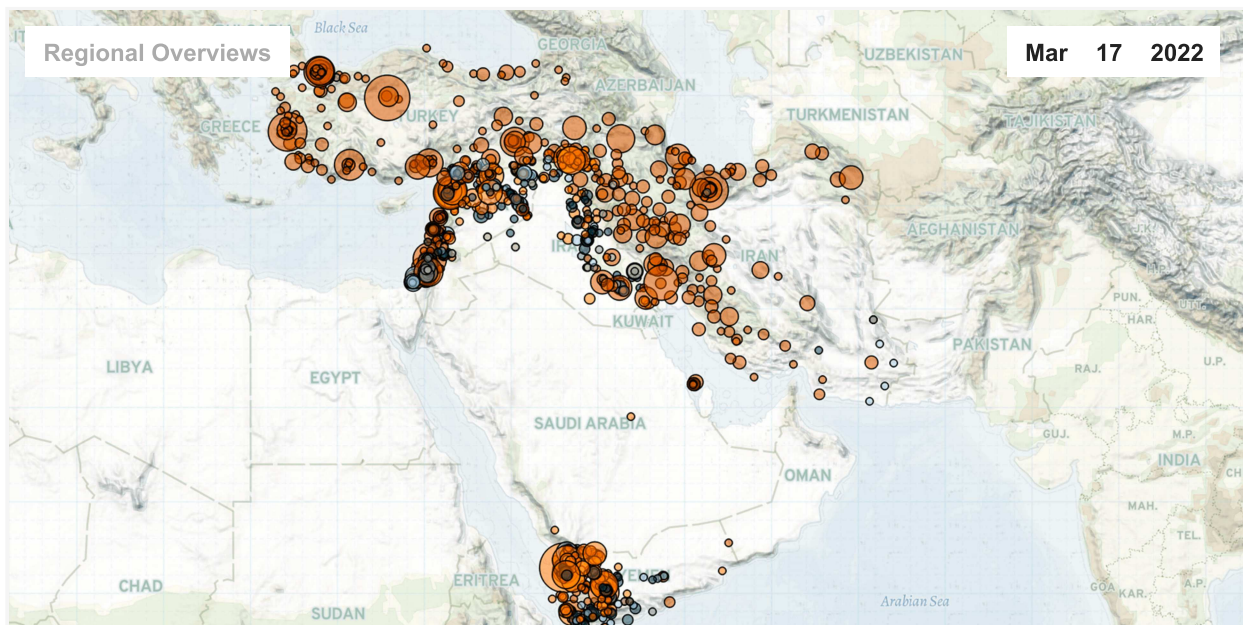


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1446
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	ACLED
Titel:	Regional Overview - Middle East (5-11 March 2022)
Udgivet:	17. marts 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	16. juni 2022

REGIONAL OVERVIEW: MIDDLE EAST

5-11 MARCH 2022



In the Middle East, political violence dropped significantly in Yemen last week, reaching its lowest level since September 2021. In Saudi Arabia, Houthi forces carried out drone attacks targeting several oil facilities. In Syria, overall levels of violence declined amid decreasing numbers of Russian and Turkish airstrikes. In Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) resumed combat operations against regime forces last week. Along the Iran-Afghanistan border, Iranian border guards clashed with Taliban forces. In Palestine, Israeli forces killed multiple armed Palestinians during attempted attacks on Israeli soldiers.

In **Yemen**, political violence decreased in Hajjah and Marib governorates last week. Few direct confrontations were recorded between Houthi and pro-Hadi forces, with the vast majority of political violence events in these governorates being Saudi-led coalition airstrikes.¹ The ongoing decrease in violence comes after a failed pro-Hadi and Saudi-led offensive [in early February](#) that led to the 597% increase in violence in Hajjah governorate last month relative to the past year that is flagged by [ACLED's Subnational Threat Tracker](#). In Marib governorate, Houthi forces fired two ballistic missiles last week, including one that fell near the Safir oil facility.

