

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	591
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International.
Titel:	Improving security for minorities in Iraq.
Udgivet:	1. juni 2012
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	18. september 2012

Improving security for minorities in Iraq

By Chris Chapman

Introduction

Members of Iraqi religious and ethnic minorities have been targeted by a campaign of violence since 2003, including truck bomb attacks on minority villages in the Nineveh Plains, hostage takings, bombings of religious and political institutions, kidnappings, killings and attacks on minority-owned businesses (see box 1). In December 2011, this violence spread to the autonomous Kurdistan Region, a normally peaceful area to which many minorities had previously fled in the hope of finding better security. As a result, huge numbers of minorities have fled Iraq; the Sabeen Mandaean community, for example, has been

reduced to a tenth of its pre-2003 size. Many members of minorities take steps to reduce the risk to their personal safety; for example hiding religious symbols or wearing a veil when going out, or simply staying at home. Iraq was rated fourth most dangerous country in the world for minorities in MRG's 2012 Peoples Under Threat ranking.¹

In 2012, Iraq is at a crossroads, particularly with regard to security. The downward trend in levels of violence, since a high point was reached after the bombing of the Al-Askari Shi'a Mosque in Samarra in 2006, appears to be bottoming out, with 2011 registering similar levels to the previous year.² In the disputed areas of the north, which are claimed by both the Federal government and the autonomous Kurdistan



A WOMAN LOOKS OUT FROM ST. MATTHEW'S MONASTERY IN IRAQI KURDISTAN, WHERE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO FLED INCREASING VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHRISTIANS IN MOSUL, IRAQ, FOUND TEMPORARY SANCTUARY © SHIHO FUKADA/PANOS.

Region, and are home to many minority communities, the withdrawal of the United States (US) army at the end of 2011 has caused anxiety; the US forces played an important role in defusing tensions there. Violence and confrontational rhetoric between ethnic groups have been on the increase in Kirkuk, a city in the disputed areas, where constitutional provisions intended to reverse or provide redress for demographic manipulation dating back to the Saddam Hussein period have still not been implemented. In Baghdad, a political stand-off within the government is leading to doubts about its chances of survival in the long term.

Minorities continue to be targeted specifically, even if the reasons for this targeting, and the identity of the perpetrators, are not always clear. According to new research carried out by MRG and its Iraqi partner organization, Iraqi Minorities Council (IMC), presented here, most members of Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities fear for their safety. In this briefing we aim to identify the views and concerns of members of minority communities relating to their security. We also seek their opinions with regard to a number of proposals that have been put forward to improve security conditions for minorities,¹³ and try to assess how feasible they are. These include drafting more minorities into the police and army, beefing up security presence at hot spots, and creating militia to protect minority communities made up only of members of those communities. The briefing draws on field research conducted by IMC (see box 2 overleaf).

There are two main focuses of violence, particularly that affecting minorities – Baghdad, and the disputed areas in

the north covering large sections of Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates, bordering the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) region. The violence in the north takes place against a backdrop of the dispute between Federal government and the KRG over territories bordering the KRG area. Many areas in the north are struggling with a complex legacy of demographic manipulation implemented under Saddam Hussein's regime, which has left communities making competing claims to areas of strategic importance. As was noted in a recent consultation of minority civil society activists in the Nineveh Plains, minorities are targeted because 'the lack of political consensus between powerful blocs against a background of the intersection of their agendas and interests, meant that minorities were used as fuel and were victims of this conflict of interests, for example an attempt to confiscate their settlements and make use of them as a political bargaining chip.'¹⁴

The relative vulnerability of minority communities is exacerbated by the fact that these communities mostly lack militias, but also the informal tribal structures that play a role in regulating disputes that Sunni, Shi'a and Kurds have – structures that were in fact encouraged and strengthened by Saddam Hussein's regime.¹⁵ This can leave them vulnerable to opportunistic targeting, for example kidnapping for ransom, which is primarily motivated by greed. It should be noted, however, that the hate speech to which minority victims of kidnapping for ransom are subjected, indicates that sectarian prejudice also plays a role in the choice of targets for these acts.¹⁶

Box 1: Timeline of recent major attacks on minority communities

April 2007: 23 Yezidis were dragged from a bus and shot in Nineveh, apparently as revenge for the stoning of a Yezidi teenager by members of her own community for having a relationship with a Muslim boy;³

August 2007: four coordinated suicide truck bombings destroyed two Yezidi towns in Nineveh governorate, killing at least 400 civilians, wounding 1,562 and leaving more than 1,000 families homeless;

January–February 2008: six church buildings in Mosul and Baghdad were bombed in coordinated attacks on Epiphany and Orthodox Christmas Eve; the Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul was abducted and killed;⁴

September–October 2008: a wave of threats and attacks against Christians in Mosul, in which at least 14 Christians were killed; approximately 13,000 individuals were internally displaced and 400 families fled abroad (about one half of the Christian population of Mosul);⁵

June 2009: truck bomb in the Turkmen town of Taza Khurmatu near Kirkuk, killing 70, injuring 182;

July 2009: bomb in Telafar, a Turkmen town in Nineveh, killing 45, injuring 65;⁶

August 2009: truck bombing in Shi'a Turkmen community in Sherkhan Sufla, Nineveh, killing 45, injuring 217;

truck bomb in Khazna, a Shabak village in Nineveh, causing 34 deaths, injuring 174; bomb in Yezidi village of Sinjar, in Nineveh, killing 20, injuring 50;⁷

May 2010: suicide bomber targeted a football match in the Turkmen town of Telafar, Nineveh, killing 17, injuring 132;⁸

October 2010: attack on the Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic church in Baghdad, leaving 56 dead and causing more than 1,000 families to flee Baghdad over two months;⁹

Throughout 2011: a series of attacks on the Turkmen community in Kirkuk, Northern Iraq, prompting a parliamentary commission of inquiry to be set up. These include car bomb attacks on a Turkmen political party headquarters¹⁰ and the houses of two Turkmen politicians, and a spate of killings of Turkmen including doctors, businessmen and politicians' bodyguards;¹¹

December 2011: 37 Christian and Yezidi businesses set on fire in Dohuk governorate, in the normally safe autonomous Kurdistan Region.¹² There were fears of violence against minorities in the region spreading and spiralling out of control as similar incidents took place over the next two or three days.

Box 2: The field research

The research was conducted in Iraq by MRG's partner organization, Iraqi Minorities Council, between July and August 2011. For the research, 300 members of 14 ethnic/religious communities were interviewed – Bahá'í, Black Iraqis, Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriacs, Armenians, Kaka'i, Kawliyah (Roma), Kurd Faili, Sabean Mandaean, Shabak, Turkmen, Yezidi, Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs and Kurds. The latter three communities, not normally considered to be in a vulnerable or 'minority' position, were interviewed partly because a members of these communities can be in a situation comparable to that of a minority if they live in an area where another community dominates; and also to provide a comparison with the situation of minorities. There were 201 men and 99 women respondents. Respondents were given a guarantee that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Respondents were identified to ensure, as far as possible, equitable representation according to gender, age and profession.

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their perceptions of security risks in their location, the security forces that are operating there, and what measures they thought could improve security.

The data were disaggregated according to community, gender and locality (Baghdad, Federal government controlled area, Kurdistan Regional Government area, and disputed areas). It should be noted that the situation of each minority is very different and will even vary according to locality. This will affect responses to questions such as how well their community is represented in the local security agency, or how safe they feel when going out in their community. We have endeavoured to take these issues into account, discarding for example results where the population size is too small to allow for meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

The localities in which research was carried out were:

Baghdad

Rasheed Camp; Kamaliya; Sadr city; Al Benouk; Zaafaraniya; Kadhmiya; Jameela; Kifah Street; Sadriya; Al Ghadeer; Zayouna; Battawiyen; Camp Sara; Mansour; Daura; A'adhamiya; Palestine street; Al Ghazaliya;

Al jamei'a; Al Baladiat; Arsat; Wehda; Saidiya; Karadah; Cairo; Dholou'iya

Basrah

Al Kabla; Al mo'tal; Zubair; Old city; Abu Al Khaseeb; Shatt Al-Arab; Kardlat; Mannawi Basha; Kot Al Dejjaj

Diyala

Shahraban; Khaniqeen; Kafri; Mandli; Saadiya; Jalawlal

Duhok

Aqra Complex; Nahla; City Centre; Sarsing; Baderash; Bablo; Bakhatmy; Sorka; Shekhan; Dereshke

Erbil

Waziran; Ainkawa

Kirkuk

Taza Khormato; Arafa; Al Mohafaza; Ton Kopri; Askari Quarter; Gharnata; Bayji (or Yaajji); Ashbiliya; Hawija; Zab Rashad; Riadh; Multaqa; Daquq; Hawija; Zab Rashad; Riadh; Multaqa; Daquq

