violence to prevent journalists from reporting incidents of corruption, assault and misconduct by the authorities. In addition to being threatened and harassed, Iraqi journalists have been subject to murder attempts. It is worth noting that most media channels in Iraq are linked to major political parties or religious groups and cannot therefore be considered impartial and objective.¹⁸³ The editorial rooms of the Al-Dustour, al-Parliament, al-Mustaqbal and al-Nas newspapers have been attacked by Shia militias for criticising a Shia cleric, Mahmud al-Sarkh.¹⁸⁴

According to a report published in 2013, people working with the international community do not experience notable discrimination or harassment.¹⁸⁵ However, Americans and people working with them reportedly experience problems. The Shia militia targeted Americans in 2011.¹⁸⁶ Interpreters, including Shiites, say they experience difficulties with Shia militias such as the Mahdi Army.¹⁸⁷

5.8. The position of women

The position of women is rather weak, depending on where they live or work. The religious climate has become stricter in Iraq. Since the Shiites won the civil war in Baghdad, the city has become more conservative. Shiites are also moving into the city from the countryside. Shia parties and ministries under Maliki have tried to enforce a dress code for female government employees. An order was issued in 2011 by the Higher National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women. The Committee operates under Ibtihal al-Zaid, Minister for Women's Affairs, who is a member of the Dawa party. Controlled by Sadrists and State of Law, the ministries for planning and higher education began to enforce this order, while non-religious or anti-Maliki ministries did not.¹⁸⁸ The order did not specify how women should be dressed, it merely referred to "appropriate clothing". According to a member of the Higher National Committee, the purpose of issuing the order was to "protect women's honour". Iraqi women's organisations considered the dress code restrictive and expressed objections.¹⁸⁹ The Organization for Women's Freedom is one of the leading human rights organisations in Iraq. According to the organisation, Shia militias represent a continuous threat to them.¹⁹⁰

Christians have reported cases of discrimination in government workplaces. Christian women are denied career opportunities because they refuse to wear a scarf in the workplace. On the other hand, being considered uninvolved in the Sunni-Shia conflict has worked to the advantage of some Christians.¹⁹¹

5.9. Minorities

¹⁸² Telegraph 14.3.2015

¹⁸³ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 19

¹⁸⁴ U. p. Department of State 2013, p. 25

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 2013, p. 16

¹⁸⁶ Parker 24.6.2011

¹⁸⁷ Wong 26.9.2013

¹⁸⁸ Musings on Iraq, 24.9.2012.

¹⁸⁹ Ramzi 26.1.2012.

¹⁹⁰ Aikins 13.3.2015

¹⁹¹ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 13



Shia militias, and AAH in particular, have been accused of murdering homosexuals and representatives of the so-called emo subculture in 2009 and 2012.¹⁹² In most cases, people were too afraid to report the assaults and murders to the police.¹⁹³ Some armed groups continue to publicly threaten people on the basis of their sexual orientation. The names of these people have been published and their lives have been threatened.¹⁹⁴ Homosexuals are being persecuted by both the Shia militias and ISIS, which has executed homosexuals outside Baghdad.¹⁹⁵

6. THE AUTHORITIES

It is a commonly held view among Sunnis that the authorities are unable or unwilling to help them. Police officers are often said to be Shiites. When the rebuilding of the security forces began in 2005, the Shia parties responsible for the operation recruited young Shiites to the forces. These young men were often loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr. As a result, the security forces were by and large under Sadrist and Mahdi Army control.¹⁹⁶ According to estimates, 90% of the 35,000 police officers in north east Baghdad had links to the Mahdi Army. It was an established fact that the Baghdad police force (60,000) was divided into two groups, those loyal to the Mahdi Army and those loyal to the Badr organisation.¹⁹⁷ In 2005–2006, the death squads of the Badr organisation killed Sunnis under the pretence of conducting police work. This explains why Sunnis are highly suspicious of the authorities.

