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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Iraq – July to December 2022

01 January 2023

04 July 2022

Fatalities in fighting between two tribes in Basra

On 02.07.22, members of the Al-Bu Hamdan and Al-Batut clans fought for several hours in the province of Basra (city of Garma). This was preceded by a dispute over unsettled debts that lasted for years and gradually escalated. Videos circulating on the internet also suggest the use of heavy weapons systems. Many of the security forces used drones and armoured vehicles to calm the situation. At least five people died and another 21 were injured.

Murder at wedding/debate over gun control in KRI

On 01.07.22, a double murder of a bride (18) and groom (21) occurred in Erbil province. The bride's 21-year-old brother shot his sister and her husband despite a family agreement. After the relationship became known, the woman had been abused by her family and attempted suicide. An agreement was then reached between the two families. It stipulated that three women from the groom's family - his 20 and 13 year old sisters and an unmarried aunt - would be given as brides to the bride's brothers as compensation for the loss of honour and consent to the marriage. However, several uncles and the alleged perpetrator did not agree to the arrangement. The crime reignited the ongoing debate on gun control in the KRI and led to a short-term ban on the sale of firearms in Erbil governorate, as well as the announcement of a campaign against illegal gun possession.

11 July 2022

Preparation of a ban of homosexuality

On 08.07.22 it was announced that a committee of the Iraqi parliament is preparing a law to ban homosexuality in Iraq. Since 2003, homosexuality has no longer been explicitly prohibited, but in legal practice a number of other laws are regularly applied against homosexuals. Large parts of Iraqi society reject homosexuality, known homosexuals and LGBTIQ activists are regularly victims of threats and attacks, even murders, by non-state actors, which are very rarely solved or punished.

Turkish drone attack on PKK camp in Makhmour

On 05.07.22, the Turkish army flew a drone attack on the Makhmour camp, which is effectively under the PKK's control. According to the PKK, only one building was damaged; security circles in Kurdistan stated that it was a PKK office, and no personal injuries were reported.

18 July 2022

KRG reports the deaths of four IS fighters

On 05.07.22, an IS hideout was busted by Iraqi security forces and coalition forces during a battle near Karakoch in Nineveh. Four IS fighters died and several supporters of the group were arrested. Two of the dead were identified by the authorities of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). They had taken part in the attack on a family in Makhmour in December 2021 (cf. BN of 06.12.21).

Drone attack near Mosul

On 17.07.22, a drone attack near Mosul killed five people and injured two others. Various sources report that the drone attack was carried out by the Turkish army. Kurdish security circles informed that the victims were PKK members, which the PKK denies.

25 July 2022

Turkish military operation in northern Iraq

On 20.07.22, the Turkish military shelled the village of Parakh in Zakho district with artillery shells. The village is popular with domestic tourists. Nine tourists died and another 23 were injured. The following day, protests erupted in several towns demanding that the Turkish ambassador be expelled from the country. The latter was summoned on 21.07.22 and was handed a sharp protest note. There were at least two rocket attacks on Turkish military posts including the Zilkan base. On 23.07.22, the Ministry of Defence presented a comprehensive report on the Turkish military operation to parliament. According to the report, more than 4,000 Turkish soldiers are currently stationed on Iraqi soil, forward posts have been established up to 105 km deep into Iraqi territory, the Turkish army maintains a total of five bases and about 100 outposts on Iraqi territory.

IS attack

On 19.07.22, IS attacked the Iraqi Federal Police in Salah ad-Din province, Matibiyya district. At least six federal police officers died in the attack and others were injured. IS continues to have a strong presence in the Matibiyya district and poses a considerable threat. On 21.07.22, in Diyala province, members of a family on their way back from an outing north of Mansuriyya were attacked by IS forces, five people were killed, among them two children aged five and seven. The background is unclear, Mansuriyya regularly experiences IS attacks, which are often part of local feuds.