Missan

Maymouna; Amara

Nineveh

Mosul city (Left bank); Mosul Al jazaer; Mosul Ba'weiza; Mosul Karatabba; Mosul Albaladiyat; Mousel Tameem; Mosul Kokajli; Mosul basakhra; Qaraqosh; Bartilla; Karmless; Ali Rash; Kabarli; Wardak; Ba'sheeqa; Bahzani; Talleskuf; Darawish; Bazwaya; Tabraq Ziada; Sinjar; Mahd Complex; Hardan; Tal Qasab; Tal Banat; Khansour; Zorafa; Dekri; Kojo; Zomany; Garzrak; Sinouny; Tal Azeez; Wardiya; Bourak; Rioussy; Jazeera; Hattar; Doghat; Sreshka; Khoshaba; Rusala Complex; Al Muhandeseen; Tahrawa; Al Muthana; Sinjar Kaheil; Bazkertan; Al Hamadaniya; Talafar; Namroud; Alkosh

Sulaymaniyah

Sulaymaniyah city

In many cases, no one claims responsibility for the large-scale attacks on minorities; therefore, debates have raged as to the identity of the perpetrators. In September 2007, the US Military killed an al-Qaeda militant, who they claimed was the mastermind behind the truck bombing of Yezidi towns in the previous month (see box).¹⁷ The gunmen who stormed the Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad in October 2010 demanded the release of jailed al-Qaeda militants,¹⁸ and the attack was later claimed by an al-Qaeda linked group, Islamic State in Iraq.¹⁹

While most of the attacks in the northern disputed areas have not been claimed, inevitably, suspicion is drawn to armed insurgent groups, motivated by a radical interpretation of Islam, who have claimed responsibility for similar attacks. According to this theory, such groups may target minorities for a number of reasons; to create a generalized atmosphere of fear and chaos, scuppering the Federal and KRG governments' plans to establish order; to take revenge on minorities, particularly Christians and Yezidis, some of whom have found jobs with the multinational forces (from 2009, the US-led forces in

Iraq); and to drive non-Muslim communities out of Iraq. Human Rights Watch found evidence, when interviewing witnesses to a number of killings linked to a dispute over the provincial elections in October 2008 in Mosul, that the assailants spoke Arabic without a Kurdish accent and wore Arab dress.²⁰ The French Consul-General in Lebanon reported that it was inundated by asylum claims from Iraqi Christians fleeing Mosul in October 2008, all citing persecution by Arabs.²¹ Human Rights Watch further noted that the ‘attacks against Turkmen and Shabak villages [in 2009]...took place around the same time as a series of attacks against Shi’a sites during the pilgrimage marking the fifteenth night of Shaban, and could thus have been part of a nationwide pattern of anti-Shi’a attacks rather than attacks focused on minorities’.²²

There is credible evidence that KRG security forces use intimidation and commit human rights violations in order to pressure minorities’ political representatives to ally with KRG parties in a bid to establish control over the disputed areas of the North.²³ The Nineveh Governor, Atheel Al-Nujaifi, stated in a press conference that the attacks on minorities highlighted in a November 2009 Human Rights Watch report took place in areas controlled by KRG security forces, and called on the Federal government to deploy troops across Nineveh and remove the KRG forces.²⁴ A senior official in the KRG’s Asayish (intelligence service) strongly denied that KRG officials were putting pressure on minorities in the disputed areas to do anything at all.²⁵ Iraqi Federal government authorities are also accused of exerting pressure on minorities in Nineveh to support their territorial interests.²⁶

This tug-of-war between KRG and Federal political blocks may even be having an impact on how minorities identify themselves. A Shabak academic, quoted in a report of the International Crisis Group, stated that ‘The most practical solution is to present ourselves as a separate ethnic group. It affords us greater protection because we live in a

dangerous area, caught between Arabs and Kurds, and we don’t want to take a position in their fight.’²⁷ The KRG claims that Shabak are ethnic Kurds, while some Shabak claim a separate ethnic identity – the same being true of the Yezidis. The poor security situation in minority areas also hampers development, particularly where there is a need for foreign investment; even minority communities in the diaspora, who are particularly keen to invest, are discouraged by the security situation.²⁸

A further, relatively new development in the security situation is an upsurge in tensions between minorities, in the Nineveh Plains in particular; for example quite serious tensions have developed between Christians and Shabak in Mosul and surrounding areas, over land rights, property development and historical demographic changes.²⁹

Perceptions of security

Most members of minorities surveyed in our research stated that they do not feel safe when leaving home, travelling or at work/school/university, but not significantly more than Sunni or Shi’a Arabs. It is probably unsurprising that the only group to reply mostly positively to the question (67 per cent) was the Kurds, whose region has by far the lowest levels of violence in Iraq. The majority of Shi’a (60 per cent) and Sunni Arabs (72 per cent) respondents answered no to this question, reflecting the fact that all communities are affected by the violence in Iraq. The communities feeling most insecure when leaving the home were Armenians (85 per cent), Yezidis (81 per cent), Black Iraqis (79 per cent) and Shabak (76 per cent).

When disaggregated according to location, those living in Baghdad and the disputed areas rate their security as equally low (27 per cent), in Federal government controlled areas (other than Baghdad) the figure is 40 per cent, while in the KRG it is the highest (79 per cent).

Figure 1: Do you feel safe when leaving home, traveling or at work/school/university? (by community)

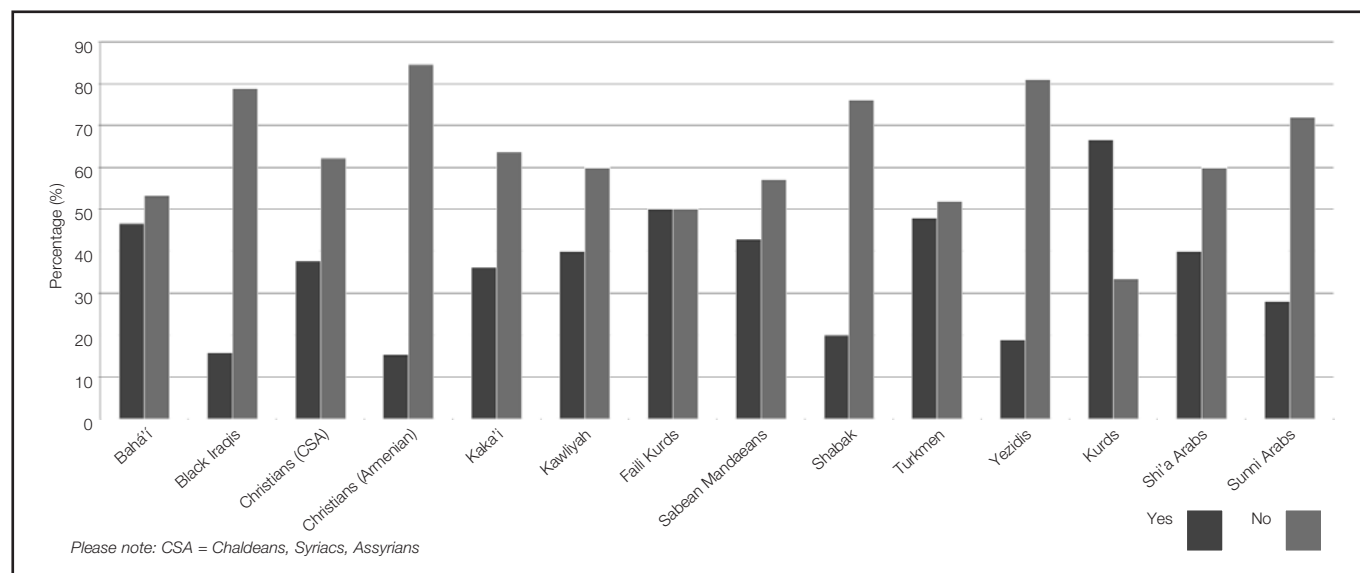
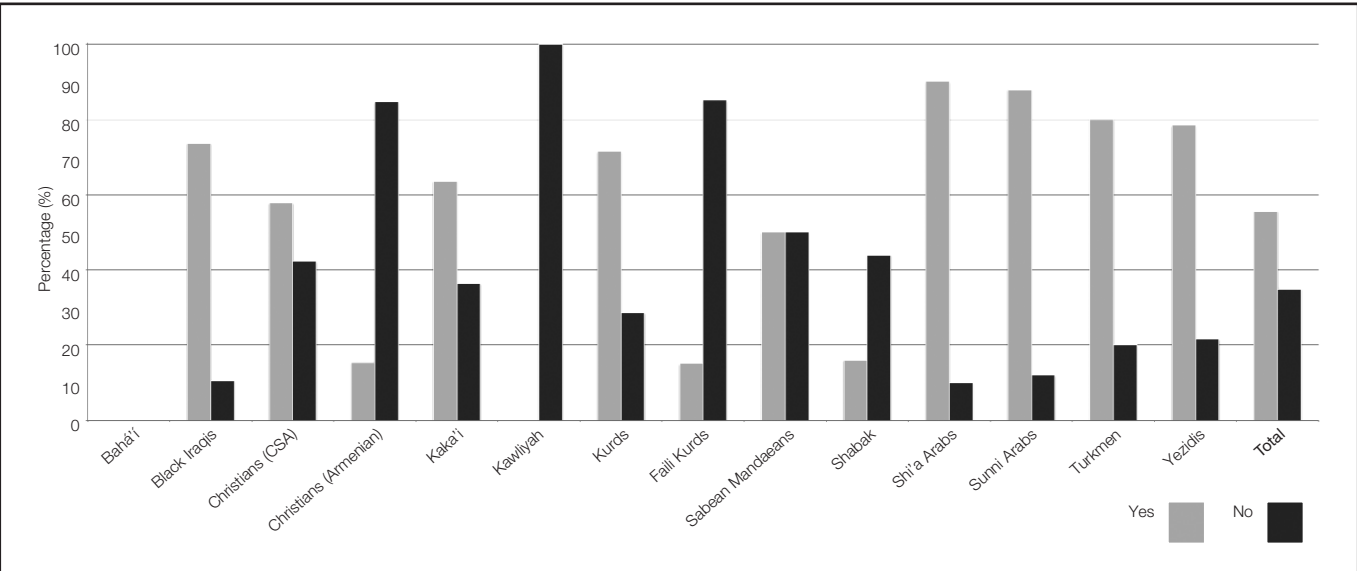