The police are unable to protect citizens against violent attacks. They are not even able to protect all government employees, with the exception of high-ranking Shia employees.¹⁹⁸

According to a survey conducted by the Minority Rights Group International in 2012, Sunnis felt that they were under-represented in the local police forces. According to Shiites, the opposite is true.¹⁹⁹ According to the Constitution of Iraq, all minorities must be equally represented in the security forces.²⁰⁰ However, non-Shiites are regularly dismissed from the Iraqi security forces.²⁰¹ 76% of Sunnis feel that the security forces are unable to guarantee their safety. According to the survey, the only minority more concerned for their safety than Sunnis was Christians. The figure for Shiites was approximately 35%.²⁰²

At this moment, the Iraqi Minister of Interior is controlled by a Shia party. The Iraqi Prime Minister appointed Mohammed Ghabbani of the Badr organisation as the new Minister of the Interior in October 2014. However, it is believed that real power is in the hands of Hadi al-Amir, the leader of the party and its military wing. It is claimed that al-Amiri personally ordered attacks against Sunnis during the civil war, but he denies such allegations.²⁰³

¹⁹² HRW 8/2009; PaperBird 25.3.2012

¹⁹³ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 19

¹⁹⁴ UNAMI/OHCHR 7/2014, p. 23

¹⁹⁵ Aikins 13.3.2015

¹⁹⁶ Hagan et al. 4.8.2013

¹⁹⁷ Allawi 2007, p. 423

¹⁹⁸ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 15, 24

¹⁹⁹ Chapman 6/2012, p. 5

²⁰⁰ Iraqi constitution, article 9a

²⁰¹ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 11

²⁰² Chapman 6/2012, p. 6

²⁰³ Morris 18.10.2014



It is the duty of the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry to investigate human rights violations conducted by the security authorities. The current Minister of Human Rights is Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati of the Badr organisation, who has defended the use of Shia militias in combat.²⁰⁴

It is increasingly difficult for the police to perform their duties in densely populated areas such as Baghdad. The police is also the most corrupted part of the Iraqi security force. Anyone can report a crime to the police but the police are unable to solve crime efficiently. Consequently, people prefer to turn to their tribe for assistance, even if they trusted the local police. It is feared that crime reports end up in the hands of unknown senior government officials. These people, and the police in general, are believed to be part of some group or other. The police can also pressure people to give them money.²⁰⁵ No charges are brought against corrupt police officers because judges are concerned for their own safety. They are not protected effectively enough for them to begin investigating the actions of corrupt police officers.²⁰⁶

6.1. Reporting crimes

Since AAH members work within the security forces and government authorities²⁰⁷, it is understandable that people, especially Sunnis, are afraid of reporting any injustice or threats they have experienced to the police. If you report a crime committed by the militias, they may find out.²⁰⁸ However, there seem to be some regional differences in this respect. In some areas of Baghdad, people say they have reported threats, assaults or kidnappings to the police. In most cases, the police said they were unable to help. One of the contributing factors is excessive workload²⁰⁹ of the Iraqi police and lack of resources, both of which prevent it from investigating crimes reported by private individuals. An AAH presence is another contributing factor in certain areas. It is said that police officers are mainly Shiites who are not interested in helping Sunnis. Reporting an offence is perceived to be a waste of time, or even dangerous. Sunnis are afraid to draw attention to themselves, or afraid to report a crime.²¹⁰ They are afraid that the militia will seek revenge if they find out that a crime has been reported.²¹¹ In some areas, people say they have reported crimes and the police have investigated them.

Sunnis have filed reports at police stations. Some incidents have been investigated, but in other cases no investigation has been launched or the people filing a report have been told that there was nothing the police could do under the present circumstances. Some people do not even bother to report a crime because they are convinced the authorities will do nothing to help. Others are afraid to report the activities of a specific armed group, because – they say – the authorities are members of the group in question. It is difficult to report the activities of the security authorities. The police protects itself and the security forces, which makes any police investigation highly questionable.²¹²

According to reports, the Iraqi security authorities, the army and the police persecute people because they are Sunnis. A taxi driver said that he was afraid to report a difficult customer to the police because he feared that the police would identify him as Sunni and arrest him. He claims that the government supports the Shia militias.²¹³ There are Shia militias and security troops at

²⁰⁴ Freeman 9.12.2014; Khedery 19.2.2015

²⁰⁵ Lifos 5.8.2014

²⁰⁶ UNAMI / OHCHR June 2014, p. 9

²⁰⁷ Military Times 25.11.2014.