01 August 2022

Protests against candidate selection

On 25.07.22, several of the political parties remaining in parliament after the departure of the Sadristes agreed on a candidate for the post of prime minister, which has been de facto vacant since the 2021 elections. The chosen candidate was Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, a former minister with close ties to former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who had masterminded the mass removal of Sunnis from the state apparatus under the heading of "deBaathisation" during his time in office, which in turn had contributed significantly to the strengthening of IS. On 28.07.22, Muqtada as-Sadr's supporters assembled for mass protests, stormed the green zone and occupied the parliament for several hours, they only retreated after a tweet by as-Sadr. As no parliamentary session was held on 28.07.22, the protest was repeated on 30.07.22 during the parliamentary session. The Speaker of Parliament postponed the session until further notice while the protesters occupied the parliament again. At least 125 people have been injured so far (at least 25 among the security forces). As-Sadr's movement has not yet presented a counter-candidate. Among other things, as-Sadr described the elections won by his own movement as rigged.

08 August 2022

Protests against election of prime minister

On 05.08.22, Muqtada As-Sadr's supporters held a public Friday prayer in a square in Baghdad's Green Zone. The show of force underlined As-Sadr's demands for new elections, which have meanwhile also been taken up by

political leaders of several other parties. Thus, new elections appear increasingly likely in the near future. After more than 300 days, parliament has still been unable to agree on a new government. Forming a government also seems de facto impossible, after the departure of As-Sadr's supporters from parliament.

Protests in Kurdistan

On 06.08.22, anti-government protests increased in several cities in Kurdistan, with a focus on Sulaymaniyya. The protesters were following a call by the "New Generation" movement, a Kurdish opposition party. The crowd clashed with security forces; apparently several politicians of the opposition as well as journalists and protesters were arrested.

22 August 2022

Several suspected terrorists killed in security operation

On 20.08.22, the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (ICTS) announced the killing of six suspected ISIS terrorists during a security operation in the Hamrin Mountains in the northern governorate of Salahaddin. According to the statement, one of the six killed was Abu Maryam Al-Qahtani, a senior IS leader in Salahaddin. According to the ICTS, Qahtani supervised the killing and abduction of civilians and security forces by setting up fictitious checkpoints near the Hamrin Mountains.

29 August 2022

Protests over prime ministerial election

Muqtada as-Sadr's followers continue to protest within the "Green Zone" of Baghdad. They resort to a variety of protest forms, including public prayers, which are clearly reminiscent of the corresponding types of protests under al-Sadr's father against Saddam Hussein. The populist election winner thus stages himself as a fighter against corruption and the political establishment, to which he himself belongs.

IS

On 02.08.22, Iraqi security forces announced the killing of six senior IS members. Allegedly, Abu Maryam alQahtani, the IS coordinator in Salah ad-Din province, is among the dead. On 23.08.22, the Kurdish security forces announced that they had arrested a total of 17 suspects in the province of Sulaymaniyah in connection with IS activities. On 28.08.22, an IS attack on a flock of sheep occurred in a disputed district of Kirkuk province, killing a shepherd, who also was a Peshmerga member, and another civilian, as well as at least one IS member.

05 September 2022

Escalation during protests

The protests of the supporters of Muqtada as-Sadr escalated after he declared his withdrawal from Iraqi politics on 30.08.22. For about 24 hours, fighting continued in Baghdad's "Green Zone", while as-Sadr's supporters stormed the presidential palace and engaged in firefights with supporters of other militias and security forces. The government imposed a curfew across central and southern Iraq. At least 30 people were killed. Further clashes between supporters of as-Sadr and the rival Shia pro-Iranian bloc broke out in all major cities of the Shia-dominated south. In the night of 31.08. to 01.09.22, four more people were killed in Basra in fighting between as-Sadr's peace brigades and the rival Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq. Peaceful counter-protests by thousands of Iraqis demanded the replacement of the entire political elite, including the leadership of both major Shia factions. The situation initially calmed down after as-Sadr called on his supporters to end the violence. A three-day state mourning was announced.

12 September 2022

Political crisis

No solution to Iraq's political crisis is anywhere in sight yet. On 07.09.22, the Iraqi Constitutional Court ruled that it could not decide on dissolving the parliament; the ruling is widely interpreted as a political "slap in the face" for the parliament. Several parties, both Shia and Sunni, called for new elections.