Figure 2: Are there any members of your ethnic/religious community in the security forces in your location? (by community)



Levels of representation of minorities within local police forces

Article 9 (a) of the Iraqi Constitution states that:

'The Iraqi armed forces and security services will be composed of the components of the Iraqi people with due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion. They shall be subject to the control of the civilian authority, shall defend Iraq, shall not be used as an instrument to oppress the Iraqi people, shall not interfere in the political affairs, and shall have no role in the transfer of authority.'

According to a report of the Assyria Council of Europe, the proportion of Christians in local police forces in the Nineveh Plains does not reflect their population share. 'Assyrians form the majority of inhabitants in the district of Al-Hamdaniya

but constitute only 32 per cent of the total number of police officers ... Assyrians make up only 12 per cent of the police officers in the district [of TelKeif] despite constituting at least half of the population.'³⁰ However, there are indications from local community representatives that this situation is improving, and that the main concern now is over the lack of minorities in leadership positions in the police.³¹

56 per cent of the respondents canvassed in IMC's field research indicated that there were representatives of their communities in their local security forces. However, only 27 per cent felt that the numbers were representative of their population size. It is particularly striking to note that 100 per cent of Kawliyah (Roma) indicated that there were no Kawliyah in their local security bodies. Faili Kurds also indicated very poor representation (85 per cent responding negatively). While 78 per cent of Yezidis had noted that there were Yezidis in the local security bodies, only 16 per cent thought that their numbers reflected the size of their

Figure 3: Are their numbers fair and representative of your community?

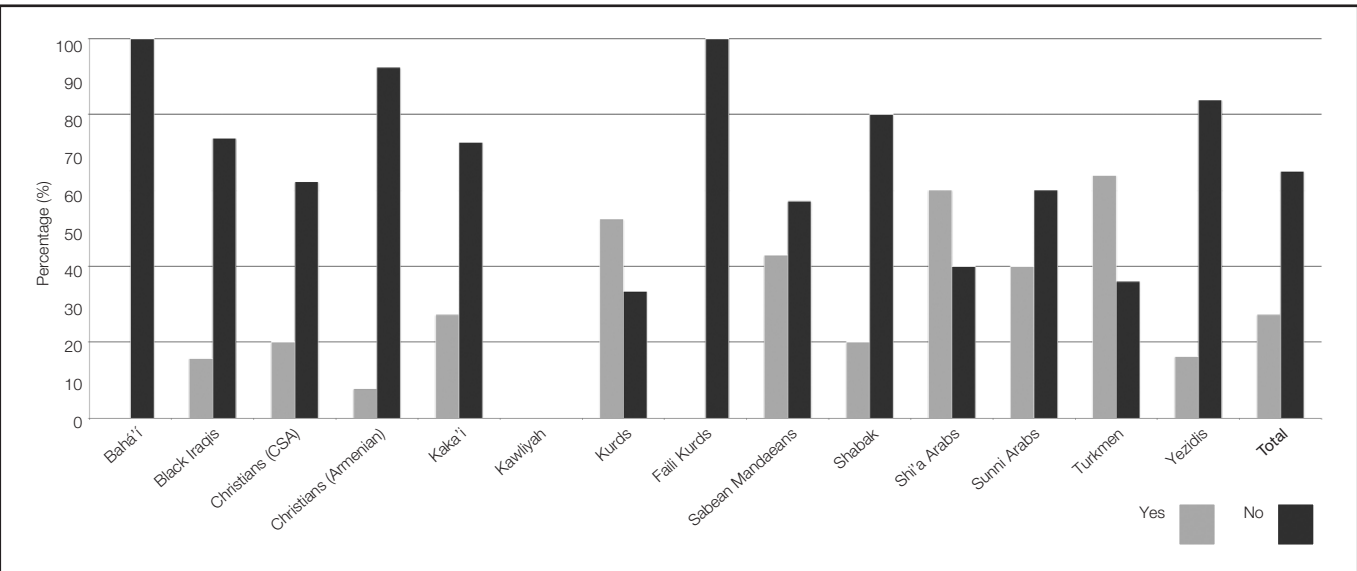
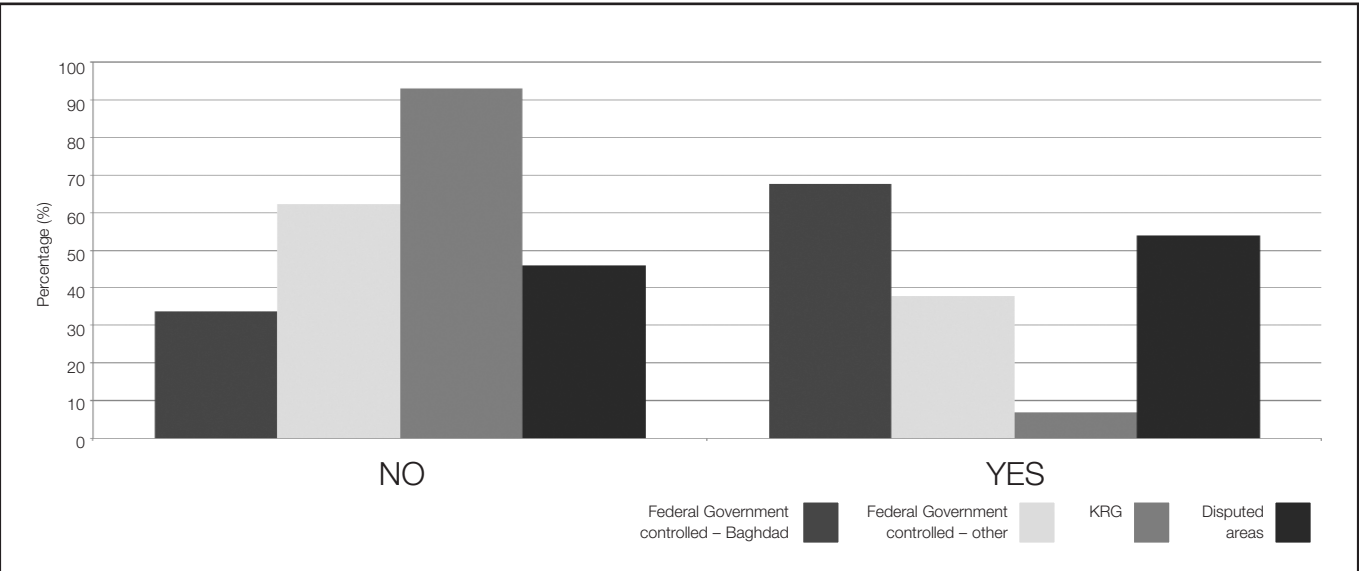


Figure 4: Do you think the security forces in your location are able to guarantee you security? (by location)



population. Overall, women responded slightly more positively than men, with 29 per cent stating that the numbers of their community in security forces were fair, compared to 25 per cent of men.

The figure for Bahá'í (100 per cent gave no answer when asked if they were represented in local security forces) can be explained by the fact that the Bahá'í religion does not permit the carrying of arms.

When disaggregated by area, Baghdad scored lowest on both counts, with only 8 per cent of respondents feeling that the numbers of their community in security forces were representative. It is of course impossible that all communities be under-represented in the security forces; it should be remembered that the survey registered perceptions rather than facts. The negative figures for Baghdad no doubt reflect the highly polarised security situation there.

Despite the poor figures for community representation in the police and army, there were slightly better figures

when respondents were asked if security agencies could guarantee their safety. Forty-nine per cent overall said that they could. There were fairly strong differentiations according to ethnic group, with 92 per cent of Armenians and 76 per cent of Sunni Arabs giving a negative response. Women were again slightly more optimistic (54 per cent giving a positive answer, compared to 47 per cent of men).