²⁰⁸ Hendawi 25.11.2014

²⁰⁹ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 24

²¹⁰ Amnesty 10 / 2014, p. 9

²¹¹ Ibid., 10 / 2014, p. 15

²¹² Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 22

²¹³ Rubin 24.6.2014



police stations and they can easily pass through checkpoints. The presence of Shia militias at some police stations makes it almost impossible for Sunnis to report a crime, and completely impossible if the report refers to the actions of the Shia militias.

7. THE SITUATION IN THE VARIOUS DISTRICTS OF BAGHDAD



Districts of Baghdad²¹⁴

²¹⁴ ISW 2007.



During the civil war in Iraq, the different districts of Baghdad became more clearly divided and characterised by their sectarian orientation.²¹⁵ In 2006 – 2007, sectarian violence was most notable in areas with a mixed Sunni and Shia population. In these districts – Jihad, Amriyya, Mansour, Adel, Hurriya, Kadhimiya, Taji and Adhamiya – people are most concerned about the movements of the different militias.²¹⁶ Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki visited these districts in May 2013²¹⁷ in order to inspect checkpoints in response to reports of high levels of militia activity in west Baghdad.²¹⁸ Sunni kidnappings and killings seem to have been focused on areas with a mixed population of Sunnis and Shiites.²¹⁹

In February 2015, Prime Minister al-Abadi announced the demilitarisation of Kadhimiya, Adhamiya, Mansour and Saydiya. How this is to be realised remains unclear. The militias have freedom of movement in all of these areas, but they are most numerous in Kadhimiya. In Saidiya, the militias increased their presence back in 2013. It remains to be seen whether this demilitarisation will restrict the movement of the militias. The presence of militias in the Shia districts, particularly Sadr City, Kadhimiya, Hurriya and Shu'ala, increased significantly following intensifying attacks by ISIS, the purpose of which is to prove the ineffectiveness of the security forces.²²⁰

In 2012, Baghdad was reported to have turned increasingly Shiite. Districts that used to have a mixed population were now dominated by Shiites.²²¹ The districts of Baghdad where considerable Shia militia activity and movement have been reported are discussed below. Attacks on Sunni districts reflect sectarian violence while attacks on Shiite districts appear to be related to internal skirmishes of the Shia²²², although account has to be taken of the fact that ISIS mounts bomb attacks against the town on an almost daily basis.

A'amel

This district was already Shia-dominated during the previous sectarian conflict.²²³ A Sunni minority lives in the district. People with a Sunni background have encountered problems; for example, the body of a Sunni student was found in the district of al-'Amel. He had been on his way from Dora to the Baya'a district, where the majority of people are Shiite. Three Sunni men were kidnapped in the district of Amel. They had been tortured before being killed. According to their families, the kidnappers were members of Shia militia. The men were killed even though their families paid a ransom.²²⁴ AAH raided a Sunni mosque in Sabatay in August 2012 and prevented Sunnis from gaining access to the mosque.²²⁵

Abu Dashir

Abu Dashir is a Shia district with long-standing AAH presence. ISIS has made several attacks on the district.²²⁶

Adhamiya

The district has a Sunni majority. The US army built a wall around Adhamiya in 2007 to protect the Sunnis from Shia militias. Complaints about harassment, random arrests and false

²¹⁵ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 7, 25

²¹⁶ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 8

²¹⁷ POI 30.5.2013

²¹⁸ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 8

²¹⁹ HRW 30.7.2014

²²⁰ ISW 6.2.2015

²²¹ CBCNews 3.4.2012

²²² Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

²²³ Musings on Iraq 2008.

