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# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Iraq – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

## 03 July 2023

### **Baghdad: Mass protests against Quran burning in Sweden**

On 29.06 and 30.06.23, several thousand people protested in Baghdad after a native Iraqi publicly burned a Quran in Sweden on 28.06.23. The controversial Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr had called on his followers to protest for the expulsion of the Swedish ambassador and in this context also called on his supporters to burn rainbow flags as they are a sign of LGBTIQ affiliation. Supporters of al-Sadr briefly stormed the Swedish embassy in Baghdad on 30.06.23, no personal injury or property damage was reported.

### **Kurdish Parliament officially dissolved**

On 02.07.23, the parliament of the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I) was officially dissolved after the Iraqi Supreme Court had ruled at the end of May that the Kurdish parliament's independent extension of the legislative period by one year was inadmissible. Due to disagreements over electoral law, the elections scheduled for October 2022 had been postponed by the parliament and the deputies had independently extended their mandate for another year. Since October 2022, the Kurdish parliament had passed six laws, which were invalidated by the May ruling.

## 10 July 2023

### **Effects of a prolonged drought**

Iraq is now experiencing the fourth consecutive year of drought. Together with reduced flow rates at dams in neighbouring countries, this is causing ever more serious ecological problems in Iraq's waters.

In the meantime, since 03.07.23, several tons of fish carcasses have washed up on the banks of the river al-Ezz. The oxygen content of the river has been measured near or at zero in several places. Heat and lack of inflow have thus largely destroyed the river's fauna. This incident is not unique. Similar news from the marshlands in the south of Iraq have been abundant for years; in the meantime, depending on the season, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers no longer flow into the Persian Gulf, but already seep well upstream. Iraq is one of the world's five countries that are most affected by climate change. The drought is also increasing internal migration pressure on the cities.

### **Security situation**

On 07.03.23, two Iranian Kurds, both associated with the Kurdish opposition party KDPI (Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran), were killed in Sulaymaniyah. The gunman subsequently fled to Iran, according to local media reports. Attacks by Iranian security and armed forces on Iranian opposition members in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I) are rare but not uncommon.

## 17 July 2023

### **Türkiye-PKK conflict**

On 11.07.23, suspected Turkish fighter jets bombed the area of the Metina and Gara Mountains (Dohuk Province/Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, KR-I), reportedly no civilians were injured. Because of the ongoing conflict this is a restricted military area which civilians are not allowed to enter.

A day earlier, the Turkish military announced the death of two soldiers in armed clashes with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in KR-I.

### **Christian community**

On 16.07.23, Louis Raphael Sako, the Baghdad-based Patriarch of the Chaldean Community of Iraq, announced that he will retire from Baghdad after the Iraqi President on 03.07.23 revoked a 2013 presidential decree recognising Sako as head of the Chaldean Church in Iraq and entitling him to administer the Chaldean endowment affairs.

President Rashid justified his decision by saying that presidential decrees can only be issued in relation to government employees, not religious personnel. The decision to revoke the decree came after Rashid had met with the leader of the Babylon Movement, a nominally Christian party and militia. Sako had repeatedly criticised the militia leader including for his links to Shiite militias loyal to Iran. Already on 13.07.23, Christians in Ainkawa, a town north of Erbil with a majority Christian population, protested against Rashid's decision, accusing him of acting under pressure from militias loyal to Iran and thus further undermining Iraq's Christian community.

### **Killing of KDPI member**

On 12.07.23, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran (KDPI) was found dead north of Erbil. The man had a gunshot wound in the head. The incident occurred one day after Iran threatened further use of military means if Iraq failed to sufficiently secure the border with Iran and disarm the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups based in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I).