When broken down by locality, the most striking result was a 93 per cent positive rating for security agencies in the KRG region. An Asayish official interviewed by MRG attributed the region's positive security record to successful infiltration and dismantling of insurgent networks, and a relationship of trust with the general population.³²

Impact of the departure of the US army

The role of the US forces in Iraq in recent years has been to provide technical support and training to the Iraq army,

Figure 5: Do you think the security forces in your location are able to guarantee your security? (by community)

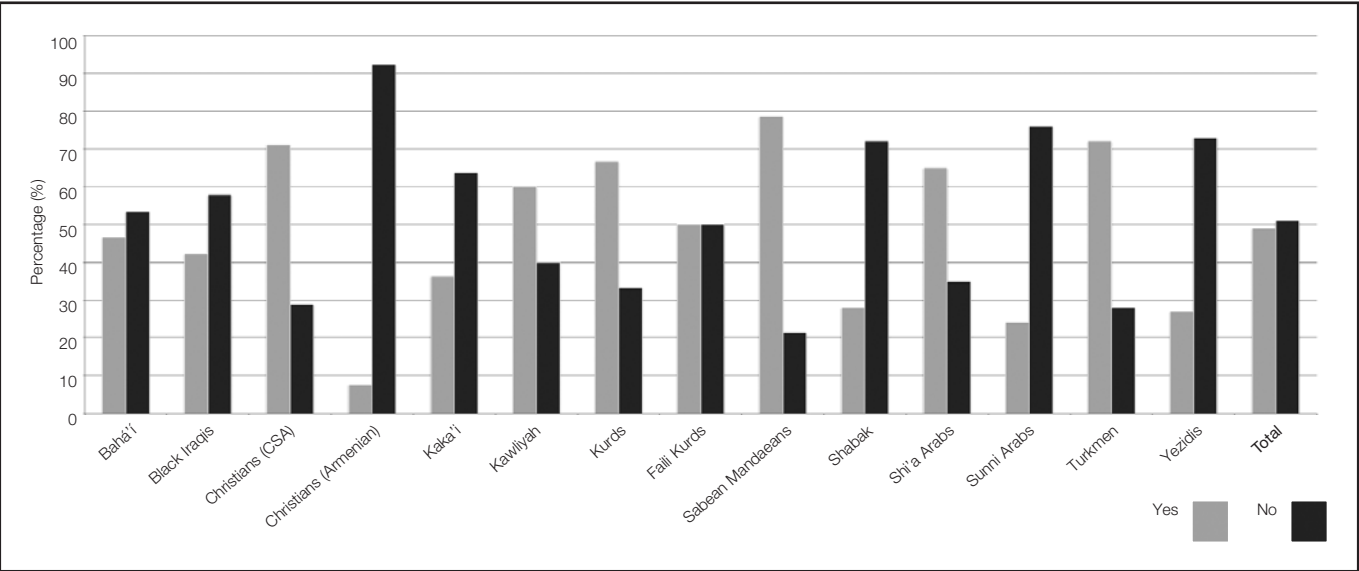
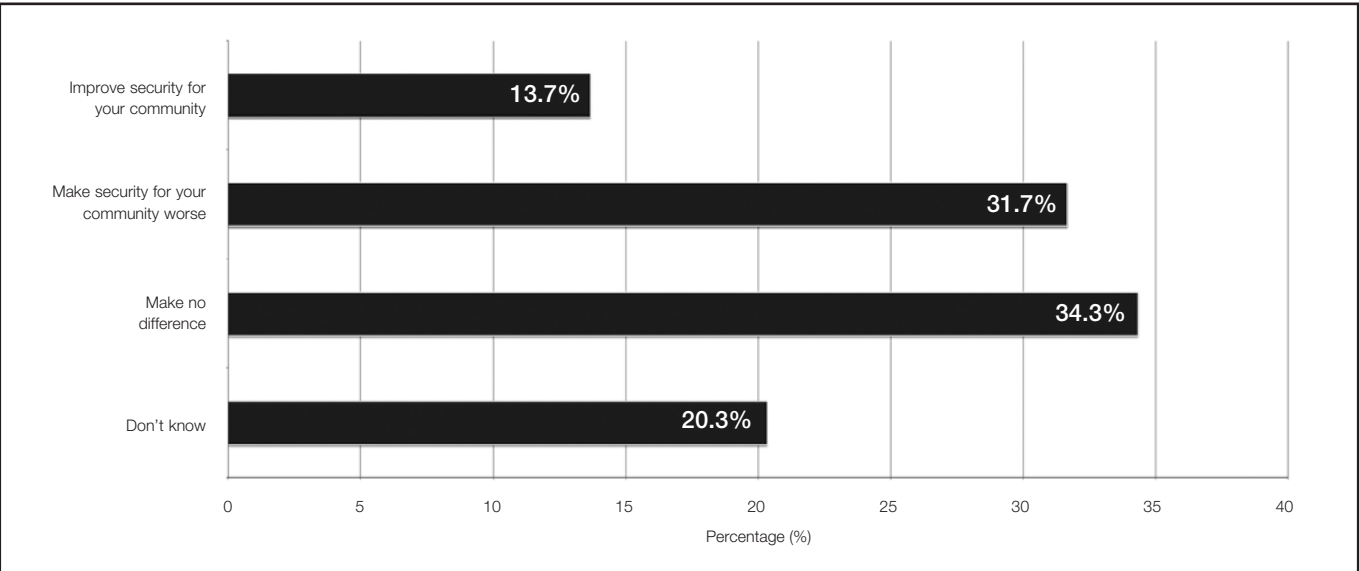


Figure 6: What will be the impact of the US withdrawal?



and to coordinate the Combined Security Mechanism in the disputed areas, a tripartite agreement between the KRG, Government of Iraq, and the US, which monitored and facilitated movement of people through checkpoints, and acted as a framework for information sharing between KRG and Federal forces. The mission officially ended on 31 December 2011.

Attitudes of members of minority groups to the US forces are mixed. A number of minorities secured jobs with US forces and other agencies, benefiting from a perception that they were less likely to be linked to insurgent groups. On the other hand many see the 2003 military intervention, and the unleashing of sectarian hatred that followed, as the starting point for a dark period in their history, characterized by vicious terrorist attacks on their communities and a mass exodus from the country.

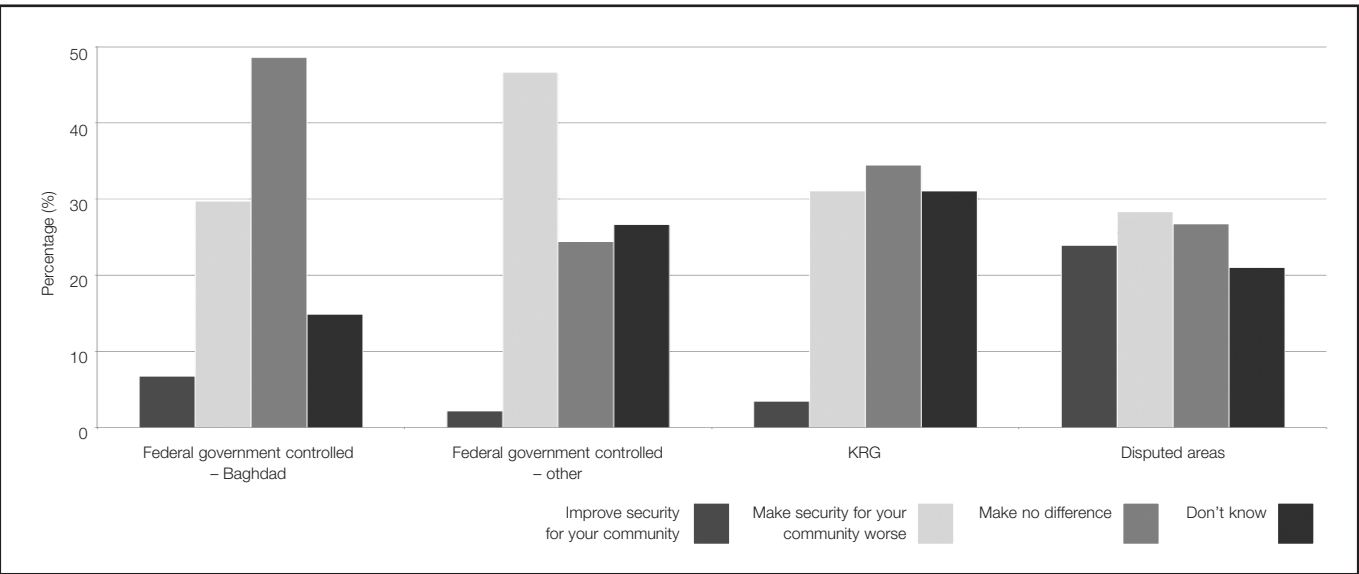
Although these considerations are not necessarily relevant to an assessment of the consequences of the US

withdrawal for security, they are likely to colour responses collated by researchers.

Attitudes to the US forces are also likely to be informed by political affiliations to either the KRG or Federal government. The dominant parties in the KRG see the US as a crucial friend and ally, whereas the Federal government is more ambivalent, being founded on a coalition with a significant number of more or less anti-American voices.