²²⁴ HRW 30.7.2014

²²⁵ Wyr 12/2012, p. 17

²²⁶ ISW 23.7.2014



imprisonment have been made in this district. A policeman working in the district claimed that all Sunnis are members of al-Qaeda.²²⁷ The authorities believe that there are ISIS sleeper cells in the area.²²⁸

Attacks on civilians and assassinations have been reported in Adhamiya. Civilians are killed in drive-by shootings. Sunni militias are more likely to detonate bombs in the eastern parts of the district. Attacks have been random and usually take place early in the morning.²²⁹ Only the region's security forces are permitted to make arrests.²³⁰

Shia militias are present in the area.²³¹ Despite their presence, some residents consider it safer not to leave the area because they are afraid of getting into trouble with the Shia militias due to their names or other, similar issues. They say that Shia militias want to cause problems for all Sunnis. Adhamiya has become less safe for Sunnis.²³² The Iraqi Minister of Defence visited the area in December 2014 to discuss the district's safety and security issues and the needs of residents.²³³ Sunnis claim that the government invests less in the infrastructure of districts such as Adhamiya with a majority Sunni population than in Shia districts.²³⁴

In February 2015, news reports indicated that seven checkpoints would be removed in Adhamiya. Similarly, 15 streets that had been closed down would be reopened. These changes form part of Prime Minister al-Abadi's decision to facilitate safety arrangements in Baghdad. Adhamiya will become a demilitarised zone.²³⁵

In 2012, the head of Adhamiya's town council and its mayor were Shiites. The region's Sunnis have been trying to have them removed from office for years.²³⁶

Ameriya/Amriyya

Before the civil war, Ameriya was a Shia district but the Shiites were driven away and Sunnis are currently in the majority.²³⁷ Some mixed Sunni-Shia families live in the district²³⁸, and in 2013 sectarian killings took place in the area. Before the killings took place, flyers were distributed in the area urging Sunnis to move out. The Mahdi Army was allegedly responsible for distributing these flyers. According to the Iraqi army, al-Qaeda was responsible for the killings, which were designed to provoke Sunnis to take action against the Shia regime.²³⁹

In April 2013, a bomb exploded in a coffee shop in Ameriya. Shia militia was probably responsible for the strike, which targeted a place popular with Sunnis.²⁴⁰ Shia militias were seen driving through the streets of Ameriya during the night, abducting Sunnis. They wore army-style uniforms.²⁴¹

Iraqi security officials believe that there are ISIS sleeper cells in Ameriya. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq swear that they will destroy these cells when they find them.²⁴²

²²⁷ McDonnell 20.7.2014

²²⁸ Daragahi 1.7.2014

²²⁹ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 102

²³⁰ Al-Jazeera 6.2.2015

²³¹ DailyMail/MailOnline 23.8.2014; McDonnell 20.7.2014

²³² DailyMail/MailOnline 23.8.2014

²³³ Mohammed 9.12.2014

²³⁴ Australian Government DFAT 2013, p. 11

²³⁵ ShafaqNews 21.2.2015

²³⁶ CBCNews 3.4.2012

²³⁷ Allawi 2007, p. 447

²³⁸ Councilman 9.4.2013

²³⁹ Sadah 25.2.2013

²⁴⁰ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 6

²⁴¹ Rubin ja Nordland 25.6.2014

²⁴² Daragahi 1.7.2014



Bagdad al-Jadid/The new Baghdad

This Shia district is similar to Sadr City. There have been numerous sectarian conflicts in the area in recent years. Several bombs have exploded on busy shopping streets.²⁴³ A Sunni woman and her son were found dead in their home, both having been shot in the head.²⁴⁴ Before the civil war, approximately 5,000 Christian families lived in the area, but the number has now fallen to 400.²⁴⁵

Baladiyat

This district is very close to the Shia districts (Sadr City) with a strong Mahdi Army presence. Sunni militias have attacked the area. Car bombs have exploded in the district.²⁴⁶ Palestinians living in the area have been harassed by people living in the neighbouring districts. The Iraqi police patrol the area regularly. The Palestinians say they can report crimes to the police. However, whether or not they actually get any help depends on the individual police officer's willingness to assist. Some police officers can be openly hostile towards Palestinians. In 2011 and 2012, Palestinians said that they were unable to obtain death certificates because the militia controls the Medical Legal Institution (MLI). The position of Palestinian women has been deteriorating since 2009, due to the proximity of Shia districts. Shia districts have become more conservative and the way Palestinian women dress is considered inconsistent with the religious values of the Shia militias. This has limited women's mobility in the area.²⁴⁷

A large number of Palestinians have moved out²⁴⁸ and the district is thought to be predominantly populated by Shiites. According to Iraqi security sources, security troops arrested a kidnapping gang in Baladiyat in early 2015.²⁴⁹