The KDPI is an Iranian-Kurdish opposition party accused by the Iranian leadership of being involved in the protests against the Iranian government. It is classified as a terrorist group by Tehran. The KDPI holds Tehran responsible for the man's death. Already on 07.07.23 two members of the KDPI were killed in Sulaymaniyah/KR-I, presumably by a member of the Iranian armed forces (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

## 24 July 2023

### **Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I): Crackdown on Journalists**

On 20.07.23, Kurdish journalist Sherwan Sherwani was sentenced to four years in prison for allegedly falsifying documents. Sherwani is already in prison after being sentenced to several years of imprisonment together with four other journalists and activists in February 2021 for "endangering the security and stability of Kurdistan". The convicts had previously taken part in demonstrations against the Kurdish Regional Government.

Another Kurdish journalist, Omed Baroshki, criticised the renewed prison sentence against Sherwani and was himself briefly detained as a result, but released again on the same day. Baroshki had served a prison sentence of several months after also taking part in anti-government protests.

Freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the KR-I are restricted, and there are repeated attacks on journalists and activists, especially for criticising the Kurdish regional government.

### **KR-I: Elections**

The Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq has postponed the KR-I elections scheduled for 18.11.23. The commission cited technical problems due to the proximity of the provincial elections in December 2023.

Elections in KR-I were originally scheduled to take place in October 2022, but due to disagreements over electoral reforms, the date was postponed, after which MPs had arbitrarily extended their mandate and set the date for the elections on 18.11.23. In May 2023, the Iraqi Supreme Court had ruled that the extension of the mandate did not comply with the constitution.

### **Freedom of expression and assembly**

On 18.07.23, Amnesty International (ai) expressed concerns about two draft laws before the Iraqi parliament. According to ai, these restrict freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The planned law on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly criminalises insulting religious rituals, symbols and persons who are the object of worship or the like, sanctioning such offences with up to ten years in prison. Ai fears that this will criminalise criticism of religious leaders, who often are also politically active in Iraq. Under the planned law also protests can be banned. The second draft law criticised by ai is on cybercrime and provides for up to life imprisonment for publishing content on the internet that is contrary to Iraq's economic, political, military or security interests or causes sectarian strife. According to ai, criminal proceedings were opened against 20 people for expressing opinions in the first half of 2023.

## **31 July 2023**

### **Sulaymaniyah: Four people killed in drone attack**

A drone attack on a vehicle in Rangina (Sulaymaniyah province) on 28.07.23 killed all four occupants. The attack is attributed to Türkiye, as the Turkish military regularly targets PKK positions in the region.

### **Attack on power supply**

On 29.07.23 a widespread power blackout affected southern and central Iraq. The blackout was caused by an accidental fire in a power plant in Basra on the one hand, and explosives attacks on several electricity pylons in the province of Salah al-Din on the other.

The perpetrators have not yet been identified, however, IS is still active in Salah al-Din and regularly attacks infrastructure and the electricity grid there.

### **Man kills both wives**

On 29.07.23, a man from Soran (Erbil province) killed his two wives in their homes and then surrendered to the police.

Domestic violence against women is a daily occurrence in Iraq (including the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan) and often ends fatally. The man's family stated that he had been suffering from psychological problems for years.

### **Dohuk: Fire in refugee camp**

A fire on 28.07.23 in Dawdia refugee camp (Dohuk province, Amedi district) destroyed 17 housing units, no personal injuries were reported.

The camp is mainly inhabited by Yazidis who fled their home region of Sinjar (Kurdish Shingal) in 2014 to escape IS. The unstable security and supply situation makes a return to Sinjar difficult, no large-scale reconstruction has taken place so far, either. Fires regularly occur in Kurdish refugee camps, partly due to the dense crowding of tents.

## **07 August 2023**

### **Suspected Turkish air strike**

On 06.08.23, an air strike hit a private car in Dohuk province, killing one occupant and injuring another. The background is unclear. There have been no official statements so far.

### **Uncertainty for prison inmates in Kurdistan**

On 03.08.23, a spokesperson for the Kurdish Ministry of the Interior announced new figures on the occupancy of prisons in Kurdistan. Accordingly, over 5,000 people are currently being held in six official prisons, 446 of whom have been sentenced to death.