With this in mind it is not surprising to see a diverse range of opinions voiced by respondents, with very few unambiguous tendencies. Overall 14 per cent thought the US withdrawal would improve security for their community. Thirty-two per cent thought it would make it worse, and 34 per cent thought it would make no difference. Twenty per cent stated that they did not know. There were again considerable ethnic differences, with 56 per cent of Shabaks saying it would improve security for them, and 62 per cent of Armenians and Yezidis saying it would make it worse.

Figure 7: What will be the impact of the US withdrawal? (by locality)



When disaggregated by locality, the only area to show optimism at the departure of the US forces was Nineveh (31 per cent). Given that a number of observers are predicting tense times in the disputed areas, with the US no longer there to hold feuding parties apart, this is a surprising finding, but one that reflects the above-mentioned complex mix of feelings inspired by the Americans. Diyala, another disputed area, which has seen recent stand-offs between KRG and federal forces, was the area where it was most strongly felt that the US pull-out would worsen security.

Despite the ambiguous findings, it does seem likely that the US role in coordinating joint patrols and providing a framework for information-sharing between Federal and KRG forces in the disputed areas will be hard to replace, and could lead to a heightened risk of violence. If that happens, minorities will not necessarily be targeted directly, but are quite likely to be caught in the cross-fire. The Combined Security Mechanism will continue, but with a considerably reduced US presence; it is likely that there will also be an increased role for the United Nations (UN).

As Hasan Özmen, a Turkmen Member of Parliament (MP) noted: 'Their invasion was problematic, their departure will probably also be problematic. Some people think the US will leave the field empty so that others can take the opportunity to realize their objectives – for example the Baathists'.³³

Measures to improve security

Box 3: What should the government do to improve security?

Before being presented with a menu of options, respondents in IMC's field research were given free rein to suggest what measures they thought that the government should take to improve security for their community. Here are some of the most commonly cited responses:

- fully implement Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution [which allows for a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories and rectification of demographic changes made in Saddam Hussein's time];
- involve all communities in political process;
- increase numbers of minorities in security forces;
- retreat of US forces;
- strengthen the army, increase checkpoints;
- compulsory military service;
- have just one security force;
- remove Kurdish security forces from Nineveh;
- combat sectarianism;
- promote reconciliation; and
- provide work for idle people.

Respondents were asked to give their opinion of the following proposed measures to improve security for their communities:

- recruiting more members of minorities into the police and army;
- setting up joint committees with representatives of the community and the security forces to improve relations and communication;
- increase numbers of security forces in your area;
- identify, prosecute and punish those responsible for attacks on innocent civilians;
- setting up ethnic/religious militia to defend their own communities and;
- have more security agents posted permanently to protect key sites (places of worship, at entrances of highly vulnerable villages, etc.)

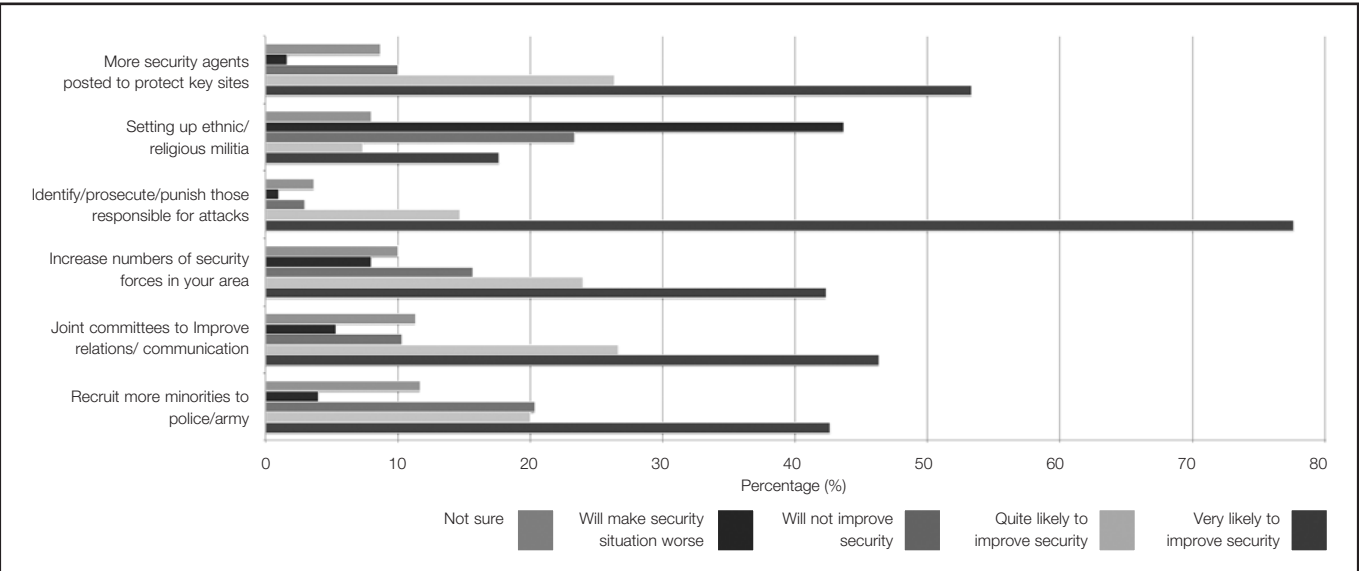
Justice for attacks on minorities

The measure considered most likely to improve security for minorities was to identify, prosecute and punish those responsible for attacks on innocent civilians. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents felt that this was very likely to improve security, with a further 15 per cent saying it was 'quite likely'.

This reflects a widely held frustration that perpetrators of the major attacks on minorities have not been identified and prosecuted. The report of a commission set up by the government to investigate a wave of attacks against the Christian population of Mosul in October 2008, in the run-up to provincial elections, although submitted to the government, has never seen the light of day,³⁴ nor has the report of a similar commission set up by Parliament to investigate attacks on Turkmen in Kirkuk in 2011.³⁵ In view of this failing, the Turkmen MP Özmen called on the UN to send a commission of enquiry to Iraq.³⁶

Similar investigations have been announced into bombings in Baghdad, including of Sunni and Shi'a communities, also failing to produce any outcomes. 'The investigations into these attacks never produce results. They are used as a bargaining chip, they are dropped in return for something,' asserted Nissan Karromy Rzooki, the Mayor of Qaraqosh town in the Nineveh Plains.³⁷ The mayor's comments reflect a widely held view that the groups responsible for such attacks have links to influential political circles in Baghdad. In April 2009, the Ministry for Human Rights communicated to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – in response to a letter asking for information about the results of judicial investigations into attacks on religious communities – that it had requested this information from the judicial authorities and received no response.³⁸ An exception to this tendency was the conviction in August 2011 of three people for the Our Lady of Salvation Church attack in 2010. The three were sentenced to death.³⁹

Figure 8: Opinions regarding proposed measures for improving security for minorities in Iraq



Following the attack on the Our Lady of Salvation Church, a parliamentary committee was established to discuss further, non-justice related measures to address the targeting of minorities; it recommended actions to the Iraqi government, including public condemnations of attacks, increased security, and compensation for victims.⁴⁰

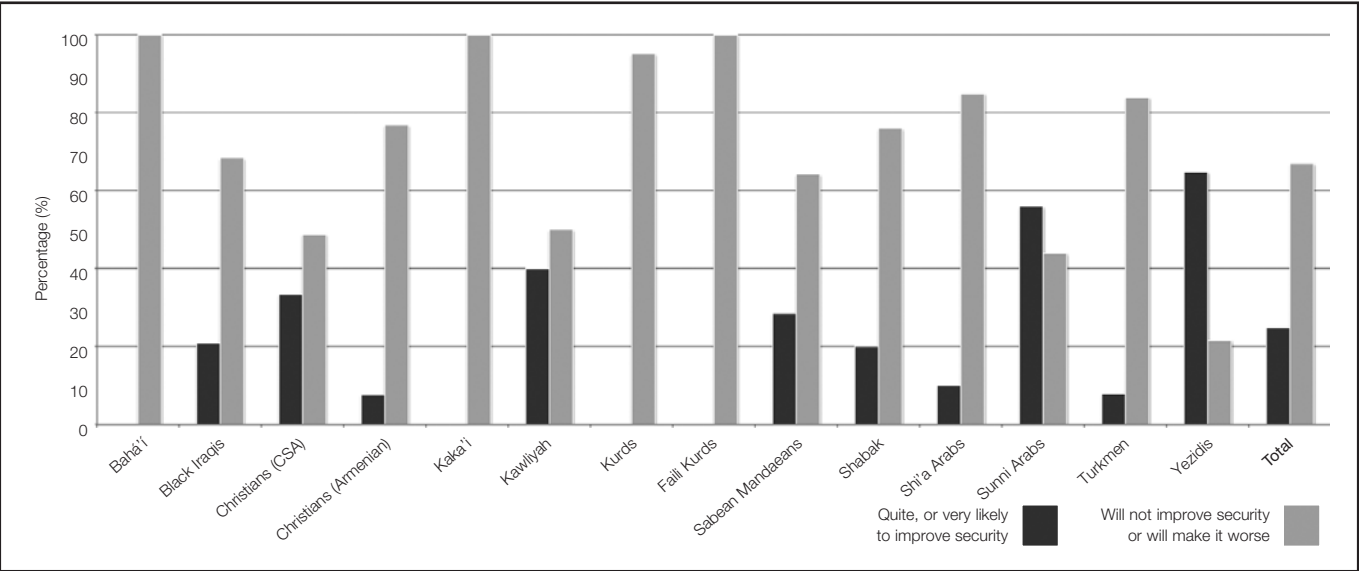
Ethnic/religious militia

There was a clear majority of respondents expressing a negative opinion about communities setting up their own militias (along ethnic/religious lines – following the example of the Christian militia set up as an initiative of the former KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan, active in some Nineveh Plains towns). Sixty-seven per cent felt that this would either fail to improve security, or make security worse in their community. However there was some differentiation across communities, with Yezidis and Sunni Arabs expressing more positive opinions.

