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Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Iraq

Overview: The primary terrorist threats within Iraq were the remnants of ISIS and IAMGs, which include U.S.-designated Kata'ib Hizballah (KH), Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), and Harakat al-Nujaba (HAN). The U.S.-designated Kurdistan Workers' Party, headquartered in the mountains of northern Iraq, operated in the vicinity of Sinjar, Ninewa province, and in areas of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR).

There was an increase in terrorist attacks in 2023, compared with the previous year, with a surge of approximately 110 IAMG attacks beginning in October that primarily targeted Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) personnel in Iraq and Syria. These IAMG attacks resulted in injuries to dozens of U.S. servicemembers and one U.S. contractor death. Although claimed by an umbrella group calling itself the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, these attacks were largely attributed to KH and HAN.

Because of continued effective pressure from the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in 2023, ISIS was unable to control Iraqi territory and was forced to resort to periodic attacks, including in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din provinces, particularly in areas infrequently patrolled by the ISF.

Iraqi counterterrorism (CT) functions are executed principally by the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), a cabinet-level entity reporting directly to the prime minister. Various Iraqi Security Forces under the Ministries of Defense and Interior as well as the Kurdish Peshmerga also routinely conduct CT planning, operations, and investigations. In limited instances, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) augment Iraqi Army and CTS-led operations. While all PMF are required by law to operate as part of the

ISF, some PMF groups defied Government of Iraq (GOI) authority and engaged in violent and destabilizing activities in Iraq and neighboring Syria.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: During 2023, Iraq saw complex ISIS attacks and IAMG attacks using sophisticated weapons, including short-range ballistic missiles.

Noteworthy incidents in 2023 included the following:

- On April 8, ISIS fighters attacked a PMF convoy near Tarmiyah, north of Baghdad, killing eight PMF members and wounding four.
- On June 29, ISIS launched a coordinated attack on several villages in Salah al-Din province, killing 13 people and wounding 24 others, including civilians and members of the ISF.
- On October 14, ISIS detonated a car bomb near a market in the town of Al-Sa'adiya in Diyala province, killing nine civilians and wounding 15 others.
- On November 20, eight members of the U.S. military assigned to OIR were injured by an IAMG ballistic missile attack on Al-Asad Airbase.
- On December 25 an IAMG explosive drone attack on Erbil Air Base injured three members of the U.S. military assigned to OIR, one critically.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Iraq has multiple security, law enforcement, and intelligence organizations with overlapping responsibilities, including the CTS, the National Security Services, the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, military intelligence, and assorted Ministry of Interior units, including national and local police. The United States assisted Iraqi CT efforts by providing training, equipment, and other assistance to some of these organizations.

Iraq made no significant changes to its CT legal and law enforcement framework in 2023. Human rights groups reported that authorities arrested suspects in some security sweeps without warrants and frequently held them for prolonged periods without charge, but the use of warrants together with physical and electronic evidence was routinely observed in the prosecution of ISIS-related cases. Human rights groups also alleged that security forces used allegations of terrorism to detain, arrest, prosecute, and harass independent journalists and civil society activists perceived as critical to the government.

Border security and corruption remained a critical vulnerability. The ISF had limited capability to fully secure Iraq's borders. Border security (including in the IKR) was administered by the Border Guard Security Force, with the support of the ISF, including Peshmerga. The border with Syria near Türkiye remained especially porous. IAMGs continued to

maintain a presence at and around many of Iraq's border crossings, including the Iraq-Syria border crossing in al-Qa'im.

While the Ministry of Interior shared biometric information on suspected terrorists upon request with the United States, INTERPOL, and other partners, a biometric information sharing program was not finalized by the government. The GOI engaged in preliminary discussions with INTERPOL to eventually make use of INTERPOL databases.

Almost 1.1 million Iraqis remained internally displaced in Iraq, and an estimated 20,000 Iraqis – predominantly women and children – resided in the al-Hol displaced persons camp in Syria. The GOI repatriated 200 suspected ISIS fighters from detention facilities in northeastern Syria, as well as 3,816 Iraqi nationals, mostly women and children, from al-Hol in 2023.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Iraq is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, and its Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office. The FIU was granted membership into the Egmont Group in July.

Countering Violent Extremism: Iraq continued strategic messaging to discredit ISIS, in part by providing significant content to the Defeat-ISIS Coalition Communications Cell. Many Iraqi ISIS fighters remained in custody in both Syria and Iraq, while many Iraqi civilians, including some family members of ISIS members, remained in displaced persons camps in Syria. Iraq acknowledged that the return and social reintegration of family members of suspected ISIS supporters, as well as the provision of fair and equal justice, are important for preventing future terrorism and radicalization to violence, though the government's pace of action to meet these challenges was hampered by lack of institutional capacity.

International and Regional Cooperation: Iraq continued to work with multilateral and regional organizations and groups – including the United Nations, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, NATO, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, INTERPOL, and the League of Arab States – to support counterterrorism efforts.

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