Executions are currently suspended in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, but the sentences are not commuted, therefore, those on death row have no certainty about their future fate. The prisons are clearly overcrowded; further facilities are to provide relief.

### **Effects of the drought**

Iraq continues to be hit by a wave of heat and drought. At present, temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius and higher have been repeatedly measured in several major cities. What is more, cooling by air conditioners is impossible due to frequent power cuts.

The lack of rain and falling water levels of the country's major rivers are exacerbating the problems, resulting in increased internal migration pressure on the cities. According to statements by the Iraqi Water Ministry, Iraq's water reserves have halved compared to the previous year. Significant impacts on agricultural production are already obvious. According to the IOM, 83,000 people must currently be considered internally displaced due to effects of the drought.

### **14 August 2023**

#### **Türkiye-PKK conflict**

On 09.08. and 10.08.23 Turkish units and the PKK engaged in fighting in the Zap region in Dohuk. At least six Turkish soldiers died in the skirmish. According to the Turkish Defence Ministry, at least four PKK fighters were killed by subsequent air strikes.

On 09.08.23, at least two drone attacks were flown in Sulaymaniyah province, one targeting a passenger car on the main road between Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk, killing one person. The second drone killed a PKK intelligence officer, according to the PKK.

On 11.08.23, a drone strike hit a car in Sulaymaniyah, killing at least two people. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for this drone attack.

### **21 August 2023**

#### **Türkiye-PKK conflict**

The Turkish air force continues its daily operations, especially in the Dohuk region. Among other things, several wildfires were started, which also affected fields and other agricultural land.

#### **Fight against the IS**

On 16.08.23, the Iraqi Air Force flew a strike against a suspected IS position in Kirkuk province. No further information on casualties was disclosed. IS is still active in the regions disputed between the Kurdish regional government and the central government in Baghdad, exploiting the power vacuum there. Even though the group as a whole only seems capable of smaller-scale operations, it still poses a significant security risk to the population of the region.

### **28 August 2023**

#### **PKK-Türkiye conflict**

On 27.08.23, a suspected Turkish drone attacked a vehicle in the town of Zangidar (Sulaymaniyah province), reportedly killing three PKK fighters.

Already on 26.08.23 Türkiye flew air strikes in the Iraqi-Turkish border area in Dohuk province after an explosion had killed a Turkish soldier on the day before. No personal injuries were reported in connection with the Turkish air strikes.

Also, on 24.08.23, a Turkish soldier was killed presumably by the PKK. On the same day, two Turkish drones attacked

Sidakan (Erbil province), killing a total of seven PKK supporters.

The Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan officially visited Erbil on 24.08.23 and called on the Iraqi government to classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

#### **Clearance of landmine-contaminated areas progresses**

On 21.08.23, Iraqi Minister of Environment, Nizar Amidi, announced the clearing of 59% of the landmine contaminated area in Iraq. The remaining 41% correspond to about 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Because of the multitude of conflicts Iraq saw in the past decades, it is considered one of the most landmine contaminated countries, most recently IS had made extensive use of mines.

### **Withdrawal of the Emtidad Party**

The Emtidad party, which emerged from the 2019 protest movement (Tishreen Movement), announced on 21.08.23 that it would not participate in the upcoming provincial elections on 18.12.23. The party cited time delays in electing a new party leadership as the reason.

The Tishreen movement of 2019 had protested against the existing political system, corruption and high unemployment.

### **Freedom of the Press in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I)**

On 24.08.23, journalist Islam Kashani was arrested. Kurdish authorities cited suspected links to the PKK as the reason for his arrest, but the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) holds that it is due to Kashani's criticism of the Kurdish Regional Government. Kashani was released on bail on 26.08.23.