This reflects a frustration with the failure to respect the law of Iraq in setting up the Aghajan militia. ‘The militia in Hamdaniya is paid by Sarkis Aghajan, there are 3,000, all Christian. It is not established according to law. It is not authorised to use guns,’ stated a Christian civil society activist.⁴¹ It should also be noted that setting up militias ‘outside the framework of the armed forces’ is contrary to the Iraqi Constitution.⁴²

An Asayish official explained, ‘we appointed this militia to protect Christians. We deliberately appointed Christians because they know the community better. If we appointed Muslims there would be problems for the Christians’.⁴³ There are indications other communities are looking at this model and wishing to emulate it – Turkmen militia have been set up in Kirkuk,⁴⁴ where the community has suffered many attacks and threats, and the Asayish official pointed out that Turkmen and Shabak villages in the Nineveh Plains have their own guards.

Figure 9: Opinions regarding the setting up ethnic/religious militia to defend their own communities



Increased recruitment of minorities to the police/army

Sixty-three per cent of respondents in the MRG/IMC survey considered that recruiting more members of their own communities to the police and army would improve security for them. Yezidis, Shabak and Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriacs were the most enthusiastic supporters of this policy recommendation.

This proposal is one of the most widely discussed among minority representatives. A Federal government order to recruit 700 Christian police officers to be posted to Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains was issued in 2006, but the then Deputy Governor of Nineveh and of the Kurdish Democratic Party, reportedly posted the recruits to Mosul to take on al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁴⁵ Very slow progress has been made on a parallel proposal to recruit minorities from all communities for posting to their communities in the Nineveh Plains. The problem is compounded by a compulsory policy of posting police away from their home areas for a period of two to three years. Minority representatives note that this has two negative outcomes; minority police officers may be exposed to prejudice and even danger if posted to majority communities (a risk that could also exist, for example, for a Sunni Arab posted to a Shi'a Arab community); and the level of minority representation in the police within their own communities is reduced.⁴⁶

There is also a KRG-initiated move to recruit Yezidis to serve in the police in Sinjar, in the north of Nineveh governorate. These Yezidis would primarily be recruited in Mosul, where they have very few employment opportunities otherwise.⁴⁷

The recruitment of members of minorities to the police would be an important step towards increasing trust between the community and police (see next section on improving police/community relations). There is a risk that other communities see the recruitment of minorities as

unfair, especially if they are also suffering from high levels of unemployment. In this case it is important to raise awareness of the reasons for recruitment of minorities, underlining that the aim is to correct current disproportionately low representation in the police.

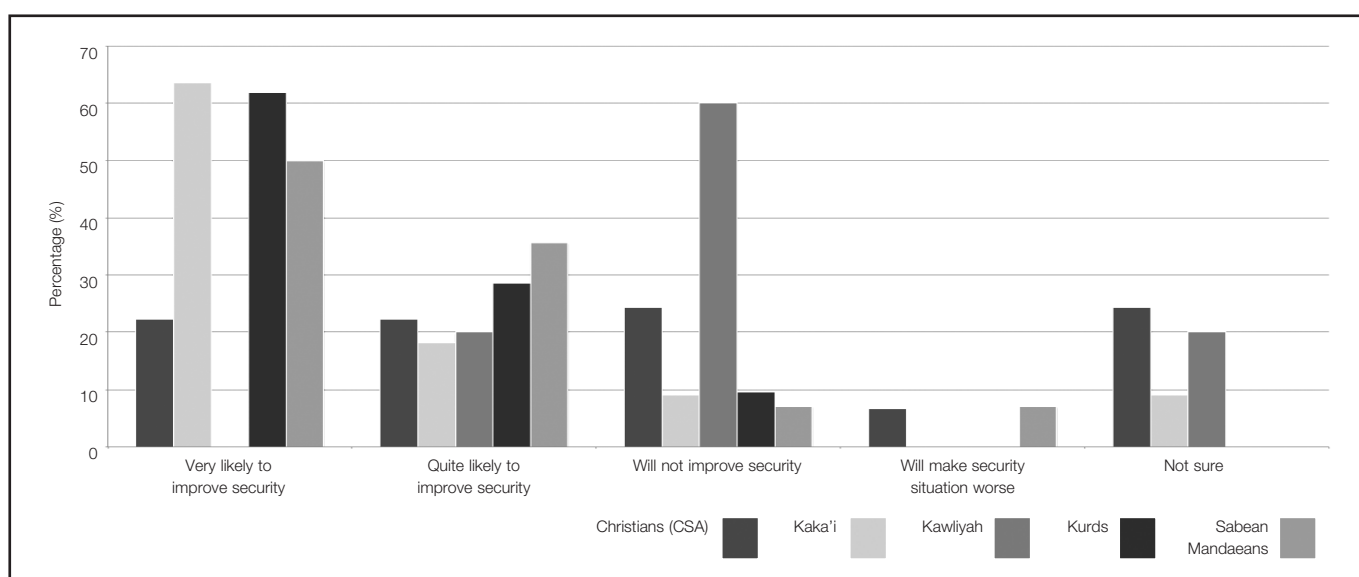
Improved police/community relations and information sharing

In post-conflict societies and those in transition after the fall of authoritarian regimes, security sector reform, and in particular, improved relations between security forces and the general population are a high priority. Community policing is one framework that can be used to promote this aim. It can be seen as a philosophy or approach to policing that encompasses principles and structures for improving relations between police and community, reducing human rights violations committed by the police, and carrying out law enforcement duties where possible by seeking consensus-based solutions with the community rather than the use of force.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a regional inter-governmental body, organized a conference in 2002 entitled 'The Role of Community Policing in Building Confidence in Minority Communities'. It was concluded that community policing promised benefits such as 'increased transparency, accountability, confidence, trust and partnership', particularly in societies in transition from conflict.⁴⁸ The following are some of the recommendations made in the final report of the meeting:

- develop and implement specific recruitment policies to ensure recruitment of minority groups and women in the police;
- include training on minority issues within the overall framework of community police training and;

Figure 10: Opinions regarding setting up joint committees with representatives of the community & the security forces



- initiate effective procedures for consultation with minorities.⁴⁹

The need for police officers to speak the language of the communities involved was also stressed.

In the MRG/IMC survey, 73 per cent of respondents considered that setting up joint committees with representatives of the community and the security forces to improve relations and communication would improve security for minorities. Shabak, Turkmen, Yezidis, Shi'a Arabs and Kurds were the most enthusiastic endorsers of this proposal. However there is clearly a problem of trust in the police and army that would likely be an obstacle to the effective working of such committees. 'A terrorist can pay a policeman to allow him to take a bomb through a checkpoint. Or to get out of jail', stated one Yezidi civil society activist.⁵⁰ 'Mistrust happens because there are people in the local police from other regions. It wouldn't happen if all were from local communities. Then maybe community policing can work,' stated a Christian activist at the same meeting. As a result of this mistrust, and the perception that the police have been infiltrated by terrorists, minorities are afraid to go to the police with information about security threats – they would not know if the person they were talking to was linked to an insurgent group, and would target them after leaving the station.⁵¹ The relative reticence to this proposal of some community respondents in the field research – notably Bahá'í, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians and Kawliyah – might be attributed to this lack of trust in security forces.

