

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	888
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Immigration and Refugee Board Canada
Titel:	Iraq: Security situation in Erbil [Arbil, Irbil], including ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) [also known as Islamic State (IS), and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)] activities (November 2014-February 2016)
Udgivet:	16. februar 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	13. juni 2016



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Iraq: Security situation in Erbil [Arbil, Irbil], including ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) [also known as Islamic State (IS), and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)] activities (November 2014-February 2016)

Publisher [Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)

Publication
Date 16 February 2016

Citation /
Document
Symbol IRQ105417.E

Related
Document [Iraq : information sur la situation en matière de sécurité dans l'Erbil \[Arbil, Irbil\], y compris les activités de l'EIIS \(État islamique en Iraq et en Syrie\) \[aussi appelé État islamique \(EI\) et État islamique en Iraq et au Levant \(EIL\)\] \(novembre 2014-février 2016\)](#)

Cite as Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Iraq: Security situation in Erbil [Arbil, Irbil], including ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) [also known as Islamic State (IS), and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)] activities (November 2014-February 2016)*, 16 February 2016, IRQ105417.E, available at:
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d7fb114.html> [accessed 3 May 2016]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Several sources describe the current security situation in the city of Erbil as "safe" (Project Consultant 24 Jan. 2016; KRG 21 Jan. 2016; US 19 Jan. 2016). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official from the US Department of State who specializes in security in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq reported that "most people enjoy a normal day; they go to work, go shopping and go out at night" (ibid.). According to the same source, no major incident occurred in 2015 apart from the 17 April attack (see section 2) (ibid.). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a research fellow at the French Institute of the Near East (Institut français du Proche-Orient, Ifpo) in Erbil [1], who has published several articles on the history of the Kurdish people, reported that [translation] "few violent incidents occurred in 2015" (research fellow 19 Jan. 2016). On its "Iraq Travel Warning" webpage, the US Department of State indicates that "[t]

errorist attacks within the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) occur less frequently than in other parts of Iraq" (US 4 Dec. 2015).

The official from the US Department of State specified that Erbil is "relatively safe but heavily secured" (US 19 Jan. 2016). According to the same source, there are checkpoints in the city and "a lot of security is keeping the place safe, especially the Kurdish Peshmerga military posted outside the city" (ibid.). Similarly, the Ifpo research fellow stated that Erbil [translation] "never seems to be in danger" with the presence of Kurdish military forces (approximately 150,000 in the whole Kurdistan region), as well as foreign military (several thousand military, including advisors and special forces) (19 Jan. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative at the UNHCR office of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Director in Amman stated that

[s]ecurity forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq remain on high alert and impose tightened security to prevent ISIS and associated groups from staging attacks as armed clashes continue to occur between Kurdish forces and ISIS on the borders of the Kurdistan Region. (UN 26 Jan. 2016)

Sources warn that the security situation in the Kurdistan region could deteriorate quickly (Canada 16 Dec. 2015; UK 21 Dec. 2015). On its "Travel Advice and Advisories" for Iraq webpage, Global Affairs Canada advises against non-essential travel to the province of Erbil, specifying that "[a]reas under Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) control have been less affected by violence and terrorism than other parts of Iraq, but nonetheless remain vulnerable to the impacts of both regional instability and internal tensions" (Canada 16 Dec. 2015). Similarly, the official from the US Department of State said that the security situation in Erbil can change anytime because of ISIS (US 19 Jan. 2016).

Finally, according to the research fellow, [translation] "[t]he situation at checkpoints is sometimes tense and can lead to ... exchange of gunfire" (research fellow 19 Jan. 2016). Corroborating information on the security situation at Erbil's checkpoints could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.1 Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Situation of Minorities

Bloomberg View, the editorial section of the Bloomberg news agency, reports that "[t]oday the Kurdish region hosts 1.5 million displaced Iraqis and 280,000 Syrian refugees, according to the KRG's statistics" (Bloomberg View 30 Sept. 2015). On its website, the KRG says that "[a] ccording to the latest figures from Erbil's local authorities and UNCHR, there are approximately 83,602 Syrian refugees in Erbil" (KRG n.d.b). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), a "source of information and analysis on internal displacement" and part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental organization, as of June 2015, there were 1.2 million IDPs in the KRG-controlled region, representing 38 percent of the IDP population since 2014; of those Erbil hosted 266,300 IDPs mainly from Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Erbil (IDMC 30 June 2015, 6, 13).