IS

On 05.09.22, a person was abducted by IS while herding sheep in Diyala province. Abductions to raise money occasionally occur in the region. On 10.09.22, Iraq's Security Media Cell announced that a key local IS leader had been killed in an air strike in Salah ad-Din already on 20.08.22.

19 September 2022

Start of fuel oil distribution in the KRG

Distribution of heating oil at heavily subsidised prices will begin in October 2022 in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KRG), this was announced by the Minister of Natural Resources. The KRG regularly offers households heating oil at about half the market price during the winter months. Due to this year's very high prices, it is still unclear whether this will be possible again. As a cold winter is expected, the demand is set to be more than twice as high as last year.

Arbaeen

The Arbaeen pilgrimage from Najaf to Karbala, one of the largest pilgrimages in the world, ended on 17.09.22 with an estimated 21 million participants, the majority of the foreign pilgrims among them, about three million, came from Iran. Despite the still fragile security situation, there were no major incidents and the pilgrimage was generally peaceful.

Turkey-PKK conflict

On 11.09.22, the Turkish Ministry of Defence announced that four Turkish soldiers had been killed in fighting in northern Iraq the previous week during the ongoing military operation against the PKK.

10 October 2022

Conflicts between militias

An attack was launched on a building of Muqtada As-Sadr's Saraya as-Salam in Basra on 04.10.22. On 06.10.22 AsSadr publicly stated that his supporters should refrain from engaging in violence. A similar statement was forthcoming from the rival Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq group.

Iranian attacks on opposition groups

On 09.10.22 the envoy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iran, Nazim Dabbagh, announced that Iran had intimated that it reserved the right to undertake further measures against opposition groups operating within the KRG, demanding that Iranian opposition groups within the KRG leave their military basis and headquarters. A total of 16 people are confirmed to have died in drone and rocket attacks across the national borders in September and October, and a number of villages near the border were duly evacuated. The district of Sidakan was particularly severely affected. Iran accuses Kurdish opposition groups of stoking the current unrest in Iran.

Conflict between Turkey and PKK

The well-known women's rights activist Nagihan Akarsel was murdered in Sulaimaniyya on 04.10.22. In view of her close ideological ties to the PKK, a link to the Turkish military operations against the PKK is surmised; a number of suspects have been arrested. Turkey's ambassador to Iraq stressed in Baghdad on 09.10.22 that PKK members and individuals and activists close to the PKK were being targeted by Turkey, which continues to regard the presence of the PKK to the south of its borders as a substantial threat.

17 October 2022

Election of new president

The Iraqi parliament convened on 13.10.22 to elect a new president after a year of political stalemate. The session was overshadowed by a rocket attack on the Green Zone, which was hit by a total of nine rockets, injuring a number of civilians and members of the security forces. Following a brief intermission to the session, Adul Latif Rashid was elected president in a second ballot. Rashid is a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and holds a doctor's degree in engineering from Manchester University. In contrast to his predecessor, he is not known to be opposed

to the death penalty; executions in Iraq require presidential approval in each instance. Directly after his election, he appointed Mohammed Shia as-Sudani as prime minister. The latter is now charged with the task of finding a majority in parliament which is capable of governing the country. The Sadrist bloc, which emerged from last year's elections as the largest single parliamentary group, announced on 15.10.22 that it was not prepared to participate in government.

24 October 2022

The struggle against IS

On 19.10.22 an explosive device on a Peshmerga vehicle exploded in the Garmiyan district of Erbil province. At least one Peshmerga died and eight were wounded. It became known on 23.10.22 that Iraqi security forces had arrested nine suspected IS supporters in Diyala province.

Conflict between Turkey and PKK

Two PKK supporters and two civilians were injured in an attack in Shingal district on 18.10.22. The precise course of events is unclear. On 23.10.22 the Turkish defence ministry reported that the Turkish armed forces had killed three PKK members in the course of the week.