Bayaa

Bayaa is a predominantly Shia district, where ISIS bombs have exploded.²⁵⁰ Sectarian killings took place in the area in 2013. Before the killings, flyers were distributed in the area urging Sunnis to move out. The Mahdi Army was allegedly responsible for distributing the flyers. According to the Iraqi army, al-Qaeda was responsible for the killings, which were designed to provoke Sunnis into taking action against the Shia regime.²⁵¹

Dora

Dora, which used to have a mixed Sunni-Shia population, gradually became a predominantly Sunni district in 2006 – 2007.²⁵² According to a UK Home Office report, both Sunnis and Shiites live in the area today. Fewer attacks occur in this district than in the neighbouring **Jihad**. Such attacks target the Iraqi security forces and government employees.²⁵³

Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq has a presence in the district of Dora. According to Human Rights Watch, AAH members often drive around Dora, waving their guns, in order to intimidate Sunnis.²⁵⁴

²⁴³ Home Office 24.12.2014; CNN 16.5.2013

²⁴⁴ Hauslohner 12.7.2014

²⁴⁵ Abouzeid 31.7.2014

²⁴⁶ BBC 3.2.2014

²⁴⁷ UNHCR 6/2012

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 6/2012

²⁴⁹ Mamoun 3.1.2015

²⁵⁰ ISW 23.7.2014

²⁵¹ Sadah 25.2.2013

²⁵² Allawi 2007, p. 447; Refugees Number 146, Issue 2, 2007, p. 5; Al-Khalidi et al. 6/2007, p. 6

²⁵³ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101; IBN Live 14.7.2013

²⁵⁴ HRW 30.7.2014



In spring 2014, Sahwa forces had been reduced to a minimum and the district was allegedly controlled by the Iraq federal police, which is predominantly Shiite. The federal police has set up several checkpoints in the area. Some say the presence of these forces is in itself a sign of oppression.²⁵⁵ Dora is said to be a support area for Sunni Islamists, which explains the large number of security forces in the area. In Dora, two members of the Sahwa troops and one police officer were shot dead at a checkpoint.²⁵⁶

There used to be a large Christian minority in Dora, but they have moved out in recent years. ISIS has sent them threatening letters, sometimes demanding that they pay 800 dollars in exchange for being permitted to stay. There are only 1,500 Christians in the area (compared to 150,000 ten years ago). Besides ISIS, Shia militias have been driving Christians away, although some of them feel that the area is now safer due to the protection (from ISIS) provided by Shia militias.²⁵⁷ In addition to Christians, a small Palestinian community has been living in the area.²⁵⁸

Ghazaliya/Ghaziliya

According to some sources, Ghazaliya is split between the Shia-dominated North Ghazaliya and the Sunni-dominated South Ghazaliya. The Shia side enjoys more freedom than the Sunni side, which fears the Mahdi Army.²⁵⁹ According to a Sunni resident, AAH and the Mahdi Army visit the area almost every day.²⁶⁰ According to a local human rights organisation employee, visiting the area is dangerous because the Shia militias arrive at night from the neighbouring **Shahla** district to harass the residents of Ghazaliya. Shia militias are also known to abduct people from their homes and arrest them.²⁶¹ According to Human Rights Watch, men in civilian clothing have kidnapped Sunni men. The kidnappers drove army vehicles without number plates. The kidnapped men were found a few days later, shot in the head.²⁶² The authorities believe that there are ISIS sleeper cells in the area.²⁶³

During the civil war, the majority of Shiites were driven away from Ghazaliya²⁶⁴. According to a local Shia resident, the Sunnis and Shiites have no problems with each other as they have been neighbours for decades.²⁶⁵

Hurriya

During the civil war, most Sunnis were driven away from Hurriya.²⁶⁶ The district is predominantly Shia. A large number of Mahdi Army supporters live in the area.²⁶⁷ Bombs have detonated in Hurriya²⁶⁸ and people have been shot dead.²⁶⁹ According to the Institute for the Study of War, al-Qaeda is responsible for the bombs. Al-Qaeda detonated several car bombs in various Shia districts of Baghdad in 2013.²⁷⁰ There have been clashes between Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and the Mahdi Army in Hurriya.²⁷¹