Concerning the situation of ethnic and religious minorities, the official from the US Department of State said that "Syrians, Christians and Yesidi refugees are welcome in Erbil" (19 Jan. 2016). The Ifpo research fellow said that ethnic and religious minorities [translation] "do not suffer from any open persecution, apart from some instances of discrimination which are difficult to quantify" (19 Jan. 2016). The official from the US Department of State added that, although Kurds are "wary of Arabs from Baghdad," the latter "would be safe in Erbil" (US 19 Jan. 2016). Regarding the situation of Sunni Arabs, the UNHCR representative stated that

Sunni Arabs, in particular those who are perceived to be affiliated with or supporting ISIS (including those suspected of kinship or family links), are at risk of arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention and expulsion from the KR-I. Arabs and others from disputed areas or

who have lived under the control of ISIS are subject to strict security controls and may face restrictions on freedom of movement, lack of choice of residence, can be subject to harassment and can remain undocumented. Within areas of control by the KRG, forced relocations have also been reported, resulting in the transfer of civilian populations, restrictions on freedom of movement and communication as well as confiscation of documentation and personal property. (UN 26 Jan. 2016)

The KRG reports on its website that

[w]hile relations between refugees and the surrounding communities have been cordial for the most part, it has come to the attention of the KRG that there have been some disturbing reports of friction/tension among the locals and the refugees quite recently.

...

there has been a reportedly sharp increase in antisocial behavior (i.e., petty crime, prostitution/"curb-crawling," licentiousness, larceny, begging) which is at least partly attributable to refugees being in an unfamiliar environment with strained economic resources. Finally, the presence of refugees in the [r]egion represents a possible security threat to our communities that terrorists could exploit. (KRG n.d.a)

Bloomberg View reports KRG's US representative as saying that "the young people displaced by the war will become a threat to the region and beyond if they are not integrated" (Bloomberg View 30 Sept. 2015). In her testimony before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 29 September 2015, Ms. Nancy Lindborg, the President of the US Institute of Peace (USIP) [2], stated that

[a]s one civil society leader noted to me, "We have seven internally displaced camps here, which equals seven time bombs, as people sit without work or education for year after year." (USIP 29 Sept. 2015)

2. Terrorist Attacks

Sources report that, in November 2014, a car bomb exploded outside an Erbil Governorate building (AI 25 Feb. 2015; Human Rights Watch 21 Nov. 2014; LA Times 19 Nov. 2014). Human Rights Watch cites the mayor of Erbil as saying that the suicide bomber "tried to storm the building but detonated his explosive as security forces shot him before he could get inside" (Human Rights Watch 21 Nov. 2014). Sources indicate that four people were killed in the blast, in addition to the suicide bomber (AFP 21 Nov. 2014; KRG 21 Jan. 2016; Rudaw 19 Nov. 2014). According to sources, 29 people were injured (ibid.; KRG 21 Jan. 2016).

Sources report that, on 15 March 2015, several rockets landed on the outskirts of Erbil, to the west of the city, without killing anyone (Shafaq News 15 Mar. 2015; UK 21 Dec. 2015).

Sources indicate that, on 17 April 2015, a bomb-loaded vehicle exploded outside the US consulate in Erbil (KRG 21 Jan. 2016; UK 21 Dec. 2015; US 17 Apr. 2015). Some sources report that two persons were killed in the attack (KRG 21 Jan. 2016; The Wall Street Journal 17 Apr. 2015), while other sources mention three victims (Al Jazeera English 18 Apr. 2015; Reuters 18 Apr. 2015; UK 21 Dec. 2015). According to sources, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack (International Crisis Group 30 Apr. 2015; The Wall Street Journal 17 Apr. 2015; UK 21 Dec. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official at the Representation of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) in the US specified that the perpetrators were "quickly arrested" by Kurdish security forces (KRG 21 Jan. 2016). Other sources specify that five suspects have been arrested (International Crisis Group 30 Apr. 2015; Rudaw 28 Apr. 2015).