There is clearly much work to be done to improve confidence between communities and the police. Information sharing will not happen without the necessary trust being developed. Minority representatives in the Nineveh Plains noted: 'Citizens fear dealing with the police and security forces, believing that they are infiltrated, and that they are not adequately equipped or professional.'⁵² A UN official was more cautiously optimistic: 'In the beginning there would be no trust. But it would be good to start, and begin building trust'.⁵³ As noted here, the issue is also linked to that of increased recruitment of minorities to the police. The UN official noted that 'having minorities in the police would help – also on a symbolic level'.⁵⁴

A further problem may also need to be surmounted – that of the political culture in Iraq. As Professor Charles Tripp of the University of London notes: 'I am not sure if there is political will to have committees. The notion that people can organize things by themselves and for themselves is not necessarily accepted in Baghdad or Kurdistan.'⁵⁵

Autonomous area for minorities in the Nineveh Plains

Although this was not one of the proposals put to participants in the field research, the establishment of some

kind of autonomous area, or new governorate, in the areas of the Nineveh Plains inhabited by minorities, has been the subject of hot debate in Iraq, and has been identified as having potential to improve security. Proponents of the idea cite Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, which states that: 'This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law.' The area would either be a new governorate, carved out of Nineveh, or a special area with devolved powers within Nineveh.

While there are calls from both pro-KRG and pro-Federal minority representatives for an autonomous area, there are crucial differences. Pro-KRG actors clearly see the KRG as having a significant role to play in the area. The Chaldo-Assyrian-Syriac Popular Council, a political party, foresees it eventually being incorporated into the KRG.⁵⁶ Pro-Federal minority actors see the area as being a free-standing governorate, within the federal system of Iraq.

It is possible to see the attractiveness of such a proposal for minorities, not only in terms of improving security. If the separate governorate had existed in 2006, for example, the Deputy Governor of Nineveh might not have been able to deploy Christian minority police away from the Plain. A Christian civil society activist linked the proposal to a discussion about establishing police corps for minorities, seeing the autonomous area as a framework for coordinating the minority-based police units.⁵⁷ However, it is also very likely that the area would fail to muster the political or military clout to be truly autonomous, resulting in it being held hostage to the interests of more powerful neighbours, particularly within the context of an unstable security situation. The position of the IMC is that, currently, the security situation and the presence of militias which are outside the legal framework do not allow for this proposal to be realized.⁵⁸

The remaining proposals concerned increasing the presence of security forces, either in minority localities generally, or at hotspots such as places of worship or entrances to villages. Eighty per cent of respondents felt that the posting of extra security at hotspots would improve security, and this option was most popular among Faily Kurds and Yezidis. This measure is one of the more politically realistic ones and has already been implemented, particularly with regard to churches in Baghdad and other locations.

In 2009, the Iraq diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva informed that:

"[T]he Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defence have protected the houses of worship of minorities, as well as appointed a number of minorities from the community to contribute to the protection of houses of worship, particularly in the city of Mosul, which received special attention because of the exceptional

situation of security there, where special protection was provided to the students in the Nineveh Plain; security services escorted student vehicles (1500 students) from their houses to university and back, in addition to tightening protection and control in areas where Iraqi people reside and work.”⁵⁹

These measures may have been successful in discouraging attacks – but as ever, proving a negative is extremely difficult. There is also the danger that insurgent groups are able to infiltrate or pressure units assigned to protect these locations. Louis Climis of the IMC, who was in Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad at the time of the attack in 2010, stated that:

“it is confirmed that the police vehicle to protect the church, had disappeared on that time and that day. When we asked later, we didn’t receive an answer to that question [...] there was something inappropriate undergoing that day as an agreement with the attackers.

What existed only, were the Christian guards related to what is called the Endowment of Christians and other

Box 4: Security in the long-term: Addressing harmful attitudes and promoting tolerance

The Nineveh Centre for Research and Development carried out a consultation with minority representatives in September and October 2011, on the reasons for targeting of minorities and recommendations for countering it. The following were some of their recommendations:

- Reform of the educational curriculum, reflecting the accurate representation and role of the national minorities, and spreading a spirit of tolerance, coexistence and acceptance of difference and of renouncing violence and discrimination in a pluralistic society.
- Create assemblies and centres of religious, social and cultural dialogue between the various components of Iraqi society, contributing to the rapprochement of viewpoints.
- Reach a political consensus between powerful blocs and of building a national project, and strengthen democratic concepts and institutions and of the concept of citizenship.
- Religious and tribal authorities should play their required role in rejecting the culture of violence and defending the rights of minorities.
- Implement articles in the Constitution which guarantee minority rights, and make laws that protect these rights; including the rights and freedoms of minorities, a law to address religious, sectarian or other discrimination; and take steps and measures to work for these rights, including positive discrimination.

religions, who are in fact, a non professional body and even not authorized to fire. What helped to resist a little the attackers and to hit one of the five attackers climbing the wall of the church, were the security guards of the Iraq Stock Exchange on the opposite side”⁶⁰

Coordination between security providers and information sharing

There is a proliferation of security agencies active in Iraq. Both the Federal government and the KRG have their own police, army and intelligence agencies, and (at the time the research was carried out) there was also a presence of US forces, within the framework of the Combined Security Mechanism with Federal and KRG forces in the disputed areas in the north. In these areas, many different agencies may be present, some constitutionally recognized, and some not, as our research demonstrated. There is a concern that these bodies do not always cooperate in an ideal manner, or share information when appropriate. Rzooki, the Mayor of Qaraqosh, stated that in his town, ‘there are federal and Kurdish police and Asayish [KRG intelligence agency]. Asayish are interested to collaborate, but only if it is to their advantage. They follow KRG directions. They are sometimes in civilian clothes, sometimes in uniform. They coordinate with US forces.’⁶¹

Opinions among respondents were divided over the extent to which security agencies collaborated in their area. Overall, 52 per cent felt that they did not. There were strong differences across communities on this question. While 92 per cent of Yazidis and 76 per cent of Kurds believed agencies worked together well, 100 per cent of Kawliyah and 87 per cent of Bahá’í said cooperation was not good.

There are some obstacles to effective information flows in practice. In particular, there is a culture of excessive political control of security agencies in Iraq. The Federal ministries controlling security affairs – Defence, the Interior and National Security Affairs – have been controlled directly by the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, since the formation of the new government in November 2010. Al-Maliki justifies the situation by citing a failure of the main political parties to reach consensus over the appointment of ministers.⁶² Al-Maliki also maintains his own intelligence agency, based in his office, bypassing the official one set up in the immediate aftermath of the ousting of Saddam Hussein – which surely causes problems for the realization of the constitutional provision that ‘*This [Iraqi National Intelligence] Service shall be under civilian control, shall be subject to legislative oversight, and shall operate in accordance with the law and pursuant to the recognized principles of human rights.*’⁶³ In the KRG, the two main political parties – the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan – each directly control their own police, army and intelligence bodies.

Figure 11: Presence of security bodies (by location)

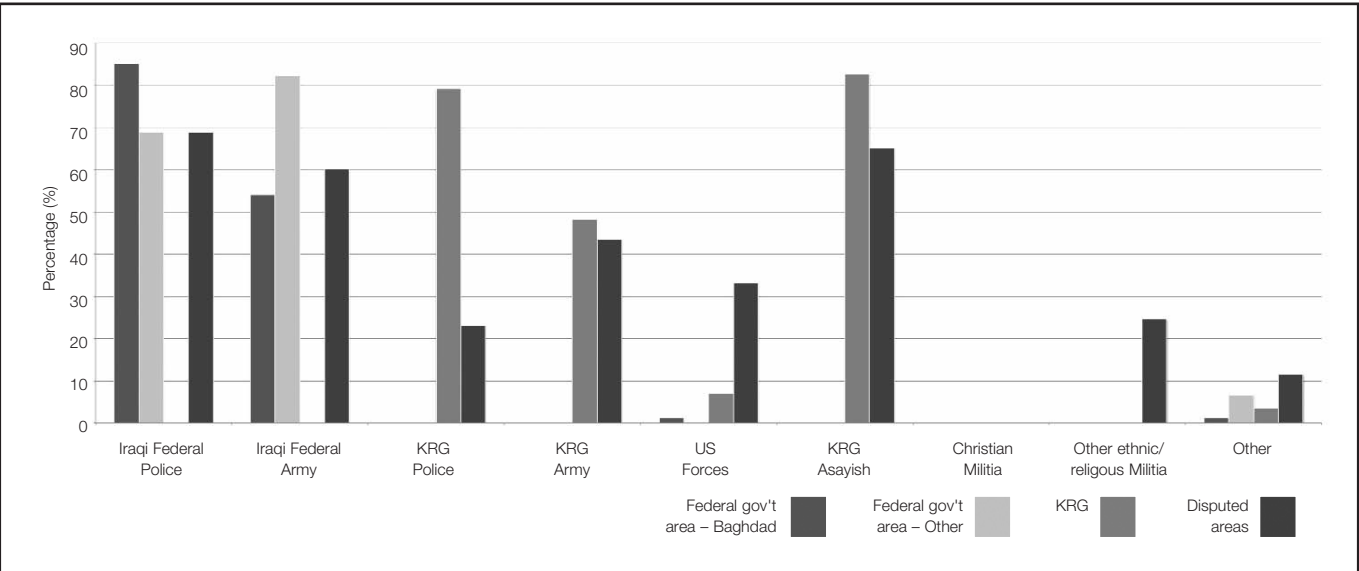
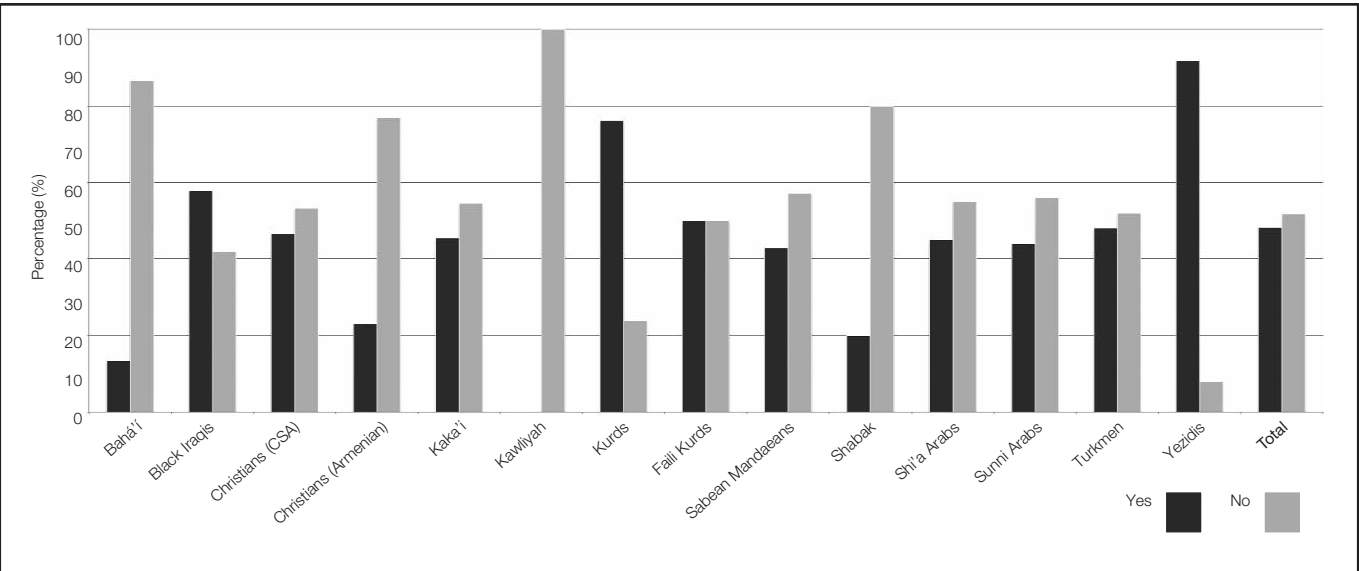