²⁵⁵ Urban 13.3.2014

²⁵⁶ ISW 24.2.2015

²⁵⁷ Spencer 22.12.2014

²⁵⁸ UNHCR 6/2012, p. 3

²⁵⁹ Rubin ja Nordland 25.6.2014

²⁶⁰ Chulov 22.6.2014

²⁶¹ Aikins 13.3.2015

²⁶² HRW 30.7.2014

²⁶³ Daragahi 1.7.2014

²⁶⁴ Allawi 2007, p. 447

²⁶⁵ Abouzeid 31.7.2014

²⁶⁶ Allawi 2007, p. 447

²⁶⁷ Sadah 28.8.2013

²⁶⁸ Berwani 9.11.2012; Reuters 28.8.2013; BBC 3.2.2014,

²⁶⁹ Iraq Body Count 8.11.2013.

²⁷⁰ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 3

²⁷¹ Sadah 28.8.2013



Kadhimiya

Kadhimiya is a Shia district. According to the UK Home Office, the Shia population in the district was larger in 2013 than before, but Sunnis continued to live there too. The majority of Sunni residents were driven away by Shia militias in 2006–2007. A growing number of attacks have been conducted against the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and civilians in the area. There have been several suicide and car bombings in Kadhimiya.²⁷² Strikes have targeted places frequently visited by the Shia population, such as restaurants and mosques. A growing number of strikes have been conducted using vehicle-borne, improvised explosive devices (VBIED).²⁷³ Confrontations have also occurred between different Shia militias.²⁷⁴

In Kadhimiya, only the region's security troops are permitted to make arrests.²⁷⁵ There have been several suicide and car bombings in the area.²⁷⁶

In 2012, stricter rules regarding clothing were reported in the area. No official orders were issued; instead, people on the streets demanded that women dress according to Islamic tradition. The Ministry of Interior denied any knowledge of such events. There is a grave of a Shia saint in Kadhimiya, and anyone visiting the grave site is required to dress according to Islamic tradition.²⁷⁷

Karkh (administrative area)

Both Sunnis and Shiites live in this area. There are several embassies and ministries in Karkh, which explains the strong presence of security forces. The area is fairly peaceful, but on occasion the Sunni militias have attacked the ministries.²⁷⁸

Karrada/Karradah

Karrada is one of the districts in Baghdad where demilitarisation will begin.²⁷⁹ Karrada is a predominantly Shia residential area, where bombings have occurred. Stores selling alcohol have been raided.²⁸⁰ There is a small Palestinian community in the area.²⁸¹

Mansour

During Saddam's reign, Mansour was home to the headquarters of the Baath organisation. It is one of the districts in Baghdad that will be demilitarised.²⁸² The district is predominantly Sunni. Although infrequent, bombings are said to have become slightly more numerous.²⁸³ Only the region's security troops are permitted to make arrests.²⁸⁴ The district's Sunni mosque was attacked in 2013, probably by Shia militias.²⁸⁵

In May 2013, two university students were found shot in the head in Agarguf in the Mansour district. There were illegal checkpoints in the area at the time. As early as 2007, the Shia militias were in the habit of leaving the bodies of Sunnis they had killed in Agarguf.²⁸⁶

²⁷² BBC, 18.9.2014, Al-Jazeera 18.9.2014, Guardian 1.10.2013.

²⁷³ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101

²⁷⁴ Ali 12.6.2013

²⁷⁵ Al-Jazeera, 6.2.2015

²⁷⁶ BBC, 18.9.2014, Al-Jazeera 18.9.2014, Guardian 1.10.2013.

²⁷⁷ Recknagel ja al-Haidari 9.9.2012

²⁷⁸ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101

²⁷⁹ Mamoun 1.2.2015

²⁸⁰ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101

²⁸¹ UNHCR 6/2012, p. 3

²⁸² Hussein 5.2.2015

²⁸³ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101

²⁸⁴ Al-Jazeera, 6.2.2015

²⁸⁵ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

²⁸⁶ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 4



Al-Mashtal

This is a Shia district where militia killed Sunnis in 2013. According to ISW, these killings were clearly sectarian.²⁸⁷ In June 2014, two Sunnis were killed in the area but, according to a member of the Mahdi Army, the killers were caught.²⁸⁸ Some Christians also live in the area.