Meanwhile, journalists Sherwan Sherwani and Guhdar Zebari remain in prison, where they have been held since October 2020, although they should have been released in August and September 2023 respectively. Instead, Sherwani was sentenced to a further four years in prison in July 2023 (see BN of 24.07.23), and further charges were brought against Zebari on 16.08.23.

Numerous NGOs as well as a press release of the German Foreign Office describe the trials of Sherwani and Zebari as not in accordance with the rule of law and unfair. Sherwani and Zebari had previously participated in protests against the Kurdish regional government.

Freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the KR-I are progressively restricted. Time and again journalists and activists experience violence, especially in response to criticism of the Kurdish regional government.

## **04 September 2023**

### **Execution of the death penalty on three IS members**

On the night of 27.08.23, several men were executed in relation to an attack on a shopping centre in 2016. 323 people had died as a result of the attack on 03.07.16. The convicts were members of IS.

### **Kirkuk: Escalation of violence after announcement of the KDP's return**

Following the announcement by Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad al-Sudani that the buildings occupied by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Kirkuk and the surrounding area in 2017 would be returned to them, ethnic tensions increased in the city, which is home to Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian and Turkmen communities as well as members of various religious minorities. Protests and counter-protests dominated the cityscape for several days. On 02.09.23, security forces opened fire in connection with a Kurdish protest. At least three people were killed. A general curfew was imposed and political leaders called for calm.

### **Rocket attack on natural gas field**

The Khor Mor gas field in Sulaymaniyah province was attacked by two rockets fired from the Tuz Khurmatu area on 30.08.23. No personal injury or property damage was reported.

In 2022, Kurdish oil and gas fields were attacked in similar ways several times. At the time the attacks were attributed to Shiite militias loyal to Iran, presumably to exert political pressure on the Kurdish regional government.

### **Conflict PKK-Türkiye**

On 01.09.23, the Turkish military carried out several air strikes and drone attacks in the district of Mawat (Sulaymaniyah province). According to the Turkish Ministry of Defence, camps and dwellings of PKK fighters were destroyed. No personal injuries were reported. According to residents, the attacks destroyed agricultural land and farms and caused a fire that took several hours to extinguish.

### **Only 40% of IDPs have returned to Shingal so far**

In an interview on 30.08.23, the official mayor of Shingal commented on the current situation in the town. He himself has to work from Dohuk, as neither the militias associated with the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) nor the PKK allies allow work to be done in the districts they control.

Rival militias continue to confront each other in the region. The infrastructure is still largely inoperable and there are neither funds nor accommodation facilities available for returnees, the mayor said. In addition, the respective militias do not allow the return of supporters of rival groups. Thus, about 130,000 Yazidis from Shingal continue to live in the Autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq and do not return. The local economy is also paralysed and there is a great potential for renewed escalation, he said. On 01.09.23, the Ministry of Migration announced that 179 Yazidis had returned to Shingal.

## **11 September 2023**

### **PKK-Türkiye conflict**

According to the Director General for Counter-Terrorism in Kurdistan, two PKK fighters were killed in a drone attack in Mawat district (Sulaymaniyah province) on 09.09.23. A fire broke out as a result of the attacks, no civilian casualties were reported.

This is already the second alleged attack by the Turkish military on targets in Sulaymaniyah within eight days (cf. BN of 04.09.23). In fact, the Turkish military operation to fight the PKK focuses geographically on the border districts with Türkiye in the province of Dohuk.

On 10.09.23, combat helicopters, suspected to be Turkish, attacked a rural area in Amadiya district (Dohuk province). As a result, ground fighting broke out between the Turkish military and the PKK. Details of personal injury or property damage are not yet known.

## **25 September 2023**

### **Attack on airport in Sulaymaniyah**

On 18.09.23, an airport about 50 km east of Sulaymaniyah was attacked. This airport had previously been used by a special unit of the Kurdish security apparatus. Three people were killed, all of them members of the Kurdish security forces. Several Turkish and Iranian drones had been sighted in the region, but at this time there is no official statement on who committed the attack.