Elsewhere in Yemen, unidentified gunmen abducted two foreign employees of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Hadramawt governorate on 5 March, as they were traveling towards Marib. Although responsibility for the incident has not been claimed, Yemeni security forces have claimed that the gunmen are linked to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) ([Reuters, 6 March 2022](#)). This comes [less than a month after](#) five UN employees were abducted in a similar incident in Abyan governorate. MSF subsequently closed some of its operations in Marib ([MSF, 13 March 2022](#)).

Meanwhile, the Houthi-run government organized a number of demonstrations within the areas under its control last week to denounce a “blockade” of ships carrying oil derivatives in the Red Sea, accusing the Saudi-led coalition of preventing the ships from reaching the port of Hodeidah ([Ansar Allah, 6 March 2022](#)). In an escalatory move, Houthi forces announced drone attacks against Aramco oil refinery facilities in the Abha, Riyadh, and Jizan regions in **Saudi Arabia** ([Twitter @Yahya_Saree, 11 March 2022](#)). Saudi authorities acknowledged the strike in Riyadh, which led to a fire in the refinery ([Reuters, 11 March 2022](#)). The Riyadh Aramco facility was last targeted by Houthi drones a year ago, in March 2021.

In **Syria**, overall levels of violence decreased last week. Russian airstrikes continued to decrease for a second consecutive week and were limited to targeting IS militants in the Al Rasafah desert of Ar Raqqa province. Meanwhile, Syrian regime shelling of opposition-controlled areas remained at the same level as the week prior. In contrast, IS militants increased combat operations, particularly in Homs province, where IS attacks on Syrian regime forces positions left 21 regime and pro-regime fighters dead in the desert of Tadmor and the Jabal



Omour area. [ACLED's Subnational Surge Tracker](#) first warned of increased violence to come in Homs in the past month.

Elsewhere, Israel resumed airstrikes on Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and pro-Iran militia positions in Syria last week, killing two IRGC officers near Damascus International Airport. Meanwhile, Turkish artillery attacks and airstrikes significantly decreased in Aleppo province, especially in Jarablus district. Turkey continued to target Azaz district at the same level as the week prior.

Overall levels of violence in **Iraq** increased last week following two consecutive weeks of relative decline. This increase was primarily driven by the resumption of IS activity in Salah Al Din and Kirkuk provinces, which contributed to 340% and 122% increases in violence, respectively, over the past week relative to the past month, as flagged by [ACLED's Subnational Surge Tracker](#). Despite the overall increase in violence, Turkish airstrikes significantly decreased in Iraq last week. The decrease was most significant in the Barwari Bala and Nerwa Rekan districts of Duhok province. In contrast, the overall number of strikes targeting Amadiya district in Duhok remained similar for two consecutive weeks.

Iranian border guards exchanged fire with Taliban fighters along the **Iran-Afghanistan** border last week, leaving at least two Iranian border guards dead. Fighting broke out after Taliban forces reportedly attempted to prevent Iranians from dredging the Sikhsar canal on the border between Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province and Afghanistan's Nimruz province ([Radio Farda, 8 March 2022](#)). The Taliban claimed that the canal lies inside Afghan territory and that the Iranian border guards crossed the borders and attempted to "intervene" with the work of Afghan farmers on the canal ([Radio Farda, 8 March 2022](#); [TOLO News, 8 March 2022](#)). The Iranian government did not release an official statement on the clash ([Khaama Press, 8 March 2022](#)). This is the third recorded armed clash between the Taliban and Iranian forces along the Iran-Afghanistan border so far in 2022.

In **Palestine** last week, Israeli forces shot and killed three Palestinians as they attempted to attack Israeli soldiers in and near East Jerusalem. On 6 March, a Palestinian was shot and killed after injuring two Israeli soldiers in a stabbing attack near the Bab Huta gate of the Old City. The following day, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian who injured two soldiers in a stabbing attack near



Alqatanin gate of the Al Aqsa Mosque. Lastly, in East Jerusalem's Abu Dis town, two Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails at an Israeli military site, prompting Israeli forces to open fire. One of the Palestinians — a 16-year-old — was killed in the clash, while the other escaped.







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17 March 2022



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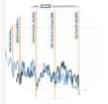
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