Palestine Street/Sharia Filistine

According to the Institute for the Study of War, this Shia district has been under AAH control since 2012.²⁸⁹ The concrete walls in the district are being gradually torn down.²⁹⁰ A Sunni man married to a Shia woman is unable to visit his wife's family living in the district. He is only able to escort his wife to the district border.²⁹¹ In July 2014, AAH kidnapped people in the area.²⁹²

Rusafa (administrative area)

The district used to be a mixed population area with Shiites, Sunnis and Christians, but since 2008 it has become predominantly Shia. A small Sunni community resides in Al-Fadhel, in northern Rusafa.²⁹³

There have been bombings in Rusafa, which are suspected to have been conducted by Sunni militias. Meanwhile, Shia militias carried out bombings in the area until 2011, mainly against American security firms.²⁹⁴

Sadr City

Sadr City is an all-Shia district. Several bombings have been carried out in the area,²⁹⁵ most probably by ISIS.²⁹⁶ The Mahdi Army has arranged several parades in Sadr City.²⁹⁷ It also has checkpoints in the area which even police officers cannot always pass.²⁹⁸ There have been clashes between Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and the Mahdi Army in Sadr City.²⁹⁹

In March 2015, 32 people were abducted from their homes by armed men dressed in black army clothing. According to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, 17 people were abducted. They were subsequently released.³⁰⁰

Saidiya

Saidiya is considered one of the most unstable districts in Baghdad. Both Sunnis and Shiites live in Saidiya.³⁰¹ In 2013, several civilians were killed due to their sectarian orientation. According to eye witnesses, the victims had taken an active part in protests arranged by Sunnis. Before the killings, flyers were distributed in the district urging Sunnis to move out and their lives were threatened. Wathiq Battat, the leader of the Iraqi Hizbollah, claims that the Mahdi Army is responsible for the flyers. According to the Iraqi police, al-Qaeda is responsible for the attacks, which are designed to provoke Sunnis into taking action against the Shia regime. Police officers and soldiers have also been killed. The police state that the victims were killed with a silenced pistol which, they say, is a trademark of al-Qaeda.³⁰²

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.5.2013, p. 5

²⁸⁸ Chulov 22.6.2014

²⁸⁹ Wyr 12/2012

²⁹⁰ Mohammed 26.2.2015

²⁹¹ Al-Mudhafar 25.3.2013

²⁹² UNAMI/OCHCR 9/ 2014, p. 20

²⁹³ ISW Al-Rusafa

²⁹⁴ Home Office 24.12.2014, p. 101

²⁹⁵ UNAMI/OCHCR 9/2014, p. 22

²⁹⁶ ISW 23.7.2014; Al Jazeera America 17.6.2014; CNN 16.5.2013

²⁹⁷ Siegel 16.7.2014

²⁹⁸ Chulov 22.6.2014

²⁹⁹ Sadah 28.8.2013

³⁰⁰ ISW 9.3.2015

³⁰¹ Scranton 31.7.2014

³⁰² Al-Monitor, 19.2.2013



In 2014, certain members of a (Shia) militia acted very secretly in forcing members of other sects and other minorities out of the area. For instance, a Shia Muslim living with his Sunni wife in the Saidiya district received a threatening letter instructing him to leave the area. The family moved to a predominantly Shia residential area of **Qahira**.³⁰³ In Saidiya, both Sunnis and Shiites seem to receive threat letters. Some sources claim that there have been attempts to make the district predominantly Shia, while other claims Shiites are also being driven out.