The official at the KRG's US representation indicated that, apart from the two bombings of November 2014 and April 2015, violent crime rates have remained "very low" since November 2014 (KRG 21 Jan. 2016). Similarly, the Ifpo research fellow stated that apart from the April bombing, there has been no terrorist attack in Erbil in 2015 (19 Jan. 2016).

The UNHCR representative reported the following:

UNHCR is aware that a number of violent incidents have been reported in Erbil [Governorate in] 2015, including assaults, small arms fire, kidnappings, indirect fire, and improvised explosive device activity. For instance, on 18 October 2015, ISIS reportedly abducted at least 84 civilians from the Qaraj sub-district in the town of Makhmour inside Kurdish-held territory. (UN 26 Jan. 2016)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Thwarted Attacks

According to sources, in November 2015, authorities seized a bomb-loaded truck between Kirkuk and Erbil (research fellow 19 Jan. 2016; The Wall Street Journal 14 Nov. 2015). The Wall Street Journal indicates that the KRG arrested three ISIS-affiliated men who had planned to detonate the bomb in Erbil (ibid.).

According to the Ifpo research fellow, [translation] "newspapers, local institutions and foreign diplomatic missions regularly report that attacks have been thwarted or terrorist cells have been dismantled" (19 Jan. 2016). Similarly, the UNHCR representative stated that "the security forces have been reported to have foiled attempts of terror activity in the city" (UN 26 Jan. 2016).

3. ISIS

The official from the US Department of State stated that ISIS is the only militant group that poses a threat to Erbil (US 19 Jan. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that ISIS represents a threat to the security of Erbil (research fellow 19 Jan. 2016; UN 26 Jan. 2016; US 19 Jan. 2016). According to the official from the US Department of State, the nearest ISIS-occupied territory lies 40 km away from Erbil (ibid.). Other sources mention that the nearest frontline between ISIS and the Kurdish military forces is 50 km away from the city (KRG 21 Jan. 2016; research fellow 19 Jan. 2016). Canada's Country Travel Advice and Advisories for Iraq states that "[e]xtremist insurgents led by ISIL are responsible for attacks on KRG-controlled areas, including towns southwest of Erbil" (Canada 16 Dec. 2015). The Ifpo research fellow noted that aggressions instigated by jihadist forces are "systematically" stopped by the Peshmerga forces, who suffer casualties (research fellow 19 Jan. 2016).

According to the official at the KRG representation in the US, "[t]he current frontline is secure and well outside the range of ISIS artillery. ISIS does not pose a significant threat to the daily lives of people in Erbil" (KRG 21 Jan. 2016). Sources specified that it would be difficult for ISIS to enter Erbil, thanks to the defence of the city by the Peshmerga forces (Project Consultant 24 Jan. 2016; US 19 Jan. 2016). However, according to the official from the US Department of State, the threat represented by ISIS could "take the form of a suicide bomb, a car bomb or a small team of attackers" (ibid.).

Sources report that Kurdish authorities are concerned about the risk of the presence of ISIS or terrorist infiltrators among the displaced people coming from the rest of Iraq to the Kurdistan

region (Human Rights Watch 21 Nov. 2014; LA Times 19 Nov. 2014; UN 17 Mar. 2015). According to the official from the US Department of State, "a lot of" ISIS members have been arrested in the whole region, including some in Erbil (US 19 Jan. 2016). The UNHCR representative stated that "according to local intelligence reports, ISIS sleeper cells are reported to exist in Erbil. The risk of executing an attack within city limits therefore exists" (UN 26 Jan. 2016). Al Arabiya News, the English-language service of the 24-hour news station Al Arabiya News Channel, reports that, on 18 May 2015, a "Kurdish six-member ISIS cell" has been arrested (Al Arabiya News 17 Sept. 2015). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In an article published in Jamestown Foundation's Terrorism Monitor in 2015, Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a political analyst specializing in Kurdish politics, claims that

a considerable number of Kurds remain active with the Islamic State in areas controlled by the group, and a limited risk of attacks by Kurdish radicals will therefore remain for the foreseeable future. (Jamestown Foundation 20 Mar. 2015)

Similarly, sources report Kurdish police officials as saying that hundreds of Kurds have joined the Islamist militants (Al Arabiya News 17 Sept. 2015; ARA News 20 Jan. 2016).