### **Turkish introduced as additional official language in Kirkuk**

On 21.09.23, the Kirkuk administration announced that Turkish would be introduced as an additional official language in the region. Kirkuk is home to a large minority of Turkish speaking Turkmens. The Iraqi constitution allows for the introduction of Syrian and Turkish as official languages in regions where the respective minorities constitute a sufficiently large share of the population. The decision was originally made in 2008.

## **09 October 2023**

### **Kurdistan Region: Plans to close refugee camps for internally displaced people**

On 25.10.23 a spokesman of the Iraqi migration ministry announced that the Iraqi government was elaborating a plan together with the UN with the aim of closing the refugee camp for internally displaced Iraqis in the Kurdistan Region (KRI). The plans provide for a return of those concerned to their native regions. There are currently 15 refugee camps in the KRI, accommodating around 650,000 people, including a large number of Yazidis who fled IS from 2014 onwards. Large areas of their native region of Sinjar were destroyed by IS and have yet to be fully rebuilt, in addition to which the security situation in the region is volatile.

### **Conflict between PKK and Türkiye**

In the wake of a suicide attack on the Turkish interior ministry in Ankara on 01.10.23, Türkiye carried out air raids on PKK positions in northern Iraq. According to information from the Turkish side, around 20 PKK targets were destroyed, including depots and hideouts.

On 07.10.23 three people were injured in a drone attack on Makhmour refugee camp. Türkiye is suspected of being behind the attack. Türkiye has yet to comment on the incident, but has already attacked the camp on repeated occasions in the past. Many of the camp's residents are Turkish Kurds, among whom the PKK is believed to recruit members on a substantial scale.

## **16 October 2023**

### **Conflict between PKK and Türkiye**

According to Kurdish authorities, a Turkish drone hit a PKK vehicle in northern Dohuk (Kurdistan Region, KRI) on 14.10.23, killing three of its members.

On 13.10.23 the Turkish defence ministry announced that a Turkish soldier had been killed in exchanges of fire with the PKK in the Kurdish mountains. On the same day, a civilian was injured in a drone attack on the refugee camp in Makhmour. Türkiye is suspected of being behind the attack. Many of those living in the camp are Turkish Kurds. This was the second attack on the camp in the space of a week (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

## **23 October 2023**

### **Attack on US facilities**

The Ain al-Asad (Anbar province), Hareer (Erbil province) and Victory (near Baghdad) military bases, which are used primarily by US troops, have been targeted repeatedly by drone and rocket attacks since 18.10.23. According to information from the US, most of the drones and rockets have been shot down and only minor injuries have occurred to date.

The so-called Islamic Resistance group, comprising Shiite militias with close links to Iran, has claimed responsibility for the attacks, which it says have been carried out because of the USA's support for Israel in the current Gaza conflict.

### **Makhmour: Clashes between Peshmerga fighters and Iraqi army**

After the PKK reported that it had withdrawn from Makhmour refugee camp on 19.10.23 (cf. BN of 09.10. and 16.10.23), armed clashes took place between soldiers of the Iraqi army and Peshmerga fighters on 22.10.23. Fatalities were reported on both sides.

The clashes stem from disputes over who holds jurisdiction in Makhmour, which belongs to the so-called disputed territories, that is, territories to which Baghdad and Erbil both lay claims. The Iraqi army took over the check points which had been left by the PKK, although these are actually located within the Peshmerga's area of jurisdiction.

## **30 October 2023**

### **Attacks on US facilities**

The US military has stated that it intercepted a drone close to the Al Assad air base in Al Anbar province on 27.10.23. The base is used primarily by US troops. Two rockets had already been fired at the same base on 24.10.23, while an attempted drone attack on a US military base in Erbil took place on 26.10.23. These are the most recent attacks on US troops in Iraq. There have been repeated attacks on military posts in Al Anbar and Erbil since 18.10.23 (cf. BN of 23.10.23). The US military has reported that a number of people incurred minor injuries. So-called Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed responsibility for the attacks, stating that they were a response to the USA's support for Israel in the ongoing Gaza conflict. Islamic Resistance is an alliance of Shiite militias loyal to Iran.