In Saidiya, only the region's security troops are entitled to make arrests. This is construed as an attempt to control the militias who have assumed a bigger role in ensuring safety and security in Baghdad. The number of vehicles in security troop convoys has been reduced to three. Furthermore, the use of heavy-duty arms is restricted in this area, in addition to Kadhimiya, Adhamiya and Mansour.³⁰⁴

Bombings have also been reported.³⁰⁵ The district's Sunni mosque was attacked in 2013, probably by Shia militias.³⁰⁶

Sha'ab

Although Sunnis were driven away from Sha'ab during the civil war, some still live there.³⁰⁷ Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq has a strong presence in the district of Sha'ab. Sunnis have been shot dead in the vicinity of the army checkpoint. The shooters did not use silencers on their guns, which means, that there was no need to worry about how the army would react. AAH has a presence at the Sha'ab police station. AAH members have beards and wear civilian clothing and cargo pants. They drive civilian cars and carry machine guns. AAH members have been seen at police and army checkpoints and marching in parades. HRW researchers have seen men, who meet the description provided by their interviewees, at checkpoints in various locations across Baghdad, together with security forces and carrying automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades.³⁰⁸

In February 2015, Sheikh Qassim Sweidan al-Janabi, a known leader of a Sunni tribe, was found dead with some of his entourage in Sha'ab. They had been kidnapped by unidentified people at a checkpoint. The kidnappers wore Iraqi security service uniforms. Sheikh al-Janabi and the others had been shot.³⁰⁹

A mixed Sunni-Shia family was forced to move out of a predominantly Shia residential area in Sha'ab. According to the family, "a known Shia militia" drove them away. The militia said that the only reason they let the Sunni father live was his Shia wife.³¹⁰

Shabab

Shabab is a Shia district. A Sunni man was found dead in the district, shot in the head.³¹¹ Shia militias in the area also act as moral guardians. They have raided stores selling alcohol and killed the owners.³¹²

Shu'ala

³⁰³ Hadi 24.7.2014

³⁰⁴ Al-Jazeera, 6.2.2015

³⁰⁵ CNN 16.5.2013

³⁰⁶ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5

³⁰⁷ Allawi 2007, p. 447

³⁰⁸ HRW 30.7.2014

³⁰⁹ Martin et al. 18.2.2015

³¹⁰ Hadi 24.7.2014

³¹¹ Hauslohner 12.7.2014

³¹² Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 5



Shu'ala is a Shia district. The security forces have arrested kidnappers in the area. They were claimed to be the biggest and most dangerous kidnapper group in Baghdad.³¹³

Two men were found killed in Shu'ala. They had been kidnapped in al-Taji, outside Baghdad and their families had paid a ransom, but they were not released. The kidnappers were dressed in army uniforms and drove an army vehicle. The kidnapped men had been shot in the head and their hands were handcuffed behind their backs. Another man kidnapped in al-Taji was found killed in Shu'ala. His hands were also handcuffed behind his back. A female family member fetched the body for burial, as the family was too afraid that there would be another kidnapping to send a male relative.³¹⁴ The area has been targeted by rocket strikes on several occasions. ISIS is claimed to be behind these attacks.³¹⁵

Yarmouk

Although it is claimed that AAH controls Yarmouk, the area is predominantly Sunni. Both Sunnis and Shiites have been killed in Yarmouk.³¹⁶ In April 2015, a car bomb exploded in front of a local hospital.³¹⁷

Zafaraniya

Bombings have been reported in the area.³¹⁸ In May 2013, armed men wearing police uniforms stormed into a private home and shot the resident. The men are believed to be members of a Shia militia.³¹⁹

Zayouna

Zayouna is a predominantly Shia district. In May 2013, unidentified men raided a brothel, using a silenced gun to kill five men and women and the owner and his wife. According to ISW, militias are attempting to gain control of the area.³²⁰

Some Christians also live in the area, but many of them have moved out or are planning to do so as they no longer consider it a safe place in which to live. People move out without telling anyone. They sell their homes and other belongings secretly. Shia militias have raided local stores selling alcohol and have killed the owners.³²¹ Many owners have responded by closing their stores.³²²

³¹³ Mamoun 11.1.2015

³¹⁴ Amnesty 10 / 2014, p. 6 - 8

³¹⁵ ShafaqNews 11.2.2015, 18.1.2015; ISW 23.7.2014

³¹⁶ Cockburn 27.6.2014.

³¹⁷ Mamoun 14.4.2015

³¹⁸ CNN 16.5.2013

³¹⁹ Lewis et al. 31.5.2013, p. 4

³²⁰ Ibid., 31.5.2013, p. 5

³²¹ Morris 22.12.2014; ISW 31.5.2013, p. 5

³²² Morris 22.12.2014



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