4. Crime Situation in Erbil and State Response

4.1 Crime Situation in Erbil

Without providing further details, the official at the KRG representation in the US stated the "[p]etty and violent crime rates remain very low" in the Kurdistan region (KRG 21 Jan. 2016). The Ifpo research fellow said that the number of murders is [translation] "quite low" (19 Jan. 2016). The UNHCR official stated that

[h]uman trafficking remains prevalent throughout Iraq ... The KRG does not have an anti-trafficking law and did not endorse or adopt the Iraqi government's anti-trafficking law. Cases of women and girls, including [internally displaced persons, IDPs], Syrian refugees and foreign workers, forced into prostitution by various actors, including criminal groups and their own families, have been reported. Some government and law enforcement officials have reportedly been involved in trafficking women and girls, either directly or through corrupt practices. (UN 26 Jan. 2016)

According to the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 for Iraq,

[l]ocal NGOs reported that abuse of Syrian refugees--often by other refugees--was common, including violence against women and children, child marriage, forced prostitution, and sexual harassment. (US 25 Jun. 2015, 45)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4.2 State Response

The Ifpo research fellow claimed that security forces are efficient (19 Jan. 2016). According to the official from the US Department of State, Kurdish police and military "do their job to address petty crimes but are more responsive to serious crimes" (US 19 Jan. 2016). The same source specified that "no statistics are available" on police responsiveness to petty crime (ibid. 30 Jan.

2016). According to the same source, Kurdish security forces are "very responsive to terrorist threats by ISIS," possess modern equipment and benefit from modern training (ibid. 19 Jan. 2016). Further and corroborating information on the material and human resources of security forces could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

However, the UNHCR representative stated that

[1] law enforcement agencies and the judiciary are reported to be prone to interference and the availability of effective protection may depend on the person's ethnicity, religion, as well as family, tribal or political connections. IDPs and refugees in the KR-I [Kurdistan Region of Iraq] would most often lack such connections or affiliations and as such lack access to effective recourse. Displaced persons (refugees and IDPs) may also be arbitrarily arrested, detained and deported based on security-related suspicions. (UN 26 Jan. 2016)

According to the official from the US Department of State, the police agencies that secure Erbil are Erbil City Police, the Zervany (paramilitary) and Asyasih [also known as Asayish] (police/intelligence service) (US 19 Jan. 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Ifpo is a research centre under both the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development and the French National Centre of Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) (France 21 Mar. 2014).

[2] USIP is an independent, nonpartisan organization created by the US Congress in 1984, which works to "prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict around the world" (USIP n.d.).

References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 21 November 2014. "ISIS Claims Suicide Bombings in Iraq's Erbil." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Al Arabiya News. 17 September 2015. Joseph Ataman and John Owens. "Analysis: ISIS in Kurdistan - the hidden enemy surfaces." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Al Jazeera English. 18 April 2015. "Deadly Blast Hits US Consulate in Erbil." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Amnesty International (AI). 25 February 2015. "Iraq." Amnesty International Report 2014/2015: The State of the World's Human Rights. [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

ARA News. 20 January 2016. Dilshad Muhammad. "Iraqi Kurdistan Arrests ISIS-linked Terror Cell in Sulaymaniyah." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Bloomberg View. 30 September 2015. Eli Lake. "Crisis Looms for Refugees Taken in by Iraq's Kurds." [Accessed 27 Jan. 2016]

Canada. 16 December 2015. Travel.gc.ca. "Country Travel Advice and Advisories - Iraq." [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

France. 21 March 2014. France Diplomatie. "Un ouvrage de l'IFPO a reçu le prix Gustave Schlumberger (21 mars 2014)." [Accessed 27 Jan. 2016]