Repatriations from Al-Hawl

The return from Al-Hawl of a further 161 families comprising some 650 members was announced on 18.10.22. The families are now being checked at a transit camp in Ninawa province. Iraq claims to have repatriated 925 families in all to date. Around 55,000 IS members and their dependants currently live in Al-Hawl. They have been held there since the fall of IS. Around half of them are of Iraqi origin.

31 October 2022

Gas tank explodes in Baghdad

At least nine people were killed and 13 injured when a gas tank exploded in a residential area of Baghdad on 30.10.22. Most of the victims were amateur footballers who were on their way to a sports field in the neighbouring area. Security regulations pertaining to construction work and the storage of hazardous substances are commonly ignored in Iraq, and a number of arrests have previously been made in this connection.

New government

The new government, comprising 21 ministers under prime minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, was ratified by parliament on 27.10.22. This marks the end of the political blockade for the time being, following one year of caretaker government. Al-Sudani has the support above all of a number of pro-Iranian parties. He has promised to organise new elections in the space of a year.

Death sentence for murderer of Thaer at-Tayeb

On 25.10.22 the supreme criminal court passed the death sentence on the murderer of well-known activist Thaer at-Tayeb, who was killed in his car by an explosive device on 15.12.19. The conviction came on the third anniversary of the escalation of the Tishreen protests. On 25.10.19, demonstrations throughout Iraq were attacked by members of the security forces, some of whom remain unknown. At least 40 people died. Key demands of the demonstrators are justice for those killed in the demonstrations and the solving of the murders which took place in this context.

07 November 2022

Relations between KRG and the new government

On 01.11.22 the prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Barzani, spoke about the matter of relations between Erbil and Baghdad under the new government. He referred to the drafting of a joint law on the exploitation of hydrocarbons as a key objective of domestic policy. The dispute centring on revenues and jurisdiction over the gas and oil wells of the KRG is a crucial issue in intra-Iraqi relations. Barzani supported the formation of the new government under prime minister Al Sudani.

Turkish military intervention

At least one PKK fighter was killed and two injured in a drone attack in Shingal on 03.11.22. The drone is believed to belong to the Turkish forces.

15 November 2022

Iranian attacks on Kurdish groups

A number of Iranian rockets hit regional party headquarters of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and the Komalah on 14.11.22. These attacks must be seen in the context of the unrest in Iran: both parties are active in Iran and are considered enemies by the Iranian government. At least two people were killed.

Unexplained death in police custody

A young man suspected of causing bodily harm was arrested by the police in Sulaimaniyya on 11.11.22. He died in unexplained circumstances in police custody on 12.11.22. According to the police, he slipped while attempting to escape and accidentally fell. According to his family, eye witnesses report that he was severely and jointly abused by five policemen when he tried to escape.

21 November 2022

The struggle against IS

IS attacked an Iraqi army outpost in northern Kirkuk on 19.11.22. Both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the government in Baghdad lay claim to this territory. There were at least four fatalities on the Iraqi side.

Iranian attacks

The Revolutionary Guards launched a new wave of drone and artillery attacks on targets in Erbil and Sulaymaniyya on the morning of 21.11.22, killing at least one person and injuring an unknown number of people. The attacks appear to be aimed at positions and facilities of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in Iraq. These are accused of providing military support for the uprising in Iran at present and exploiting the unrest for their own ends.

28 November 2022

Turkish offensive and Iranian attacks

Following indications of a broadening of Turkish military operations in the north of Iraq, the government heads of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) jointly condemned the violation of Iraq's sovereignty at a meeting on 22.11.22. An Iranian drone strike on a military facility of an Iranian Kurdish party in Prde occurred on the same day. On 23.11.22 the cabinet discussed redeploying forces to the border region with Türkiye and Iran. On 26.11.22 the Turkish general staff stated that three more soldiers had been killed in fighting with the PKK in northern Iraq. The "neutralisation" of 13 PKK members was announced on 27.11.22.

06 December 2022

Turkish offensive

An air strike took place on a village in Sulaimaniyya on 02.12.22. At least one civilian died and five were injured. The attack is being attributed to the Turkish armed forces.