### **Conflict between Türkiye and PKK**

Kurdish authorities report that at least ten PKK fighters died in Turkish air strikes and drone attacks on PKK positions on 25.10.23. The attacks took place in the north of Erbil and the east of Dohuk. On 29.10.23 the Iraqi government announced that it was seeking to reach a security agreement with Türkiye in order to curb the sustained Turkish air strikes. In return, Iraq would prevent armed groups from launching attacks on Türkiye from Iraqi territory. A similar agreement has been in force with Iran since September 2023.

### **New bishop ordained by Armenian Apostolic Church**

The Armeno-Lebanese archimandrite Oshagan Gulgolian was chosen as the bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Iraq on 25.10.23. The Armenian Apostolic Church had previously been without a spiritual leader for 42 years. Gulgolian was ordained in Erbil on 28.10.23. Substantial Armenian communities existed in Basra, Mosul and Baghdad in the past. In recent decades, many Armenian Iraqis have left the country due to continuing violence against minorities, however.

### **06 November 2023**

#### **Situation in Makhmour**

Following fighting between Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army which claimed a total of four lives, an agreement was reached on 03.11.23. The checkpoints which have been abandoned by the PKK are to be divided up, with some occupied by the army and others by Peshmerga.

Makhmour is a district which is disputed between Ninawa province and KRI. Makhmour refugee camp primarily accommodates Kurds who have fled Türkiye and their descendants. PKK withdrew after maintaining a presence here for decades, because it was not able to counter the repeated air strikes by Turkish forces.

#### **Limited scale of returns to Sinjar**

On 01.11.23 the Iraqi ministry of migration and displacement announced that some 1,150 Yazidis have returned from Dohuk to Sinjar. Key public services and basic provisions remain unreliable in the region and more than 60 % of the original population have not returned to the area which was the scene of genocide of the Yazidis between 2014 and 2017.

### **13 November 2023**

#### **Attacks on US military facilities**

According to the Kurdish authorities, the Harir military base near to Erbil airport was attacked by a total of three drones loaded with explosives on 07.11.23. Two of the drones were intercepted, while one drone crashed to the ground without exploding.

A renewed attack on the base took place on the night of 08.11.23, causing a fire to break out. No information on casualties or damage to property has been forthcoming as yet. The base is used primarily by the US military. All troops of the anti-IS coalition who were stationed there left the base on 20.10.23 as a consequence of the attacks, however.

These are only the most recent in a series of attacks on US troops in Iraq (cf. BN of 23.10. and 30.10.23). The Pentagon has put the number of such attacks in Iraq between 17.10. and 06.11.23 at 18. So-called Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed responsibility for the attacks, stating that they were a response to the USA's support for Israel in the ongoing Gaza war. Islamic Resistance is an alliance of Shiite militias loyal to Iran.

#### **Conflict between Türkiye and PKK**

Two people were injured in a drone attack in Raparin (Sulaymaniyah governorate) on 06.11.23. While the Kurdish authorities have yet to release any information on the origin of the drones, pro-PKK media are blaming the attack on Türkiye.

It has been reported that a Turkish mortar shell hit a residential building in Amadiya (Dohuk governorate) on 10.11.23, causing material damage. On 11.11.23 the Turkish military carried out air strikes on PKK positions, again in Dohuk governorate. Material damage was reported.

As part of a military operation, Türkiye has been carrying out attacks on PKK positions on a regular basis for a number of years. The main focus of the attacks is the territory bordering on Türkiye in Dohuk governorate.