Human Rights Watch. 21 November 2014. "Iraq: Spate of Attacks Terrorize Civilians." [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). 30 June 2015. Iraq: IDPs Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place as Displacement Crisis Deepens. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2016]

International Crisis Group. 30 April 2015. "Iraq." CrisisWatch Database. [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

Jamestown Foundation. 20 March 2015. Wladimir van Wilgenburg. "Islamic State Develops New Strategies to Destabilize the KRG." Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 13, Issue 6. [Accessed 12 Jan. 2016]

Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG). 21 January 2016. Representation in the US. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

_____. N.d.a. "Impact of the Refugee Population on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

_____. N.d.b. "Syrian Refugees in Erbil Governorate." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Los Angeles Times (LA Times). 19 November 2014. Patrick J. McDonnell. "Suicide Bomber Kills 5 in Usually Secure Irbil, Iraqi Kurdish Capital." [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016]

Project Consultant, Goethe-Institut Irak. 24 January 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Research fellow, Institut français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo) in Erbil. 19 January 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Reuters. 18 April 2015. Isabel Coles. "Car Bomb Kills Three Outside U.S. Consulate in Iraq's Kurdish Capital." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Rudaw. 28 April 2015. "More Arrests and Confessions in Erbil Car Bombing." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

_____. 19 November 2014. "Five Killed, at Least 29 Wounded by Erbil Car Bomb." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

Shafaq News. 15 March 2015. "ISIS Bombarding the Western Borders of Erbil With Katyusha Mortar." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

United Kingdom (UK). 21 December 2015. "Foreign Travel Advice - Iraq." [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

United Nations (UN). 26 January 2016. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Director in Amman. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

_____. 17 March 2015. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Q&A: Positive Outlook for Iraq, but Improvement Will Take Months to Show." [Accessed 12 Jan. 2016]

United States (US). 30 January 2016. Department of State. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

_____. 19 January 2016. Department of State. Telephone interview with an official.

_____. 4 December 2015. Department of State. "Iraq Travel Warning." [Accessed 13 Jan. 2016]

_____. 25 June 2015. Department of State. "Iraq." Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014. [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016]

_____. 17 April 2015. Department of State. "U.S. Condemns Erbil Attack." [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016]

United States Institute of Peace (USIP). 29 September 2015. "The U.S. Role and Strategy in the Middle East: The Humanitarian Crisis." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

_____. N.d. "About USIP." [Accessed 1 Feb. 2016]

The Wall Street Journal. 14 November 2015. Ben Kesling and Ghassan Adnan. "Kurds Say They Repelled Islamic State Attack in Iraq." [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016]

_____. 17 April 2015. Matt Bradley and Nour Malas. "Islamic State Claims Bombing in Iraqi Haven of Erbil." [Accessed 21 Jan. 2016]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Agence France-Presse Baghdad office; American International School in Kurdistan; British International Schools Kurdistan; Canada - Embassy to Jordan in Amman; Carnegie Middle East Centre; Center for Strategic and International Studies; École française MLF d'Erbil; European Union - Delegation to the Republic of Iraq; France - Consulate General in Erbil; German School of Erbil; International Crisis Group; International Rescue Committee; Iraq - Embassy in Ottawa, Embassy in Washington, DC; Kurdish Regional Government - Erbil Governorate, Ministry of the Interior; NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq; Radio France internationale; Royal United Institute For Defence Studies; Rûdaw; Save the Children Iraq Country Office; UK - Consulate General in Erbil; UN - UN Development Programme in Iraq, UNESCO Office for Iraq, UNICEF Erbil; US - Overseas Security Advisory Council; World Vision.

Internet sites, including: BBC; ecoi.net; Freedom House; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; IRIN; UN - ReliefWeb; US - Department of State's Country Reports on Terrorism.

Copyright notice: This document is published with the permission of the copyright holder and producer Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). The original version of this document may be found on the official website of the IRB at <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/>. Documents earlier than 2003 may be found only on Refworld.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Iraq](#)

Topics

- [Security situation](#)
- [Terrorism](#)