Combating domestic violence

The minister of employment and social affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq announced on 28.11.22 that his ministry intends to set up further women's refuges in Zakho and Soran which are to offer shelter for at least 72 hours. Domestic violence is a widespread problem in Iraq and laws to counter it often fail to be applied in practice.

Anti-LGBTIQ campaign

The influential Shiite cleric and politician Muqtada as-Sadr launched a comprehensive campaign against sexual minorities on 30.11.22. Starting with a social media post, he called for all forms of sexually deviant behaviour to be

combated, while stressing that this must take place without violence. During Friday prayers, signatures were collected at mosques with close links to him and his movement, affirming a vow to oppose LGBTIQ and its recognition under law. The assertion that the vow also covered the fight “to abolish the law on homosexuals” caused a degree of irritation, as no such law exists in Iraq.

12 December 2022

The struggle against IS

A suicide attacker who is thought to have belonged to IS killed two members of a militia in Babil province on 06.12.22. This attack took place ahead of a major counter-IS operation. On 10.12.22 the Iraqi army announced that six IS members had been killed in a major counter-IS operation in SalahAl-Din.

Haidar az-Zaidi convicted

20 year-old online activist Haidar az-Zaidi was sentenced to a three-year prison term on 05.12.22. His conviction stemmed from a tweet which was posted under his name and allegedly contained an insult aimed at the pro-Iranian militias (militia chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed in an attack by the USA on 03.01.20, was referred to in the tweet as a “spy” - an allusion to the pro-Iranian character of his militia, Kata’ib Hezbollah). Az-Zaidi continually denied having posted the tweet, claiming that his account had been hacked. Protests broke out on 07.12.22, above all in Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar province. At least two people were killed and 21 injured, including one member of the security forces. The protesters consider the verdict unjust, arguing that murders of activists or protesters are practically never solved. The province’s governor declared a day of mourning for the killed 5 demonstrators on 09.12.22 and ordered a three-day period of public mourning at provincial level. In the political arena, the long prison term was also openly criticised by a number of MPs.

Fire at an IDP camp in Erbil

A fire occurred at a camp for internally displaced people (IDP camp) in Erbil on 11.12.22, killing at least one person. Large-scale fires are no rare occurrence at the remaining camps, owing to the poor conditions which commonly prevail there.

Dispute over land in Kirkuk

Two people were injured in disputes over land in the Daquq district of Kirkuk province on 09.12.22. The disputes stemmed from Arab farmers ploughing land to which Kurdish farmers lay claim. The Arab farmers belong to a group of farmers who were settled in the region with the intention of Arabizing the area under Saddam Hussein’s settlement policy. As a result of such settlements the property situation in the region is often confused, and this regularly escalates into violence between different families.

19 December 2022

The struggle against IS

Three members of the Iraqi army died when an IED exploded to the north of Baghdad on 15.12.22. It is assumed that the device was planted by IS.

Three children died in the village of Baashiqah in Ninawa province on 17.12.22 while playing with a mortar which they had found. The mortar had presumably been left behind during the withdrawal of IS. It exploded as the children were playing with it. Explosive ordnance disposal in the territories recaptured from IS is expected to take decades or centuries. On 18.12.22 an Iraqi police convoy was the target of a bomb attack near to the village of Safra, around 30 kilometres north of Kirkuk. Nine Iraqi policemen were killed. The explosion formed part of an ambush. The subsequent attack with light weapons was repelled.

Sadrist committee takes stock of progress to date

A Sadrist committee has been working since 2022 on returning property to members of minorities, in particular Christians and Mandaeans, which has been stolen or occupied by militias since 2003. According to an interim appraisal, 200 apartments, houses and other properties have been returned to their rightful owners. In some cases the latter had been attempting to recover their property through the courts, but were thwarted by inefficiency and

also discrimination on the part of the authorities as well as the power of the militias. Sadr himself has no official position on the matter at present. For the most part, it may be assumed that the returned property had been occupied by militias belonging to the Sadrist movement.

Death in custody

A 45 year-old man was arrested in the course of a house search in Kirkuk on 15.12.22. He died in custody some hours later. The exact circumstances have yet to be clarified.

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