Figure 12: Do the different security bodies coordinate together? (by community)



A KRG Asayish official stated that ‘We have an unofficial agreement with other security forces in Iraq – we have partial cooperation. The high officials of Baghdad and Erbil have recommended this kind of cooperation. We share some information, for example on dangerous persons who are leaving one region to go to another. Also there is cooperation with Interpol. We would like to have full cooperation with all bodies, especially in Baghdad’.⁶⁴

The departure of US forces is also likely to impact negatively on information sharing, as this has been an important element of the combined US/Federal government/KRG security arrangements.⁶⁵

Conclusion

From the field research, two seemingly contradictory tendencies could be discerned; a deeply held mistrust towards constitutionally recognized security agencies (and

disappointment with their capacity to guarantee security), and on the other hand a recognition that, in order to provide effective security for minorities, there is no alternative to these bodies.

It is clear that many members of minority communities want to see their rights and interests protected – for example by increasing the representation of minorities in security bodies – but they want this to happen within a strengthened, ideologically neutral, non-sectarian constitutional framework. This appears to fit in with a broader tendency within society as a whole. As Professor Tripp notes, ‘people support strengthening the federal army and police because of a very poor experience of the last few years with a weakened, decentralized state. They want a state that keeps a lid on local power barons. That is why, in the 2009 local elections, voters took their chance to turf out the militia thugs who had dominated their neighbourhoods, in contradiction to what many observers predicted.’⁶⁶

With the larger, more powerful communities often relying on mono-ethnic or mono-sectarian militias to protect them, minorities fear an encroaching ‘every community for themselves’ approach, in which they will face the choice of being outnumbered and outgunned, or accepting offers of protection made by other communities, with the terms necessarily dictated by the protector.

It is understandable then if minority representatives feel that the best hope for securing their rights and security is through strengthened neutral, federal structures, established according to the rule of law. At the same time, if those strong, neutral structures fail to materialize, it may not come as a surprise if minorities’ political representatives propose the setting up of ethnic/religious militia.

Some proposed measures would have multiple benefits. Improving the representation of minorities within official security forces, for example, would reduce the economic marginalization of minorities, strengthen trust between community and police, and very likely improve security in minority communities.

Finally, it is clear that in the long-term, many of these issues will not be resolved unless the deeper underlying political problems are cleared up – such as Shi’a/Sunni and Arab/Kurd reconciliation, the final status of the disputed areas, and transitional justice issues with regard to Saddam-era demographic changes. However, in the meantime, it is important to take immediate measures to improve security in all communities. It is hoped that this briefing has pointed the way towards achieving this.

Recommendations

To the Federal and Kurdistan Regional governments:

- Improve recruitment of members of minorities to the police and army to be stationed particularly in areas of concentration of minorities, in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution.
- Recruitment of minorities to the police should be accompanied by public information campaigns to raise awareness among the general public, underlining that the aim is to correct current disproportionately low representation in the police, that recruitment continues for all communities, and that competence is still a central part of the recruitment process.
- As a measure to build confidence and to address lack of representation, issue policy guidance to police commanders that members of minorities should be allowed to serve in their communities.
- Develop community policing pilot projects in areas of ethnic diversity, with full consultation and involvement of minority representatives; and establish an independent advisory group with representation of minorities to promote the integration of minority concerns into policing, as well as to provide scrutiny on hate-motivated cases.
- Gradually increase coordination between security bodies and information sharing in areas where both KRG and Federal government agencies are present.
- Establish specialized units in the police to deal with crimes motivated by ethnic/sectarian hatred; provide these units with comprehensive training on hate crimes, discrimination issues and victim support.

- In line with commitments made during the adoption of Iraq's first Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in June 2010, the Federal government should take immediate and long-term steps to address impunity including prompt, impartial and independent investigations of attacks on minorities, respecting international standards of due legal process, including criminal prosecutions for those found to be responsible; and set up an independent investigative commission to identify and remove corrupt police officials who are found to be collaborating with insurgent groups.

To the Iraqi Parliament:

- Ensure that commissions established to investigate attacks on minorities complete their work and publish their findings, and press for implementation of recommendations.

To governments supporting the transition in Iraq:

- Provide advice and technical expertise based on their own experiences of community policing, particularly with regard to increasing confidence with minority communities, and of setting up specialized hate crime police units.

To the UN Assistance Mission and non-governmental organizations:

- Explore options for providing an unarmed observer presence in areas where minorities are concentrated and are subject to violent attacks.

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Improving security for minorities in Iraq

The briefing is based on field research carried out in Iraq in July and August 2011. Three hundred members of 14 ethnic/religious communities were canvassed for their views on security for their community, perception of security forces, and views on measures to improve security. Interviews were also carried out with policy makers and expert observers.

This briefing follows on from the report published by Minority Rights Group International and the Iraqi Minorities Council in November 2011, 'Iraq's Minorities: Participation in Public Life', which contained the findings of another survey on issues affecting the participation of minorities in public life, such as freedom of religion, access to employment and public services, and the treatment of minority women.

Improving security for minorities in Iraq

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Acknowledgements MRG gratefully acknowledges the European Union (through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) for their financial contribution towards the realization of this briefing. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of MRG and IMC, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union. The primary research used in this report was conducted by Iraqi Minorities Council (IMC). Minority Rights Group International (MRG) would like to thank Louis Climis, IMC project manager, and his team. MRG would like to recognize the key contribution made by individuals from minority communities to the research for this briefing.

Programme Coordinator: Chris Chapman. Commissioning Editor: Beth Walker. Production Coordinator: Jasmin Qureshi. Copy editor: Rebecca Lee. Data analysers: Louis Climis, Laila Alodaat, Peter Henderson.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities. MRG has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. MRG is registered as a charity, no. 282305, and a company limited by guarantee in the UK, no. 1544957.

Iraqi Minorities Council (IMC) is a not-for-profit civil society organization established in 2005 as a registered Non-Governmental Organization in Iraq. IMC defends all minorities' rights, based on democracy, freedom, equality, brotherhood, social justice, cohabitation of citizens and prosperity. The members of IMC are independent volunteers from communities including Turkmen, Kurd Faili, Christians (including Chaldeans, Syriacs and Assyrians), Christian Armenians, Shabaks, Yezidis and Sabeen Mandaeans. IMC also works with Bahá'í, Kawliyah (Roma), Black Iraqis, Kaka'i, and Palestinians.

ISBN 978 1 907919 28 2. This briefing is published as a contribution to public understanding. The text does not necessarily represent in every detail the collective view of MRG or its partners. Copies of this study are available online at www.minorityrights.org.

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