### **20 November 2023**

#### **Speaker of parliament relieved of his mandate**

On 14.11.23 the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq relieved Mohamed Al-Halbousi, who was also the speaker of parliament, of his parliamentary mandate and expelled him from parliament.

The court considered it proven that Al-Halbousi, who is a member of the Taqadum (Progress) party, had falsified a parliamentary document. Taqadum, which is the largest Sunni party in the country, described the court's verdict as unconstitutional and announced a boycott of parliamentary sessions by Taqadum members. Three of the four ministers appointed by Taqadum have already stepped down. Al-Halbousi is regarded as the most influential Sunni politician in the country. Accusations of corruption have recently led to growing resistance among his supporters, however. His relations with the Shiite coalition partners are also considered to be strained.

### **Conflict between Türkiye and PKK**

According to the Yazidi militia Sinjar Resistance Units (Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şingal, YBŞ), two of their fighters have been killed and one injured in a drone attack in Sinjar. In pro-PKK media the attack is being blamed on Türkiye. As part of a military operation, Türkiye has been carrying out attacks on PKK positions on a regular basis for a number of years. Türkiye, among other countries, considers YBŞ to be associated with the PKK.

### **Erbil: Attack on US base**

The Harir airbase in Erbil, which is used by US troops, among others, was attacked by a number of drones on 17.11.23.

So-called Islamic Resistance has claimed responsibility for the attacks, stating that they were a response to the USA's support for Israel in the Gaza war. Islamic Resistance is an alliance of largely pro-Iranian militias. On 16.11.23 a Pentagon spokeswoman put the number of attacks on US facilities in Iraq since the outbreak of the Gaza crisis at 27.

### **Attempted assassination of Iranian-Kurdish lawyer**

The lawyer and political activist Sohrab Rahmati was shot outside his home on 16.11.23. He suffered grave injuries. The attacker or attackers remain at large. Rahmati is a member of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), an exiled association based in northern Iraq. The KDPI is accusing Iran of being responsible for the attack. In the past, Rahmati has represented the families of murder victims who are believed to have been killed at the behest of Iran. Several KDPI members have suffered violent deaths in recent months.

## **27 November 2023**

### **US air strikes on pro-Iranian militias in response to missile attack**

Eight people were injured in a short-range missile attack on Al Assad air base (Al Anbar province), which is used by US troops, on 20.11.23. A US air force jet fighter subsequently attacked a vehicle carrying Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) fighters who the Pentagon claims were responsible for the missile attack. A number of KH fighters were killed in the air strike.

On the night of 21.11.23 the US air force launched two further air strikes on KH positions in Al Anbar and Babil provinces. KH has reported that eight of its fighters were killed in these attacks.

KH is a Shiite militia loyal to Iran and as such forms part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd al-Shaabi) which are formally under the control of the Iraqi government. In reality, the government in Baghdad has very little influence over the militias. Since 17.10.23, pro-Iranian militias have carried out around 32 attacks on US troops in Iraq in response to the USA's support of Israel in the current Gaza war (cf. BN of 20.11.23 and 13.11.23).

### **Conflict between Türkiye and PKK**

The Turkish defence ministry reported on 24.11.23 that the Turkish military had attacked 17 PKK positions in Dohuk (Kurdistan Region), "neutralising" a number of PKK members. Türkiye uses this term for enemy fighters who have been injured or killed, or who have surrendered.

## **04 December 2023**

### **IS attacks in Diyala und Makhmour**

At least ten civilians died and at least twelve were injured in a bomb explosion followed by an attack with firearms in Muqdadiya (Diyala province) on 30.11.23. The bomb exploded at the roadside as a minibus passed by. A number of unknown persons subsequently fired at the rescue forces who rushed to the scene and other persons who were

present. Iraqi security services are blaming the attack on so-called IS and assume that the minibus was specifically targeted. A local politician was on board the bus.

On 01.12.23 an Iraqi army base near Makhmour was attacked by suspected IS fighters and one soldier was killed. In response to the attacks, the Iraqi army carried out an air strike against the IS in Kirkuk on 03.12.23. According to the Iraqi military, several IS fighters were killed in the strike.

While IS has been territorially defeated in Iraq since 2017, isolated attacks still occur; the so-called disputed territories (i.e. territories to which both Baghdad and Erbil lay claim, such as Makhmour, Kirkuk and parts of Diyala) are a focus of sustained IS activities.

### **Suspected US air strike against militias**

On 03.12.23 five fighters of the “Imam Ali Battalions” (Arabic: Kata’ib Imam Ali) were killed in what is presumed to have been an air strike by the US military. The militia was reportedly in the process of firing missiles at American targets in the country.

Since October 2023, the US military has been the target of attacks by Iraqi militias on several dozen occasions. The militias say the attacks are reprisals for the USA’s support for Israel (cf. BN of 20.11. and 27.11.23).

## **11 December 2023**

### **Attacks in Baghdad, Erbil and Anbar**

Al Assad air base (Anbar province) was attacked by a drone on 06.12.23. The base is also used by US troops; no information has been forthcoming on casualties or damage to property. Islamic Resistance, an alliance of largely pro-Iranian militias, has claimed responsibility for the attack, which it says was carried out in response to the USA’s support for Israel.

The US embassy in Baghdad was attacked with a number of missiles in the early hours of 08.12.23. No casualties have been reported. Prime minister Al-Sudani described the incident as a terrorist attack and a special unit of the Iraqi security forces has been tasked with carrying out investigations. A US government spokesman blamed the attack on the pro-Iranian militias Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH) and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba. A KH official announced on 09.12.23 that the attacks on US targets in Iraq would be continued until a complete withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. He described the attack on the embassy as the “beginning”, without assuming direct responsibility for the incident.

The headquarters of the Iraqi National Security Service (INSS) in Baghdad were also damaged in a missile attack on 08.12.23. The INSS is an Iraqi intelligence service. No group has directly claimed responsibility for this attack to date.

Attacks also took place in Erbil on 08.12.23. A residential building was first of all damaged by a combat drone. No casualties were reported in this attack. On the evening of the same day, the international airport in Erbil was attacked by four drones. A fifth drone was shot down. No information has been forthcoming on casualties or damage to property.

Militias loyal to Iran have carried out several dozen attacks on US targets in Iraq since the war in Gaza began in October 2023 (cf. BN of 20.11. and 27.11.23).

## **18 December 2023**

### **Sulaymaniyah: Closure of refugee camp**

The Iraqi government announced on 14.12.23 that the refugee camp for internally displaced people in Arbat (Sulaymaniyah province) had been closed, following the final residents’ return to their places of origin. The director of the Kurdish migration authority refuted this account, stating that less than half of the families had returned and that the remaining families had been transferred to another refugee camp. He said the camp had been closed due to funding difficulties.

The Iraqi government announced in December 2022 that it intended to close all camps for internally displaced people in Iraq within six months. While this plan has not yet been implemented, more pressure has reportedly been put on internally displaced people to return to their places of origin.

### **The conflict between Türkiye and PKK in northern Iraq**

According to the Turkish defence ministry, five PKK supporters were “neutralised” in an air strike in the Qandil Mountains (Erbil province) on 12.12.23. Türkiye uses this term to denote the death, capture or capitulation of a PKK member.

According to unconfirmed reports, Türkiye carried out further air strikes on 15.12.23 – this time in the area around Barzan (Erbil province). There are also reports of air strikes on 17.12.23, targeting the district of Amadiya (Dohuk province). No information on casualties or damage is available for either of these incidents.

Türkiye has been carrying out air strikes on PKK positions in northern Iraq on a regular basis for a number of years now. The Iraqi/Turkish border in Dohuk is one of the geographic focuses of these military operations.

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Briefing Notes  
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